

Without Blood: Reconciliation as a Shared Experience in South African Hybrid Artistic Practice

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Abstract

National healing and reconciliation have come to represent a new vision of democratic action in political life that both punctuates South African history and by being imbedded in the constitution. Reconciliation is persistent. President Ramaphosa admits that ‘we must also recognise our own wounds, we must acknowledge that we are a society that is hurting, damaged by our past, numbed by our present and hesitant about our future. This may explain why we are so easily prone to anger and to violence’. The executive director of the Centre of the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Mogapi, emphasizes that we should find ways to speak to our pain. And former president Thabo Mbeki posed that to achieve national unity and reconciliation, as South African’s we should confront our racist legacy as a historical challenge that faces all South Africans, black and white. Philosopher, Ricoeur proposes that reconciliation lingers as an unfulfilled need and speaks to a ‘poetics of existence’ a human ideal that lures us towards achievements not yet realised.

This article details the South African hybrid staged adaptation of Alessandro Baricco’s novel, *Without Blood* (2010) to explore the themes of reconciliation and forgiveness. Opposite to the commissions where stories are told and witnessed; this production sought to include the spectator through experience, incorporating them into the action by appealing to their senses and memory through visceral responses rather than only cognitive (re)actions. As *ex-post facto* research, achieved through using a performative lens to illustrate the dialectical mode of doing and being in the research process, this article intersperses portions of personal narrative with academic writing to enable a juxtaposed appreciation of the various layers of interpretation. Further, through

reflexive and reflective process, this article includes a delineation of the hybrid live-multimedia and physical theatre storytelling creative practice; including observed, yet subjective, perception of the audience's response to the performances of *Without Blood*.

The objective of the production was never to instigate catharsis towards a rosy solution; but to provoke discourse and challenge viewpoints. Experience, whether lived or imagined, relates to culture and memory; it is influenced by and simultaneously determines both. The physical performer and sentient spectator, together, are dependent on this experiential performance for meaning-making. The theme of reconciliation exposed further by guilt and forgiveness, were conveyed via a shared experience through memory. Memory is not just an individual, private experience, but is also part of the collective experience. Guilt was addressed through forgiveness as transformative justice brought about by the two main characters making amends.

Keywords: reconciliation, performer/spectator engagement; phenomenology, experiential theatre

To reconcile is defined by the *Oxford Dictionary* (2013) as to 're-establish a close relationship between; to settle or resolve; to become friendly with (someone) after estrangement or to re-establish friendly relations between (two or more people); to bring (oneself) to accept'. As a word, reconcile is classified as a verb, to do. One needs 'to do' reconciling in order to achieve reconciliation. The word reconciliation is a noun, the act of reconciling has been reconciled, it is done, named, set, established. There is nothing imbedded in the word to suggest how. How does one 'do' reconciling to achieve the product: reconciliation. A main activator is that of forgiveness advocated through religion – as in Reverend Celestin's insight regarding the aftermath of the massacres in Rwanda that,

Forgiveness is required for reconciliation to take place; it takes place internally, an internal decision you make that allows you to let go of strong emotions against the perpetrator, freeing you to re-think, re-imagine a better future. Giving up the desire to get revenge is essential and recognizing that the punishment of the other isn't what will heal

you. But reconciliation, the next step, cannot happen internally. It requires two people willing to come close, both willing to let go of anger, resentment and the desire for revenge or punishment (Musekura 2012:6).

This article proposes that the need for reconciliation forms part of the South African collective cultural representation. Evidence of which can be seen in the continual return to and search for means of reconciliation that peppers South African history, as far back as colonial times, where enemies were left to find ways of living in peaceful coexistence; and currently, post-apartheid, reconciliation is inclusive in the country's political agenda by being embedded in the constitution.

South Africa's transition to democracy in April 1994 is regarded by many as one of the major achievements of twentieth century. The transformation of the apartheid state to majority rule has been warmly (and at times cynically) referred to as 'a negotiated revolution', 'a miracle transition' and 'the birth of a new rainbow nation'. It is true that South African society has changed. Power has been ushered correctly into the hands of the majority, overt racism has been outlawed, human rights policies entrenched, a constitutional system that can rival any liberal democracy in the world established and there has been limited socio-economic development. Despite these successes, the long-term impact of the agreements made to ensure peace and reconciliation remain uncertain. A highly politicised population remains trapped in a society of staggering wealth differentials. Those brutally victimised by the security forces have witnessed ruthless killers and their governmental accomplices walk free in exchange for often-meagre confessions. For some victims and survivors of apartheid, the price of peace has been high (Hamber 1998:online).

Reconciliation is persistent. As humans, it is a question we have in common, a shared question that must be asked and asked again if we are to come to broader understanding of who we have been, what we are, and what we hope to become – together (Du Toit & Doxtader 2010:ix). In the post-apartheid reality, truth commissions have emerged as the leading institutional method of pursuing restorative justice. Truth commissions in general, including such events as the

Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) hearings, with their focus on ‘national healing’ and reconciliation have come to represent a unified vision of democratic action in political life. Former president Thabo Mbeki (2010:1-7) posed that to achieve national unity and reconciliation, as South African’s we should confront our racist legacy as a historical challenge that faces all South Africans, black and white.

The constitution openly recognised the fact that our [South Africa’s] past made it inevitable that we would have to contend with ‘a legacy of fear, guilt and revenge’...these can now be addressed on the basis that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu but not for victimisation (Mbeki 2010: 2).

