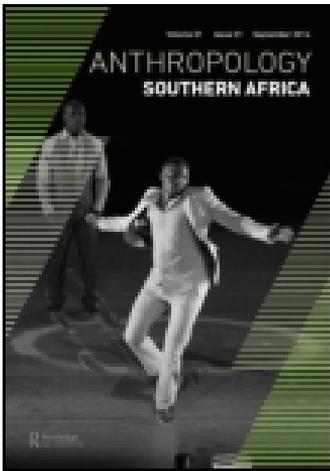


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Exit/Exist: Gregory Maqoma's dance and the call to life

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Exit/Exist: Gregory Maqoma's dance and the call to life

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The paper explores life-giving qualities of creativity and self-stylisation in the performance art and dance of contemporary South African choreographer Gregory Maqoma. Placing his performance *Exit/Exist* in conversation with social theories of becoming, desire and futurity explored in the work of anthropologists Elizabeth Povinelli and Henrietta Moore, and the philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, the paper gestures towards a vitalist understanding of sociality. The approach suggests potentiality rather than limitation, fragmentation and depletion. In the face of a neo-liberal world order and the lingering influence of apartheid history, much of South African social analysis continues to reiterate forms of structural violence that constrain lives. Such an emphasis cannot account for the ways in which individuals sometimes force celebratory and defiant images of themselves into the public realm, issuing into being new publics, locally and abroad.

Keywords: creativity; dance; memory; potentiality; self-stylisation

In this paper, I situate my understanding of a closely observed performance by a contemporary South African artist within a body of social theory that seeks to explore creativity — the life-giving qualities of bringing the new into the world. Anthropologically informed, the paper is primarily theoretical in orientation, linking creativity with the notion of life and its proliferation of life forms. It suggests that performance provides a form of encounter in which possibilities for the self are refashioned in ways that simultaneously create social critique. The paper begins with a short introduction to the work of the much celebrated choreographer Gregory Vuyani Maqoma, placing it alongside that of three other contemporary South African artists who share a mutual preoccupation with self-stylisation, the opening of new spaces in which to live expansive lives, as well as engaging in trenchant appropriations of the past.¹ I then give a brief historical account of the life of Jongumsobomvu Maqoma, Gregory Maqoma's illustrious ancestor, who is evoked in the performance *Exit/Exist*. This is followed by a detailed rendition of the performance I was privileged to attend during the 2013 National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa. I end with an exploration of strands of contemporary social theory that seem useful in considering Maqoma's work and that of the other artists briefly introduced in the paper. They suggest ways in which history may be radically appropriated in order reflexively to draw out engagements with the present that simultaneously reshape the past.

Four South African artists

Gregory Maqoma's work explores conflicts and tensions within contemporary South African life, bringing into view submerged forms of experience. *Exit/Exist* — its title suggestive of both a line of flight, endurance and even transcendence — is an evocation of Maqoma's current existence in which he finds himself simultaneously living “at play” in the malleable and capacious sociality of Johannesburg,² yet caught up in a profound relationship with the past. In *Exit/Exist*, Maqoma “calls up” the life of his ancestor to make visible his heroic past with its attendant forms of dispossession (2006, 35).

Recently, a number of South African artists have grappled with presenting emerging senses-of-self in public space. Their work, orientated towards a sense of potentiality within the present and future, remains in conversation with embodied memory, erased histories and the unpalatable dimensions of everyday South African life. Life's dangers and vehement forms of dismissal are registered through the body, particularly through gendered and sexual dimensions of society. These artists' work, and the often personal circumstances out of which it is made, has become writ large on the local cultural scene and internationally. Their work demonstrates commitment to the crafting of selves that upends the normative, and draws on far-flung possibilities for engagement. It is precisely in their refusal to capitulate to narrow forms of cultural "authenticity" that they forge new ways of being in conversation with the past, yet without compliance with totalising notions of tradition. With Maqoma, these include Zanele Muholi, Nicholas Hlobo and Mary Sibande.³ Their vibrant and powerful works suggest a celebration of life and brave becomings. I briefly touch on the work of the first three artists before returning to Maqoma's performance.⁴

