

Emandulo: Process and Performance in a Changing South Africa

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In the spring of 1992 the Natal Performing Arts Council (NAPAC) in Durban, South Africa, invited me to develop a performance based on Zulu traditions with their recently formed Kwasa Group and their long established Loft Theatre. 'Kwasa', Zulu for 'it dawns', was NAPAC's attempts to address the changing needs of South Africa. Two weeks after white South Africa voted in favour of a nationwide referendum to allow non-whites the ability to vote I began rehearsals for *Emandulo*.¹

NAPAC is one of the four state-funded Arts Councils in South Africa, the others being in Pretoria, Cape Town, and Bloemfontein, founded to provide the cultural needs of white South

Africa with each council having a fully functioning theatre company, symphony orchestra, choir, ballet, and musical theatre company. NAPAC is located at the centre of Durban, Africa's busiest seaport and capital of the predominately Zulu, Natal province. Durban whites take pride in being 'the last outpost of the British Empire'.

The Natal Performing Arts Council

NAPAC takes up a full city block with a well-maintained and well-lit Tudor and Spanish-colonial façade. A seven storey administrative building is adjacent to the performance facility.

Plate 19: The Goddess Ma (Cindy Sampson), a shade of the Zulu spirit dances in celebration as Umshayandlela is given ritual breath by Mother Earth (Bongekile Ndaba) [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].



NAPAC also operates a production building that includes large scenic and costumes shops, rehearsal halls, and a dormitory for some township-living Zulu employees. During apartheid NAPAC and the other Councils were seen as arrogant symbols of white South Africa's cultural dominance over the black, coloured, and Asian (primarily east Indian) populations. NAPAC was openly boycotted by the non-white population until the creation of Kwasa in 1990. Under apartheid, NAPAC and the other state Art Councils were well-funded, well-equipped, and single-minded in offering Anglo-European performing arts.

NAPAC's lobby is a marvel of glittering brass, reflective glass and tile, bronze sculpture, paintings, and textile art exclusively reflecting Western art tradition. A sea of rich thick carpeting surrounds a large elegant staircase and leads to bar and café: a black or Indian security guard eyes everyone carefully and become alert when an unidentified black enters the double glass doors. Throughout the day, Zulu women, uniformly dressed in blue, constantly clean and re-clean the brass and glass and rug, serve coffee and cakes, while white women sell tickets and look after the gift store.

Although NAPAC had nearly 800 employees in the spring of 1992, I knew of no Zulus nor people of colour in positions of authority. Zulus almost exclusively served as menial labourers: drivers, janitorial workers, gofers, food service, stage hands, and guards. Only in the 1980s could blacks and whites sit in the same audience during a performance — before that matinées were established for non-whites, nor were black and white performers legally allowed to perform on the same stage. The repertoire of NAPAC, as shown by the 1991–2 season, was overwhelmingly Anglo-European: Shakespeare, *The Nutcracker*, Beethoven, Verdi's *Falstaff*, *My Fair Lady*. The conditions at NAPAC were not that much different from many major regional theatres in the United States.

Much as the Anglo-European cultural institutions in the United States have created — over the last 15 or so years — a panoply of outreach and minority programmes, so had NAPAC. The Kwasa Group was created late in 1990 as a well-meaning, politically shrewd, and culturally courageous programme. Murray McGibbon, NAPAC's Director of Drama, and Robert Cross, NAPAC's General Director invited Themis Venturas, a white, second generation Greek-South



Plate 20: Lord of the Sky (Ivan Lucas) and Mother Earth (Bongekile Ndaba) look on as the buyers give their reasons for wanting Umshayandlela [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].

African playwright, composer, director, and producer to develop a community outreach programme. Themí was one of the organizers of the boycott of NAPAC that immediately preceded the creation of Kwasa. Themí brought to NAPAC Tiki Nxumalo, the Zulu composer and musician, and Debra Cairnduff, a feisty, energetic, and committed white theatre organizer. It was the first time in the fifty-five years history of NAPAC that the brass and glass doors of the minority, Anglo-European culture opened to let the majority community in. NAPAC was the first and, until recently, the only Arts Council to develop such a programme and it is doubtful if any of the Arts Councils will survive the transition from white to black ruling government.

Kwasa and the Loft Theatre

Before 1992 the Kwasa consisted primarily of Zulu performers from the outlying townships of Durban and the scattered rural areas of Kwa-Zulu, a Zulu governed homeland in Natal. Two Kwasa group members were white, one coloured, all except two under twenty-six years old. Kwasa's mission is to provide a cultural outreach to all of the people of Natal that have not been served previously by NAPAC. Kwasa provides a one-year training programme for approximately

twenty talented but untrained performers. Their training included classes in dance, production (costume, set, technical theatre), western-style acting, theatre management, and English (in response to the poor quality of education in Natal's black schools). The teaching of theatre management was to develop not only artists but producers and organizers who would someday return to their township or rural area to create and/or organize performance and theatre events. Kwasa sponsored weekend township festivals, organized with the help of the Kwasa students, that featured workshops, food, and local talent such as gospel singers, gumboot dancers, and traditional dancers. Before Kwasa, there was no state subsidized or assisted programme for non-white theatre/performing art. Those wanting to become involved in theatre did so by working with small impoverished troupes or by pursuing a formal university (Anglo-European) training. Few blacks and other people of colour were included in the latter.

The Loft Theatre, the professional acting company of NAPAC, consisting of twelve actors under 35, all trained in western-style theatre and acting styles (predominantly at South African universities). Poorly paid, these young professionals were not too different to their American counterparts in training or career ambitions. Of the twelve Loft Theatre members,



Plate 21: Fana (Gavin Starkey) offers the gift of a drum stick to the Lord of the Sky and Earth Mother.

two were coloured, one Indian, and one Zulu, the rest white. Their 1992 season included an updated version of *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, *Winnie the Pooh*, a South-Africanized version of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, and *Peter Pan*.

After a year of Kwasa's operation, members of the Loft Theatre and Kwasa Group came together for one production. The experiment had manifold motivations. Most prominent were: concern of ghettoizing Kwasa within NAPAC; and a response to external political pressures to put more black performers on NAPAC stages. With NAPAC funding coming almost exclusively from national, provincial, and city governments, the spectre of being cut entirely by an eventual black majority government was very real.

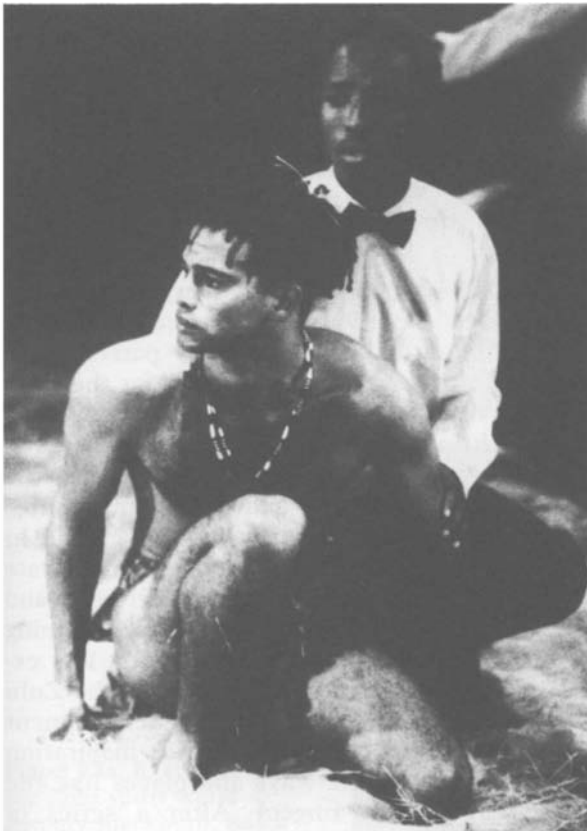


Plate 22: Fana (Gavin Starkey) and the Zulu usher (Yisa Gasa) watch as the history of the Zulu people unfolds before them [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].