From a more philosophical perspective, Paul Ricoeur (2000:31-35) states that ‘[reconciliation] speaks to a ‘poetics of existence’; a human ideal that lures us towards achievements not yet realised’. Metaphysically speaking reconciliation lingers as an unfulfilled need.

Elusive and beyond adequate conceptual grasp, it [reconciliation] refuses to go away. It cajoles, tantalises, and annoys, refusing to be quantified, adequately explained or named Like a stone in the shoe, it leaves us uncomfortable. Just when we think we have dealt with it, it reappears bothering us all over again (Villa-Vicencio 2010:168).

Reconciliation offers an opportunity for a people to engage one another to find the means of resolving conflicts. ‘Drawing on cultural and religious linkages between individuals, their families, clans, communities, and ancestors, traditional African structures draw on symbol, ritual, music, song, ancestors, and sacred space, all of which are adapted from ancient customs and beliefs to meet modern needs’ (Villa-Vicencio 2010:163). Theatre is one such tool used as a mirror reflection of society, as Boal proposes theatre reflects a ‘rehearsal for a revolution’. South African’s Truth and Reconciliation Commissions can also be analysed as a kind of social performance (theatrical). Exposure to political notions in theatre is not a new concept to the South African audience where the over-arching themes of guilt and forgiveness are unmistakable and hard to ignore and are often packaged as a desire for transformation. Works

include those such as: Calvin Ratladi's *Silent Scars* (2017); the South African State Theatre's *Marikana the Musical* (2017); Lara Foot-Newton's *Solomon and Marion* (2013); Mike van Graan's *Green Man Flashing* (2004); *Brothers in Blood* (2009); and *Rainbow Scars* (2013); as well as Yael Farber's *Woman in Waiting* (1999); *Molara* (2007) and her South African adaptation of Strindberg's *Mies Julie* (2012). The National Arts Festival artistic director, Ismail Mahomed in a blog post discussing the power of theatre to transform people's lives, described how South African audiences represent a people so desperately in need of catharsis and so desperately in need to scream out its pain, anger, disillusionment, fears about each other which political correctness has forced us to bottle inside of us and from which we create a cancer that will be worse than apartheid.

Transformation is more than making some of the white people stand at the gate so that more black people can put their bums on the seat. Transformation is also about giving audiences that quiet hour in a theatre where they can voluntarily take up the kind of content that pierces through the layers that shield their hearts and allows them to break their defences and to sniffle and to shed a tear and to acknowledge that we're all [messing] up big time That we need to remember our past, but we all need to seize this moment and be so much more obsessed with building a better future (Mahomed 2013).

Further, world acclaimed South African theatre maker, Yael Farber (2008) terms the use of theatre to tell stories that through witnessing impel a sense of suffering, transformation, and peace for the spectator. This collective concept for her publication of her works under the title: *theatre as witness* is based on social justice theatre a model of performance developed by Teya Sepinuck in 1986 that gives voice to those whose stories have not been heard in society, so that the audiences can collectively bear witness to issues of suffering, redemption and social justice, and seek to celebrate the power of the human spirit to grow and transform. Recent programmes of Theatre of Witness developed by Sepinuck have brought 'survivors of violence together with perpetrators and witnesses to explore issues of accountability, healing, guilt, restorative justice, forgiveness, and redemption' (Sepinuck 2013) and are said to be public forums where audiences may move beyond entrenched positions and ideologies to-

wards understanding and healing.

For the purpose of this article, the South African stage adaptation of Alessandro Baricco's novel, *Without Blood* (2010) will be used to explore the themes of reconciliation and forgiveness. Opposite to the commissions where stories are told and passively heard, this production seeks to include the spectator through experience, incorporating them into the action by appealing to their sense of personal-cultural circumstances and memory through gut-reactions rather than only cognitive re/actions. Experience, whether lived or imagined, relates to culture and memory and is influenced by and simultaneously determines both. The physical performer and sentient spectator, together, are dependent on this experiential performance for meaning-making. The theme of reconciliation exposed further by guilt and forgiveness, were transferred to the spectator through a shared socio-cultural experience through memory. Memory is not just an individual, private experience, but is also part of the collective experience. Guilt was addressed through forgiveness as transformative justice brought about by the two main characters making amends. The hope that the need for reconciliation, within this theatrical inclusive experience, lives on in the minds and renewed actions of all participants.

To enable a juxtaposed appreciation of the practical application of the *Without Blood* performances, discussions of the creative meaning-making process employed by the physical performer-creators, that engage aspects pertinent to sentient spectators, have been interspersed with portions of metatext and performance text.

Within hybrid¹ staging the use of physical theatre performance modes allow both the performer and spectator, together, to be dependent on the

¹ Theatre is essentially an unavoidable hybrid of inherited, borrowed, stolen and invented practices and ideas (Murray and Keefe, 2007: 6; Sánchez-Colberg, 2007: 21). David Alcock (in (Blumberg and Walder, 1999: 51)): 'Cross-cultural performance has developed in South African theatre, where black theatre style/practice in particular has brought its enriching traditions of oral literature, ritual and dance, all with a strong somatic emphasis, to bear on the dominant European forms. Research into this complex area of hybridization or syncretic [sic.] development is likely to continue and enrich our understanding of South African theatre'. Hauptfleisch (2007: 1-2) terms hybrid or crossover theatre as a reference to a more recent anti-realist thrust of

experiential performance for meaning-making. In physical theatre, the experimental, collaborative, ensemble process presented by the performer-creator will only be ‘unlocked’ and interpreted through associated meaning-making by the spectator. Expressive physical actions augment the message of the performance that provides a sensory experience by engaging the spectator. In order to engage the spectator, Ademenko’s (2003:15) three aspects of a new postmodern spectator are required: investment, complicity, and discipline. This article will reveal how these aspects associated with a sentient spectator were explored in the South African stage adaptation of Alessandro Baricco’s novel *Without Blood*.

