

\$7⁵⁰ / £4⁹⁵

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INTERNATIONAL THEATRE JOURNAL

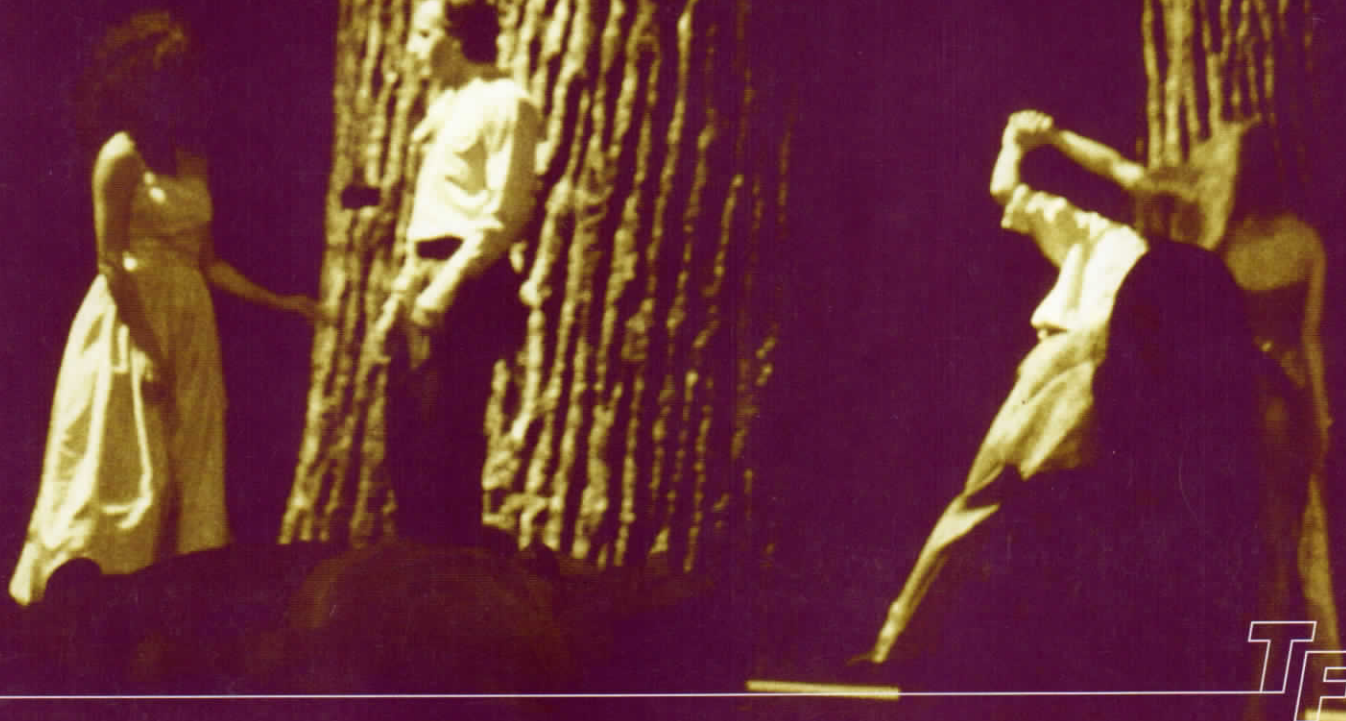
Pina Bausch's *Nur Du (Only You)*

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*The Universe***

**Arnold Aronson:
Foreman as Scenographer**

Brazil's Grupo Galpão

**!Xuu and Khwe Bushmen
From Africa**



TF

N!NGONGIAO

people come out of here

making a new story with the !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen
by Thomas Riccio

It was the second day of interviewing. Already they had told many stories and sung many songs for me. Some of the stories spoke about the Zebra, Crocodile, Wildebeest, and Hyena as fondly as if they were relatives. Some of the songs were about a clumsy monkey fetching water, a young woman laughing at an older man's awkward advances, a lion following an unsuspecting man. And there were songs about traveling and singing with the wind. Accompanied by clapping, drumming, or a simple stringed instrument, their songs were full of feelings rooted in the land they had lived on for longer than anyone knows. The songs of the !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen were simple and subtle songs, presented in a playful, easy way. In rhythm, phrasing, and tone they were a moving aural pathway to an "old" conception of reality that is now shared by only a few.

During the course of the interviewing they had decided that certain songs and dances were "special" songs. I asked them what a "special" song was and they talked a long time among themselves. Finally Fernando, our translator, said they were discussing whether they should show the special dances to me. I was a stranger and a white man. After several minutes I was told they would leave and come back later. We agreed to meet in one hour. After they left it occurred to me that I had assumed the group had a sense of what "an hour" meant. The South African army camp at Schmidtsdrift was sixty miles north of Kimberly, at the lower edge of the Kalahari, surrounded by nowhere. Before being brought to the



VOAO

camp these four thousand people had lived in even more isolated areas as hunters and gatherers. Time is a modern, urban-provoked mechanism for measuring life and space.

One returning !Xuu man told me that they didn't know what an "hour felt like;" they returned when it "felt right." Inside the trailer, a refuge from the shadeless, hot desert sun, early arrivals squatted in a large circle and passed around a pipe fashioned out of a tree branch and tin. They smoked greedily. The clothes they wore were donated by either European aid agencies or the South African military. These Bushmen had been self-sufficient hunters and gatherers living on and with the land until they were forced by circumstances, after thousands of years of independence, into the food chain of modern civilization and capitalism. They have become like others around the world who for different but like reasons are similarly dressed and homeless.

Machai and George stepped up into the trailer nodding, smiling, and shaking hands effusively instead of the verbal greetings we couldn't make. Machai put on an elaborately beaded belt and a colorful beaded headpiece. In each hand he held a rattle. Others had returned with small drums and rattles made from cans for beer, soda pop, automotive fluid, or orange juice, and filled with pebbles. Fernando said they were going to perform some "special" dances. [Photo 1]

Several sets of rattles combined with the polyrhythmic drumming and three levels of women clapping. Machai led the song with others singing chorus. [Photo 2] A few women added high-pitched bird calls. Machai was shaking his shoulders and head, and soon others joined the dancing,



Photo 1: Workshop members about to dance at an early interview session.

shaking with a shuffle step across the floor. The dance and song cycled, weaving the room into another space, one outside my normal sense of time and reality. Soon most of those in the trailer were shaking at the shoulders and hips to create “heat.” Silenga, a small, older woman, also wore a beaded headpiece. Her eyes were closed and her face relaxed—she was entering an altered state of consciousness. The dance and song had many spontaneous swells of emotion and energy that pleased the group. The dance took them to some other place deep within their cultural identity, a place where they were happy. The singing suddenly stopped with a signal from Machai. Silenga was still shaking and singing in a trance. A few women gathered around to hold her but she resisted them. Fernando translated, “They say when Silenga dances she can’t stop. Sometimes she dances until the next day with only her inside music.”

Until the early 1970s two Bushmen groups, the !Xuu (pronounced with a prefix click as “kone”) and the Khwe, had essentially lived unmolested by the outside world in the southeastern part of Angola along the Namibia and Botswana border. Unlike the well-documented !Kung Bushmen of Botswana, their habitat was semi-desert with forest. They were “river” or “forest” Bushmen. In the early 1970s UNITA, the socialist Cuban-backed freedom fighters of Angola, entered the !Xuu and Khwe areas and suddenly the Bushmen were part of the Angola bush war. After UNITA came to power in 1975 there was a clandestine

operation to remove the Bushmen from their lands. They were easy targets and their lands became part of a haphazard land redistribution program. A few thousand !Xuu and Khwe fought AK 47s and mortar attacks with spears and poison arrows, and their knowledge of their land and sense of survival was more resistance than the UNITA soldiers expected.