The Beginning

At the first meeting of the two groups, the Loft Theatre members were a little put off by working with the untrained and un-professional Kwasa Group. The Kwasa felt intimidated, not necessarily by the predominantly white Loft company, but by the knowledge they supposedly had. The seven Loft members exuded an air of confidence and privilege. The Kwasa Group members were, with few exceptions, poorly educated, suffered from low self-esteem, struggled with English (their second or third language) and came from poor if not poverty level families.

The first week was a workshop and ensemble building period, to give the two groups a common language and experience, to break down barriers — personal, emotional, racial, physical, and cultural — and to build confidence. Initially the workshop was a mix of theatre games and exercises that could be applied to any group. These included deliberately culturally non-specific trust exercises, body isolation exercises, partner awareness games, imagination building games, concentration and stillness exercises, stretching and warm-up exercises (including yoga), group encounter games, and movement/vocal exercises that lead to partner work.

Within the first days of the workshop personalities began to emerge and revealed the human detail of forty years of apartheid. For most the games and exercises were new, challenging, and entertaining. Even a few yoga sessions went well — the Zulu and non-Zulu alike were open, if not hungry to learn. An ease began to emerge between the groups along with a willingness to work together. Amongst the Kwasa Group there was a sort of awakening and excitement in making contact with their own individual feelings — something that was not a part of their experience. The Kwasa members began to realize that they had potential, that they had something to say. That they too could become professional actors.

Performance Culture Explorations

The workshop turned to more culturally exploratory and performance specific work. The performance and cultural heritage of the Zulu

was to be our guide. Similar to my work with Alaska native performers at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, the objective was not only to develop actors and a performance, but to evolve a performance method and style organically extrapolated from a rich indigenous performance tradition. The Zulu members of Kwasa carried with them a strong and vital folk culture of dance, song, drumming, and ceremonial traditions. The Zulu 'rhythm of resistance', denied free expression, lived on in performance.

Long after the destruction of the Zulu kingdom and when independent African power had become a distant memory, these dances continued to resonate in the minds of dock workers, domestic servants, and farmhands with the glory of the Zulu heritage. Above all the songs articulated the most deep-seated desires of the expelled, dehumanized, and dispossessed black masses: the cry for land, the longing to regain the land the forefathers had lost to the white settlers. [Pratt, 87]

That the Zulu maintained a strong link with their performance traditions became, ironically, a way for the colonizers to assert their power. White cultural expression was held up as superior to 'primitive' Zulu performances. When the Zulus spoke in the language of performance they were forced either into a traditional expression formulated in the pre-contact era, or they had to adopt European forms. Apartheid attempted to deny the evolution of a contemporary Zulu performance expression.

The Ritual Warm-Up

The ritual warm-up was the starting point in the identification and mining of Zulu performance culture — providing the riches to be evolved into a contemporary expression. Obvious during the workshop with the Kwasa/Loft groups was the strong sense of Zulu performance tradition living within each of the Zulu members. Recognized also was the conscious perception of their own performance tradition as being formalized, rigid and somehow a sacred holder of cultural tradition. This sensibility is understandable given the political and cultural identity and resistance that the performance tradition

has encoded since colonization. The continuance of the militaristic and regimented style of Zulu dance and song and use of traditional shields and weapons enforce the impression of suppressed, but ever present identity and resistance through performance. The warm-up, however, was a way to circumvent the Zulu's own rigid perception of their performance tradition and to make them available to a larger range of performance expression — and in turn share it with others. The intent was to guide the Zulu to the resources that lived within them and demonstrate that they knew much and that they had much to offer. For the non-Zulu participants the intent was to present an alternative performance language — a Zulu performance language.

The warm-up, like Zulu performance, begins with the beat, the beat of the Zulu people being their rhythmic interpretation of their existence on their part of the earth. The relationship between the land and its people is like that of a heartbeat — the spirit that gives life is sustained by its function and each exists as an expression of the other. Traditional Zulu goat skin drums were purchased and Tiki Nxumalo joined the project as musical director. With the assistance of three of the Zulu men, Tiki laid down a fundamental Zulu 4/4 dance beat. At first a series of rhythm exercises were performed to explore the traditional Zulu rhythm in every part of the body — beginning with the forehead and working down to the toes. The body part/rhythm isolation exercises were important for the Zulu to break their habitual way of interpreting their own traditional rhythm. For the non-Zulus it was an accessible way of being introduced to the physically forbidding, and sometimes militarized regimented Zulu rhythm/movement. In traditional dance the Zulu tend to concentrate the rhythm expression in their lower body and legs — relying on hip or powerful stomping movements — leaving the upper body less expressive or secondary. At issue with the Zulu participants was the exploring and development of expressiveness (using rhythm as inspiration and unifier) in subtle ways and places like the eyes, mouth, and fingers. After a series of rhythm isolation exercises the traditional Zulu rhythm became for the group a focusing point — the rhythm serving as a catalyst for an infinite variety of expressions.



Plates 23a, b, c: Shades of the Zulu spirit world (Jeremy Blackburn, Rasta Hadebe, Jennifer Woodburne) [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].

Three Traditional Zulu Movements

To begin work on the ritual warm-up each of the twenty-seven Zulu and non-Zulu participants were allowed only five minutes to react to the following instructions: 'Present three traditional Zulu movements — whatever you think that is — there is no right or wrong answer.' After the five minute period each person presented his movements to the group. I deliberately chose a few of the white Loft actors to give their presentations first. As expected the Loft members gave a commendable but stilted impression of Zulu lifestyles — showing how little they really understood the Zulus and their culture. When it came time for the Zulus to give their presentations they were hesitant. Some Zulus misunderstood the assignment — they did not recognize their own culture expressed by the white performers. I had to prod the suddenly shy Kwasa members to present their assignment. Then something remarkable happened. A Kwasa member, Senele Ndlovu, came to the centre of the circle sheepishly, then suddenly, he came to life when presenting his three traditional movements. Then, Bongekile Ndaba, a Zulu woman, came out singing and presented her movements, joined by Nora Msani. At this point a few of the men started beating a simple Zulu rhythm on the floor as a few others ran to get more goat skin drums and brought them to the circle's edge. The other Zulus responded to the spontaneous combustion, each in turn presenting fragment improvisations of Zulu dance and mimetic representations of daily Zulu life. All of the movements were in time to the traditional beat. They included women washing clothes at a stream, carrying water on their heads, men brandishing spears, digging, herding animals, courting, falling in love, killing — traditional movements mingled with traditional dance. A courting and marriage vignette spontaneously evolved with a cast of characters entering the situation as the scenario required. Benefit Nzimande took the role of caller, prodding the other Zulus to join in.

Without premeditation, a scenario developed. Thabani Sibisi became a stern Zulu father, Eric Sibiya the obsequious, would-be lover requesting Patricia Majapelo's hand. Others started singing, whistling with recognition,

answering for the character, and then chanting in response to Thabani's questions and thoughts. The marriage proposal evolved into a massive dance improvisation with the non-Zulus invited to participate. Freely interactive the presentation went on for nearly an hour. The familiar traditional Zulu rhythm drove and informed each movement and sound. The non-Zulus, including myself, at first sat stunned by the force of this sudden explosion of expression. From that moment forward, there was amongst the non-Zulus in the group, a new found appreciation and respect. For the Zulus a vital link was made between theatre and their traditional performance culture — in their minds and bodies traditional dance and theatre expressions were no longer mutually exclusive, and they realized that they had a valuable contribution to offer the emerging ensemble.