Without Blood: Production and Perceptions

Without Blood (2004) by Alessandro Baricco is a fable about the brutality of conflict - and one girl’s quest for revenge and healing. Adaptation and performance rights were obtained from Baricco in 2009-2010 to transform this novel into a stage production set in a South African context. *Without Blood* is a revenge tale tempered by other human activities like love and loss, remembrance and forgiveness, and the way we are shaped by the events of our past.

Although set against the violent backdrop of farm murders, this socio-cultural understanding runs deep within the psyche and being of South African’s, through daily encounters/confrontation with violent acts. Most South African’s cannot say that they have not been touched by violence, most often directly, but otherwise consciously through the media, and the lives that they live. It is inculcated into our very survival mechanisms. The story also resonates with the swell of anti-gender-based violence protests, anti-child abuse demonstrations, the bombardment of class-related theft and violent crime, and the undercurrent of fear that most citizens of the country live with daily – that cuts across and is irrespective of colour, creed, or class. Not to mention the fear, anger and the pain that are resultant factors.

Without Blood was produced by Seity in association with the South African State Theatre, with performances in 2010 in the Momentum Theatre

the European-American avant-garde and film and media industry in South African theatre. This includes a modern performance ethic developed through physical theatre that transcends language which continues to evolve and define contemporary hybrid theatre in South Africa.

in Pretoria, the National Arts Festival Grahamstown, and at the Wits 969 festival in Johannesburg. The South African creative team gave this Italian text a South African flavour².

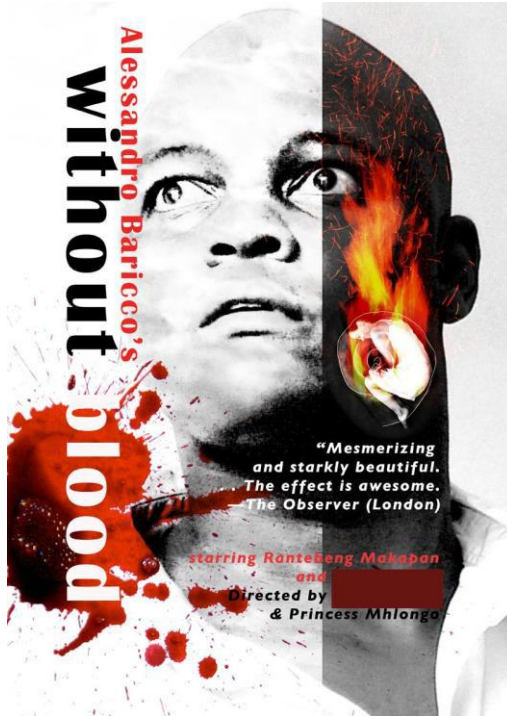


Figure 1: Poster design for South African stage adapted play, *Without Blood* (2010). Image courtesy of the artist Anni Snyman

² Seity means ‘with something peculiar to one’s self’. Seity is a South African performance company established by Janine Lewis and Melodie Schoeman and strives to present original exciting collaborative performances with established professional artists, performance artists and physical theatre performers. Other shows include: *Walking with Water* (activation collaboration with Anni Snyman, *Memory of Water* exhibition, UJ Art Gallery 2006); *So?seity* (commissioned by the Pretoria Zoological Gardens 2007); *Panda – ode to Jan and More* (VERVE Physical theatre and Performance Platform 2008); *Fluid/s* and *Dikker as Water* (site-specific performance art commissioned by Woordpoort Festival 2009).

Without Blood was performed as a two-hander with me (Janine Lewis) and Rantebeng Makapan, with the inclusion of interactive multimedia that played the third revelatory performer. Digital and visual artist, Anni Snyman, and audio-visual specialist, Chris Taute, brought their expertise to the creative set design and multi-media aspects of the performance. Adapted and devised by me and the cast with Princess Mhlongo as an assistant director – the objective first audience member.

All descriptions regarding spectators' perception of the *Without Blood* performances included in this article remain a subjective perception of the audience's response to the productions. These are presented alongside the (re)conceptual nature of the performative that enables a juxtaposed appreciation of the various layers of interpretation. The (re)conceptualised narratives portrayed through spatial poetry and physical theatre create an artistic, surreal expression – dreamlike and strange, not ordinary or every-day. The non-literal and abstract nature of expressive staging chooses the emotive rather than descriptive storytelling route. Remaining true to the reflexive tone of this article, the deliberate use of expressive staging in this contemporary performance primarily uses physical actions to convey the message. Rendering the message (sur)real – narrative physical actions juxtaposing the real and surreal³.

Social issues are at the core of my productions. The conceptual expressive treatments of my work as 'magical reality' give voice to sensitive emotional issues in South Africa. The surreal lens through which the delicate subject matter is presented to a multi-racial South African spectator, allows the work to be embraced and experienced without rejection due to prejudice. None of the spectator's cultural boundaries are literally traversed. Any judgment is encouraged and done subjectively by the spectators themselves.