Zanele Muholi's photographs have forced into the public domain uncompromising images of black members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community, in a country where discourses circulate about queer sexualities being "western" aberrations; where rape is sometimes seen as a corrective "ritual" aimed at turning lesbians into "proper" women; and where such talk and actions bear an undercurrent of wanting to render divergent lives invisible, mute, or expunged. In 2012, Muholi's exhibition *Faces and Phases* presented a series of portraits of individuals whose gaze directly engages viewers.⁵ Each person's presentation of self is distinctive, celebratory and aesthetically honed. In other exhibitions, for example *Miss D'Vine and Only Half the Picture*, people are photographed in places varying from roadside lots to intimate interiors. The specificities of the environments in which the person or people photographed appear are secondary to their chosen stance and embodied presence. Muholi, an activist, earlier took intimate photographs of black lesbians who had been subjected to "corrective" rape. These photographs of parts of women's bodies, of scars and the soft moulding of flesh, the delicate curve of hands clasped or with hospital tags attached at the wrist are deeply affecting. They constitute a profound form of memorialisation, of pain that cannot be dismissed, marking the fragility of life in the face of murderous violence.

In 2007, Mary Sibande, the daughter of three generations of domestic workers, created her iconic alter-ego, Sophie Ntombikayise, a figure of a domestic worker writ large. Sophie is created from casts of Mary Sibande's body clothed in voluminous Victoriana-like costumes of exuberant excess. The costumes were made of blue cloth ubiquitous in the manufacture of domestic worker uniforms, complete with white apron, head scarf and cuffs. The image of Sophie, photographed in combination with various objects and striking particular attitudes, became well known through their projection onto the sides of high-rise buildings in Johannesburg and elsewhere. Where Sophie occupied gallery space, she took up commanding presence within rooms in which the strength of her posture and the excessive qualities of her dress compelled attention. In Sibande's words, she was "interested in the garment as part of the body, an extension of what happens inside it." Insisting on the powerful presence of Sophie in her various, often playful and confronting incarnations, Sibande recoups the dignity of her domestic worker mother, grandmother and great-grandmother in their ability to "live and imagine outside the constraints of being apartheid black bodies, or colonial identities" (Eyene 2013). Through the figure of Sophie, Sibande stresses the aspirational, fantastic, heroic and humorous dimensions of their unfolding lives.

Nicholas Hlobo's work explores sexual and cultural identity through combining unusual materials and the naming of his sculptural pieces, images and performances in isiXhosa, often with reference to life-cycle rituals or idiomatic expressions. The juxtaposition of his sexuality as a gay man, and his evocation of ritual and forms of naming, create a brave set of unsettling provocations and possibilities. Interweaving swathes of black rubber inner tubing, ribbon, lace, satin, organza and silicon in his bulbous sculptures — into which he sometimes inserts himself

or to which he attaches himself in performance — his ethereal two-dimensional images suggests delicacy, fragility and masculinity. These possibilities are at once elusive and seductive, suggestive of the hidden, of being enclosed yet of being unlaced or opened up. Tracy Murinik writes:

His works probe the edges of identities in formation or evolution, as they simultaneously imagine or intuit their dissolution. Though what is sculpturally or performatively presented may at first appear solid and finite, it is instead along the joins, and into the edges of liminality, that Hlobo's conversations lead us. (Murinik 2012)

There are parallels here with Maqoma's explorations of the past in the present and its possibilities for the future.