Process as Method and Metaphor

The group was to become an erstwhile tribe, and the ritual warm-up was to be its physical, vocal, and cultural gathering point — a ritual that bound them together within a tradition greater than themselves. Group members were asked to repeat and explain their movements, each was called upon to compromise, adjust, make combinations and decide on sequences that best served the group and the group's objectives. In keeping with an oral tradition sensibility no written notation was allowed, each person had to remember each of the agreed movements, beats, and songs that were put into place. Discussion and debate took place: this was a vital step forward in the ensemble building process.

The most vocal disagreement came from several Zulu men who refused to do any women's dance steps which included a snake dance that Zulu women perform when coming of age. Kenneth Khambule, a tall, powerfully built Zulu, became visibly upset: 'Zulu men do not do women's dances! Zulu men do not drink Ijuba (beer) together with women and they do not do women's dances either. That is not what we do traditionally.' The Zulu women became quiet and suddenly uneasy, saying nothing in response until Jennifer Woodburne, a white Loft member, strongly disagreed with Kenneth. She

argued that it was 'only an exercise and that it didn't matter about the tradition . . . we are creating a new tradition'. Kenneth replied that 'it did matter'. The issue of sexism was then raised, and the discussion led to how sexism and a tradition of enforced chauvinism parallels the experience of apartheid. The faces and subsequent words of the Zulu men revealed that they had never connected the issue of sexism and racism.²

It was an important day in the development of the group. That day the group made an agreement to keep talking and that any subject or issue could be discussed — that discussion was part of the process. The discussion of racism and sexism marked the breaking of an important barrier and would set a tone for all our subsequent work. Two of the most sensitive issues had been broached. At the same time the first step in the transformation of Zulu performance culture from a traditional to contemporary context had taken place. The women's movements and songs were incorporated, and so both sexist and traditional barriers actively breached. Initially some of the Zulu men exaggerated and made fun of the disputed women's movements, however, the demonstration of resistance soon faded.

Becoming an Ensemble

The ritual warm-up, like the holistic herder/gatherer/horticultural Zulu world-view that it was inspired by, functioned on many levels. 1) It established and was a daily validation of the performance language we were asserting — an invigorated dictionary of movements/rhythms/sounds. 2) The Ritual Warm-up became a methodological model and living example of how to participate creatively with traditional Zulu performance culture. 3) It exercised traditional Zulu movements/rhythms/sounds and thereby liberated them from the rigid context of traditional Zulu dance/song/drumming demonstrating that new combinations were possible and that all ensemble members (Zulu and non-Zulu) could actively participate with a rich performance language. The ritual warm-up laid the foundation from which to create the project's ultimate objective — the performance of *Emandulo*.

The Story of Umshayandlela

After reading scores of Zulu stories, legends, and myths, one simple story revealed itself as being the one to focus and organize the project. The



Plate 24: The Zulu (Sanele Ndlovu) meets a British warrior (Robert Fridjhon). [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].

Plate 25: The Umshayandlela parts dance in formation
[Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].



strong narrative of the story 'Kenelinda' or 'Umshayandlela' (as it is known in Zulu) offered interpretative latitude as it provided sufficient work and challenge for twenty-eight performers. At the end of the first week in keeping with the Zulu story telling tradition I told the story to assembled group. In brief it says:

In the golden era of Zululand there lived a man named Thulwane, who had a herd of many cows. Next to his son, Fana, they were nearest to his heart of all his possessions. Among them there was one more precious than the rest, her name was Umshayandlela. No matter how dry the grass, or fierce the winter, she remained fat with her milk gushing forth at milking time. Never had a cow of such size and beauty been known in all the land. The meat from such a cow, thought all the tribes around, could not fail to be both soft and good; and in turn make them both strong and good to look upon. Many tried to buy Umshayandlela by honest means but Thulwane would not part with her. And over the years a great love had developed between the cow and the boy. Fana would sing to Umshayandlela and she grew to love his voice, and would acknowledge no other master.

One day two fierce warriors with cruel eyes and gleaming spears came to Fana on the faraway grazing lands and demanded his

beloved Umshayandlela. Fana knew that resistance would be useless. What could a small defenceless boy do against two such wicked spears? 'Take her,' he said after a pause, 'you have greater strength than I.' The two warriors tried to take away the prize cow, but she would not move. In anger they turned threatening to Fana who replied, 'I will make her move.' Fana put his arms around the cow's neck and sang softly into her ear. With a sorrowful look at her little master, Umshayandlela allowed the thieves to drive her away. 'The voice she obeys must go with her' laughed the warriors, and so they drove Fana behind the cow with their sharp spears. When they reached a swiftly flowing river Umshayandlela would not cross until Fana again sang to the cow. When they reached the captors' home the warriors tied Umshayandlela to a tree and raised their spears to stab her in the heart. But their newly sharpened spears refused to pierce the skin. Fana, not wanting the cow to suffer, sang to Umshayandlela and the spears went in, and the cow fell down and died. Sharp knives were produced but the knives refused to cut the skin, and again Fana had to sing to the dead cow before the knives would go in. So Umshayandlela was skinned and all the meat cut up for roasting.

When all was ready, the thieves and their kin gathered around to eat, but they could not bite the meat because it stuck in their teeth like stone. In anger they turned to Fana to kill him. To save himself his clear young voice rose once more to sing to the flesh of Umshayandlela. The flesh became tender and all the thieves ate to their hearts' content. When nothing was left but skin and well-picked bones, all settled down to sleep.

As the thieves slept an old woman came to Fana and whispered into his ear, 'My child, you are young. I once had one like you, and I would not have you die. These men are cannibals, and when hunger strikes again, you will be their meat. Go now and with haste while yet they sleep!' But Fana replied: 'I cannot leave here without Umshayandlela.' 'Then gather her up and call to her and she will go with you', said the old woman. Silently Fana gathered up all the clean-picked bones, and arranged them on the bloody skin in their place. He then sang softly to the bones. One by one the skin and bones shuddered and each of the limbs jerked back to life and then slowly was able to raise herself. Fana encouraged Umshayandlela, calling to her 'Woza (come), Umshayandlela, Woza!' Breath filled Umshayandlela lungs again and

the boy and his cow slipped into the moonlit forest.

The next morning, as Thulwane was searching the distance with sad and troubled eyes, he gave a shout of joy as he saw two figures side by side, and heard Fana's clear young voice, breaking on the early morning stillness, singing as his father never heard him sing before, 'See, we are home, oh Umshayandlela!' [Savory, 42-46]

The Evolution of Umshayandlela into *Emandulo*

Most of the Zulus had known, or had childhood recollections of the story, yet they asked many questions. Patrick Sibisi wanted to know why Fana, the herd boy, gave Umshayandlela away so easily. I said that it was probably for the same reason that the Zulu people surrendered to the British and the Afrikaners. Fana, like the Zulu people, were outnumbered and had little choice and could no longer watch the suffering. With that several heads bowed and it became very difficult for me to speak for the hurt that was suddenly in the air. I tried to explain that Umshayandlela was the story of all South Africa's people and that all were returning home with Umshayandlela after a long, traumatic journey.