At about the same time the South African government was mounting a secret guerrilla war against UNITA. Soon the !Xuu and Khwe, having little option, found themselves in alliance with the South African Defense Forces (SADF). They were excellent trackers, scouts, and fighters, and they became the fabled “Bushman Battalion.” By 1990 international criticism and mounting internal political pressures forced South Africa to cease their secret war against Angola. The independence movement in Southwest Africa soon won independent nationhood as Namibia. The !Xuu and Khwe found themselves unwelcome in either Angola or Namibia. Association with the apartheid-tainted SADF did not make them welcome in South Africa either.

In 1990 the SADF settled the !Xuu and Khwe “temporarily” on a military reserve at Schmidtsdrift. It became a refugee camp—a sea of army-issue brown tents. Except for the store and school, the camp had no electricity. Families lived on a small monthly allowance (about \$90 US). Inadequate water and sewage and overcrowding resulted in a variety of illnesses. Alcohol deepened problems of family and cultural disintegration. Their existence in limbo created anxiety, uncertainty, and depression. The Bushmen wanted only to return to their ancestral homes, but the post-civil-war chaos of Angola and the ill-will between South Africa and Namibia made an amicable return unlikely. The !Xuu and Khwe were nomads on a political and cultural landscape of which they had little understanding.

The !Xuu and Khwe Trust had been established to facilitate autonomy and cultural adjustment, but the Trust board was divided over how and what to do. Some were pursuing repatriation of the Bushmen to their homelands; others were attempting to develop a housing project for them near the former diamond mining town of Kimberly; the military board members viewed the Bushmen as a problem to be managed; and other board members were trying to deal with a quickly escalating breakdown of social and cultural

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order. The !Xuu and Khwe Cultural Project was formed, and its director, Catherina Meyer, developed a very successful arts workshop for the camp. The objective of the workshop was to reaffirm cultural identity and assist with the introduction of the Bushmen to a cash economy. The cultural project employed several folk artists who produced traditional crafts. Animal wood carvings—something not done traditionally—had found a lucrative market. Lino printmaking, introduced by Catherina, also appealed to white collectors at local craft fairs and art galleries. These kinds of activities were encouraged and, though sponsored by SADF and the Trust, direct funding for my work at Schmidtsdrift came from the Northern Cape Tourist Association. With the grant came the expectation of developing a Bushmen tourist show. The idea was to help the Bushmen and to draw tourists to the economically stagnant Northern Cape region.

On the third day the interviews became an outpouring of their plight. Their stories were about how one day both !Xuu and Khwe were shot by soldiers, and how they fought back. They were about how the bombs came. [Drawing, p. 45] They felt the camp was a prison and wanted only to return to their land in Namibia and Angola. The gathering became an informational sharing, a kind of town hall, where the spiritual leaders of the two groups gathered, discussed and exchanged thoughts, and shared concerns for the first time.

NDALA MUTENYA (a !Xuu): We do not feel happy about being here and we do not feel welcome in South Africa.

MOHERA KUWIQ (a Khwe): In Namibia we could eat, but here only the ones that have jobs can eat and survive.

NYAMA MOKUKE (a !Xuu): We feel like we need a lot of help here and we want to take care of ourselves.

GEORGE DIKOSI (a Khwe): In Namibia we could hunt. There were all kinds of food in Namibia and Angola, but there is nothing here.

ALOUIS SIJAJA: When we came here and looked for food we were caught and arrested. Where must we find food? We are hungry and the Army does nothing!

MACHAI MBANDE: Our hearts are not happy here, and we do not know who will help us.

Despite their anger there was a general sense of acceptance—a passive acceptance that is the Bushman way. It is how they have survived for so long as hunter-gatherers, accepting and moving with change rather than resisting. Now there were long silences. The atmosphere was heavy. I suggested we return to showing some dances and sharing some stories like we had done the day before. George said he

was hesitant about singing his songs because the !Xuu did not know his language or style of clapping even though he and the other Khwe had made attempts to learn the !Xuu style. The !Xuu responded that they were too shy to learn. Our discussion, which had started with their common plight, turned to the issues between the two groups.

The !Xuu are small in frame and stature with yellow-brown skin, high cheek bones and almost Asiatic eyes. The Khwe, or Barquana as they are also called, are larger with darker skin and more pronounced features. While the Khwe consider themselves Bushmen, the !Xuu consider the Khwe to be blacks or Bantus. Both groups were referred to as Bushmen by anthropologists and governments and both the !Xuu and Khwe accept the term when referring to themselves collectively. While some anthropologists prefer to use the term “San People,” both groups reject it and have no idea where it came from. The term Bushmen best describes their lifestyle, race, and culture as distinct from blacks, their historical adversaries.

In southern Africa the difference between blacks and Bushmen is an important distinction historically. The migrating black Bantu tribes from the north (the Tswana and Zulu among them) considered the Bushmen inferior because of their stone-age life styles. Successive invasions by Bantu tribes and then by colonializing whites pushed the !Xuu and Khwe out of their own lands. Prohibited from hunting or cultivating on the surrounding desert lands, they became partners in misery, refugees and poachers who risked arrest for hunting on local ranches. Ironically, after four years of being in the same camp together there had been no attempt to bring the two groups into interaction. Bowing to the wishes of the two groups, the army kept them physically separated. A group of trailers stood between the two



Photo 2: Machai Mbande demonstrates a song during an interview session. Alouis Sijaja is next to him.

groups and housed the school, store, clinic, military offices and motor pool, and the cultural project. Though there was some social and ceremonial interaction between the !Xuu and Khwe, they were essentially two different groups—together by force of circumstances. The theatre workshop was to bring the two groups together in a joint effort.

On the fourth day of interviews we lost our translator Fernando. He had accepted more lucrative employment on a local ranch. We used most of the morning trying to find someone who spoke English and the native tongues. We settled on two translators, both of



Photo 4: After a healing ceremony, healer Machai Mbande explains how he sees sickness as a small stone in a person's body, removes it, and throws it into a fire.

whom spoke Afrikaans and their respective native tongue; neither spoke English. The interviews became absurdly torturous. Asking my questions in English, Catherina would translate into Afrikaans. Luiz then translated it into !Xuu, and Lerato translated it into Khwe. Responses went through the process in reverse. Sometimes the space between my question and their reply was so long I had forgotten what I asked. It was nearly impossible to keep a train of thought, a sense of momentum, or to ask for clarification and detail. Furthermore, Luiz was a !Xuu man educated by the Catholic missionaries. He had abandoned his

!Xuu name and traditional culture. As a church deacon, he held himself aloof and regarded the other !Xuu as heathens in need of salvation. Consequently, when translating he censored whatever he found un-Christian.

In spite of the sometimes comic translation problems, the interview sessions were essential to access and assess the community and to formulate with the group an understanding, purpose, and strategy for creating theatre with them. The interviews also established a rapport, setting the tone for my participation and thinking. Seeing their dances and cultural rhythms was just as important as hearing their personal and traditional stories. Watching how the group moved and what rhythms they used when performing animals spoke volumes. They captivated, overwhelmed, frustrated, and deeply disturbed me. Before me were the remnants of a proud and ancient culture, and I was a helpless witness to its breakdown and slow, ignoble dissolution. It was like watching a fire slowly burn through a library of invaluable knowledge. They were losing their ancient folkways and their relationship with their land and animals. Their culture was slipping away—and so was a part of humanity's legacy.

