

## CHAPTER 12

# Liezel's story – #NotInMyName: Playback Theatre in Post- apartheid South Africa

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**Abstract:** This chapter explores a stop moment in light of a story told during a Playback Theatre performance (PT) in South Africa. The inquiry guiding this chapter asks: How may diffractive encounters through a stop moment in PT illuminate possibilities for dissensus? The stop moment is examined to reveal how the distribution of the sensible has impact on women's lives in post-apartheid South Africa, through the eyes of two Drama for Life Playback Theatre members: Kathy as conductor and Cheraé who was one of the actors. It argues that for PT performers to redistribute the distribution of the sensible and to stage dissensus requires a recognition and understanding of power on multiple levels.

**Keywords:** Playback Theatre, distribution of the sensible, gender-based violence, performative inquiry, diffractive ethnography

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## Introduction

In this chapter, we invite the reader into the story of Liezel<sup>1</sup> who shared a memory in a Drama for Life Playback Theatre performance (DFL PT)<sup>2</sup>. The story of her rape twenty years earlier triggered a more recent story – the betrayal of a female friend. This was the heart of Liezel’s story, and we as DFL PT “missed” it. In this chapter, we elaborate on this, using Jacques Rancière’s concept “the distribution of the sensible” in order to critically examine decisive moments and their political and ethical consequences as part of memory work in post-apartheid South Africa. The aim of the study we present is to uncover more about the consequences of a stop moment<sup>3</sup>, and it constitutes the recognition as a PT ensemble of the opportunities we missed in staging Liezel’s story. Cheraé and Kathy both felt compelled to further investigate by asking the question: *How may diffractive encounters through a stop moment in PT illuminate possibilities for dissensus?*

The performance took place as part of the Building Democracy through Theatre project. The project employs theatre as a primary method of inquiry to reveal how embodied knowledges can contribute to addressing complex social issues connected to building developing democracies. The PT performance during which this critical moment opened up was guided by the project’s aim to explore the challenges of addressing stories concerning gender-based violence in South Africa through PT. The laissez-faire attitude of political leaders and institutions in South Africa, combined with deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes, seriously thwart the country’s ability to build a strong democracy. Undertaking this research is an effort to commit to the seriousness of relating to gender-based violence in order to work towards combating it.

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1 The teller’s name has been changed to Liezel for the sake of anonymity, as have other names, except Kathy, Cheraé and Tarryn: names of Drama for Life Playback Theatre group members.

2 DFL PT was founded in 2008 by Kathy Barolsky as part of her master’s. Kathy was the Artistic Director until 2016. DFL PT continues to exist under the artistic direction of Cheraé Halley and Tarryn Lee.

3 In performative inquiry stop moments are learning moments that jump out at us. These stop moments are a “potential call for action, an in-between space of engagement like the pause between exhalation and inhalation... A stop moment invites us to interrupt our habits of engagement, to recognise absence within presence, to renew an opportunity of choice” (Fels, 2015, p. 511).

## Uprising-#NotInMyName #AmINext

At the time this performance took place at the University of the Free State (UFS), South African women and many men were collectively raising their voices through a wave of mass protests against gender-based violence across university campuses, and spilling over into the city streets. In August and September 2019, the brutal attack and murder of Leighandre Jegels, Uyinene Mrwetyana and Jesse Hess caught the news headlines (Francke, 2019),<sup>4</sup> fuelling nationwide outrage. People en masse had taken to social media to express their anger and frustration at the killings, under the hashtags #NotInMyName #AmINext and #SAShutDown. In response, civil society gathered to express anger and sorrow through various public marches.

The shadows of these marches, murders and rapes hung heavily in our rehearsals preceding our performance at UFS. Despite this, the UFS performances had a different mandate around student leadership. Each of us in the PT ensemble had our own stories connected to gender-based violence. Kathy felt as a conductor that it was fundamental to invite stories related to the issue in our rehearsal process, but also not to overemphasise it. The issue of gender-based violence was such a source of tension that we felt it was incumbent upon us to ensure that enough space remained open for other stories to emerge. As a result, some stories spoke of the ongoing crisis, but Kathy did not make it a specific focus in rehearsals. As we reveal, this choice was to have a substantial impact on the UFS performance.