Plate 26: Fana (Gavin Starkey) with his new-found friend Umshayandlela [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].

What ensued was a two day sit-down work session with the ensemble to determine collectively what the story meant and how it should be performed. Gradually the story of Umshayandlela was transformed into an allegory of repression, exploitation, resistance, and cultural re-affirmation. Political and cultural interpolations sprang from the fertile soil of the legend and served as an inspiration and a loose, guiding plot.

The Tree Person Tells the Story

It was decided that the story was to be told by the tree person, Uhlanga LweZizw, 'Reed of all nations'. This ancient and wise spirit is said to live in certain acacia trees or in huge hollow reeds and connects past, present, and future. The tree is *Emandulo*, meaning the 'ancient one' in Zulu; the ensemble itself are seekers of information from this ancient tree spirit that make an offering of their performance to an ancient elder. Yisa Gasa, a gentle, self-effacing Zulu from a rural area, developed the character of the contemporary Zulu who is led through the story of Umshayandlela. It was decided that Yisa, a Kwasa member, should play himself and be one of the ushers seating the audience as they enter the theatre — a job that Yisa had per-

formed for income. Costumed in white shirt, bow tie, and black tuxedo pants, he would be both an usher and a symbol of western imposed culture and servitude. Yisa would be an Everyman going on the journey of the story told by the Tree Person. The Tree Person, played by Thabani Tshanini, would draw Yisa into the story and in so doing call up the spirits of his ancestors.

The Shades

The first called by the Tree Person were the shades, ancient spirits said to be everywhere, and able to guide, hinder, or assist human events. They are the ancestors of the Zulu people [Berglund, 78–79]. Five of the Shades were whites or coloured: Jeremy Blackburn, Leila Henriques, Cindy Sampson, Jennifer Woodburne and Griselda Hunt. Three were Zulu: Eric Sibiya, Rasta Hadebe, and Phumelephi Ndlovu. Zulus believe that ancestral shades are either white (the spirit world being the opposite of the human world) or of indefinite colour. For this reason the appearance of the first white people in Southern Africa was thought to be somehow spiritually sent or connected with another world. In performance the shades — black and

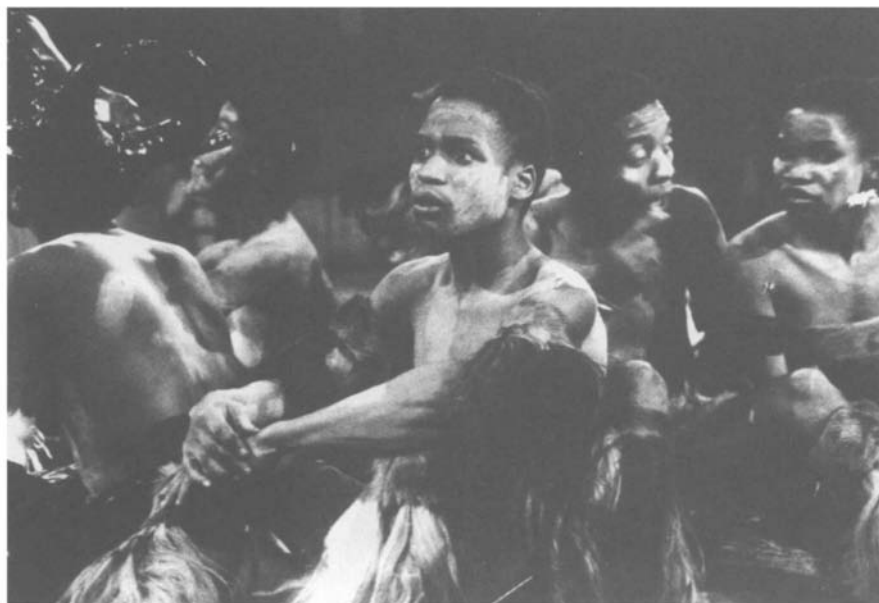


Plate 27: The Umshayandlela discussing the prospect of being bought by one of the buyers (l. to r.: Lindelani Nzimande, Benefit Mzobe, Patricia Majapelo) [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].

white cast members — covered their entire bodies in a white clay (traditionally used by Zulu diviners) with black and red markings specific to their Shade character. The individual markings changed and evolved during the month-long performance run of *Emandulo* to reflect character and performer evolution. The guidelines for the markings, however, were required to represent simultaneously death, birth, and life [Bryant, 510].

The interplay between historical, mythological, and contemporary issues was discussed with Zulu ensemble members telling stories heard from elders and relatives. Some revealed a deep-seated belief in the Shades — for the rural Zulus it was a statement of their reality, for the urban/township Zulu it was a rediscovery, and for the non-Zulus it was a re-imagining of their own reality. The inclusion of the shades as active participants in the performance was appropriate and reflective of a re-emerging spiritual sensibility. The Shades represented, 'An element of morality, an element of natural processes, and an element of mystical processes' [Ngubane, 131]. During performance the shades intermingled with the performance and the audience, variously being mischief makers, witnesses, mourners, manipulators, musicians, commentators, celebrants, combatants, stage helpers, and spirit helpers. In performance the shades balanced and counter-balanced sorcery, outside evils, life crises, and incidental environmental dangers. That four white people would play shades was discussed and it was agreed that it created no difficulty. The first men to walk the earth were not like the people of today:

They all looked exactly alike — golden-eyed, hairless, with skin as red as Africa's plains. In those days there were no black-skinned or dark brown people, no Pygmies, no bushmen, no Hottentots, no long-bearded Arabi, no white men. The splitting up of humanity into different races came much later, through the wickedness of men themselves. [Mutwa, 6]

The Creation of Umshayandlela

The wedding of the Lord of the Sky and Earth Mother begets Umshayandlela — a divine cow

and symbol for the fertility and spirit of the Zulu land and the life provided by that land. The shades bring out four traditional Zulu knob sticks (a traditional war club that the white government and the ANC have attempted to ban) which symbolically became the legs of Umshayandlela. Four Zulu men performed the legs of the cow by melding traditional dance with narrative movement and are joined by the head and tail of Umshayandlela, performed by two Zulu women. The hind legs are a symbol of the land; the front legs represent its strength; the head symbolizes understanding and wisdom; and the tail is the spirit of the land to sweep across it [Berglund, 66].³ Each part had a distinct personality, and could separate from the whole to dance, sing, talk and act up, but the meaning, strength and identity of Umshayandlela existed only when the cow functioned as a whole. For the Zulu, traditionally herders and gatherers, the cow already enjoys important cultural respect, elevating Umshayandlela to a mythical level was considered an organic theatricalization.⁴ An enormous cloth, with the shape and markings of a cow skin, would serve as transformable ground cloth on which the action took place — a symbolic representation of Zululand.

The Buyers

Those that tried to buy Umshayandlela in the original story were symbolically transformed into those that threatened Zululand. Four women came to bid for the cow, each in turn arguing to the Lord of the Sky and the Earth Mother that they needed the cow most and would treat it best. Personified were the four major historical combatants for traditional Zululand: the British, the Afrikaner, the Zulu, and the Xhosa. Each was to be dressed in their culture's clothing of the 1880s — an era of major political and cultural transformation. Each woman, speaking in her native language, would offer gifts and songs to the Lord of the Sky and the Earth Mother — that they were women suggested that the four cultures came benignly at first. All were selfish and petty, alien to the intent of the Lord of the Sky and Earth. The buyers disrupt the balance that typified the world until their intrusion. For their disruption of the

natural order they are chased away by the angry thunder of the Lord of the Sky.