When Catherina had telephoned three months earlier to ask which people she should gather for this workshop, I asked her to pick the best performers. That was what she did. The group consisted of seven traditional healers—Machai, George and Silenga among them—and the rest were their assistants and musicians. All participants were between thirty-five and seventy years old. It soon became clear that there were deep conflicts between these older people and the younger members of the community.

MACHAI MBANDE: They think they are better than us because they can read and write. To them we are old and foolish.

ARENESTO NDALA: The sooner they learn about the new ways the better they will be.

MACHAI: We old people still like to think about the old times, but if we tell those old stories to children they say "Leave those old things—we are living in modern times. Can't you see we are wearing clothes today and not antelope skins."

GEORGE: The old ways should not be abandoned so quickly because it is still important to know those ways. What we do must show them about the old ways. Before we lose the old stories. Those stories hold us together and make us who we are.

TUMBA GISENDA: We must tell them our story even if they laugh at us. Someday they will understand and use it.

SILENGA: Those old ways are gone now and we must start with a new story.

RICCIO: What is the new story?

SILENGA: We don't know, you must help us.

RICCIO: Should the performance tell the new story?

NDALA: We don't know.

RICCIO: What should be a part of the new story?

GEORGE: In the past we have suffered, in the future we don't know if we will suffer.

TUMBA: In the old story we were not chased, now in the new story we have been chased.

We finished the session with the agreement that the story lives within the group and the group must create it, if necessary, and then tell the others. The purpose of my presence and the function of what we were doing and why finally became apparent to many of them. I couldn't explain theatre to people who had no concept of it. However, they understood there was a story within them that needed telling.

That evening I attended a healing ceremony conducted by George in the Khwe camp. I had no translator so would simply observe and take notes of questions to ask later. [Photo 4] When I arrived at the tent, about forty

other men sang counter to and over the women's voices. Each healer has a unique style and method of healing and so the songs George used belonged only to him.

The rhythmic pattern of the music and the unity of voices, combined with the flickering light of the fire and the focused attentions of all those gathered, were hypnotic and transported me to a place between realities. The overwhelming sensation was of losing the self in the event—my individuality was secondary to the collective event that surrounded me. The cyclical music spun and distorted time, yet there was an underlying sense of a slow, inexorable accumulation, as if everything within the event were building to something and all of us were part of that build. Somehow songs would stop in unison—a testament to the relaxed yet highly sensitized focus of the group—then another voice would begin another song and the song cycle continued.

George goes to the sick woman, listens to her back, then massages her with his red powder medicine mixed with cooking oil. With the wooden tip of his rattle he finds the point of her illness. He presses the rattle into the woman, then slowly pulls it away and, taking the invisible illness from the tip of the rattle, puts it into the medicine on the plate and quickly covers it with a white cloth. Turning the

The stones have power, always, from the beginning. People from all over the world came from there, and people still live inside.

people, mostly women, were seated on blankets in a circle, rattling and singing in support of George, who was at the center, next to the fire and his patient. He wore a t-shirt and torn dark pants, no shoes and no special regalia. The sick woman lay wrapped in a blanket with her naked back to the fire. Near her back was a covered plate with red powder medicine on it and next to it was a ten-inch knife shaped from an automobile brake shoe. George was also healing two infants, the grandchildren of the woman, who were sick because they ate from the same bowl as their grandmother. Throughout the ceremony he first ministered to the woman, then repeated the same actions on the babies.

As I entered the tent George welcomed me by anointing my brow with the red medicine. He did the same for everyone entering the ceremony. The group gave me a place at the inner circle, and I felt comfortable immediately, as if with family, huddled close together against the cold desert night. There were no drums, only rattles, clapping, and singing, and, as during the singing in our interview sessions, the emotion ran deep. Rhythms and counter-rhythms were dense and complex. The voices of the women laid a vocal and rhythmic bottom while George and the few

woman over he feels her neck, head and stomach, pausing with absolute stillness over something only he sees. The intensity of the singing rises in support. After working with the patient for a time, he sits and sings, as if calling on powers within himself. His eyes roll white and his body shakes as he bolts up and dances around the fire. His shoulders and hips shake back and forth quickly and sharply. Such movement activates the nerve endings in the spinal column to create the "heat" necessary for healing.

There are several short breaks in the healing process. Participants pass around cigarettes, pipes, and beer cans as they talk and laugh. Even George talks and sometimes tells what seem to be jokes. The healing ceremony is as much a social as a spiritual event. For Bushmen, like other indigenous people, the two spheres of human endeavor are not mutually exclusive. The healing is as much for the well-being of the community as it is for the sick person—social interaction is a healing, too. But each break also serves as a necessary release for the build-up of heat. Heat is necessary, but too much could overpower George.

After a break the singing resumes, but George sits very still. George's young male assistant sits next to him and

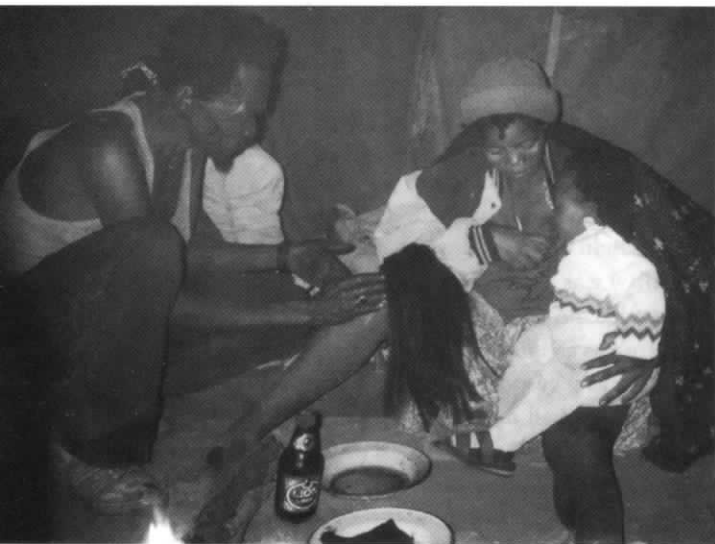


Photo 5: During a pause in a healing ceremony, Machai Mbande treats a woman's minor knee ailment with a mixture of cooking oil and his special root medicine.

massages his neck. Soon George stands, talking to something only he sees, his body shaking with dance. He removes the white cloth from the plate and takes up the knife. He kneels next to the woman and lifts his shirt, exposing his stomach. Using the rattle as a hammer, he pounds the knife into his stomach. It is hard to believe what I am seeing. Is it a sleight of hand trick or something I am imagining?

George takes the knife out of himself, leaving no scar or blood. He dips the knife into the plate of red powder and wipes the knife on the woman's neck. He pounds the tip of the knife into her chest. The singing is like a sea of aural ebb and flow, embodying, surrounding, and supporting an emotional wave of human energy. It is unlike anything I have ever known.