## A stop moment - missing the heart of Liezel's story

This section describes Liezel's story and her reflection on it that DFL PT played back for her on a Saturday afternoon at UFS in Bloemfontein,

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4 In honour and memory of Leighandre "Baby Lee" Jegels, Uyinene Mrwetyana and all women who have been killed by the hands of men, as well as women like Liezel who continue the fight to live despite the scarring endured by GBV. See: [www.facebook.com/groups/SAwomenfightback/permalink/620603725233475](https://www.facebook.com/groups/SAwomenfightback/permalink/620603725233475)

South Africa. Liezel's reflection on her story mirrored the discomfort that we felt during and after the performance at not addressing Liezel's story adequately – subsequently becoming a stop moment for both of us. The enactment of Liezel's story was witnessed by her son and daughter, along with approximately twenty-five other UFS students and a few staff members.

### *Liezel's Story*

Liezel has come to the teller's chair and has told a story filled with harrowing events. As she sits on the teller's chair, Liezel explains she is here because of something that happened two days ago but is connected to the harrowing event 20 years ago when she was raped. Her rape 20 years previously altered the course of her life, but it is the event two days ago that triggered an inconsolable, unfathomable sorrow that brought her to the teller's chair. Liezel explains that in light of many women across South Africa speaking out about gender-based violence, she took to Facebook to tell her story of being raped, a secret she had kept for 20 years. Her friend Charlene, who was there at the time of Liezel's rape, lashes out at her on Facebook, shaming her, accusing her of being a liar. Liezel is now on the teller's chair, tears streaming down her face. (Stop moment, Conductor's journal, September, 2019)

In the DFL PT reflection after the performance, we collectively recognised that we missed what is often referred to in PT as the “heart of the story” (Salas, 1993, p. 23). The inadequacy of our response to Liezel's story was not directly related to how we responded to the horrific rape she endured; it was about the aftermath, the betrayal of a friend, the way Charlene tried to silence and shame Liezel by not allowing her to voice her story. This was verified in a focus group we had with Liezel after the performance.

Liezel: ... I liked the way you were all so artistic, even the music lady, that you portray everyone's story immediately. It shows an artistic mind is really a deep mind. I liked the way the lady [Tarryn – a DFL PT actor] started my story; it was really the highlight. I felt the emotional build-up because she started it off so nice. Okay for me it didn't end so well. I think she ended on a high but still left people guessing, because I was like okay is, she still going on ... I just gave a little bit, but I felt like maybe she could wrap it up more. Because to me, it

started off with a very nice build-up, but then she just left me hanging, because I really expected more. But as I say, I know more, and I only gave you guys this little part.

Kathy: From what you told us you are in the middle of an unfolding experience, a story 20 years ago that is being revisited ...

Liezel: YES

Kathy: I'm wondering for you what felt incomplete?

Liezel: I felt maybe you guys since we are amongst students, and me and Charlene were that age at that time. Maybe show Charlene as the friend.

Kathy: You missed her presence ...

Liezel: Yes, because I wanted to tell, I wanted for people to see Charlene ... because to have really devious friends that will tell you, you know what, you deserved that. Because there is that, people really can be horrible. (Audience focus group, September 2019)

In our analysis we discuss the stop moment, and our conversation reveals how multi-layered the impact is both of gender-based violence and of the struggles connected to it in post-apartheid South Africa. It also illustrates how the PT ensemble becomes entangled in these layers, which can obstruct the deep listening required in finding the deepest note in a teller's story.

## Gender-based violence in South Africa and points of becoming with Liezel's story

The "we" in this chapter – Kathy, and Cheraé – are both South African women. Our identities, even if different in multiple ways, offer points of connection with Liezel's story concerning themes of gender-based violence. Cheraé is "Coloured"<sup>5</sup>, bearing the intergenerational trauma of being Coloured in South Africa, where to be visibly Coloured is complex, neither being white enough nor black enough (Erasmus, 2017, p. 7). Zoë Wicomb writes about the formulation of Coloured identity where shame

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5 The "Coloured" racial classification was created under the Population Registration act No.30 of 1950 (Erasmus, 2017, p. 87). Erasmus capitalises Coloured as a way of acknowledging its history and its contested classification as a racial category (2017, p. 20).