Gregory Maqoma's ancestor

Chief Jongumsobomvu Maqoma, Gregory Maqoma's forefather, was born in 1798, son of Chief Ngqika, King of the Rharhabe, a branch of the amaXhosa that occupied land adjacent to what became known as the Cape Colony. Throughout his life, Jongumsobomvu Maqoma opposed his father's ceding of land to the colonial government. He was twice imprisoned on Robben Island, dying there alone at the age of 75 in 1873. In *Exit/Exist*, Gregory Maqoma explores his ancestor's struggles and his grief and mourning at the loss of land and cattle, witnessed far from home by an Anglican chaplain who visited him on Robben Island shortly before his death (Peires 2003, 326; Solomon 2013). His conflicts with his own father led Chief Maqoma to establish an independent chiefdom in 1822. Successive colonial governors intermittently turned a blind eye to his reoccupying land in the Kat River Valley — land that his father had ceded to the colony between the Fish and the Keiskamma Rivers to form a neutral band of territory as a buffer zone between frontier settlers and the amaXhosa (Peires 1981, 79, 145). Much to the chagrin of the amaXhosa, Khoekhoe families were brought to live on this strip of land to form a living barrier between white settlers and themselves (Ross 2014).

Jongumsobomvu Maqoma's experience of being driven from his home in the Kat River Valley and subsequently from the Amatola Mountains, as well as the ongoing refusals of colonial officials to allow him to set up as an independent farmer within the colony, led him to distrust any seemingly benign claims on their part. He came to understand that colonial officials often legitimised their destruction of his peoples' homes through torching them and compelling them to move further from the frontier by accusing them of cattle-rustling. In time, Maqoma came to see that the colonial government's engagement with his people was incrementally destroying their way of life. Maqoma had in fact assiduously tried to prevent cattle rustling on the part of frontier amaXhosa. Through his acknowledged political skills and wide influence he attempted for many years to keep the peace between British settlers, Boers and the amaXhosa through upholding the Stockenstrom Treaties in which chiefs were required to hand stolen animals back to the colony (Mostert 1992, 614; Peires 2003, 90, 128; Stapleton 1993, 321; Stapleton 1994).

After the death of his father, Ngqika, in 1829, and the deaths of Chiefs Ndlambe and Mdushane, Maqoma, as regent for Sandile (the future Xhosa king and his younger half-brother), became the undisputed leader in contesting the actions of the Cape Colony (Mostert 1992, 612). At the end of the 1820s, he was seen by both colonisers and amaXhosa as the greatest amaXhosa leader, one who could potentially organise military power against the colony (613). Maqoma was described as a fine soldier and "a bold and determined enemy" (Stockenstrom [1887] 1964, 348). The attack at dawn by Henry Somerset and three hundred men on Maqoma's Great Place (his home) in 1828, where homesteads were torched, became a turning point for him in his increasing militancy against colonial powers. He was particularly angered by the incursion of military patrols into Xhosa territory that, in the name of recouping stolen cattle, often raided Xhosa cattle with impunity. This led to Maqoma's pointed query: "Were there no thieves among white men?" (Mostert 1992, 628).

In 1834, Maqoma's younger brother Xoxo was injured by a bullet during a protest about the seizure of royal oxen by a patrol that had set out from Beaufort West to destroy his brother Tyali's home in the Kat River Valley. The fact that royal oxen had been seized and that Xoxo had nearly been killed was deeply offensive to the amaXhosa and was regarded as tantamount to a declaration of war (Mostert 1992, 652–653). On the December 21, 1834, 12 000–15 000 men began invading the colony in a co-ordinated assault from the Winterberg above the Kat River to the sea. Settlers were forced to abandon “virtually the whole country east of Algoa Bay, saving only the towns of Grahamstown and Fort Beaufort” (Peires 1981, 145). At the time, Maqoma described himself as a bushbuck, living in the bush without a home. He had gone to war because chiefs were being shot like bushbuck and were no longer esteemed (as quoted in Mostert 1992, 655). Maqoma also played a seminal role in leading a guerrilla war against the Colony from 1850 to 1853 in response to the colonists' treatment of Sandile, who had become the Xhosa king.