Politics and the Political Spectator

Without Blood slips into the South African political (historical and current rea-

³ Surreal in general means bizarre or dreamlike. It may refer to: Anything related to or characteristic of Surrealism, a movement in philosophy and art. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the all-powerfulness of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life (Klingsöhr-Leroy and Grosenick 2004:6; Levy 1997:7).

lity) framework with ease. *Without Blood* retells the story of two characters who have met in their youth during a farm raid and murder, where one of the aggressors, a young man, inadvertently saves the girl's life.

During the hunting down and killing of Nina's father, the murderers fail to discover her hidden in a hole beneath the farmhouse floor. After the carnage, Tito, one of the murderers, discovers Nina's trapdoor. Enthrilled by the sight of Nina's perfect innocence, he keeps this discovery secret. The story skips forward to a time when Nina, as a mature woman, seeks out Tito and confronts him about his actions in the past. Tito's struggle accomplices who were involved in the initial murder became the peacetime hunted, which provides a mystery element to the story – it is implied that Nina is taking revenge for their brutal attack (Baricco 2004). The revelatory discussion about motivations when Nina and Tito officially meet decades after the terrible violence is the core of this production's message – providing personal narratives to understand the reasons behind both their actions.

Despite the political context of the original story being set in an unnamed location (originally somewhere in Europe), it is clearly a time of war. Within a post-apartheid South African context, the transfer of power has not led to peace in all areas – Farm attacks in South Africa are seven times higher than any other country in the world. In 2002 it was revealed that the number of black farmers killed is increasing. International Genocide Watch recently raised South Africa's threat level to Stage Five out of the eight possible stages of genocide, referring to boers and refugees as the highest targeted potential victims (Singh & Osam 2011; Altbeker 2008:1 - 31). Also, through current crime statistics it is easy to see how the war-setting of Baricco's *Without Blood* echoes the low-intensity civil war taking place in South Africa.

In the adaptation of *Without Blood* for the South African stage, the main characters Nina and Tito were changed to represent a white woman and a black man to literally symbolise the colour divide in South Africa. However, other than this external reference, there is no reference to racial divide in the performance text. The expressive interpreting of the text also allowed for the associations with the patriarchal, the gender-based as well as child violence references. Besides the mention of South African names and places, nothing else in the story content had to change. Names referred to in the production are fictional and are used to indicate orientation to the historical struggle. None of the references are true tales of people in South African history.

Nina became the daughter of Johannes Basson, a reference to South

African Dr. Wouter Basson, equivalent to the chemical warfare expert referred to in the original story. As the story is not a biography that references Dr Basson's life and actions, his surname was used only as an inference to his association with the apartheid regime. Basson was the head of chemical and biological warfare during the apartheid era. Since Basson underwent various convictions and acquittals for war crimes, including an application to continue practicing as a medical doctor brought to the high court in 2010 (Smith 2012) (the year of the production going to stage), he was an obvious choice as referent. The rawness of Basson's saga continues years into South Africa's post-apartheid era, when, with his trial also came an unsolicited anger and resentment from the populace, as it poured out as protest at his court hearings. This just underscored the relevance of the *Without Blood* narrative within the current South African context.

The names of the three aggressors who committed the violent attack at the beginning of the story did not need much alteration. The generic reference to a Chris and a Tito could easily be transposed to African National Congress historical struggle references and so were retained. The name of the attack leader was changed to Modise. Both the original names Nina and Tito suited the Afrikaans and Nguni⁴ cultures respectively. Names of places suggested the South African locale and past provincial names applicable to the historical context of the apartheid struggle.

Given the general political numbing to violence of the South African audience who watched this production, it could be said that it was impossible for them not to participate.

With the initial hearing about the description of *Without Blood*, a person would like to write it off as merely *another* drama that deals with the historical struggle between black and white. That would however be a short-sighted reaction and a loss for those who then

⁴ The ancient history of the Nguni people is wrapped up in their oral history. According to legend they were a people who migrated from the north to the Great Lakes region of sub-equatorial Central/East Africa. They migrated southwards over many centuries, with large herds of Nguni cattle, probably entering what is now South Africa around 2,000 years ago in sporadic settlement, followed by larger waves of migration around 1400 AD.

choose to side-step watching the production⁵ (Sadler 2010).

It is precisely the exploration of this taboo topic, told through a personalised narrative that entices the spectator. Alternative methods of engagement were also sought in the telling of this tale that were intended to further entice the spectator into participation, through investment, complicity, and discipline.

Investment

Without Blood performances asked the sentient spectator to engage in an interaction by investing in the performance. The stage design was the first element that asked the audience to participate in the interpretation.

The stage design for *Without Blood* was sparse and minimalistic. A metal, cubic cage-like structure was used throughout, that transformed by tipping and turning, as well as by having panels removed and repositioned. This cube denoted the literal limitation in the performance space and the boxed-in thinking that the story expounds. Also, literal representation of being trapped. ‘Anni Snyman’s simple yet intricate steel set-design contributes to the nearly clinical and surrealistic approach’ (Sadler 2010). Text, action, and images are juxtaposed to the simple design.

A wall of newspaper was hung as a backdrop to the action onto which the multi-media was projected. Each newsprint told of current stories (positive and negative) and were left on display as a constant reminder of contemporary South African circumstances. A newspaper was also included as an interactive prop in the performance. Other props included a shawl (initially used to

⁵ Translated from the original Afrikaans review: ‘Met die eerste aanhoor van die beskrywing van *Without Blood* wil ‘n mens dit afskryf as net nóg ‘n drama wat die historiese stryd tussen swart en wit opdelf.