The group's insistence that the Zulu and Xhosa buyers be included surprised me. Their acceptance came in part with recognition that both Zulu and Xhosa tribes could be as petty, destructive, and exploitative as the British and Afrikaners (other discussion considerations included east Indians and Jews). The inclusion of the Zulu and Xhosa as potentially disruptive forces pushed the interpretation of the story out of the narrow, and potentially didactic, confines of racial exploitation.

The recognition that the British, Afrikaner, Zulu, and Xhosa were all competitive for the same land and were willing to fight over it was historically and politically relevant, if not obvious. That all four were to be refused as unworthy indicated that the ensemble was urging the performance to see beyond political, cultural, and racial issues to deal with the more essential issue of ecological or spirit world responsibility. In traditional Zulu belief one does not simply take possession of something, it is instead considered a gift that comes for a reason and with reciprocal obligations. A balance must be maintained. The group reasoned that Buyers did not recognize their obligation, instead possessing Umshayandlela for selfish purposes. Within the traditional Zulu world view to possess without recognition of one's obligations is evil.

Fana the Herd Boy

The cow herd boy, Fana, was transformed from a *de facto* inheritor (as in the original story) of the cow/land into a lonely searcher. The loneliness of humble Fana is met by the loneliness of the cautious Umshayandlela. Fana must prove himself by way of a dance demonstration and call-response song interview. The song that Fana sings portrays his genuine humility and generosity and so Umshayandlela is won over. The casting of a Kwasa member, Gavin Starkey, as Fana, aided in broadening the cross racial/cultural significance of the performance. Gavin was raised in KwaZulu and was fluent in Zulu, but unlike other Zulu Kwasa members was self-confident, well-educated and well spoken. Being of Zulu and Portuguese ancestry, Gavin was living in both Zulu and western cultures. Like

most Coloured in South Africa he was of neither and both cultures simultaneously — like much of contemporary South Africa. Observing the compatibility of Umshayandlela and Fana, the Lord of the Sky and the Earth Mother give Fana the cow with their ritual blessings. As the story progresses Umshayandlela and Fana became mutually inter-dependent partners. To demonstrate their relationship a traditionally inspired Zulu song with multiple harmonies was developed. The song and its rhythms linked them, then grew in complexity of emotion to mirror their evolving relationship.

The Warriors

The Warriors of the original story were evolved from the vague and anonymous to the particular. In keeping with the interpolated point-of-view of the Zulu spirit world, a Zulu 'sangoma' (witch doctor) was introduced into the story. By way of evil magic, the sangoma conjures up a Zulu warrior, a British soldier, an Afrikaner Boer, and two Christian missionaries.⁵ All of these characters were dressed in costumes of the colonial era. Like the Buyers, the Warriors were alien evil spirits who wanted to take possession of the cow/land. In this way the military and political conflicts that have plagued South Africa was put into a Zulu spirit world context — in the traditional Zulu world view. The Zulu sangoma was played by Kenneth Khambule at his insistence. I later discovered that he was the grandson of a powerful sangoma. The Zulu, Brit, and Boer were the husbands of the women who earlier attempted to buy Umshayandlela. When the alien Warriors meet with the cow parts they immediately catechize, educate, and control the cow parts and make servants of them. The Afrikaner, played by the Indian Loft member, Anness Ramklown, whips discipline, obedience, and the hegemonic Afrikaans language into the cow limbs. The head and tail of the cow are taught hymns and Christian behaviour. The Brit and Zulu Warrior, played by the Loft's Robert Fridjhon and Kwasa's Senele Ndlovu, respectively, make political deals on how Umshayandlela is to be divided — the Zulu gets the short end of the deal. Yisa and Fana are helpless. In keeping with the original story the powerless Fana sings to the suffering

Plate 28: The Zulu warrior (Sanele Ndlovu) attempts to kill Umshayandlela as the Witch Doctor (Kenneth Khambule) looks on [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].



Umshayandlela and the cow is led symbolically across the waters to a new and strange land — travelling symbolically from the tribal to the colonial world. The cow parts sing, talk, and cry as they represent both allegorical and very human fates.

Arriving at the new land each of the warriors attempts to kill Umshayandlela but cannot because it is protected by the shades. Umshayandlela, however, is beaten and degraded until Fana can stand to watch no more. Fana sings, the Shades relax their protection, and the cow replies mournfully as it dies. The sacred meat cannot be cut by the Warriors because it is protected by the Shades. As in the original story, Fana sings to the dead animal (and allegorically to the Zulu nation) as it is being kicked, pulled, and abused. The shades respond to the will of Fana and allow the cow parts to be pulled apart. The warriors next go into a fit of anger when they cannot eat the cow parts, the meat being hard to their bite. Again, Fana sings to the cow and the warriors celebrate their victory with dance and song.

The bodies of the Umshayandlela parts are hung variously across railings; some are hoisted into the air to hang lifeless to suggest,

simultaneously, both animal flesh and contemporary torture room. Each of the warriors, the missionary and Sangoma, with the assistance of the wives, sings a traditional Zulu sacrifice song as they mark the inert cow part/bodies with the vivid colours of the South African flag. The wife of the British soldier meanwhile taking posed photos of the warriors as they stand proudly next to their colonial conquest. When the warrior group leaves, there is a mournful stillness as the shades, Fana and Yisa remove the bodies from their degradation. The lifeless and brutalized cow part bodies are laid side by side by Yisa, Fana, and the Shades. The idea for this scene was inspired by a newspaper photo that appeared the day of this scene's discussion — similarly depicted were unclaimed black bodies, casualties of recent township violence.

Both Fana and Yisa sing to mourn Umshayandlela, and as their mourning becomes stronger a faint reply is heard. The songs of Yisa, the contemporary Zulu, and Fana, the mythological Zulu, combine to exhort Umshayandlela to return to life: 'Woza (come), Umshayandlela, Woza!' The same song that marked Umshayandlela's death is sung to celebrate her re-birth. Though battered, scarred, and having

Plate 29: Umshayandlela cowers in fear of the Zulu Witch Doctor (l. to r.: Thabani Sibisi, Prince Mathe, Benefit Mzobe, Lindelani Nzimande, Norah Msani) [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].



Plate 30: Fana (Gavin Starkey) mourns the butchered remains of Umshayandlela [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].



passed through a long and bloody story, the cow reassembles with a song and dance that carries her, Fana, and Yisa home to a new South Africa.

The story comes full circle and a balance, having been disrupted and challenged, is restored. Like the indiki possessions of the early twentieth century, the story and possession of Fana and Umshayandlela by evil aliens is transformed from potential destruction into a journey of spiritual and cultural growth. Yisa, the contemporary Zulu, has likewise been empowered by his experience. [Ngubane 148–49]

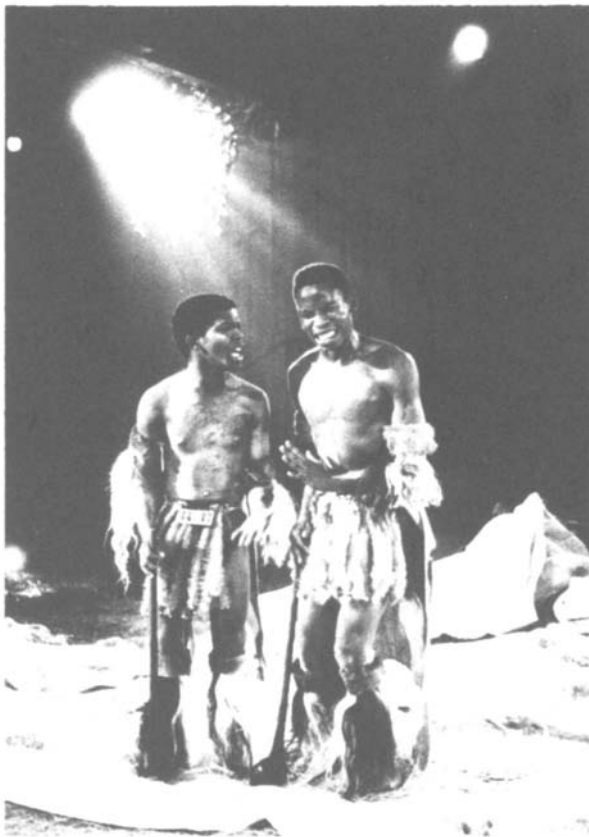


Plate 31: Umshayandlela cow parts (Prince Mathe & Thabani Sibisi) talk about their future [Photo: Val Adamson, NAPAC].

