CARGO: STAGING SLAVERY AT THE CAPE[21]

By Mark Fleishman

This is about remembering in the postcolony. A remembering that is less about the need to forestall forgetting than it is about a putting back together of the fractured body (Brandstetter, 2000; Seremetakis, 2000). A postcolony defined in the terms of Achille Mbembe: the multiple, contradictory moments of everyday life in Africa read against the persistent accretions of slavery, colonialism, apartheid and neo-liberal forms of democracy (Mbembe, 2001).

Mbembe describes the postcolony as a "time-space characterized by proliferation and multiplicity [. . .] an era of displaced entanglements, the unity of which is produced out of differences" (Mbembe & Hoeller, 2002). Its characteristics include volatility, excess, hysteria, racial delirium, superfluity, nervous discomfort and improvisation, flexibility and resilience. In this palimpsestuous timespace, diverse urban worlds exist in the same territory filled with discontinuous fixtures and flows and odd juxtapositions, and the past has an uncanny habit of inserting itself into thepresent in surprising and unexpected ways (Mbembe, 2004:373-405).

An example of this haunting of the present by a past that will not be silenced is the case of Prestwich Place. In 2003 the remains of in excess of 3000 human skeletons were discovered on a site in Prestwich Street in Cape Town, buried beneath a building demolished to make way for a 90-million-rand private sector 'New York-style' 'World Class' residential development now known as 'The Rockwell'. Prestwich Street[22] lies in an area called De Waterkant, which the city describes as a development node. In the early colonial period the area was a sandy stage for hangings, torture and the burial of those elements of society who were not considered fit enough for internment in the colony's respectable cemeteries: "slaves, free-blacks, artisans, fishermen, sailors, maids, washerwomen and their children, as well as executed criminals, suicide deaths, paupers and unidentified victims of shipwrecks" (Hart, 2003, cited in Shepherd, 2007:7).

The remains discovered at Prestwich Street seemed to have formed part of this vast burial ground for the underclasses, buried without grave markers or coffins. In accordance with the recently enacted National Heritage Resources Act (No. 25 of 1999), the developer was obliged to halt construction and to inform the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA). The developer appointed the Archaeological Contracts Office (ACO), a University of Cape Town-based unit, to conduct the

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22 The site is commonly referred to as Prestwich Place.

archaeological work on the site, and the ACO applied for and was granted a permit by SAHRA to conduct "a rescue exhumation of human remains".[23]

The exhumations began on 11 June 2003. A few weeks later the public participation process required by the act began with a meeting at St Stephen's Church. This angry meeting was the beginning of an intense and often dramatic debate regarding what was to be done with the site and the remains. On one side stood the developers, stressing daily the millions of rands that they were losing as a result of delays, and the archaeologists appointed by them who were intent on removing the bones and subjecting them to scientific study to recover the 'facts in the ground'. On the other side stood the hastily formed Hands Off Prestwich Place Ad Hoc Committee, [24] consisting of ex-anti-apartheid activists, Muslim and Christian spiritual leaders and academics from the historically black University of the Western Cape, resisting the exhumations (Shepherd, 2007:8). In the middle stood SAHRA, mandated by legislation to intervene and adjudicate in such affairs.

The upshot of this confrontation was that permission was granted for the bodies to be exhumed and to be removed from the site and that a new site in the vicinity was identified 'for memorializing and re-internment'.[25] However, itwas also declared that no anatomical research would be allowed on the bones.

According to Nick Shepherd, the conflict around Prestwich Place was one between archaeology conceived of as "instrumental science, distanced from broader issues of culture and society", and a more nuanced, multi-disciplinary research approach that "sought to insert the events at Prestwich Street into a prevailing debate in post-apartheid society around notions of truth, reconciliation and restitution" (Shepherd, 2007:20). Are the bones artefacts, units of information, of cold, hard data, or are they ancestors, to be awakened, recalled, honoured, recognized and remembered? But what exactly would such a multi-disciplinary research involve? And what was it that the Prestwich Place Project Committee (PPPC) was proposing for the site?

In my reading, based on the records of the public participation meetings and the submissions made by the PPPC at various stages of the administrative process, two things were being sought: time and silence.

According to Heidi Grunebaum, people who attended the public participation meetings "appealed for time to come to terms with the meaning of a burial ground in the centre of a 'major node of development expansion in the city'" (SAHRA Permit Committee 2, cited in Grunebaum, 2007:213). What was being requested on the one hand was a suspension of time, an opportunity for "countertemporality", (SAHRA Permit Committee 2, cited in Grunebaum,

23 SAHRA 2003, Permit No. 80/03/06/001/51 issued by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) Archaeology, Paleontology, Meteorites and Heritage Objects Permit Committee to T. J. G. Hart of the Archaeology Contracts Office.