Dit sou egter ‘n baie kortsigtige opvatting wees en ‘n verlies vir dié wat dit as gevolg daarvan systap...danksy ‘n uitstekende teks bo die struggle-onderwerp uitstyg nie, maar juis oor die besonder boeiende wyse waarop dit op die verhoog uitspeel... Vir 70 minute eien die uitsers talentvolle tweemanskap van en Rantebeng Makapan die verhoog met fisieke durf en oortuiging... Albei akteurs het ‘n sterk fisieke teenwoordigheid... Anni Snyman se eenvoudige maar interaktiewe stelontwerp dra by tot die byna kliniese en surrealistiese benadering’ (Sadler *Beeld* May 2010).

symbolise a blanket for the young Nina), a shirt (for Tito), along with hats for each that were used to represent the transition of the main characters Tito and Nina to maturity. Both performers were dressed in plain white outfits and had non-gender specific shaved heads – representing neutral ‘paper’ on/with which to ‘write’ the story.

The story was condensed and told by two performers and utilised literal storytelling interspersed with characterisation. Through physical storytelling and narration, Makapan showed off his diversity by portraying the various male characters involved in the violent farm attack, as well as the main character of Tito. Lewis who also narrates the story, portrayed the young and mature Nina.

The excitement of the play is the experimental approach and the novelty of telling stories in fresh ways... this play lends itself to multimedia and physical theatre... It is a wise choice because much of the story is told - as if reading from a book or reciting a poem - by the two characters on the stage. It comes alive with the help of physical theatre and the actors taking on many different lives (De Beer 2010).

The first act retells the story of the violent farm attack and is supplemented by multi-media animated visuals. In this act, the cube is set with panels forming a platform on the top and the hole strategically placed in the centre. Makapan performs from this elevated platform, enacting the attacker’s approach to the house and violent attack. Lewis, as Nina, physically and symbolically enters the cube by being dropped through the centre opening by her father. The inner volume of the cube represents the small cavern under the floorboards of the farmhouse where Nina hides from the attackers. Lewis performs and narrates inside the cube, often referring to, or physically returning to, the crouched position of Nina huddled on the floor (refer to Figure 2, and Hyperlink 1: [Nina is hidden under the floorboards](#)).



Figure 2: Lewis performs and narrates inside the cube, often referring to, or physically returning to, the crouched position of Nina huddled on the floor. Photograph courtesy of Candice Cupido at CuePix (Hyperlink 1: [Nina is hidden under the floorboards](#)).



Figure 3: Tito (Rantebeng Makapan) on top of the cube discovers Nina (Janine Lewis) in her ‘hiding place under the floorboards’. A scene from the first act of *Without Blood* at The National Arts Festival and South African State Theatre. Photograph courtesy of Susan du Toit. (Hyperlink 1: [Nina is hidden under the floorboards](#)).

The second act sees the cube initially tipped forward to represent a newspaper booth, then the panels removed and reassembled in other positions to form various spatial images, finally the panels were placed at an angle to represent a bed. Virtual puppetry was included in the form of live cameras hidden in the hats worn by the characters. This provided a metaphorical extension to the world outside the cube of the physical action of the performers. The hats are worn conventionally, as well as being voyeuristic invaders of the space, revealing specific behavioural gestures of the characters. For example, zooming in on the mouth or hands of a character reveals the uneasiness or physical messages in the non-verbal actions and unspoken text, as may be focussed on and witnessed in a conversation between two people. The use of cameras also suggest spying, a use for which they were ostensibly intended (refer to Figure 4, and Hyperlink 2: [Virtual puppetry in Without Blood](#)).



Figure 4: The use of cameras also suggest spying, a use for which they were ostensibly intended. Photograph courtesy of Candice Cupido at CuePix. (Refer to Figure 4, and Hyperlink 2: [Virtual puppetry in Without Blood](#)).



Figure 5: The use of hats manipulated as virtual puppets in *Without Blood* at The National Arts Festival and South African State Theatre. Photograph courtesy of Susan du Toit (refer to Figure 5, and Hyperlink 2: [Virtual puppetry in Without Blood](#)).

In *Without Blood* the spectator is required to engage in the interaction that the performance is asking for by interpretive participation. Due to the non-literal set design and the physical story-telling performance style, the spectator is asked to imaginatively visualise the narrated story with only a symbolic set, sparse multi-media imagery, and moments of characterisation to use as footholds for their imagination to grasp. The spectator's investment in the performance is akin to that of a reader of the novel. Their imagination is required to colour-in the sparse line-drawn contexts created by the physical performers.

Complicity

In *Without Blood* a sense of ensemble and collusion was required by the performers in and through the physical storytelling performance. 'The spirit of ensemble only communicates itself to an audience when there is a palpable sense of those performers all being complicit – of colluding – in the deed of daring to create and present a show to the spectators' (Callery 2001:71; Murray 2003:84). The action also called for the spectators to be complicit during their interpretation. – as in they become accomplices involved in knowing about something bad that has happened. This complicity asks the spectator to act without self-consciousness.

The action in *Without Blood* was enhanced using expressive staging. Despite the linear story being narrated, often the physical performers would display what the moment 'felt-like' through abstract action, as opposed to literally demonstrating the action. Examples include:

When Nina and Tito meet years after the violent attack on the farm, Nina asks Tito how much he remembers of the attack.