was “exploited in apartheid’s strategy of the naming of a Coloured race” (1998, p. 92). In this, “miscegenation”, being of mixed race, was appropriated, forming a complex entanglement with shame that persists in post-apartheid South Africa today (Wicomb, 1998). Thus, Coloured women’s bodies carry the tracings of this historical violence perpetrated by the arrival of white settlers in South Africa. Kathy is white and Jewish, yet not fitting neatly into either of those categories. During the 1930s the Nationalist party had sympathies for the Nazi party in Germany but ultimately South African Jews had the privileged position of being classified as “white” during apartheid (Adler, 2000). The tension and negotiation of this white privilege, with its connection to historic shame, is carried by Kathy. The presence of this tension is something Kathy is actively interrogating as part of her commitment to post-apartheid South Africa.

Both of us have experienced acts of gender-based violence together as friends and separately in our lives. We come from families where domestic violence has been present but remained behind closed doors. We are acutely aware of the patriarchal surveillance of our bodies in a brutish South African capitalist society, and this has heightened our awareness of power and actively promoted us to engage with queer, decolonial and feminist spaces and ideas. Being part of DFL PT together for 11 years, we have navigated and celebrated our many differences whilst also being bound by a connection of similarity. These similarities regarding gender-based violence each met Liezel’s experience through our intra-actions with her becoming in different ways.<sup>6</sup>

In the next section, we present the theoretical-philosophical perspective of Jacques Rancière outlining concepts of the distribution of the sensible, politics and art, dissensus and police.

## The distribution of the sensible

The distribution of the sensible, according to Rancière, is how social regimes in societies are structured and ordered (Rancière, 2013). This

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6 Here we use the terms “intra-action” and “becoming”; these are discussed below, in relation to Karen Barad’s diffractive methodology.

ordering reflects “what is visible and audible within a particular aesthetic-political regime” (Rancière, 2013, p. 12).

The distribution of the sensible is “the implicit law that parcels out places and forms of participation... the distribution of the sensible thus produces a system of self-evident facts of perception based on... what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made or done” (Rockhill, 2013, p. 89). What underlines this are assumptions about which individuals and groups are capable and which are not. In this chapter, we draw attention to how women who have endured gender-based violence are marginalised in multiple ways that render them invisible. However, before we do this, we must lay out key terms from Rancière that are necessary to help orientate an understanding of the distribution of the sensible.

## Politics and art

Politics, which is equivalent to democracy for Rancière, is not about state politics, according to Steve Corcoran, but a breaking away from, and a challenge to, “the rules governing ‘normal’ experience” (2010, p. 3). It is a form of political engagement by people who contest normative distributions of the sensible. “Politics”, writes Rancière:

consists in reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals. (2009, p. 25)

When the senses are re-arranged and people subvert social orders ascribed to them, they occupy new spaces in time and place. Rancière describes these occurrences as an “Aesthetic Revolution” (Rockhill, 2013, p. 85). Such happenings are what constitute democracy as opposed to representational forms. Rancière situates democracy at a grassroots relational level where “these intermittent acts of political subjectivization that re-configure the communal distribution of the sensible” (Rockhill, 2013, p. xiv). These moments occur through acts of perception and experience which create avenues for the birthing of new identities and subjectivities through art.

In this study, we utilise Rancière's philosophy of the "politics of aesthetics" to illuminate the relationship between politics and art using his concept of the "distribution of the sensible". We do this in order to provide a political articulation of PT practice and argue that there is an intrinsic link between art and politics, in particular their potentially disruptive effect. Along the way, as part and parcel of this, we also examine how PT can unwittingly collude in the regimes of the distribution of the sensible, becoming part of ethical or representational regimes.

Rancière understands art and politics as egalitarian methods of practice which have a fundamental role to play in the fracturing of what is perceived as normal. Both art and politics are capable of destabilising and disrupting the normalised rationale of who has authority to speak, think and act.