On the morning of the fifth day of interviews Catherina and I sat in the sun-filled trailer, wondering what had happened to our group. After a long wait Machai showed up. George arrived soon after, feeling tired but very happy after the healing, which was declared a success. George and Machai had been busy lately with many healings. Before all of the troubles there were two or three healings during a cycle of the moon. Now healers were conducting ceremonies every few days, "because there is much sickness in the camp." [Photos 5 and 6]

Through the trailer window we saw women carrying cases of beer on their heads. It was the monthly pay day for the Bushmen soldiers. It would be a beer party weekend throughout the camp and there would be no group interviews today.

The wind started blowing in our direction, carrying with it the distant sound of drumming. George said it was the end of Manfred's healing ceremony. It was now mid-day with a high, hot sun and the ceremony had begun the night before. George took us over and they granted us permission to observe. The successful healing had culminated at day-

break and the cooling down had been going on for seven hours. Manfred, unlike George, was known for his highly physical style of healing which created a great deal of heat, necessitating a long cooling down. He was in high demand as a healer and therefore unable to participate in the workshop, although his lengthy interviews contributed a great deal. [Photo 7]

There were several drummers and many children among the more than one hundred people gathered inside the tent. At the center was a vibrant and indefatigable dancer, Mbûto, a healer in training. Wearing a black bra and kakoi wrap-around skirt, she was holding the attention and propelling the energy of the crowd. In a state of ecstasy, her dancing was fluid, uninhibited, almost erotic. She variously made faces, teased people, and administered blessings from the powder pot. [Photo 8] She much amused the onlookers who variously clapped, sang, danced, or rattled in accompaniment. Catherina was a known figure in the community, but I stuck out, and, of course, Mbûto came after me. She first took my baseball cap and danced mocking me. Later she took my watch and danced defiantly inches away from my face, making faces, going cross-eyed, acting arrogant, sticking out her tongue, and rolling her eyes up to the great amusement of those gathered. My accepting response went far to familiarize the Khwe community to my presence and personality, breaking down many social and cultural barriers.

A middle-aged woman carrying a stick suddenly entered the compound. People scattered and screamed. The woman swung her stick at anyone who got in her way. George said that, attracted by the drumming, the woman had come to be cured. "She is a bit mad like some other people. It is normal for them. When the moon is full they go mad. So they let them stand inside the circle to feel better. Five days before the moon is full is when it is especially bad for them."

Photo 6: With a patient's family looking on, healer Machai Mbande examines a pregnant woman who is suffering from stomach pains. His tail switch of kudu (a deer-like animal) lays over the woman's stomach to help her breathe.



The dancing continued as an assistant healer went to the woman and took her stick and comforted her. When she was brought into the circle she began to shake and dance convulsively in the arms of an assistant healer who comforted her as she lapsed into a trance.

Having experienced the healing ceremony, an entirely new way of perceiving and approaching my work with the !Xuu and Khwe was urging itself. It would be wrong to introduce an alien performance form, such as theatre, into their culture. However, I also felt that there was a need for a contemporary expression of what they were going through. The workshop could provide a perspective and tools to augment and expand perceptions of self. These tools would offer them the ability to see and understand themselves in the larger, "modern" context in which they found themselves. The "sickness" they were confronted with was a new kind of sickness, one that came to them from their interaction with the outside. They saw their performance and healing technology as inadequate to the task. But was I a part of their cultural transformation or part of their dissolution? The colonialist errors of the past haunted me. To do nothing in this situation would be wrong. But to do something wrong could mean doing more damage to an already fragile and abused culture.

The synaptic moment between ritual/ceremony and theatre, a moment that had taken place in Western culture and other cultures around the world, is about adaptation. It is about expanding a homogeneous group consciousness so it can see self and community as interactive with other groups and in a new, larger context. Theatre was and is a tool of adaptation in constantly adjusting worlds. The ancient Greeks evolved theatre to help them adapt to their urbanization and statehood. With theatre the emphasis shifted from maintaining homogeneous cosmological balance to responding to social-cultural adjustment. Ritual and ceremony are tools rooted in the hunter-gatherer, mytho-spiritual reality of human development. Consciousness, once expanded to include "others," used theatre as a means of dealing with the problems resulting from contact, interaction, and social adjustment. Theatre serves that same function today.

Sitting in George's tent, white-haired Gomez Kapango told us the story "N!ngongiao," the "first story and the best story, even though it is sad." It is the story of how "people came out of the big stone." When I asked why no one had told it before now George replied, "Because everyone knows it and doesn't think of it as a story." The story was so fundamental to their culture that it had become a cultural assumption. It lives in a way similar to the way the story of Christ lives in Western culture, as a broadly shared cultural narrative and reference point that does not require retelling. The story "N!ngongiao" and how people came into being could be an appropriate means by which the !Xuu and Khwe could in a sense return to their mythologi-

cal origins in order to reaffirm, redefine, and understand who they are today.

Gomez's telling of the "Two Stones" brought the group to life. Everyone wanted to tell the story as they remembered it. We agreed that "Two Stones" would be the basis of our performance. With a large artist's pad at the center, the group gathered in a circle. The drawing of the story and the agreement to perform the story suddenly gave our work an objective, structure, and immediacy that was satisfying to the pragmatic Bushmen. The drawing and the narrative also provided us with a medium by which we could directly communicate with one another, without language or a translator. After many drawings and story sessions an agreed-upon telling evolved. [**Photo 9 and Drawing**, p. 55]

In the desert there are two stones.
They are by themselves out in the open
Surrounded by grass and small bushes.
The stones are called Ō (n) Whatsu.
That means "people come out of here."
They are like two houses with a path.
Both have big holes in them like the entrance to a hut.
The tall stone is a man and the short one is a woman.
The tall one is square at the top the other is short and pointed.
They are a hard, smooth stone.
White and black mixed up in color.
Today you can find the stones still, if you are supposed to.
The stones have power, even today.

Trees came out of the stones first and then the animals.
Cattle, animals, plants, and things all came out of the woman stone.
They were there before people came out.
Then the good doctor and bad doctor came out.
They came from the man stone.
The doctors were there at the beginning,
Before the people came out.
The good doctor was the first to see outside the stone,
The first to see the tree.
These doctors could speak to the father.
They said to the father:
"We will give the people this medicine you have given us from the bushes to help the people."

Then the father gave them dance and singing to heal.
The doctors saw the father and he looked like a Bushmen.
The good doctor walked on into the desert
The bad doctor stopped at the tree.
The bad doctor used the power from the father to look like a lion,
With the tail and mouth of a lion, with big and black eyes,
With roars like flames and horns to hurt the people.

The first people of all nations came out of the stone.
The first to come out were Bushmen,
And they came out of the stone naked.
These people came out because
The wind was blowing and sounded so nice.
These people didn't exist before.
They just came out the hole with the father pulling them,
From early in the morning until dark that evening.
Everybody came out in one day.
Everybody that came out could communicate with the father.
They could hear him and the father would hear them.
But they could not see him.
They said to the father: "Father, look at me, you gave me everything.
Now I am standing here.
You know me."

They sang to the father in the Bushmen language
And went into the veld still calling his name.
In the veld they found the father had given them
Trees
Water
Food
And animals.
The father gave the Bushmen little pieces of the two stones
Because they had to break things.
And it is where the Bushmen got their arrows.
There was also medicine in the stone.

Then when the night came the father gave people fire sticks.
For sleeping in the dark and cold,
The tree offered the sticks to keep them warm.
Pulling from the tree the Bushmen got fire sticks.
Fire has helped the Bushmen find their way.