WOMAN: *'is it true that they called you Tito?
'had you ever met my father before?'*

MAN: *'I knew who he was'*

WOMAN: *'is it true that you were the first to shoot him?'*

MAN: *'What difference does it make...'*

WOMAN: *'you were twenty. You were the youngest. You had been fighting for only a year. Chris trusted you like a son.' Then the woman asked if he remembered.*

MAN: *It may have been a coincidence, but certainly it was odd. Little by little everyone was persuaded that the child knew something.*

WOMAN: *The man said that he remembered. That he had done nothing else, for years, but remember everything.*

MAN: *The man stared at her. And only in that instant, finally, did he see again, in her face, the face of that child, lying there, impeccable and right, perfect. He saw those eyes in these, and that extraordinary strength in the calm of this tired beauty. Have I ever been in a moment that was not this one?*

During this exchange, both performers exited the cube and began a wrestling action – pushing the cube between them. When Nina appeared to be taking the upper hand in the discussion, the female performer literally stopped pushing the cube causing the male performer, Tito, to collapse in defeat. This sequence forms part of the discussions between the characters in their struggle to understand the actions of the past (refer to Hyperlink 3: [Struggling to understand](#)).

Another example comes later in the second act, when Nina tells her version of how her father was shot in cold blood.

WOMAN: *Now tell me: why should my story be any less true than the one you told? My father was a wonderful father. Don't you believe me? And why? – why should this story be less true than yours?*

Do you know that I know everything about that night, and yet I remember almost nothing? I was there beneath the trapdoor, I couldn't see, I heard something, and what I heard was so absurd, it was like a dream. It all vanished in the fire. Children have a special talent for forgetting. But they told me, and so I knew everything. Did they lie to me? I don't know. I was never able to ask myself. You came to the house, you fired at him, then Modise shot him and finally Chris stuck the barrel of the AK in his mouth and blew off his head. How do I know? Coetsee told me. He liked to talk about it. He as an animal. You were all animals. You men always are, in war. How will God forgive you?

The female performer climbs onto the shoulders of the male performer and from there recounts Nina's story. The female performer palpates the head of the male performer, as if drilling the details of the story into his mind. This action also symbolises how the details of the story have been etched in Tito's mind and how remembering the details tortures him. The male performer holds his hat/camera in his hands, directed upwards towards the female performer's face – her facial expressions are projected onto the backdrop (refer to Image 3, and Hyperlink 4: [Nina's version of the story](#)).

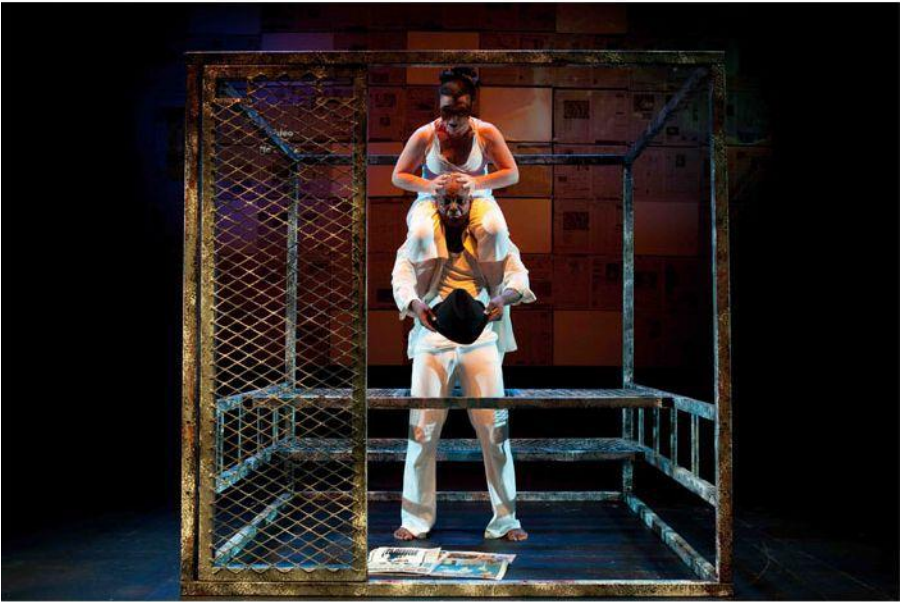


Figure 6: Nina (Janine Lewis) on the shoulders of Tito (Rantebeng Makapan) palpating his head, telling her version of how her father died. A scene from the second act of *Without Blood* at the State Theatre in Pretoria. Photograph by Susan du Toit.

These moments, and others, utilise all the elements of performance – action, text, the set, and multi-media – in conjuring up and deliberately juxtaposing one moment with another in order to effectively portray the story expressively. It is in these moments that the spectator is invited in to the action to react

viscerally without any self-judgment, and to conspire in the act of meaning-making. With this involvement in the personal stories of the two characters, the spectator is no longer merely an observer they become an accomplice. The spectator is a complicit participant in the action. Witnessing the narrative becomes a pertinent personal-cultural contribution to interpretation of the action. No spectator is exempt from the political and emotional wrangling performed in front of them. The spectator's experience further produces an ethically-forged sense of community between the performers and spectators, so also contributing to the spectator's status as co-creators of the artistic event.

Discipline

Adamenko (2003:15-16) requires from the postmodern spectator discipline to commit to opening themselves up to experience new forms of interaction.

Within the context of this article and the South African performance of *Without Blood*, discipline may include an additional implication. Discipline within a country steeped in political militant history has a distinct connotation that cannot be ignored. The racial divides within South Africa are still prevalent despite a new democratic dispensation – these divides now extend beyond the black/white divide, to include ethnic groups and foreign nationals. The heartache and turmoil that racism leaves in its wake is hard to discard. The resolute decision to align one's allegiance ruthlessly to one's original faction takes discipline – albeit a socially-conditioned discipline. *Without Blood* challenges this allegiance by telling a story about reconciliation – the ravages of war, how the need for vengeance, and hidden mental scars continue to be passed on to successive generations.