24 Originally the committee was known as the Hands Off Prestwich Street Ad Hoc Committee, echoing the Hands Off District Six campaign in earlier times. Later it became the Prestwich Place Project Committee (PPPC).

25 SAHRA, 2003, p. 6, cited in Heidi Grunebaum, 'Unburying the Dead in the "Mother City": Urban Topographies of Erasure', Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America (PMLA), 122.1 (2007), 210–19 (p. 215).

2007:214) or, as one person put it, to open "a time for the dead" (cited in Shepherd, 2007:11). This was time for memory work: naming, listing, recalling, re-storying, accounting, deferring, listening, speaking and claiming (Grunebaum, 2007: 214). On the other hand, and in an apparently contradictory way, what was being requested was a process of historicisation, the locating of the site and the remains within time, marking a position within a sequence of past, present and future from which they had been excluded before.

As for silence, in its final appeal to the Minister of Arts and Culture, the PPPC expressed a desire for the exhumations, the scientific investigations and the development to be stopped and for the site tobe preserved as a "*vrijplaats*" – an open space for memory and identity.[26] This notion of an open or free space, emptied of any new structures or uses, suggests a particular kind of silence. Nick Shepherd argues that what is required in places like Prestwich Street is an "archaeology of silence, of secrecy, of closure (rather than disclosure)" to prevent the "archi-violence" Keisuke Sato writes about, the material and epistemological "violence done against sites and remains in the process of archaeological investigation" (Sato, 206, cited in Shepherd, 2007:21).[27]

But the call for silence displays an obvious contradiction. On the one hand, those who call for the silence deplore the erasures that cause the silence. On the other hand, they can offer no way of alleviating the silence except by offering more silence (Jonker 2005:68).28 This gives rise to many questions. What might render silence articulate? How might silence be made to speak in unspeakable ways? Is there an ethics of silence? As Julian Jonker asks: who has the ethical right to speak for the dead and of the dead? How may the dead be made to speak, and of what will they speak? (Jonker, 2005:50-51).

What the example of Prestwich Place indicates is that while the postcolony demands remembering, its particularities render remembering highly problematic, if not impossible. In what follows, I will suggest the possibility that performance and a particular practice of dramaturgy might be one way of intervening in this process of remembering, one way of making the silent dead speak, because performance is

26 According to Nick Shepherd, the term 'vrijplaats', as used in this context, comes from Christian Ernsten, 'a graduate student in the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town who followed events closely', as quoted in 'Archaeology Dreaming', p. 12. In this regard, see Christian Ernsten, Stylizing Cape Town: Problematizing the Heritage Management of Prestwich Street (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 2006).

27 The silence caused by 'erasure' is of course different from a consciously conceived project of silence as an ethical response. As Julian Jonker argues, there is a need to 'differentiate between *articulate* silence and *inarticulate* silence, or even to describe silence as a dialectic of the articulate and the inarticulate', in 'The Silence of the Dead: Ethical and Juridical Significances of the Exhumations at Prestwich Place, Cape Town, 2003–2005' (unpublished master's thesis, Faculty of Law, University of Cape Town, 2005), p. 68. However, it is my contention that the differentiation does not do away with the contradiction and its resultant demand for response.

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connected to both time and silence in key ways.[29] I will do this with reference to the production *Cargo*, first produced as part of the Spier Arts Summer Season in March 2007 in Stellenbosch and then at the National Festival of the Arts in Grahamstown[30] and the Baxter and Artscape Theatres in Cape Town later that year.[31] In 2006, together with a group of collaborators, representatives from two Cape Town-based performance companies with connections to the University of Cape Town, I set out to create a production on the history of slavery at the Cape. The production, *Cargo*, is the fourth part of a series of productions based on key "sites of memory" in and around the city of Cape Town. The term is taken from Pierre Nora (1989:14) and refers to a conglomerate of physical, material and archival sites that function to concentrate remembrance in a world in which, to paraphrase James E. Young, the more we monumentalise, the more we seem to have "divested ourselves of the obligation to remember" (Young, 2000:9).[32]

The project takes place within the particular landscape of post-apartheid South Africa, a society in transition, struggling to come to terms with its past and the realities and challenges of its present, whilst creating a sustainable future. Within this landscape, debates about heritage, memory and history are of great concern. In particular, the project takes place against the background of Cape Town's own transformation from colonial 'mother city' to one of the more recent metropolitan additions to Mbembe's African postcolony.

29 I use the term 'performance' here rather than 'drama' or 'theatre' because the works produced as part of this project display a wide range of live performance genres and combinations of these and do not easily reduce to traditional notions of theatre or drama. Central to all the performances, however, is an insistence on the primacy of the body and its relationship to space and a concurrent devaluation of the verbal text. This is fundamental to the idea of speaking 'the unspeakable' that is at the heart of the project. This challenge to speak 'the unspeakable' is articulated by Jonker at the end of the second chapter, entitled 'The Ethics of Memory and Silence', of his master's thesis (Jonker, 'The Silence of the Dead', p. 75).