The Bushmen first came to a big river,
But they were too frightened to cross.
They sang the song:
"I saw the water, I saw the water, we better move otherwise it will come after us."

But the other people crossed the river
And when they crossed they became white.
After they crossed the river the white man got books.
Then the Bushmen said:
"Look at that man he is now a white man, our relative, why didn't we go with him, maybe now he will come back to hurt us."

Then the Bushmen went to a place where there was rain,
Bara, the essence of rain.
They showed the black people the essence of rain,
And the blacks wanted some so the Bushmen gave them rain.

Everything else the Bushmen gave away too, or
The blacks took everything.

And the Bushmen got nothing.
The Bushmen did not know the value and so they let it go.
The Bushmen did not appreciate the gifts the father gave.
That is why today they have nothing
And why they are afraid
And today accept their fate
And why they are in the desert
Because they are ashamed they lost everything.
They live in and survive terrible conditions
And are great hunters and not great fighters,
Because they are afraid.
They are afraid they will die.

Then the Bushmen saw the bad doctor and they were afraid
And went looking for the good doctor
And they walked far.
The river was far so they had to find the water in the bush.
The sand was white and they had to dig very deep.
The stones have power, always,
From the beginning.
People from all over the world, from all nations, came from there,
And people still live inside.
At night you can see light inside.
You can hear people and their activities.
Then in the day the light is gone.
Nothing.

We were at a positive new stage of the work, but there were other problems. A new camp commander who had little understanding or sympathy for the Bushmen's predicament decided to put up an elaborate fencing system, making work in the trailer impossible. Our workshop moved to the large community hall, but schedule conflicts kept interrupting our work. Also, the new camp commander frowned on traditional healing ceremonies because he felt they were disruptive to camp order. His crackdown on healers caused great concern and fear.

Adding to the confluence was a sharp increase of illness. The camp's white physician told me that the hygiene conditions had become critical. TB and dysentery were the main problems, but there were others. Nyama, a member of our group, was taken by truck to the hospital seventy miles away with severe burns on her back. Her drunken son had pushed her into a fire. With all of these problems the group became preoccupied and soon their willingness to participate in the workshop and to talk about healing practices diminished. Like the camp commander, I was a white man and I was associated with his attitude and policies. Catherina also fell away from active participation with the project, becoming more concerned elsewhere. Something had to happen quickly.

To avoid further interruptions, schedule conflicts, and distractions, I arranged to have the group transported daily to some empty military barracks about fifteen kilometers

from the camp. The isolation, promise of lunch, and the specialness of being transported helped to restore the group's purpose, prestige, and concentration.

To overcome their reluctance to talk about their healing practices and to demonstrate my support, with their permission I began the video documentation of their healing ceremonies. Two weeks later I showed them the videos. The healers watched with stilled attention. After the presentation I became a welcomed insider and was given a place of honor at subsequent ceremonies. With their agreement, the video and other information would be shared with others so "they will know about the Bushmen ways." It would also serve as a record for their grandchildren. Copies of all tapes, photos, and transcripts of my work with the Bushmen went to the Cultural Project for the establishment of a cultural library.

[Photo 10]

The white sergeant major wondered how the "show" was progressing. Catherina was becoming increasingly concerned with how the "show" was coming. The Trust and the Northern Cape Tourist Association were looking for a product. The workshop was under pressure to produce. But the Bushmen, like other indigenous people, saw themselves as participants in an ongoing process, in something greater than themselves. In the Bushmen world view, control does not come from the assertion of human activity but rather from the interaction and constant adjustment of many things: the environment, the spirits, feelings, and an inherent aspiration for balance. The Bushmen were out of balance, and the project was, in reality, about how to restore a balance. It was not about putting on a show.

Given the cultural, social, and personal state of disruption the Bushmen were in, work toward a performance would have been regressive, imposing, and playing to external expectations. It was important for the Bushmen to define themselves on their own terms. The quandary all this put me in was, in retrospect, a necessary catalyst to define the value and purpose of the project and my work with indigenous people in general. The !Xuu and Khwe did not need to perform for others, they needed to perform for themselves so as to understand who they were and what had become of them. The process of taking stock in themselves—recovering who they were and redefining who they are in a modern context—was the project's primary function.

There could be no show. With this decision I confronted my own training, tendency, and orientation toward creating a result to mark the achievement of my work. I convinced Catherina, but I half expected to be on a bus back to Johannesburg within days. Instead the Trust agreed to the new objectives—to develop research materials and train the Bushmen for a future performance.

After three weeks the project finally took on a cohesiveness and structure. Working daily at the army barracks the group began the process of discussing and exploring the story of "People Come Out of Here." This

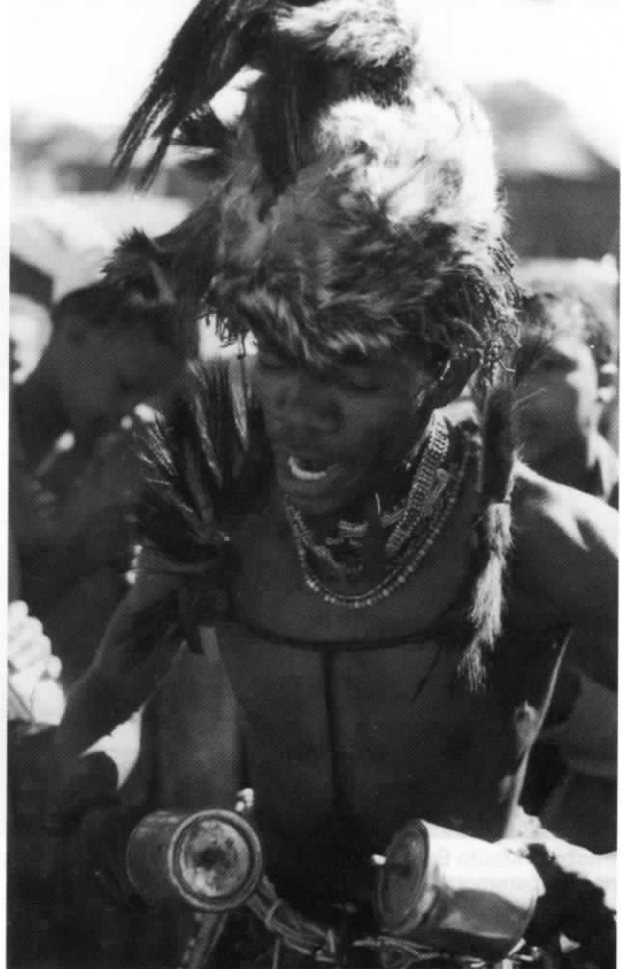


Photo 7: Khwe healer Manfred during a "cooling down" session following an all-night healing ceremony.

story provided a focal point of our exploration into their cultural expression. The retelling of their original story, told in their own, modern terms, would serve to reaffirm their cultural sense of self as it reflected what they have become. The act of retracing where they came from and who they were would provide living perspective (by way of performance) by which to provoke and engage a dialogue.

Two brown tarp tents, like the ones they all live in, represent the two stones of the story. Like the Bushmen of the origin story, the group inside the larger tent sings as the first Bushmen did. The songs alternate between !Xuu and Khwe songs:

!XUU: A song about the old time people

KHWE: A song about the old houses the old people used to make

!XUU: An old time lullaby that has a forgotten meaning

KHWE: About SWAPO and people dying in the war

While still inside the stone and between songs, they talk and tell jokes to one another. Then there is an old traditional song about the wind and how the old time people came out of the stone. After the song there is silence, then George says, "Now we must leave." With his words George is the first to exit from the stone/tent; the pleasant sound of the wind has called him. He is at first timid and afraid and tries to back



Photo 8: Mbúto Bohera performing during a “cooling down” session after an all-night healing ceremony.

into the tent, but others push him out. From inside the tent there is much excitement about exiting into the world.