The audience engages in a conditioned, political discipline by witnessing a familiar narrative. With Adamenko's prerequisite for discipline, when the spectators open themselves to interaction by considering both sides of the argument presented within the narrative, this, in turn, may test their political loyalty.

The climax of *Without Blood* occurs when the main characters Nina and Tito grapple with events that shaped both their lives. In coming to terms with the intention for the violent crime that linked their pasts, explanations are proffered as grounds for the violence inflicted by all factions. Tito explains the reasons for the unexpected act of mercy he showed Nina by saving her life. Tito goes on to explain that, by not acknowledging to his accomplices that he

had spared Nina, he had assumed that he had allowed Nina to die when his accomplices set fire to the farmyard upon their departure. Tito inadvertently caused himself the most pain through guilt over her presumed death.

Both characters demand understanding from each other of their intention to cause conflict in each other's lives. These demands provide moments that activate personal-cultural choices made by the individual spectator. The on-stage interaction provides an opportunity for the spectator to witness, and literally hear the opinions of the opposing side, possibly triggering a realisation otherwise not often experienced (refer to Hyperlink 5: [Explaining what we don't understand](#)).

WOMAN: '...you were a boy of twenty and yet you did nothing. Please explain how this is possible. Do you have some way of explaining to me that something like that can happen? It's not a nightmare of a man with a fever, it is something that happened. Can you tell me how it is possible?'

MAN: We were soldiers

WOMAN: What do you mean?

MAN: We were fighting the war

WOMAN: What war? The struggle is over!

MAN: Not for us

WOMAN: Not for you?

MAN: You don't know anything

WOMAN: Then tell me what I don't know

MAN: I believe in a better world

WOMAN: What do you mean?

MAN: You can't go back. When people murder each other, you can't go back. We didn't want to get to that point others started it, but then there was nothing else to do.

WOMAN: What do you mean a better world?

MAN: A just world, where the weak don't have to suffer for the evil of others, where everyone has the right to happiness.

WOMAN: And you believe that?

MAN: Of course, I believed it, it could be done, and we knew how.

WOMAN: You knew?

MAN: Does that seem strange to you?

WOMAN: *Yes*

MAN: *And yet we knew. And we fought for that, to be able to do what was right.*

WOMAN: *Killing children?*

MAN: *Yes, if it was necessary.*

WOMAN: *But what are you saying?*

MAN: *You can't understand.*

WOMAN: *I can understand - you explain, and I'll understand.*

MAN: *You can't sow without ploughing first. First you must break up the earth. First there must be a time of suffering, do you understand?*

WOMAN: *No*

MAN: *There are a lot of things that we had to destroy in order to build, we had to be able to suffer to inflict suffering – whoever could endure more pain would win, you cannot dream of a better world and think that it will be delivered just because you ask for it. Once you understood that it no longer made any difference if they were old people or children, your friends or your enemies, you were breaking up the earth. Then there was nothing but to do it, and there was no way to do it that didn't hurt. And when everything seemed too horrific, we had our dream to protect us. We were not fighting for money, or field to work, or a flag. We were doing it for a better world do you understand what that means? We were restoring to millions of men a decent life, and the possibility of happiness, of living and dying with dignity, without being trampled or scorned. We had to break up the earth and we did, millions of other children were waiting for us to do it, and we did.*

WOMAN: *Do you really believe that?*

MAN: *Of course, I believe it*

WOMAN: *After all these years you still believe it?*

MAN: *Why shouldn't I?*

WOMAN: *You won. Does this seem like a better world to you?*

Other poignant moments in the narrative included the text: 'you need to have faith in the world in order to have children' and the crux of the argument:

WOMAN: ... all these years you have asked yourself a thousand times why you got involved in the struggle, and the whole time your better world is spinning around in your head, an intolerable memory. That is the only true reason you fought, because this was what you had in mind – to be revenged. And now you should be able to utter the word ‘revenge’. You killed for revenge, you all killed for revenge. It is nothing to be ashamed of, it is the only drug for the pain there is, the only way not to go mad, the drug that enables us to fight. But it didn’t free you, it burned your entire life, it filled you with ghosts. In order to survive the struggle, you burned your entire life

Throughout the story reference is made to the fact that the attackers are being ‘hunted down’ one by one and meet untimely deaths. It becomes clear that Tito suspects that Nina is the person responsible for these murders and so he is sure that she has now come to kill him too. Tito explains earlier in the story how he has heard rumours that Nina has been taken in for psychiatric treatment. Later, Nina’s discussion about revenge proves a pivotal moment. She refers to Tito’s participation in the struggle as being motivated by revenge. ‘...[revenge] is the only drug for the pain there is, the only way not to go mad...’ (Baricco 2004). This moment in the story serves as a realisation for Nina. She is also fixated on revenge for survival. The realisation extends to the spectator and is further underscored by Nina’s next actions. Nina takes on an animal-like territoriality in defensive actions to protect Tito from the prying eyes of ‘fellow patrons’ at the cafe; and she is the one to proposition Tito for sex. Revenge forms a motivating factor for her actions. With the change in Nina’s manner, the spectator is beguiled into putting all the evidence together and realises that Nina may be crazy as a result of this traumatic experience in her youth and may indeed intend to kill Tito.