30 The name 'Grahamstown' was officially changed to 'Makhanda' on 2 October 2018. Makhanda (also known as Makhana and Nxele) was a spiritual and political leader at the time of the conflict between the *amaXhosa* and the British settlers in the region that is now known as the Eastern Cape province in South Africa. Colonel John Graham was the British soldier and administrator of the colonial settlement in the valley that took his name, and was changed to Makhanda in 2018 as an act of redress for the British colonial oppression of the *amaXhosa*.

31 The production was commissioned by and premiered at Spier (24 February to 4 March 2007), a wine estate located 45 minutes outside of Cape Town on the outskirts of the town of Stellenbosch. The estate was once a major site of slave-holding in the Cape. Today it is a major tourist site and boasts a large outdoor amphitheatre that stages opera, dance and theatre productions in the summer months. The second season was in Grahamstown (28 June to 7 July 2007) in the Eastern Cape province near the city of Port Elizabeth as part of South Africa's National Arts Festival, the largest all-comers arts festival outside of Edinburgh (see Megan Lewis, 'Past, Present and Future: A Tense South Africa Performs', PAJ 89, 30.2 [2008], 93–101; and Loren Kruger, 'Performance Review: National Arts Festival', Theatre Journal, 60.1 [2008], 117–20). The third season was at the Baxter Theatre (8 to 11 August 2007), an arts centre attached to the University of Cape Town, and the final season was at Artscape (12 to 21 October 2007), the major opera house complex in Cape Town, part of the old Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB).

32 James E. Young, At Memory's Edge: After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 9. It is worth emphasizing that in the sense that it is intended here, a site need not be a place, it could just as well be an object or a set of objects, an archive of documents or images, or a piece of music, or a combination of all of these.

The sites I have focused on are:

- Robben Island (place of banishment and incarceration and its museum and archive);
- District Six (apartheid-evacuated working-class city district and its museum and archive);
- The Bleek and Lloyd collection of /Xam records (an ethnographic archive housed in the library of the University of Cape Town and more recently accessible on the Internet);
- The archive of slavery at the Cape (a dispersed collection of trial records, household inventories, legal and bureaucratic documents and physical sites).

These are not just any sites; they are what might be termed sensitive sites. They are sites that embody a history of "extreme events" (Roth & Salas, 2001:3). They contain "disturbing remains", the disturbance of which raises difficult questions.

The productions and projects created from these sensitive sites are, respectively:

- *53 Degrees* (2002–03)
- *Onnest'bo* (2002–06)
- *Rain in a Dead Man's Footprints* (2004–05)
- *Cargo* (2007)

They were all created with my company Magnet Theatre, a professional company that has operated in South Africa and abroad for the past 21 years.[33] Most have been done in partnership – primarily, as in the case of *Cargo*, with the Jazzart Dance Theatre (Cape Town's foremost contemporary dance company), but also with the District Six Museum in the case of *Onnest'bo*.

In making each of the works mentioned above, my collaborators and I faced two fundamental and interconnected problems related to the themes of time and silence: how to find an appropriate image in the present for something that has passed, and how to make the archive speak in unspeakable ways. The work proceeds from Michel de Certeau's notion that history is not the objects in the archive; the material traces. It is what is done with them or on them, through operations/practices (De Certeau, 1988:20; Ahearne, 1995:22). The specific practice here is dramaturgy understood as the making of new works for performance. In all of my projects I am credited with being the director but I always feel more comfortable with the idea that they are pieces I write, with other bodies, in space. The role of the dramaturg here is part pedagogical, part facilitatory, and part authorial. It involves the employment of particular tools and methods in acts of gathering, generating, guiding, advising and shaping. In other words, I assist in the making of content and the weaving of form.

33 For more information on the company, see http://www. magnettheatre.co.za.

Dramaturgy is a thing; an end product; the particular compositional logic of the work created. It is a relationship between a subject matter, its framing and the particular context in which it occurs. But dramaturgy is also the process of getting there; the multiple conversations, interactions and exercises that lead to that end product.

In all four productions in the series, dramaturgy and the performance it makes and makes use of are put to work on what remains from the past. It reflects, comments on and re-imagines the historical and memorial processes at work in SouthAfrican society during critical junctures of our social transformation.

My particular conceptual approach to dramaturgy is based on the idea of "dwelling", a term borrowed from the anthropologist Tim Ingold, whose work on dwelling proceeds from a question posed by Heidegger (Heidegger, 1971) on the difference between building and dwelling. The answer has for a long time been that we build in order to dwell; that buildings are containers to live in. This leads to what Ingold calls the building perspective: "worlds are made before they are lived in" (2000:179).