Our first day of performance development had been encouraging and remarkably fruitful. The working process was simple, efficient, and straightforward. We talked about the beginning of the story, discussed and agreed on how it should be performed, then performed it improvisationally. The day ended with everyone feeling a sense of accomplishment. Fully committed and deeply felt, their work was as emotionally moving as any theatre I had ever been a part of or seen.

The next day we reviewed the work we had done, but now everything was different. It was not just a matter of minor adjustments and less spontaneity, which is usual when an improvisation is repeated. Nearly all the previous day’s work was changed or forgotten. They introduced new songs, deleted or changed others, adjusted movements, some people did not participate, and there was no sense of excitement inside the tent. George exited as he would from his own tent on any ordinary day. It was fascinating and frustrating.

We stopped to talk about how and why things had changed and this puzzled them. I realized that the concept of repetition and rehearsal was not a part of their cultural vernacular. After the initial performance exploration they did not see the need to express that part of the story again now. They knew the dances and songs and would perform them when necessary. As hunter-gatherers living in a hot climate they habitually act with efficiency out of necessity. The repetition of rehearsal was neither efficient nor necessary. And they were right. Everything they had performed was from a

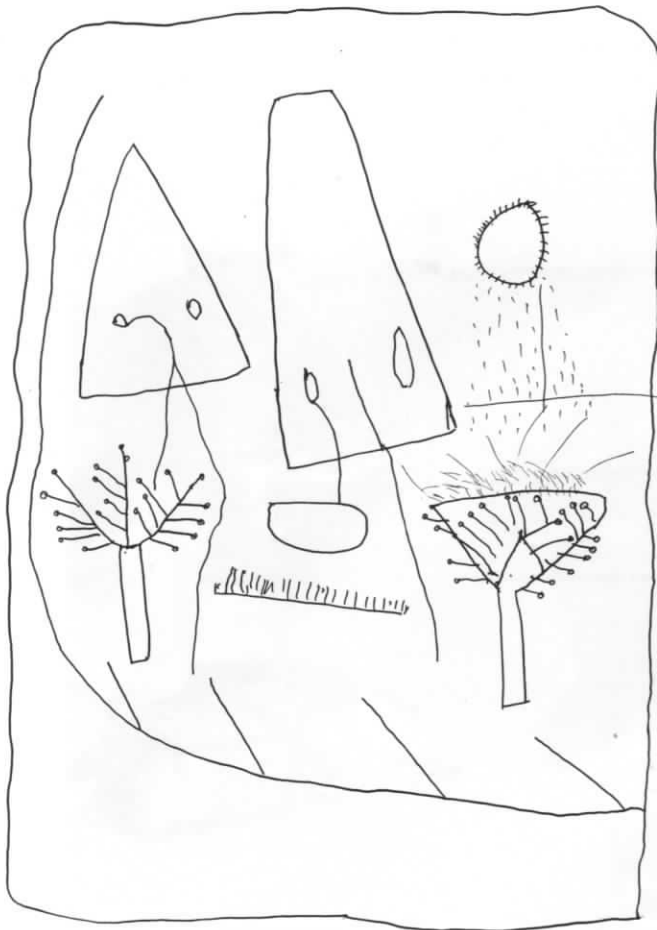
well-established cultural reservoir that lived within them and not something external and learned as in Western performance expression. Their work was not concerned with adapting or developing expression to suit an individual’s motives/emotions/ideas as in Western cultural performance.

As we talked further I realized how many of my fundamental assumptions about performance I took for granted. When I asked them who they were when they were performing the story they replied with puzzlement, “We were ourselves.” I asked them if they were not the old time people. They said, “No, how can we be?”

I tried to figure out how, indeed whether, to introduce the concept of performance as pretending and imagining to people who have no tradition or concept of such a thing. But

my raising of the subject had made them curious and they asked about it so I tried to explain the concept to them. They confused what I was saying with soul possession and the work of a bad doctor. Maybe they were right. As seen from their world view, in which all things are part of a continuous cycle and totality, to perform one part of the cycle or totality was to perform other parts of it. With everything being included and part of the same system there could be no significant differentiation. Individualization was not a significant factor, nor was the need to define self outside self as in pretending/acting in Western culture.

Our discussion about pretending and acting evolved into a discussion about metaphor. The concept of how something can mean something else was alien if not absurd to them. The literal-mindedness of the Bushmen did not surprise me. They are pragmatic people, living, until recently, a subsistence life without modern technology. The need for metaphor and to “act” something or someone else is urged by the need to make a connection to another person, event, or thing. By virtue of how they perceived their reality, the Bushmen were already connected. Metaphor, like acting, in the Western context, serves to bridge or reveal an idea or feeling so as to identify, emphasize, compare and contrast. The Bushmen have little interest in such things because everything is self-evident. Things are simply what they are. Everything, every event, every person, every animal is inherently a reference to that which is simultaneously itself and something greater. Mythology lives within them, not removed or differentiated as something outside self. What in Western perception we term internal and external to self, is for the Bushmen, one and the same.



success is to speak to people who do not have homogeneous belief systems. The function of theatre is to understand other times, places, events, and people and to assert, question, celebrate, parody, or reassert community values. Theatre, contrary to ritual, often serves to assay the changing values, interactions, and alienating effect of non-homogeneous society. Theatre is a mechanism of social and cultural adjustment, whereas ritual is a mechanism of myth/spiritual reaffirmation. Ritual speaks to inclusion. Theatre speaks to exclusion.

The Bushmen were of a ritual culture. For them singing, dancing, and performing were not about something outside, but about what lives within and is indistinguishable from their identity. But in their present predicament a non-homogeneous situation was confronting them, challenging their most fundamental perceptions of reality and conceptions of self. Culturally they are in a state of trauma, forced suddenly into a cultural context without precedence or preparation. During traditional times the land, its elements and animals, had provided the foundation, identity, and homogeneous/archetypal referent of which they were a part. The war and its camp aftermath forced them into a state of sudden disorientation, quick adjustment, and radical reconciliation. Theatre could offer them metaphor, social adjust-

Could it be that the need for metaphor and acting in Western and other cultures arose when they became removed from their hunter-gatherer interaction with their part of the earth? When those cultures became removed from their sense of and interaction with place, did metaphor become a device by which to bridge and hence reconnect with a lost wholeness? Did acting, like theatre, arise when once-homogeneous groups interacted with other groups? Did acting become a means by which to integrate (and thereby expand) a homogeneous group's understanding of others? Acting allows one to become another and in this way understand another. Is the necessity of acting and theatre the attempt to connect with others and is it possibly an attempt to re-establish lost holism?

Ritual is the manifestation and reaffirmation of a greater and often spiritual whole. Its function is to participate in a greater sense of self, meaning, order, or being. For ritual to work it assumes that a group's myth and sense of greater self are alive within. Ritual is simply an outward manifestation of what is within. Theatre, which evolved from ritual, likewise finds its inspiration in the attempt to regain a whole and, similar to ritual, aspires to transport its audiences to other places, situations, and people. But unlike ritual, theatre does not need to address itself to a homogeneous belief/myth group. Indeed, theatre's design and mark of



Photo 9: Alouis Sijaja and Naka Mbandje draw the story of "People Come Out of Here." Machai and others look on.