## Dissensus

Art and politics are thus seen as one entity that have the potential to generate dissensus (Corcoran, 2010, p. 3). Dissensus is when those who are unseen and have no form of political power become visible. It raises Rancière's political theory to an active approach in support of those who are not usually made visible. Accordingly, "at the heart of dissensus, therefore, is a process of dis-identification, or the undoing of bonds tying people to specific places, of the various forms of the privatisation of speech and emotion" (Corcoran, 2010, p. 5). What, then, lies at the heart of democracy or, in Rancière's terms, politics, is dissensus, that those who have been previously ignored as "noise" become visible as political bodies by disrupting the social hierarchy. In this study, we trace our intra-actions in an attempt to identify if and where diffractions for making a difference through dissensus emerged, and how we engaged with these moments in seeking a re-distribution of the sensible. We do this to contest "depoliticised" understandings of PT, where art and its distributional procedures are depoliticised, which tend to conceal any political analysis.



## The distribution of the sensible and the police

According to Rancière the DS is organised by the “police”. The police in this instance stipulate and enforce rules in society that are inegalitarian forms of the distribution of the sensible. “The police is not a social function but a symbolic constitution of the social. The essence of the police lies neither in repression nor even in control over the living. Its essence lies in a certain way of dividing up the sensible” (Rancière, 2010, p. 42). In this chapter, we use the notion of “police” to be understood as a means of “policing” and enforcing social order in a way that marginalises and literally “invisibilises” women.

## Playback Theatre and the distribution of the sensible

In PT, according to the distribution of the sensible, PT performers are all governed and implicated within distributed discursive orders where we as practitioners may not be able to abolish the *police* and all the orders of the distribution of the sensible that they co-ordinate. What we can seek out is to identify democratic moments that re-distribute the supposedly predefined co-ordinates, and to re-configure them. What this implies is being able to hear and identify the distribution of the sensible in a teller's story and to re-distribute the sensible through PT enactments in order to draw attention to the invisible. To understand the distribution of the sensible and ways in which it impacts the performance, we trace significant intra-actions in our performance where we find ourselves entangled with the distribution of the sensible.

## Methodology

In this section, we sketch out the methodological approach to our inquiry. The study is a performative inquiry (Fels, 2008), placed within Karen Barad's agential realism (2007) employing Jessica Smartt Gullion's diffractive ethnography (2013).

In performative inquiry (Fels, 2008) stop moments are learning moments that jump out at us. These stop moments are a:

potential call for action, an in-between space of engagement like the pause between exhalation and inhalation ... A stop moment invites us to interrupt our habits of engagement, to recognise absence within presence, to renew an opportunity of choice. (Fels, 2015, p. 511)

To add further depth to performative inquiry, we draw on diffractive ethnography (Gullion, 2013). In diffractive ethnography “the researcher is a presence, and active force, in the assemblage that becomes research” (Gullion, 2013, p. 122). Diffraction as a methodology “involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how differences get made, what gets excluded, and how exclusions matter” (Barad, 2007, p. 30). Diffraction is not just about recording difference; it attempts to account for and take responsibility for the producing of that difference too, especially when it produces frictions. This methodological practice examines both material and discursive matter. We read the stop moment through the philosophical perspective of Rancière in the diffractive analysis of this chapter. According to Alecia Jackson and Lisa. A Mazzei (2012) such readings encourage an insight that “opens and diffracts, rather than crystalizes, representations” (p. xi).

Through our analysis of the stop moment, we attempt to trace our intra-actions – which is Barad’s term for relations – to account for how we missed the heart of Liezel’s story. As Barad explains:

Intra-acting responsibly as part of the world means taking account of the entangled phenomena that are intrinsic to the world’s vitality ... Meeting each moment, being alive to the possibilities of becoming, is an ethical act, an invitation that is written into the very matter of all being and becoming. (2007, p. 396)

To Barad, intra-action is a “becoming” that is dynamic and not simply about the present unfolding moment. Barad explains that “As the rings of trees mark the sedimented history of their inter-actions within and as part of the world, so matter carries within itself the sedimented historicalities of the practices through which it is produced as part of its ongoing becoming” (2007, p. 180). These historicalities are in a constant dynamism

through relating and become entangled matter as part of intra-actions. In turn affects are produced, where “power resides in affective flows between relations” (Fox & Alldred, 2017, p. 154) which shape materialising intra-actions.