Performance Outline and Development

With most roles cast during the discussion phase the ensemble began at the beginning of the story and worked through each scene. The

outline work began with Yisa awakening Thabani Tshanini (the Tree Person); both Thabani and Yisa were free to perform the scene in whatever way they deemed appropriate. Both men pulled extensively from their traditional Zulu dance/song background. After each interpretation the ensemble would comment and offer suggestions on how to clarify the scene — what to cut, add, and improve. My role as director became that of a pro-active guide and interviewer — what I offered was my experience in organizing and shaping their ideas and feelings into a theatrical expression.

Adjustments were incorporated, until the outline for the first scene was understood and agreed. A song for the calling of the Shades, for example, was said to be needed and was subsequently roughed out collectively with a group of five responsible for the song's completion. In turn each scene was performed extemporaneously with the ensemble as critic, playwright, and interested participant. Over a period of two days the entire story was given a performance outline. Some of the outlined scenes had more detail than others; some scenes, because of a lack of strong plot motive, were noted but deliberately left vague. The reality of giving performance tangibility to a formerly abstract story enlightened the ensemble not only to its creative potential (individually and collectively) but to a creative process as well. The story outline was something tactile, participatory, and theirs. There was and would be no written record of the outline or performance.

Daily Events

The next task was to add muscle and flesh. Given the large group and limited (six weeks) development/rehearsal time, creative groups consisting of five to ten people were assigned specific tasks. A typical day would start with a presentation of the announcements, then the day's objectives, organization of events, and assignment of creative groups. The process was not only the preparing of a performance, it was concurrently a model in cultural worker methodology.

Each day a new leader and drummers were chosen for the warm-up, to encourage leadership



Plate 32: Fana (Gavin Starkey) consoles the head of Umshayandlela [Photo: Val Adamson, NAPAC].

and drumming experiences for all involved: for the Zulu to lead the non-Zulus; for women to drum (traditionally a male responsibility), and for non-Zulus to lead and drum. The work would then move directly into a theatre game or exercise that addressed current rehearsal needs or training issues.

Confidence of the group members grew. Personal issues increasingly found their way into our discussions. The reality of daily life in a country undergoing tumultuous social change could not be kept from the rehearsal hall. Unforeseen events would become incorporated into the process, informing the performance development. Kenneth Khambule, for instance, revealed old scars of a whipping on his back. When I asked him about the marks his reply was: 'It is nothing, man, Nothing.' He resisted my pressure to talk about it, but a week later, during a discussion about the Warrior scene and how symbolically and literally the Afrikaner uses a whip, Kenneth told the circled group how, when 13 years old, he was beaten while watching a demonstration in his township. Because he was big for his age the police decided to make an example of him. He was whipped

and then spent two weeks in jail along with some sixty other black youths. His family did not know if he was dead or alive.

The story was familiar to all, and especially painful for some. There was a long mourning-like silence and some tears. Nodding their heads with understanding some of the other Zulu men began talking about their wounds — physical, emotional, and spiritual. For an hour what was previously suffered in silence was spoken, often for the first time, revealing what they had come to live with as a normal part of their existence. Nearly every Zulu male and half the Zulu women had been arrested, beaten, or held by the police. Policemen, it should be noted, were often Zulu. As the group talked, a connection was made between their experience and the necessity of performing that experience. They all had stories of hurt and loss to tell, and *Emandulo* was one of them. All the group, black, coloured, Indian, and white, to a greater or lesser degree, were wounded by what they had lived through. Thereafter the process of performance became, in its way, a process of grieving, understanding, and healing.



Plate 33: Umshayandlela's Tail (Patricia Majapelo) dances with one of the cow parts (Prince Mathe) [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].

The Creative Group Process

Creative groups, once assigned, went to other rooms where individuals took responsibility for themselves and their groups.

Initially the groups served fundamental character and story needs. For example, the Shades worked in isolation for several days developing their individual and group characteristics. Ethnographic and oral history records were distributed and combined with personal story telling to provide a point of creative departure by which shade movements, vocalizations, songs, attitudes, and personalities evolved.

The six Umshayandlela performers and Fana established a sophisticated dance and song relationship inspired by Zulu traditional performance. The Warriors group defined their entrance scene, establishing a distinct movement and vocal/language for each character. They established a hegemonic hierarchy which became a complex current beneath the warrior's relationship towards one another and the story. The Buyer group established who they were, what they thought of one another, and what

gifts and songs they offered. The Lord of the Sky, Earth Mother, Yisa, and Tree Person, initially composed a creative group that developed the language and actions for the opening scenes. At the end of each day (or every second or third day) each group would give a presentation: a dance, a new song, a scene, a recently written speech or dialogue, or simply the explaining of a scene's action. Each presentation was reviewed and discussed with encouragement. The presentations built performance confidence and experience. The excitement of creativity blended with healthy competitiveness to push the groups to their next assignments.

In this atmosphere anything became fodder for development. On one occasion three Zulu men took a twenty minute break when only a ten minute break was given. When the latecomers arrived with soda cans in hand I scolded them for keeping the group waiting. They apologized but fifteen minutes into the work I sensed something was wrong. Patricia Majapelo explained: 'We don't like it when you yell at us. Too many white men have yelled at us.' Though Patricia was not among the three, and though I did not consider my voice anything

but firm and business-like and only directed to the three, she and other Zulus were adversely affected by it. Underlying the issue of discipline was their fear of betrayal: 'It is like you don't like black people,' they said, 'and think we are lazy, stupid and not as good as white people.' They were voicing all the unspoken self-doubts and fears institutionalized by apartheid.

As individual personalities, talents, and leadership ability emerged so did the composition of the creative groups. Yisa, an accomplished traditional dancer, worked with the shades on their dance; Prince Mathe, Benefit Nzimande, and Thabani Sibisi, who were Umshayandlela performers, worked with the warriors as drummers and choreographers. Shades (and non-Zulu Loft members) Lelia Henriques, Jennifer Woodburne, and Cindy Sampson worked with the buyers to develop western-style acting and singing skills. They were learning how to learn, and teaching one another. The musical director, Tiki Nxumalo, and I would move between the various creative groups to observe or work with the groups according to their request. Many times such sessions would become training sessions in drumming, song, dance, or acting. Often these sessions would deal more with issues of conflict resolution, time management, or group organization, rather than performance development.