Photo 10: Luiz Samba (holding microphone) translates a story by Machai Mbande as Thomas Riccio takes notes.

Photo: Catherina Meyer

ment and a stepping outside of self to see self in a larger and new social context. It could serve them in very tangible ways. Cultures unable to project and abstract into a larger context are disadvantaged, and unless they can find a way to adjust, expand, and adapt to the new cultural context, they are often either absorbed or abolished. In a sense the workshop and theatre were presenting survival tools.

While the Bushmen were at ease, fluid, playful, when performing parts of their mythological narrative, they became stiff and self-conscious when asked to perform what had happened to them. The performance of personal narratives was an unfamiliar concept because it was outside their mythological narrative framework and because it asked them to individualize, which meant putting oneself outside the group when group identity was intrinsic to their very being. They had agreed to the idea of performing their personal narratives and understood the necessity of telling their stories, but the reality of stepping out of their mythological/group concept of self was just too frightening for them. To alleviate some of their fear we developed a process of acting by consensus. When a performer was expressing what had personally happened to him, the others, including myself, would assist the performer with movements, directions, emotion, facial expression, and even giving lines. In a way we were all exploring a leap into a new narrative context by supporting one another. In time the group became

more confident in working with their own experiences, integrating traditional performance with individual expressions. Implicitly they realized their mythological narrative was malleable and participatory.

Maintaining a mythological narrative is important to any culture, lending a culture a sense of place, continuity, and connection. However, though the maintenance of a mythological narrative may be important for continuance of a homogeneous group—which links its narrative to place and situation—it can become counterproductive for a group confronted with fundamental social and cultural adaptation. In a similar way, I believe, the cultures of the world, holding on to the mythological narratives of their nationhood, need to evolve to a new, global narrative that is both organic to a specific place and aware of being part of a vast system called earth. Such a narrative is urged by and congruent with the globalization of politics, economies, and popular culture and is necessary in response to the realities of technological advance, population explosion, and the eco-collapse of the earth. Theatre, the ancient technology of adaptation and adjustment, can serve such a narrative evolution.

With branches they had gathered they transform into trees. Rhythmically waving the branches and singing softly, they portray the wind “coming out of the sun and then into the trees.” Moving around the

room in a single file they both portray and pay homage to the wind moving and bringing the trees to life. We had not discussed the events of the scene beforehand; it had evolved naturally out of a focused and shared feeling. It was lengthy and was very moving in heartfelt emotion. When I asked them later if they were dancing a traditional song they said no, when they heard the trees' branches the song just came.

NAKA MBANDJE: It made us happy to remember the trees.

MACHAI: When the first people came out of the stones they were happy like we are to see the trees.

SILENGA: They are friends.

After this scene the work came to a sudden halt with a disagreement over who would play the Good and Bad Doctors of the next scene. Though roles were previously agreed upon, it suddenly occurred to the group that the assignment of the Good Doctor role was an honor and tacit recognition that whoever played the role was the best healer in the group. They all wanted to be the Good Doctor. We settled the issue by having the role rotate among them. However, there were no takers for the equally powerful Bad Doctor. The idea of even pretending they were a Bad Doctor was repugnant. We decided to make the Bad Doctor invisible. For his entrance there was no dance or song, only silence with all of the group standing and "seeing" the entrance of the imagined Bad Doctor. As the group sees the Bad Doctor they describe how he looks and the badness they see. As the Bad Doctor goes to the tree of life (two branches held by Nyama) to eat, the Good Doctor and the others stand watching intently, still describing each of the "witch doctor's" activities. For this section the healers drew upon their own personal experiences with Bad Doctors. The "seeing" of the Bad Doctor developed into a very theatrical scene.

After humans and the doctors had exited from the stone the animals exited from the smaller of the two stones. In quick succession the group improvised animal dances, playing and parodying the movements of a wide variety of animals. The animal performances were loving and benign, highlighting animal personality traits that brought immediate recognition and delight to the group. That day the word *JaKala*, which means "very good," became a part of the group's vernacular.

As a mark of how far relations between the groups had progressed, both Khwe and !Xuu group members learned one another's songs. The next scene used songs from both groups. The Bushmen, afraid of the Bad Doctor, leave him and follow single file behind the Good Doctor. ("Where do you go?" I asked. "We just walk far like Bushmen do.") As they walk they sing a Khwe song about a hyena who eats meat and then walks far to the river to drink, then goes back to the meat, back and forth until all of the meat is gone. When the Bushmen come to the river they become afraid and comically resist getting close to it. Then they sing a traditional !Xuu song about getting water from the river.

Machai then sings an old !Xuu song about a little ape going to the river to drink water and Mbûto and George add a very funny Khwe dance of a little ape.

Soon the group came upon the idea of the workshop being a sort of healing ceremony to cure the "community illness." When George first suggested it the other healers were adamantly against it. The workshop was one thing; their healing work, however, was separate. Silenga said, "Only one person at a time can be cured." George responded, "But there is great illness in the camp and we can work together." Among some others I felt the resistance to the idea was more about rivalry and professional suspicion. Though the group was willing to share specific methods and ideas with me, an outsider and white man, some were reluctant to share their ways of working so openly among other healers for fear the others would steal them. Though each practiced healing in his or her own unique style, some had established reputations to be concerned about.

The next scene we worked on was "The Crossing of the River." The river is a tarp laid on the floor. The People from the Stone huddle together as they approach the river. Finally a man (played by Luiz, the only one to volunteer) steps forward from the group and crosses the river. The rest of the group is fearful for the person crossing, then curious. As in the original myth, the Bushman who crosses the river turns into a white man. (To theatrically suggest this Luiz streaked a white chalky substance on his face.) From the other side of the river Luiz suddenly seizes the opportunity of being white and berates his fellow Bushmen about their heathen ways, shaking his finger at them as he paces up and down his side of the river like an intolerant teacher. The huddled Bushmen on the other side of the river are stunned by his transformation which some called magical. The scene suddenly became uncomfortably real. With Luiz's performance the mythological and the real unexpectedly fused. The scene focused and shaped the ephemeral and became theatre.

Asked what the white man coming out of the river should wear, their reply was, "jacket, nice shirt, pants, pen, glasses, hat. And carry a book bag with a book in it. The Bushmen have no books today because the white people took them with them to the other side of the river." I was curious about the crossing of the river. "Could the river be the ocean?" The response was various. "Yes, it means far away." "Any water." "England and America." "A river separates whites from us." I was equally curious about why whites have books and the Bushmen do not. "The Bushmen had books but they were taken by the white people." "White men keep their lives in books." "They have taken our lives and put them into books." "That is why we are in a camp now because we have no book." Only Luiz and Lerato could read and write. The importance they gave books was a curious blending of respect and fear for the power of the written word they had come to associate with The Bible, medical records, the store's credit book, their monthly allotment, and my notebook.