We draw on *diffraction*, *intra-action*, and *affects* as a way of framing an understanding of distribution of the sensible in relation to gender-based violence and the way in which it manifested. We trace this matter created through our intra-action with Liezel, where we became entangled as performers. We do this in an effort to discover how we missed the heart of Liezel's story, the stop-moment of this chapter. In this way, we endeavour to paint a socially just, and detailed, account of our intra-actions from the various viewpoints of actor and conductor towards Liezel's story. Through this, we hope to demonstrate how our different perspectives, embodied through the performance and the analysis, may create a pathway for a more just and political understanding of PT by looking closely at our intra-actions in PT stories.

The material we use is taken from video-excerpts, excerpts from the focus group with audience members and the DFL PT group. Material from Kathy and Cheraé's post-performance conversations and journals is also used. Kathy was theoretically informed about the distribution of the sensible in her PT practice. Cheraé was also informed about the distribution of the sensible, but only after the performance where it became central in our post-performance reflections. In fact, Cheraé in her PT practice has always employed a bodily knowledge of the DS by seeking to disrupt intersectional power structures in her listening and enactment of PT stories. We now head into our analysis of the consequences of the stop moment.

## **Affects and glimpses of seeking a re-distribution**

### **Liezel's story in South Africa: An embodiment of the marches, a site of resistance**

A political subject is not a group of interests or ideas but an operator of a particular *dispositive* of subjectivation and litigation through which politics comes into existence. (Rancière, 2010, p. 47)

By telling her story in PT, Liezel became a political subject. This moment presented an opportunity for the ensemble to recognise Liezel's story as more than personal noise: it was a declaration of the politics of what it is to be a woman in South Africa living under a patriarchal and violent social system, and of the impact of other women not acknowledging one's experiences of gender-based violence.

Suddenly we were in a room full of entanglement heaving under the weight of what Liezel had brought us. Her story is a symbol of why all the marches had been taking place in South Africa as a site of resistance. As we engaged with Liezel, we knew this was an ethical moment for our actions as an ensemble. Brian Massumi maintains that “[t]he ethical value of an action is what it brings out in the situation, for its transformation, how it breaks sociality open, it's not about judging each other as right or wrong” (2015, p. 10). Liezel's story broke open sociality, presenting the opportunity for transformation. From the moment Liezel began to tell her story, the materialising affects hit both of us as Liezel became an embodiment of speaking truth to power.

Through her telling, Liezel began to construct her sensory experience, challenging the sensible orders as a “victim” of rape, a view which allocates people to a position of invisibility and dispossesses them of the means to equality – implying that such a woman cannot imagine the possibility of occupying a different position in society. Her act of telling took her out of her “victim” station. Liezel was not neat and tidy. She was not easy, ordered and refined. She had a story to tell, and she did not hold back. She sat on that chair, an amalgamation of strength and vulnerability pushing aside the sensory noose in society that voices what is possible to express pertaining to stories of friendship, women and rape. For us it appeared that Liezel had identified and seized the opportunity of PT to create an alternative space where those who are ignored by the sensible orders are given access to re-story their place in the distribution of the sensible. Liezel subverted the distribution of the sensible, “this subversion implies the reframing of a common sense. A common sense does not mean a consensus but, on the contrary, a polemical place, a confrontation between opposite common senses or opposite ways of framing what is common” (Rancière, 2009, p. 286).

Liesel reclaimed her voice confronting South Africa's patriarchal denial twice, once through her Facebook post and again by coming to the teller's chair. Yet not even this could rectify how she had been silenced in the past and how in the present her voice could still not be fully realised, as Cheraé elaborates:

She was not able to say it to the police and open up the case, she was not able to say it to her family and friends, she has not been able to say it to her children that she gave birth to. She was not even able to say it on an online campaign because she was told it was lie. (Cheraé, post-performance conversation, September, 2019)

Liesel initiated a diffractive encounter that created the possibility of a re-distribution of the sensible. Her occupation of space made the gap visible in the sensible social order of women who are relegated to being silent "victims" of gender-based violence by butting up against the orders of the police. Liesel was engaging with her power to create dissensus, reframing her position in society. We felt the materiality arising from the silencing of generations of women and from its wounding – women who have never received justice – and from the impact of this.