There was no concrete resolution offered to the political discussions in *Without Blood*; just as there are no concrete resolutions to the divided reality that South Africans face. The experiential nature of this production was found in the expression of these viewpoints, without ridicule or perceived judgement. *Without Blood* articulates ‘your side of the story’ and as a spectator you hear the opposing side, you are forced to listen and be heard.



Figure 7: Nina (Janine Lewis) and Tito (Rantebeng Makapan) meeting in a ‘public space’. A scene from the second act of *Without Blood* at the State Theatre in Pretoria. Photograph by Susan du Toit.

The story twists unexpectedly when the characters Nina and Tito become literal bedfellows. This unlikely twist can only become a reality through theatre – where the metaphorical ‘agree-to-differ’ offers a suggested resolution for meaning-making. The characters put aside their differences in a need to fulfil their unspoken longing for forgiveness and belonging.

Conclusion

Immense discipline was required for the South African spectators to commit to opening themselves to the interaction needed for *Without Blood*. Exposure to political notions in theatre is not a new concept to the South African audience. However, within this non-literal packaging where a linear narrative was told through expressive physical means warranted participation from the spectator, required discipline through investment and complicity.

During the performances of *Without Blood*, the spectators were encouraged to independently select where and to what they were to focus their attention. The spectators achieved this by actively participating in the experiential and sensorial stimuli in the production. The split-focus was intentional. Scenes were layered with intentions and metaphors. While text could be heard, physical action occurred that either justified or juxtaposed the text; integrated multi-media offered a close-up or spy angle on the action. Spectators could listen to one thing and watch another.

The experiential physical theatre performance of *Without Blood* necessitated gut-reaction rather than mere cognitive reaction and achieved this through sensory experiences of space and time. Through the experiential physical performance, the spectator was asked to become a participant. The sentient spectator was engaged alongside the physical performer as co-creators of the performance through meaning-making. The spectator was forced to utilise sensory, somatic, and mental interpretations during the theatrical experience.

The over-arching themes of guilt and forgiveness were unmistakable and hard to ignore. Guilt was addressed through forgiveness as transformative justice brought about through the two main characters making amends. Tito breaks down in tears and reveals the honest remorse for his actions to Nina. Nina does not express her emotions so openly. Instead the moment of serenity that Nina found when she was lying perfectly still and in perfect alignment hidden beneath the floorboards is referred to again and again throughout the story.

WOMAN: [...] she felt her own curled-up body, folded around itself like a shell – she liked this – she was a shell and animal, shelter of herself, nothing could hurt her as long as she remained in this position. She reopened her eyes, and thought, don't move, you're happy...

Curled on one side, she began eliminating the imprecision's one by one. She lined up her feet until she felt her legs perfectly coupled, the two thighs softly joined, the knees bent like two cups one inside the other, the calves barely separated... She like that orderliness. If you are a shell, order is important. If you are shell and animal, everything has to be perfect. Precision will save you.



Figure 8: Artistic representation of Nina curled up as a shell drawn in ash. Digitised representations of the image (ash) being blown away was animated in *Without Blood*. Image courtesy of the artist Anni Snyman.

The story ends with a return to this need for precision and serenity. After their love-making Tito is sure that Nina will now take this moment to murder him, instead Nina,

curled up behind him, pulled up her knees to her chest; aligned her feet until she felt her legs perfectly paired, the two thighs softly joined, the knees like two cups balanced one on the other, the calves separated by nothing, she shrugged her shoulders slightly and slid her hands, joined between her legs. She looked at herself. She saw an old doll. She smiled. Shell and animal (Baricco 2004).

It becomes clear that Tito has spent his whole life ‘running away’ from violence in order to cleanse his soul; whilst Nina may have been looking for, or instigating, violence as the only trigger for serenity she comprehends.

... she [Nina] thought that however incomprehensible life is, probably we move through it with the single desire to return to the hell that created us, to live beside whoever, once, saved us from the inferno. She tried to ask herself where that absurd faithfulness to horror came from but found that she had no answers. She understood only that the one who saved us can do it forever. In a long hell identical to the one from which we came. But suddenly mercifully. And without blood (Baricco 2004:87).

Both parties, however, did not express remorse for the collective guilt associated with their respective political histories. These themes – guilt and forgiveness – were transferred to the spectator through a shared socio-cultural experience through memory and reconciliation. Memory is not just an individual, private experience, but is also part of the collective experience. Culture (cultural studies) has a remembering process (historiography). Memory is a phenomenon that is directly related to the present; our perception of the past is always influenced by the present, which means that history is always changing. Crucial to understanding cultural memory as a phenomenon, is the distinction between memory and history.

Memory is one of the most important ways by which our histories animate our current actions and experiences Much of our moral and

social life depends on the peculiar ways in which we are embedded in time (Sutton 2010).

Experience, whether lived or imagined, relates both to culture and memory and is influenced by and simultaneously determines both.

It is perhaps only in the aftermath and the recounting or analysis of what was experienced that the spectator can theorise and explain their impressions of the production.

This inseparable relationship between the ‘event’ and the explication of the event implies that no event is truly completed until it has been discussed and therefore recreated within the symbolic (Lacan 1997).

As performer-creator I hope that the various spectators have, and still do, reference their participative spectator experience during the physical theatre performance of *Without Blood*. Through somatic meaning-making the physical performer can engage as the sentient spectator and create this experiential performance, with the hope that it lives on in the minds and renewed actions of all participants.

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