Later, when I asked what he had said, Luiz replied without irony: "I talked to them like a white man. Yes, yes, I will come back and see you next year," is what I said." I became concerned. "Is that how you see me?" Then he laughed "No! I was the Bushmen white man. The one that lives inside us. Before they crossed the river the white man was the same as the Bushmen, but when they became white everything changed." When we discussed the scene with the entire

story's connection to their own contemporary lives became more apparent. Often discussion of the story, and how it might be expressed, melded with the telling of personal stories. As one would expect from a culture that perceived reality as an interconnected whole, soon what was mythological, historical, personal, and imagined collapsed into one. The story and, just as importantly, the performance of it became a structure for the examination of self, culture, and their

Everyone would be both participant and spectator simultaneously. The story would be both old and new.

group they said their fear was for the river, the unknown, the white man, and the power of the book.

After the man crosses the river and turns into a white man, he departs to return sometime in the future. Then a Bushman runs to tell the blacks to come to the river. The blacks (played by Mohera and his wife Panea Kahale) are unlike the Bushmen because they are not afraid of the river, and they settle on its banks. The Bushmen stand helpless with fear, but remain because they are curious. The blacks call for their cattle to come to the river. The huddled Bushmen watch the imagined cattle, realizing and commenting on their loss of livestock, chickens, and sheep to the blacks. The blacks then demand that the Bushmen give them rain. The Bushmen, afraid to say no, give the blacks rain. The blacks, having claimed the river, rain, and livestock for their own, then chase the Bushmen away, threatening them with death. The Bushmen walk a solemn winding path in single file (to suggest distance), singing first a travel song and then a food-gathering song as they scratch about for food.

In the myth the Bushmen could not find food or water anywhere and were forced to look in the hostile bush. Mohera and his wife Munogi said, "We are out of the stone, the first people out of the stone. Now today we have no place to stay. We just wander with all our things on our back. Now today black people have a place, white people have a place. Where will I go today?"

Machai explained, "The stone people were the first ones to look for water in the sand. The sand was white and they had to dig very deep. They had to learn to get water from trees and food from the bushes. That is why we are Bushmen." Others nodded in agreement. Machai admitted, as if it were a revelation, that the "Bushman did not accept god's gifts and that is why we had everything first but did not claim, and so we lost it."

The group spent two weeks working on the creation of a new story. Meeting daily for four to six hours and working through the story bit by bit, the relevance of theatre and the

predicament. Who the Bushmen are, what had happened to them, and what their culture had to offer, was laid bare. The revelations provoked the question: "What should be done?"

The mythological Bushmen learned how to live in the bush and in so doing learned (as the contemporary Bushmen relearned) an appreciation for the gifts they had been given. The performing of this scene provoked a taking stock of their knowledge and ingenuity. The work on the scene inspired sharing and reaffirmation of subsistence knowledge they had taken for granted. Activities included the getting of food from the trees, the cooking of roots, the tapping of certain trees for honey, and how to read the clouds like maps. It was in the bush, because they had so little and had to make the most of what they had, that the Bushmen were able to hear their ancestors talking to them and giving them advice. The bush and their mythological predicament had given the Bushmen their identity. "It is the ancestors that help us to survive," proclaimed Silenga. "It is the ancestors that pass on information on how to live and heal. They got the information from god," said George. To demonstrate his point George showed how he sees and talks with the ancestors. Having come from an all-night healing ceremony, George was still "cooling down." He had his medicine bag with him and pulled out an old car mirror and rubbed herbs on it. Several others immediately stood and supported his activity with singing and dancing. When I asked later if he had seen his ancestors he said yes. "Did they give you any advice?" "Yes, we must do a healing ceremony." And with that the others agreed that there should be a healing. The ancestors had become contributing participants of our group.

MACHAI: The Bushmen have been bewitched!

RICCIO: How does a bewitching happen?

NAKA: The Bad Doctor bewitches them when he throws a stone in the direction of who he is bewitching. When he throws a stone he curses

them and bewitches them. Then the person suddenly becomes sick. Then they are bewitched.

RICCIO: Is there a curse that has bewitched the !Xuu and Khwe?

MORHERA: Yes, we are sick and hungry and away from our homes. This is great sickness.

RICCIO: Is this a part of the new story or is it part of the old story?

SILENGA: It is the new story, the story we live now.

RICCIO: And when did the new story begin?

GEORGE: When the bombs came suddenly one day. It was like a stone from a Bad Doctor. It is why we are here and so sick.

Performance had provided a fulcrum by which they were able to revisit their origin myth. It also provided a form in which they could examine and discuss these issues and the situation in which they found themselves. The origin myth, seen as living and viable when performed, became a reasserted perspective. It had exposed to us not only their history but the paradigm of their world view and ways of knowing and being. At a time when the !Xuu and Khwe were dislocated from themselves and their traditional lifestyles, and challenged and fragmented by war, disease, and cultural disintegration, the performance located not only where they had come from, but who they were. They had found themselves in the "old story."

As the workshop continued at the barracks, it became increasingly difficult to gather and keep a momentum for the group. Setbacks and delays came in the form of transport problems, sickness among group members or their families, and lack of organizational support. A general atmosphere of helplessness and depression surrounded the camp and aggravated the workshop situation further. I became a sort of cheerleader trying to shake them from the overwhelming morass that surrounded them; it was emotionally exhausting. This is not to say there was disinterest or lack of moral support from the !Xuu and Khwe Trust, but rather it reflected overwhelming needs and overly stretched resources.

My time with the Bushmen was coming to a close. There would be no public performance and this is as it should have been. The group had to take stock in itself before it could share itself with others. The workshop with the !Xuu and Khwe had different needs, motives, and ways of marking accomplishment. I was confident the value of the workshop would express itself in its own way and time.

The group and I decided on a day when they would present the story in full. It would be a performance for themselves, a sort of family performance, much like the participatory dynamics of a healing ceremony. Everyone would be both participant and spectator simultaneously. The story told would be both old and new.

On the day of our performance there was excitement among the group. It was as if they were doing a special ceremony. Group members brought beaded belts and head pieces that I had seen used in healing ceremonies. Their assistants brought drums and other instruments and without my asking they began their singing inside the stones. Progressively they went through the story as we had worked and rehearsed it, but this time it was different; it seemed charged and with a depth of feeling and meaning I had not seen before. Within the outline of the story they added improvisational flourishes of song and emotion that were spontaneous and playful. As before, they watched as Luiz crossed the river and transformed into a white man and then departed. As we had worked out before, the blacks came and laid claim to the river, chasing the Bushmen away into the bush. There they looked for food and sang sad songs. Mohera and Mbuto ventured to the river again and to my surprise they enacted the falling of bombs, running about shielding their heads. Then George came to the river and enacted being shot and fell to the ground quivering. These were things they never performed before. The cloth on the ground representing a river had become a road. The road was something others had control of—it was a place of danger, like the river. Bushmen were shot and killed on roads, and it was on roads that they traveled in slavery to far distant places. Roads had brought the bombs, war and misery. The performance was the reenactment of their mythological and contemporary selves, melded and interactive.

The wounded, along with the rest of the group, unexpectedly re-entered the stone and sat inside for some time in silence. I thought the performance had ended. Then slowly they sang of "just sitting inside the stone and dying of hunger." Machai exited the stone by himself and, with a wire and wood instrument he had made, slowly began a dance and song calling medicine from the four directions. After some time the others began to emerge from the stone as they did the first time—coming into the world again. Soon the group began singing and dancing healing songs. The assistants went to their drums as some healers began clapping their hands while others began shaking their hips and shoulders to generate heat for healing. Their telling of the story had led them to where they presently lived and the scene had become a healing ceremony. They had found themselves in their own story and they knew what to do.

TF