This perspective depends on an essential division between the perceiver and the world, "such that the perceiver has to reconstruct the world, in the mind, prior to any meaningful engagement with it" (Ingold, 2000:178). So in our world, houses are designed inthe mind before they are built (by us, or for us, by others).

Ingold's dwelling perspective poses an alternative:

> [T]he forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relationalcontexts of their practical engagements in their surroundings. [. . .] People do not import their ideas, plans or mental representations into the world, since that very world, to borrow a phrase from Merleau-Ponty, (1962:24) is the homeland of their thoughts. Only because they already dwell thereincan they think the thoughts they do. (Ingold, 2000:186)

The dwelling perspective does not, therefore, separate the perceiver from the world. Its point of departure is the body-in-the-world. We build forms, not as a consequence of having had thoughts but as a consequence of dwelling, of being in the world, of being in action. And one kind of action we take whilst dwelling, one among many, is "taking thought" (Whitehead, 1938:217) or imagining ways of meeting our needs. "In the process of dwelling we build" (Ingold, 2000:188).

Ingold argues, further, that from the dwelling perspective, "landscape is constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves" (2000:189). When we dwell in the landscape, we dwell amongst what is already there and because of what is already there. When we dwell in the landscape we remember, which in this sense means "engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past" (Ingold, 2000:189).

From the western perspective, when we perceive an environment we construct a view which leads to one particular meaning of the word landscape. This perspective is from the outside looking in or from afar looking at the world that is something other than ourselves. From an alternative perspective, a perspective Ingold derives from his study of hunter-gatherer societies, we perceive an environment by engaging with it, "moving about in it, exploring it, attending to it, ever alert to the signs by which it is revealed"; (Ingold, 2000:55) by adopting a view from within it. This perspective is from the inside and exists in active relation to parts of the landscape other than ourselves, but our selves are not separate from the landscape or from those other parts: we are our body-in-the-landscape. This is a very different sense of landscape.

In line with this view, my dramaturgical method involves locating myself within the landscape of a particular "site of memory" that is pregnant with a particular past. It involves adopting a view from within this landscape, paying close attention and involving myself, and others I work with, in an active, participatory, embodied way. I don't build a structure in order that the performance might dwell therein. I dwell in the landscape over time in order to learn *how* to build there. It is not a case of building a container in the mind and then filling it. It is a case of allowing the living itself to reveal the right container. This is a methodological approach that reverses the cognitive model. It is not a Cartesian thinking to effect being; it is an incarnated, participatory being developing thought through creative discovery and paying attention to the landscape.

In his monumental work *Memory, history, forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur, building on De Certeau, describes the historiographical operation as consisting of three phases (Ricoeur, 2004:136):

- The first phase he terms the documentary phase. It runs from "the declarations of eye- witnesses to the constituting of archives, which takes as its epistemological program the establishing of documentary proof".
- The second phase he terms explanation/understanding. It is the phase in which the researcherputs questions to the documents in the archive"seeking the multiple uses of the connective "because" responding to the question "why?" "Why did things happen like that and not otherwise?"
- The third phase he terms the representative phase. It concerns "the putting into literary or written form of discourse offered to the readersof history".

These three phases are not meant to be seen as "distinct chronological stages, but [. . .] methodological moments, interwoven with one another" (Ricoeur, 2004:137). The process of making *Cargo*, as with the three productions that preceded it, aligns to a greater orlesser extent to this triadic structure.

It began with a year-long process of research working with primary sources in the archive, and with secondary sources, the studies conducted by historians and archaeologists who have worked on the archive of slavery, physical slave sites and the Cape colonial period in general.

When one dwells in the landscape of a site or an archive, one encounters its content, that which it contains, but one also comes face to face with the logic of its construction, its rules of inclusion and exclusion. "Archive as much as you like, something will always be left out" (Nora, 1989:14). One of the particular focuses of my project is to uncover subjugated histories; to identify what has been left out or what can only be inferred.

The work at this stage involves gathering traces or fragments, because, as Nadia Seremetakis reminds us, the memory of the past comes to us in pieces, it does not show itself all at once, in wholes (2000:310). These fragments include documentary traces: the deposed testimony of eyewitnesses, the records created by those who are "witnesses despite themselves" (Bloch, 1964:61) and images passed down from previous times, paintings, drawings, etchings, photo- graphs and cinematic records. [34] They also include material traces, the kinds of fragments usually dealt with by archaeologists: shards of pottery, old coins, furniture, clothing, and architectural remains.