From our position of power, in our roles as actor and conductor, we desired to meet this equality presented to us by Liesel, but we became bound up in the entanglements of the affects of the distribution of the sensible that we detail below. Very quickly, the entanglements of our life histories from different perspectives intertwined with Liesel's story of what women face in South Africa. We listened to Liesel's story, longing to rectify that history in a single moment. We were hungry to provoke a politics – "an intervention in the visible and the sayable" (Rancière, 2010, p. 43) – that would give meaning to these traces of silenced women. We craved this for Liesel, for ourselves, for everyone present in the room.

## **Conductor's work – an act of navigation: Liesel's story, guiding the actors and layers of matter**

After giving Liesel space for a while, Kathy needed to guide her telling. She had to work within the frames of PT to help the actors navigate through

the many layers of Liezel's story. Kathy sensed early in Liezel's story that her rape was only the prelude to why she was sitting on the teller's chair. This was something the audience and actors did not necessarily know, however. The excerpt from Kathy's journal captures the predicament:

Liezel was not an "easy teller". I had to work a lot with her in terms of the shape of the story . . . . I was searching in myself around how I could serve her and not be the distribution of the sensible and shut her down but also having to be the conductor with the story sense . . . As a woman that is meant to be an ally for her as another woman and feeling super self-conscious that I wasn't doing it adequately. (Kathy, PT Journal, September, 2019)

Kathy did not want to come across as dismissive of Liezel's rape, as she followed her intuition about the heart of Liezel's story. Liezel had altered perception, in Rancière's terms, by attempting to express this often neglected and unheard aspect of her story and Kathy was struggling to catch up with the significance of this rupture in the distribution of the sensible. Liezel's telling was episodic, jumping back and forth from different happenings. Kathy's role as a conductor in this moment was an opportunity to exert her voice as a conductor in relation to Liezel's voice. Instead, she feared she could not match the ideal picture of what a woman activist should embody and articulate at such a moment. Kathy was overcome and had internalised the material affect of the distribution of the sensible that attempts to squander the authority of women's voices who speak up. The distribution of the sensible that judges a woman for seeking voice no matter what its modulation might be. Hélène Cixous so eloquently captures this feeling for many women, "heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away – that's how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak – even just open her mouth – in public" (1976, p. 880). The echo of this invisible territory bled into and interrupted Kathy's capacity to assert her political being to support Liezel's voice. Kathy was vulnerable at this point, negotiating her own story of being impacted by gender-based violence in the shadow of Liezel's story, and resistant to acknowledging this. That avoidance of attuning to herself allowed hypercritical Kathy to emerge. She began by having a moralising internal dialogue with herself, emphasising

that if she put a foot “wrong” she would come across as a reflection of the distribution of the sensible, of yet another person not being able to listen and hear her deeply.

The conductor role at that moment needed Kathy to sit with Liezel and listen with depth, to call on a combination of softening and guidance directed towards herself and Liezel. Kathy's moralising in fact blocked her, and she did not view these qualms as part of the uncertainty of the ethical step she was attempting to make. Waiting for the “right” moment to interject removed her from Liezel. Kathy became so consumed with her need to “perform” and do justice in the right way that she sacrificed the tools that she needed to conduct. Had Kathy asked Liezel to slow down to clarify further, she would have given herself more time to digest Liezel being beside her. That transparency would have grounded her as the conductor and, in turn, helped the actors absorb better an enormously complex story.

Kathy hoped that the actors would be able to find a better “translation” and expression of that sense of connection with Liezel that she struggled to find in the conductor interview. During the interview Kathy felt as though she had become part of the police, “the police... which says that here, on this street, there's nothing to see and so nothing to do but move along” (Rancière, 2010, p. 27). The guilt of this made Kathy look at Cheraé, trying to find connection again and at the same time realising that Cheraé was entangled in another affect as she explains:

I was conscious of listening and competing with how my body wanted to react, the way my emotions were reacting... I had to sit there battling with my emotional response and performance requirements... all I wanted to do was weep, but I had a different responsibility. And it's so hard to name because I don't know where it came from why it hit me. (Cheraé, Journal, September 2019)

Kathy's eye contact with Cheraé was not only about wanting to support her but also about expressing her desire that Cheraé serve the socio-political echo of the story as one of the supporting actors. In PT the teller chooses an actor, known as the teller's actor, to play them in their story. Cheraé had not been selected by Liezel to be the teller's actor, so she had the opportunity to play multiple roles. Kathy wanted the politics to be

served in Liezel's story by re-configuring it in such a way that we did not just "move along". This required a dwelling in Liezel's experience with Charlene, to foreground it, making it visible. Kathy sensed Cheraé recognised the themes around power and gender-based violence in Liezel's story and the way in which women are made invisible with the distribution of the sensible, and Kathy wanted her, along with the ensemble, to disrupt it in a way that she knew she could not from the conductor's chair.