Outside Events

Three weeks into rehearsals one to three Kwasa members were absent daily. They were students and not paid. Consequently many had difficulty paying for transport to and from the Umlazi or Claremont townships where many of them lived. These townships (which were essentially established as ghettos for blacks) were ten to fifteen miles from NAPAC and some days they simply did not have the money. On other occasions Kwasa members would come in rattled by an incident of random violence — the shooting of trains by out-of-town workers (away from family and homes) that lived in hostels was a continuing problem. Some of the violence was inspired by the conflict between the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkarta, the Zulu

political organization. One day Lindalani Nzimande was visibly shaken after bullets whizzed by him on his train ride from home when several workers fired randomly at the train and two people were killed. When rehearsals lasted until 5 p.m. (it became dark at about 5.30 p.m.) several Kwasa members would hurry to leave to protect their homes and family from being burned and/or looted by either of the political factions or hoodlums that preyed on unprotected homes. During the second week of Emandulo's performance run the brother of Benefit Nzimande, one of the Umshayandlela performers, was killed.

Issues and events of the outside political reality blended with the images and ideas of the play. In one instance the Kwasa Group blacks were told by the guard/doorman to enter by the stage door, not the posh main entrance that the Loft Theatre members used. A protest was raised with the administration, and then the lobby became accessible to the Kwasa members. One of many small victories.

In the NAPAC cafeteria a subsidized lunch could be had for less than \$1. But many Kwasa could not even afford a tea. Some would lie on their stomachs at an outdoor park 'because then the hunger pains are not so bad'. Almost daily four or five Kwasa members would ask the Zulu grill woman for ten cents worth of white bread and gravy, or they would eat leftovers. The Loft members and I got in the habit of giving them food or money. Sometimes, embarrassed by their need, some of the students would avoid me at lunch so I would not feel forced into giving them money. One day Patrick and Lindalani were in the cafeteria with a hungry look and I wanted to give them some money but they refused saying they were not hungry. When I insisted they relented, and as Patrick put his hand out to receive the coins I noticed a battered and out-of-date library book under his arm: *A Practical Guide to Theatre*. When I asked him about the book he said: 'I want to do a theatre group in my township.'

We lobbied the administration on the Kwasa's behalf. NAPAC was being cruelly insensitive and made no connection between a white organization making money off the labour of black performers that were going hungry, and the historical circumstances of white South

Africa profiting from the sweat of the black. While the administration's resistance was an example of an institutionalized mind set, what aggravated the irony was that NAPAC was then spending nearly a million rand (approximately 300,000 US dollars) on a superficial and over-produced musical theatre production based on the music of the rock group 'Queen', escapist theatre pandering to the white audiences. Yet Kwasa was often promoted as the most visible indication of NAPAC's change. When a four million rand emergency grant was made to NAPAC from Durban City Council, NAPAC director Robert Cross stated on the front page of the *Natal Mercury*, Durban's largest daily newspaper, that he was 'Delighted . . . not only will this save our permanent companies for another year, Kwasa — our community programme aimed at making performing arts a way of life for all in the region — will be able to grow as we had hoped and planned' [*Natal Mercury*, 10 May 1992]. Once the contradictions of the Kwasa situation were pointed out to the liberal thinking Mr Cross, he apologized for the insensitivity and provided one full meal a day for all the Kwasa members for the duration of *Emandulo*'s performance run.

At rehearsal both Loft and Kwasa members had difficulty personalizing their work. An unconscious barrier made it difficult for them to take their work to the next imaginative level.⁶

After some frustration, we discussed the possible causes of the problem. Both Zulu and non-Zulu cited the cause as being how they were raised and educated. A heavily structured educational system was in turn re-enforced by a social order that discouraged going beyond instructions — another indelible effect of apartheid.

The ensemble felt a profound sense of sadness, hurt, and helplessness. It was like discovering that one was infected by a disease.

Into Performance

The performance started with an Everyman being pulled into his Zulu mythology. The performance followed a path of myth, from the origins of the Zulu cosmos, to the creating of the land/Umshayandlela, then to its habitation and befriending by Fana, and then to its possession and abuse. The metaphoric significance of the

performance accumulating until it abruptly ceased to be theatre, suddenly transforming into reality, with its story line remaining continuous. The death scene, the mourning song and the subsequent song imploring resurrection was like a synapse between performance and reality; *Emandulo*'s subsequent public performances only made this synapse stronger. The performance's metaphoric mourning became a public mourning, and without consciously working for it the performance had organically found a catharsis. The acceptance of Umshayandlela's death was followed by the imploring demand of Fana: 'Woza, Umshayandlela! Woza!' Umshayandlela rose again into a celebration of re-birth, demonstrating the release of a past and the hope for a healed South Africa.

Into the Theatre

Our performance space, the Loft Theatre, is a 200-seat black box theatre. The seating was arranged in the round to convey the sense of community and traditional performance. To complement the feel of community, comfort, and intimacy, and to avoid the implied structured formality of chairs, the first two rows of the seating platforms were laid with Zulu grass mats. The stage area was laid thick with dry grass and leaves — typical of rural Zululand. Though a large production staff was assigned to *Emandulo* many production elements had been left undone at the time of move-in — much of the work and production organization falling on the shoulders of the talented and dedicated set and costume designer, Andrew Donald.

NAPAC showed itself to be the state run bureaucracy it was which meant many meetings, much paperwork, countless departments, and a large number of people called 'Organizers'. It all seemed like a façade of normalcy from a bygone time when the life and times of South Africa had a very different order. My dismay about the production organization prompted Jennifer Woodburne to comment: 'Things at NAPAC are just like things in South Africa, everything is slowly falling apart.' Morale among the general staff at NAPAC was running very low with the general concern amongst a staff that was becoming increasingly anxious about personal and career survival

within an institution and a country that was in the beginning stages of devolution and many unknowns. Many cutbacks were rumoured, with several mass meetings held to allay employee fears that NAPAC was imminently closing. As I left NAPAC the black workers were planning a work 'stay away' in protest of low wages. On our first day in the theatre some Kwasa actors were late because of renewed violence and road blocks in the townships. Walking to the theatre one day I watched a thousand or so Zulus demonstrating and doing 'toi toi' warrior chants down a main business street in protest at the slow, divisive progress of those working for a new constitution. The tropical heat added to an 'on edge' atmosphere from which the theatre was not immune.

Female Body as Political Battlefield

A controversy arose over which of the women should go bare breasted. Unmarried Zulu women were at ease with being bare breasted, it being a widely accepted traditional practice. However, the white women playing the Shades had several doubts and could not reach a consensus. It was agreed that all had to go bare breasted (wearing body paint and clay) or none at all. The concern was how the bare breasts of white women might sensationalize and detract from

the intent of the performance. The bare breasts of white women in public was viewed as a political issue. The white female body had been historically claimed as sacred and protected since the arrival of the first white female Calvinists that colonized South Africa. Some popular theories about the development and institutionalizing of racism in South Africa suggest that motivation may have evolved from the need to separate and protect white women from black men. This paradigm of segregation conveniently re-enforced a Calvinistically inspired sexism that afforded white men a clearly defined social role of dominating protector.

Racism and the laws of apartheid defined the roles of both blacks and white women securing white male autonomy and authority in both domestic and public realms. It was not until 1992 that soft porn became legal in South Africa. Ultimately the Shade women, in agreement with the rest of the cast, felt that uninhibited expression of the white female body was a worthy fight but would muddy the intent and expression of *Emandulo*, reducing, it was feared, the performance into a sensation about white breasts. Only Norah Msani, the Zulu woman playing the head of Umshayandlela would go bare breasted during the performance; her bare breast not being politically controversial and, given her role, symbolic of the nurturing cow.



Plate 34: Umshayandlela's Head (Norah Msani) dances with Fana (Gavin Starkey) [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].