For Marc Bloch (1964), all are testimonies, either written or unwritten, and all are equally unreliable, demanding a critical reading on the part of the historian.[35] For Carlo Ginzburg (1989), there are testimonies and there are clues. Ricoeur sees Ginzburg setting up "a dialectic of clue and testimony internal to the notion of trace and thereby to [giving] the concept of document its full scope". The testimonies testify through written words; the clues "'testify' through their muteness" (Ricoeur, 2004:174).[45] Ginzburg proposes a "conjectural paradigm" that involves using clues to penetrate the opaque surface of reality. (1989:123). These clues must be read symptomatically, a practice that Ginzburg argues originates in tracking and divination, passes on to medical diagnostics, appears in detective stories and forensics and of course in psychoanalysis, and ultimately forms the basis of all semiotics. In fact, the practice of reading symptomatically is present wherever there is a need to surface what is hidden from view; our subjugated histories.

Ingold also refers to clues in discussing the ways in which novices are called to pay attention to aspects of their environment.[36] In his discussion he distinguishes between clues and ciphers. He suggests that in attempting to discover the meanings inherent in the environment, the novice is

> . . . provided with a set of keys [. . .] not as ciphers but as *clues*. Whereas the cipher is centrifugal, allowing the novice to access meanings that are

34 The notion of 'witnesses in spite of themselves' or 'involuntary witnesses' refers to those who create records of some aspect of society in one period that become a testimony in another period without this being the intention of the 'witness' (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 170–71). Bloch argues that 'in the course of its development, historical research has gradually been led to place more and more confidence in [. . .] the evidence of witnesses in spite of themselves', in *The Historian's Craft*, p. 51.

35 Bloch acknowledges the unwritten traces, referring to them as 'vestiges of the past', in ibid., p. 53, but deals with them in far less detail and complexity than he deals with the written traces.

36 The idea of an 'education of attention' passed on from generation to generation is taken from James Gibson's *Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), p. 254.

> attached ("pinned on") by the mind to the outer surface of the world, the clue is centripetal, guiding him towards meanings that lie at the heart of the world itself, but which are normally hidden behind the facade of superficial appearances. The contrast between the key as cipher and the key as clue corresponds to the critical distinction [. . .] between decoding and revelation. (Ingold, 2000:22)

In this sense, meaning does not cloak or cover the world – as in "multiple layers of symbolic meaning or cultural representation [. . .] deposited upon it" (Cosgrove: 1989:118-35). Rather, it is to be discovered in the world, in relation to specific features of the landscape. The task of discovery is not one of interpretation of layers of representation (decoding), but of probing ever more deeply into the landscape in order to discover what meanings are there to be found (revelation). "Meaning is there to be discovered in the landscape, if only we know how to attend to it. Every feature [. . .] is a potential clue, a key to meaning rather than a vehicle for carrying it" (Ingold, 2000:208). It is important, however, to stress that the meanings that are discovered in the landscape are both plural and partial, not singular or absolute.

My primary concern in the first phase of the making of Cargo was to gather fragments that shed light on key aspects of slavery but also suggested a particularly bodily or kinetic trace. The focus on the body is central to all the work. The body in space is the starting point of the creative process, and the body is the primary agent of exploration and expression, with a concurrent devaluation of the 'text' as point of origin and authority. This body-centred approach draws from Artaud's theatre of the phenomenal body in which the function of the body "is not to identify layers of signification within operative cultures (i.e. the domain of semiotics) but to aim to discover 'language beyond words', a metaphysics of the theatre via an immersion in the physical" (Sanchez-Colberg, 1996:43-44).37 Artaud writes of the stage as a "concrete physical space" to be filled by its own "concrete language" (1958:37):

> [it is] intended for the senses and independent of speech [. . .] [T]here is a poetry of the senses as there is a poetry of language, and [. . .] this concrete physical language [. . .] is truly theatrical only to the degree that the thoughts it expresses are beyond the reach of spoken language. (Artaud, 1958:38)

This search for expression "beyond the reach of spoken language" is precisely at the

37 Ana Sanchez-Colberg, 'Altered States and Subliminal Spaces: Charting the Road towards a Physical Theatre', *Performance Research*, 1.2 (1996), 40–56 (p. 43). The body-space nexus as point of origin can also be traced to the work of Rudolf Laban. According to Sanchez-Colberg, 'In Laban's work the central guiding premise is that of the "body in space". Before there is movement, there is a body in space — a body that has orientation, dimensions, inclination, that by virtue of just existing occupies and produces space. Movement follows from this first principle' (p. 44). This idea can also be found in the work of Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991): 'Before *producing effects* in the material world [. . .] before *producing itself* by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before *reproducing itself* by generating other bodies, each living body is space and has its space' (p. 41).

heart of the work, the aim of which is not only to find images in the present for what has passed, but to make the archive speak in unspeakable ways.