## Affective flows and the responsibilities of the citizen actor in Playback Theatre

We were aware that our affective flows would shape our ability to make aesthetic choices which were part of a broader ethical act. The pull of Liezel's affect instigated an intensity of awareness of the ethics around being a PT performer, bringing questions to mind around what the responsibilities of a citizen actor<sup>7</sup> (Fox, 1994) are at such a moment. How Cheraé's affective response would play out would be part of an ethical act.

Cheraé and Liezel are both Coloured; this was to play a significant materialising role in the intra-action that unfolded. This complex racial identification prompted an over-identification on the part of Cheraé. The affect of intergenerational trauma became in the space between Liezel and Cheraé. Cheraé found her body overwhelmed with the affect of relating to Liezel's story, entangled by it. Cheraé's difficulty in being responsive demonstrates the "body's historicity in which its very materiality plays an active role in the workings of power" (Barad, 2003, p. 10). Cheraé encapsulates this in our post-performance reflection: "It was personal, it was so personal that it erased what normally would happen. I did hear the distribution of the sensible in her story. It's just that I was deeply connected to the teller that I didn't make choices, make choices based on it" (Cheraé, Post-performance conversation, September, 2019). The marks of Coloured history in South Africa became an active material agent between Liezel and Cheraé – a complex materialisation of psychic-cultural,

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7 According to Fox, "the citizen actor, who performs as needed by the community, then melts back into the social fabric" (1999, p. 214). The citizen actor adopts the role of a healer by taking in the pain and challenges of others to support them in finding their wisdom and potential.



socio-historical force of the affect. In this, she was confronted by the ghosts of the past and their traces activated in the becoming moment while trying to wrestle with her awareness of power through the distribution of the sensible. In this instance, Cheraé's affiliation with Liezel was that of consensus, seeing herself as part of Liezel's story. This consensus was, in fact, an impediment to Cheraé exercising her ability to serve Liezel's story entirely. This continuing material historicity of Coloured history and shame in South Africa was evoked in the space.

## Seeking ways to navigate through the whirlpool of affect: "Let's watch!"

At this point, we were all swimming in a whirlpool of entangled affects, the affect of carrying women's voice and stories, including our own. We needed to find ways to navigate through them. All of this was present in the room, and Kathy had not even uttered "Let's watch", the actors' cue in PT that alerts the audience and teller to ready them for the enactment of the teller's story.

Cheraé: It is very clear we (DFL PT) understand where women are excluded, we know this, and we are equipped as a team of female players performing in a time when women are a site of war. And someone like Liezel comes and tells a story, she tells that exact story and then there is no comment made.

Kathy: it becomes so generalised, and the heart of the story becomes lost.  
(Post-performance conversation, September, 2019)

From our respective roles, we struggled to seek a re-distribution of the sensible despite the affects that we were wrestling with. Charlene needed to be represented, not only on the level of what she was to Liezel as a friend who betrayed her as a personification of the distribution of the sensible, but also because staging the distribution of the sensible and commenting on it would have further re-distributed the sensible beyond Liezel's verbal telling. Cheraé expands:

On re-distributing the sensible it would have been Liezel's online campaign (Liezel's FB post) being told what she can and cannot reveal. And when she does reveal

something she's told "you're a liar". So, it's that. It's that moment, how those around her failed to support her. (Post-performance conversation, September, 2019)

This scene not being present, however, is only the result of assembled moments that diffracted that possibility. In our case the diffractive encounter hindered our ability to illuminate dissensus in Liezel's story and re-distribute the sensible. As Cheraé points out, we could not assume that because we are an all-female team, who share a gender location with Liezel, we would automatically be able to unearth the layers of Liezel's story. "We can't just expect because we are women and understand the context fully that we are all going to re-distribute the sensible together in those moments..." (Post-performance conversation, September, 2019). A recognition that, even if we considered ourselves allies to specific groups and individuals, our entanglements and our listening would not necessarily be brought closer and embolden us to make innovative dramatic choices, choices which might move performers towards an aesthetic revolution. On the other hand, entanglements can also easily disturb that potential where we as performers become further entrenched in the partitions of the distribution of the sensible.