The decision that only Nora and no white woman went bare breasted was ultimately decided less on the grounds of racial consideration and more in terms of artistic context and expression. As it turned out Nora's bare breasts — covered with black and white clay as to suggest the markings of a cow — were appropriate and natural to her role.

'Why things must change'

A heated discussion arose amongst the Zulu men and the designer over women wearing 'beshus' (cow skin waist coverings traditionally worn by men). For women to wear a beshu was for some a cultural sacrilege. Unfortunately what began as a discussion evolved into an issue of power. The costume designer and I had seen the discussion, though heated, as continuous with our process and were confident that the issue would work its way to a solution. However, other production personnel, not familiar to our working methods and sensing conflict in the fact that blacks were voicing strong disagreement with a white designer and director, told the administration. A NAPAC administrator made an appearance the next day requesting to speak to the actors. He insisted the actors sit like school children, grouped before him, (whereas I had encouraged them to sit on all four sides to understand working in the round). Then like a pedantic school teacher he scolded the ensemble, warning them that they must obey the dictates of the director and designer. 'Any future lack of discipline or respect will be reported to me and I can assure you will not be tolerated.'

The four days before the first public performance were concerned with polishing the performance — each actor and their groups would be seen arriving early to rehearse a song or dance in the lobby or even on the street. Small things found their way into the performance that lent it an increasingly detailed expression. One such addition was the 'Sorry' chorus. In South Africa a much used, common expression is to say 'sorry' when interrupting, excusing oneself, asking for something to be repeated, when asking a question; 'sorry' it seemed was applied ad nauseam. So over used was the polite saying of the word that it almost seemed as an incessant

apology meant to mitigate any number of social or racial inequities. In one day I counted its use forty-four times; and so inspired we created and incorporated a 'sorry' chorus that the Warriors chanted as they ate Umshayandlela.

The Audience

The audience for the first preview performance was all white with the exception of two people. However, it did not matter, the presence of an audience was all that was needed to spark *Emandulo* to life. With singing and dancing, sweating bodies, loud drumming, the burning of imphepho (Zulu herb used for healing and ancestral worship), grass covered stage floor, clay covered Shades interacting with the audience, and with textures, movements, and emotions the audience could not but participate. A discussion was held with the predominantly liberal, middle-aged audience at the end. Reactions ranged from ecstatic to confusion and discomfort. Some resented that the performance included so much Zulu language, others were tired of seeing and hearing about the social-cultural-political struggle, or complained that the drums were too loud. Others were disturbed and saddened by the story; a few said the grass and imphepho smoke aggravated their hay fever; others said that nothing should be changed and that it could not be any better.

There was work still to be done, but overall the ensemble and I were feeling confident and agreed that the true test was its presentation in front of a Zulu audience. When I was told that the Africa Arts Centre (a local arts charity) had purchased seats for an entire preview performance for a benefit I thought that opportunity for the performance to find itself in front of a Zulu audience had arrived. I did not expect a nearly all white audience of predominantly young, well-meaning, liberal professionals, dedicated to supporting African (meaning Zulu in Natal) art and artist. The aim was to raise money to send several Zulu artists to art school. They were an enthusiastic audience and, afterwards, they paid me copious compliments. In the lobby they were eating finger sandwiches, sipping white wine, laughing and chatting when I noticed a few of the Kwasa actors peeking around a corner in their street clothes.



Plate 35: Audience during a post-performance discussion [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].



Plate 36: Thomas Riccio conducts a post-performance discussion [Photo: Shelley Kjonstad, NAPAC].

Surely there would be no difficulty in inviting the Kwasa members; they were, after all, African artists and this was a group dedicated to their appreciation and support. The director, a white woman in her late thirties, was blunt without hesitation: 'No, this is a private party.' The irony of the situation, however, did not go unnoticed by an elderly white woman who overheard and told the director: 'Then I believe your private party is nearly over.' With that she

handed a large silver platter of food to the thankful and hungry Kwasa members.

Opening night was a success with reactions and reviews in the white press ranging from polite to confused to excellent. *The Sunday Tribune* said: 'There are flashes of perceptive contrast that suddenly bring the performance into sharp focus and give it very topical meaning.' *The Natal Witness* remarked: 'It is the kind of theatre that demands the viewer be a partici-

pant in what is happening, part of the process, rather than a cold objective observer (don't worry, you won't be asked to get up on stage) and while some may find this approach unusual I recommend you drop your defences and let yourself have an extraordinary experience.'

Built organically the opening was only a seed for the growth of the performance. For many of the ensemble members the opening night was only prelude, a beginning of something greater. The opportunity to run for a month in Durban and then to sold-out houses on tour in Pietermaritzburg allowed the group to explore and truly make the story their own. The experience had given the ensemble a part of themselves and taught them about their potential. *Emandulo* had become a performance ritual that embodied as it celebrated the expression of self, culture, and spirit. To a greater or lesser degree the performance became, a healing, a therapy, an encounter group. In testament of its effect, several audience members (Zulu and non-Zulu) returned on many occasions bringing friends and relatives. For most Zulu audiences it was the first time that they had seen any type of theatre or even been in a theatre. Repeatedly the Zulu audience remarked on how the performance made them feel interested and proud of their traditions. For many audiences it was significant to see non-Zulus performing alongside Zulus and participating in Zulu culture. The brass and glass cultural palace of the whites, once alien and formidable to the Zulu, had opened its doors to a vast unknown — the new South Africa.

Thomas Riccio lectures at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. He has been working for many years on performance projects with indigenous people: with Inuits in Greenland, with Tamils in Sri Lanka, with Sakha in Siberia, with San (Bushmen) in Namibia . . .

Notes

1. Americans are still a bit of a curiosity in South Africa, especially for blacks who have little contact with Americans (black or white) outside of the popular media. During my 1992 stay in South Africa I met only three other Americans.
2. Subsequent issues raised by workshop or ritual warm-up activity included a discussion of Zulu machismo. Many

of the non-Zulu men felt that the Zulu men brought an undertone of tribal, male superiority to some of the theatre games. The competitive, militaristic legacy of the Zulu nation was especially resented by a coloured (mulatto) Loft actor, Ivan Lucas. He said that when he did exercises with a Zulu they treated him, and any other non-Zulu 'like a dog'. This led to discussions to white male to black male and white female to black female relationships both in the hall and in contemporary South Africa. The insights that such discussions revealed served to deepen trust and understanding between ensemble members as it allowed individuals to consider prejudices and attitudes of their own.

3. The head was played by Nora Msani, who being unmarried performed bare breasted and wore an elaborate head piece. The tail, played by Patricia Majapelo, used a large black cow tail attached to a rod. These type of tails are often used by Zulu sangoma (medicine people) to chase way flies and evil spirits. All costumes, including traditional cow skin beshus, sticks, and cloth, were made by traditional Zulu crafts people in KwaZulu, a Zulu homeland.

4. To this day the rural Zulu identify wealth and well-being in terms of number of children and cows. Cows are offered by men to perspective fathers-in-law when they seek a daughter's hand. Goats are often sacrificed (predominantly in the rural areas and to a lesser extent in the urban/township areas) for healing, celebration, rites of passage, and spiritual offerings — however to sacrifice a cow is the ultimate.

5. The strong militaristic history of the Zulus as invaders is long and bloody. It must be remembered that the Zulu have been in southern Africa for approximately 400 years conquering, coming originally from the north as invaders.

6. I was to have a similar experience later in the summer of 1992 while working with the Metamorphosis Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia. In that instance Communism seems to have likewise left a mark on the group member's inability to work creatively beyond the structure of the improvisation.

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