My secondary concern in this first phase was to identify a principle or logic to guide "emplotment", Ricouer's term for the "grasping together" or configuration of a series of disparate events into a discursive whole that says more than what the individual parts say on their own.[38] I will come back to this idea of emplotment further on, but for now let me indicate that the two principles that I identified to guide the emplotment for *Cargo* were listing or inventorising and the staging/performing of social relations in the space of the colonial household and its environs. The first principle arose from a recognition of the work of the TANAP[39] transcription project working on the VOC archives in South Africa, Asia and in the Netherlands. One of the key elements of this project involves the transcribing and translating of inventory lists of the household items of people who died intestate, produced by the Master of the Orphan Chamber. These inventories are being studied in terms of the clues they provide about many aspects of life during the colonial period at the Cape, including many aspects of the life of slaves. The inventory list was to become both structure and productive catalyst for *Cargo*. The second principle was based on work by archaeologist Yvonne Brink, who reads the layout of the Cape Dutch homestead semiotically as a stage for performing power relations and hierarchies and for disrupting them. In this way we were echoing the methodology of Robert Shell in his major work on slavery at the Cape, *Children of bondage* (1994). His study is conducted from the level of the slave-holding household, a household he describes as a "theatre of subordination", to create a "[h]istory not only from the bottom up, but from the inside out" (Shell, [1944} 1997:xxv) Ultimately, the production would be performed on a set that begins as a double- volume cargo crate surrounded by water and earth, then falls open to simulate the layout of a Cape Dutch household without walls, as if turned inside out but also turned around so that the audience's entry point is from behind, as was that of the slaves. The second phase of work begins by exposing performer-collaborators to the collected material and the broad territory, helping them to find their way into the landscape and to position themselves within it. This is achieved through workshops, lectures, tours to physical sites, video documentaries, whatever is available.

Next, a repertoire of dramaturgical tools and methods, gathered and developed over time, is used to work on the fragments. It is a kind of forensic archaeology performed by the body interacting with a fragment. What we hope to do is to prise open the fragments to reveal meaning rather than to interpret a meaning "pinned on" to the outside of the fragment. The intention is to create what De Certeau calls a "breach in the text" through which

38 See Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1, trans. By Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), pp. 41–2 and 53–4, for more detail on 'emplotment' as a grasping together of disparate elements into a narrative whole.

39 TANAP (Towards a New Age of Partnership) is a joint Dutch, Asian and South African research partnership intended to preserve, restore and increase access to the VOC (Dutch-East India Company) archives. For more information, see http://www.tanap.net

> [. . .] the voice exiled on the borders of discourse, might flow back, and with it, the murmur and the "noises" from which the process of scriptural reproduction distinguishes itself. In this way an exteriority without beginning or truth might return to visit discourse. (De Certeau, 1988:236)

At the heart of the work in this phase is improvisation. Western discourse around improvisation centres on the concept of 'spontaneity' – the removal of all blocks or impediments to responding immediately in the moment – and the idea of 'remaining in the present'.[40] Much emphasis is placed on not predetermining the outcome, not deciding on a 'text' and then setting out to realise it in the improvisation, but rather on responding as truthfully as possible to the proposition in the present moment.

Traditions other than the western literary traditions, and in particular oral traditions in which improvisation plays an essential role – performances are composed in the moment of performance – don't quite see it in this way. In these oral traditions, improvisation involves a play or dialogue between certain core elements of the existing tradition and the spontaneity of the moment. The performer engages with the specifics of the environment – the context, the space, the audience – and these determine the particular innovations of the tradition in each particular performance event.

My own current thinking on theatrical improvisation is more influenced by this latter way of thinking. This is also to some extent supported by neurological research, particularly by Antonio Damasio, on our perception of the world around us (Damasio [1994] 2006; 2003). The improviser responds to propositions in the present moment (what Damasio calls "perceptual images") originating in the archival fragments, in the other performers, in the space. At the same time, however, the improviser is also engaged with what has been discovered at earlier stages of the research (what Damasio calls "recalled images"). The process of improvisation thus involves a relationship between these two sets of images in what Shannon Rose Riley describes as "an intentional process of layering". She goes on to argue that, in such a process,

> [. . .] attention is not split so much as layered and in a state of ongoing dialogue and change. [. . .] [E]mbodied processes focus on becoming attentive to recalled images and their dialogical relationship with perceptual imagery offering the actor a method for becoming attuned to the polyphonic connections between body and brain, organism and environment. (Riley, 2004:454)

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40 Viola Spolin, Improvisation for the Theater (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1963); John Hodgson and Ernest Richards, Improvisation (London: Methuen, 1966); Keith Johnstone, Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre (London: Methuen, 1981); Louise Steinman, The Knowing Body: Elements of Contemporary Performance and Dance (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1986); Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow, Improvisation in Drama (London: MacMillan, 1990); Keith Johnstone, Impro for Storytellers: Theatresports and the Art of Making Things Happen (London: Faber & Faber, 1999); Chris Johnston, The Improvisation Game: Discovering the Secrets of Spontaneous Performance (London: Nick Hern Books, 2006).