In recognition of the fact that we had battled to re-distribute the sensible co-ordinates of Liezel's story, Kathy attempted to make up for what was missing in the enactment. Cheraé points out:

... what you say in the interview shows how the conductor is re-distributing the sensible ... do you know what you asked Liezel in your post-enactment interview? You asked her, "What was it like witnessing this version of your story?" (in a dubious tone) Do you know that? And I remember thinking thanks, Kath! (laugh) It was good, the critical actor goes "thanks Kath you just called it a version" (laughs), but it was true, it was right.

Cheraé & Kathy: "It was incomplete."

(Kathy and Cheraé post-performance conversation, September, 2019)

Although Kathy subtly alluded to Liezel's story not being fulfilled in the post-enactment interview, she did not help her to elaborate on this further. It could have been an opportunity for Liezel to go back to what was not present in the enactment – her encounter with Charlene – and speak about that. Staging this was necessary as a statement about women in

South Africa who silence other women who endure gender-based violence, a statement that such silencing is part of the distribution of the sensible and needs to be re-distributed. As a conductor, it was a missed opportunity to acknowledge the distribution of the sensible in the story, and Liezel's bravery in challenging it. Liezel's story and the enactment raise questions about how we address PT's potential to re-distribute the sensible within the PT's ritual frames. The stop moment asks that PT practitioners pay more careful attention to how we may attend to the unfolding intra-actions that present opportunities for re-distribution and dissensus.

## **Summing up: A political moment of dissensus and the co-creation of Power in PT**

In keeping with the aims of the *Building Democracy through Theatre* project, we uncovered vital knowledge about the nuances of PT practice when faced with the opportunity to address the issue of gender-based violence, which is, as was noted above, such a significant hindrance in building post-apartheid South Africa.

PT is a form of power, and as practitioners we can become more aware of how we utilise this power. We demonstrate how power in PT is co-created through relationality; how we act as agents collectively re-configures entanglements. What we discovered through the stop moment is how, in PT, the role of the teller brings PT's political potential to the fore. Liezel claiming the teller's chair was a political moment of dissensus. In this instance, Liezel was the subjectivation by which politics comes into being. The ensemble needs to hear if and in what way the teller is challenging the distribution of the sensible, in order to be able to recognise the political becoming of the teller in the first place. From there, the most challenging task of the ensemble is not just how they listen to the teller, a political being, but how the ensemble collectively honours the act of political dissensus. As we have shown, the first level of listening and recognising is easier than the second level where ensemble members can face multiple material affects arising from intra-actions.

Upon hearing Liezel's story, we struggled to resist the normative force of the "police" concerning gender-based violence in South Africa. We

illustrate how the appropriation of aesthetics can be employed inadvertently as a political tool, justifying social orders that we ourselves reject. These choices are where the staging of democracy can miss a beat, and a choice must be made between maintaining the status quo, or challenging and questioning the construction of the societies we live in. We demonstrate that the distribution of the sensible is a critical discourse philosophy and a discursive power affecting individual social and political life. In the performance it materialised as an assemblage of intergenerational trauma, gender-based violence, shame and loss. The entanglement of affects we experienced became an obstacle to embodying this further and re-distributing the sensible.

Attunement to the distribution of the sensible, to the socio-political echo of stories in PT, is ongoing work. What we need is to be courageous enough to bring these themes into our PT training space. Our tracing of how these diffractive moments occur began behind the scenes with the preparation we did before the performance. We were all deeply invested in gender-based violence concerns, but we had not thoroughly processed this engagement as a group. In turn, our intense entanglements challenged the capacity we had in the PT performance to ground ourselves in listening to Liezel.

This study has traced our intra-actions within Liezel's story – reading diffractively with the optics of Rancière and the PT performance, we folded the two “texts” into one another. We did this to elucidate our understanding of the relationship between PT and the distribution of the sensible, trying to find how an awareness of power shaped our becoming at the critical moment.

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