This highlights the particularly embodied and sensory nature of the improvisational process and brings us back to Ingold's notion that we perceive the environment through active, embodied attention and participation from which thought arises; we don't think our way into the environment.

For *Cargo*, we began our process by identifying objects from the inventory lists and making our own lists arranged as alliterative strings:

> A bed, a bucket, a book, 'n baadjie, a boot, abottle, 'n bees, 'n kooi, 'n kas, 'n koekje seep, a mirror, 'n mes, 'n matras . . .

Then we associated outwards from the listed objects so that:

> Bed became: birth, death, washing, sexual intimacy, sexual abuse, rape, nightmare, family, sleep, suffocation, stain
>
> Bees (beast/cattle) became: work, strength, food, land, load, castration, slaughter, meat, blood, skin, leather, dung
>
> Koekje seep (bar of soap) became: washing, cleaning, smell, luxury, slippery, guilt

We then listed places in the house or around the house and mapped the individual objects to particular places. Then we matched documentary fragments gathered from the archive to each object/ place combination. Then groups of performers were asked to respond to these collections of cues using the body. Later I did the same thing with trial records involving slaves, listing violences enacted on the bodies of slaves and places that were identified in the testimonies and then mapping them together, before subjecting them to bodily investigation.

The physical exploration of the fragments begins in silence.[41] The relationship is between the bodyand what is suggested by the fragment, how it speaks itself to the body. Slowly a sounding might begin, sound as an extension of physicality. Only later does the quoting of documentary fragments find its way in, and right at the end music it is fed in to dialogue with what has been discovered, music that has been composed in parallel according to its own independent research process.

As the improvisational work proceeds, I dwell in the changing landscape, paying attention to the images the performer-collaborators produce, seeking out what I call

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41 All improvisation, and all performance for that matter, begins in silence. In fact, moments of silence punctuate the subtle shifts of action throughout a performance. This silence is not empty, however; it is full of potential energy waiting to become kinetic, to burst into action at one or another level. According to Eugenio Barba, '[T]he Greek word ene´rgheia means [. . .]: to be ready for action, on the verge of producing work' (The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology [London: Routledge, 1995], p. 55). The above resonates with the notion of an articulate silence and its insistent demand for utterance referred to by Jonker above.

second-order fragments, bits and pieces of performance material that re-imagine, reflect on, uncover and reveal the archival fragment in interesting ways, and then feeding that back into the performers' work. By paying attention to these fragments I am beginning to select, to make choices. This paying of attention doesn't only reveal content, it also starts to reveal form. A shape for the fragments begins to emerge from within the landscape.

The above process results in a collection of compound images, compound because they consist of layers of physical, vocal and musical gestures, but also because, although they primarily refer back to the past, embedded in them are flashes, moments, fleeting gestures of what the past has become in the present. And these anachronistic moments have a certain disobedient playfulness about them that unsettles the overall reading of the images. This deliberate insertion of 'play' achieves what Ermarth refers to as "the elasticity in a line that is not pulled taut, of the flexibility in a system that can also include its capacity to permit substitutions even to the point of shifting the balance of its so-called structure" (Ermarth, 1992:146). For Jacques Derrida, (1978) play is what distinguishes a living system from a dead system and must be seen in opposition to all attempts at structuring that have as their goal the limitation of play. Central to this notion is the idea of "supplementarity" derived from Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in general linguistics* (1986). As Ermarth puts it with reference to Derrida, "supplementarity" is:

> [. . .] the process whereby a fixed system or syntax is perpetually renewed by the necessity of substitution: substitution of one term, one experiment, one improvisation after another as dictated bysome irreducible ambiguity in the system of signs. (Ermarth, 1992:148)

It must be emphasized that these compound images are not re-enactments of the past; they are re-creations, refigurations of what remains from the past. Their relationship with the past is sometimes metaphorical, sometimes metonymical, but never simply imitative.

Finally, in the third phase the images selected are emplotted, woven together into the final representative form to be shown to the audience. I have already indicated the logic of the emplotment of *Cargo*. The selected images are ordered sequentially as items on an inventory list. Each item is announced:

> Een kokje seep . . . a cake of soap.
> Twee porseleijne potten . . . two porcelain pots.

Most items are linked to a place in the house:

> In de agterplaats . . . in the back yard
> In de kraal . . . in the kraal
> Agt Beesten . . . eight cattle

And then the fragment is performed. There is no attempt to create cause-and-effect links between items. They begin and end. If there are links they involve rhythmic contrasts and shifts in tone. The idea is that when you have read through the contents of the inventory you have determined the contents of the house. The effect is cumulative. For Paul Ricoeur, the configuration or grasping together of disparate events into some form of narrative "effect[s] a mediation between the events and certain universally human "experiences of temporality"" (White, 1987:173). In other words, there is a meaning inherent in the emplotment that is separate from the meaning of the individual parts, and that meaning, or "content of the form", (173) to quote Hayden White, concerns our human sense of being in time and the complexities thereof.

The emplotment places the images in time, both the time of the performance itself, its duration, but also the linking of the time of the past to the time of the future so that the present, the moment in which we perform or watch, is a transition between the incomplete projects of the past and the yet-to- be-fulfilled projects of the future. But the present cannot just be a passage for historical processes; for the uninterrupted flow of "historical time".[42] It must be a site of engagement, of the "counter-temporality" called for at Prestwich Place. It is in the present that we play at assemblage, that we generate possibilities through the adventure of experimenting and improvising with fragments from the past and what we make of them in the present through the act of dwelling.

If *Cargo* is a history, it is not the history of the past as much as it is the history of the present. And it is a particular present – the present of the postcolony that is not, as we have already argued, easily remembered. The post-colonial body is too fractured to be easily reconstituted into the narrative Paul Ricoeur would want. We set out in search of coherence, of new ways of being together, but the forms that emerge tend towards disruption and discontinuity and ultimately dissolve back into fragments. In this sense, each production is a proposed response to the problematics of remembering in the postcolony and each proposal is also an inevitable failure and a celebration of that failure. It cannot make fully present what has gone before but is now absent. What it can do is to offer mnemonic provocations so that the audience might creatively remember, might bring fragments or remains of the past together in the present into a narrative of restitution. But the narrative aims for no resolution, no sense of closure. It is an assemblage that is, as Gilles Deleuze suggests with reference to the poetry of Walt Whitman, "a whole that is all the more paradoxical in that it only comes *after* the fragments and leaves them intact, making no attempt to totalize them" (1998:58).

So as the "state busily tries to memorialize and museumize, to build new monuments and historic landscapes that are supposed to bring together the different fragments of the nation", (Mbembe, 2004:404) transforming the past into a site of petrified signification

42 As Ermarth shows in Sequel to History, historical time is not a given, it is produced. It is equivalent to the kind of space produced by the Quattrocento: the system of single-point perspective developed by Renaissance painters. It coordinates 'past, present and future – and by implication all the possible viewpoints contained therein – into a single system of measurement [and thereby] organizes [. . .] the faculty of consciousness in much the same way that realist painting rationalizes the faculty of sight' (p. 66). The result is an objective view of the world, regardless of perspective, of the particular location of each spectator.

pronouncing new rights and truths, domesticated and purged of all ambiguity, productions such as *Cargo* propose an alternative version of remembering. A remembering that is an active and embodied project, a project that recognises, to quote Keith Jenkins, that the past "is never over and done with but must be made tomorrow and the day after" (2003:30), as must all performances. And a remembering that is also ultimately a dismembering – that dissolves into fragments almost as soon as it suggests a particular figural coherence; that keeps fragile contradictions and disobedient adventures in play for a short duration and then watches them disappear, as do all performances.

One of the motifs that runs through the *mise-en-scène*, across the inventory list, is the steady accumulation of papers until finally, in an item called "13 spades", a large trunk is brought onto the stage filled to the brim with paper. Suddenly, from within the pile of papers a figure explodes upwards into a standing position, still in the trunk, freeing herself from the mass of paper. In silence she begins to knock on the bones of her body. The body is amplified. The silence is filled not by words but by a desperate and insistent knocking of bones resonating through the space of the theatre. Which brings us back to those bones we began with and a question asked earlier: are they artefacts or ancestors? "Facts in the ground" that must be tested or mnemic traces,[43] signposts to something intangible and silent that lies beyond; the absence we struggle to make present?

But *Cargo* is merely a title pointing to something that has to be brought into being through the collective efforts of performers and audiences. It too is an absence that must be made present every time it is performed. This might be performance's particular and subversive contribution to the history of the present. The fact that it must be worked at, brought into being, creatively imagined, re-invented, collectively sustained, argued over each and every time. That it is never complete, never stable, never fixed once and for all. As Derrida comments: "Inheritance is never a given; it's always a task. It remains before us" (quoted in Bennington, 2000:37).

Figure 9: Women's chorus, *Cargo*, 2007. Photograph by Garth Stead.

43 'Mnemic' is used here in the Freudian sense, to signify a hysterical thought with an unaccounted-for intense affect.