Over the long years of attrition, culminating in what has come to be known as the Xhosa cattle-killings attributed to millenarian prophecies by Nongqawuse,⁶ Maqoma became embittered. In 1857, nearing his sixties, he was put on trial at Fort Hare for having defied an order to carry an official pass to enter the Amatolas, and for supposedly instigating a man's death — an accusation for which there was little evidence. A death sentence was transmuted into a twenty-year sentence on Robben Island. He travelled there with a young wife and son. Subsequent to the cattle killings, other frontier chiefs were also jailed there. All were released before Maqoma, who left the island in 1869. Within just over two years, having attempted once more to set up a household in his original country, he was sent back to Robben Island without a trial. He remained there, alone, until he died under mysterious circumstances on September 9, 1873.

In 1978, during a time in which the apartheid government established the “independent” homeland states, including the Ciskei, his remains, buried in an unknown and unmarked location on Robben Island, were sought by a diviner. Found, they were eventually reinterred in the memorial to those who had fallen in the frontier wars on top of the Amatola Mountains, with 15 000 amaXhosa in attendance (Mostert 1992, 1241).

Exit/Exist: the performance⁷

Exit/Exist explores some of these matters. In the performance, Gregory Maqoma chose to minimise verbal or textual exposition, apart from using the song lyrics of Simphiwe Dana, a six-time South African Music Awards-winning musician, and a few short projected texts. Instead he used visual elements with lasting symbolic resonance. His ancestor became a figure of historical transformation, someone who had cleared a path to ongoing emancipation in which his descendants invigorated the present with the cry: “Where are our father's cattle?”

Maqoma's performance was deeply affecting. It drew succinctly on the continuing reverberations of the symbolic significance of cattle and ground maize meal in a context of searing inequalities and transformed social and built environments. Their evocation became a shorthand attached to ideal conceptions of and control over the deployment of wealth and hospitality that are necessarily intertwined with sociality and its responsibilities. As metaphors, cattle and meal carry an emotional weight, not least because their reiteration simultaneously underscores the absence of sufficient means for many people to sustain a way of life considered socially responsible.

The importance of cattle among Africans within southern Africa has been well documented in the accounts of early colonial explorers and missionaries and in extensive ethnographic monographs produced by anthropologists during the 20th century.⁸ Margaret Shaw (1974, 94–96), in writing an overview of animal husbandry in southern Africa into the colonial period, documented how cattle were the principal medium of exchange and embodiment of wealth. Through sacrifice, they were the means through which intersessions were made with ancestral shades to ensure health and prosperity among descendants. Cattle were the means through which marriages were contracted and relationships cemented between families. Linked to male status,

they facilitated men's attempts to secure wives and followers and enabled those of social standing to dispense hospitality and generosity (94). Among Nguni peoples, including the amaXhosa and Bomvana, sacred cattle herds were held inalienably by the chief in trust for his people and were sacrificed in times of national crisis (95).

As shown above, cattle raids were a frequent cause for war. In fact, as we have seen, the theft of royal cattle and the injury to Xoxo, a relative of the incumbent chief, precipitated war in 1834. Well into the 20th century, many migrants who retained a link to rural homes invested their savings in cattle and secured their local standing, despite prolonged absence at far flung places of work, through the presence of their herds at their rural homes.

While grain was much less overtly valued than cattle, women, the principal agriculturalists, upheld their own forms of generosity and hospitality through the preparation and sharing of grain-centred food. Even as recently as 2004, in my own work in Okhahlamba, KwaZulu-Natal, women referred to an absence of maize meal within a home as undercutting valued forms of hospitality through offering food to those passing by (Henderson 2012, 164). An absence of maize meal was linked to a sense of diminished personhood. It therefore goes without saying that cattle and grain hold value in relation to notions of properly constituted sociality with its convivial generousities.

* * *

In the midst of Maqoma's performance, the song "African Sunset," composed by Siphso Mabuse and recorded by Miriam Makeba in 1989, and more recently performed by the contemporary South African singer Zahara, rose in my mind with spectral force. The ways that Maqoma's performance drew on his own personal family history and his current dwelling and becoming within a social space of both potentialities and confrontations, reminded me of when I was an anti-apartheid cultural activist and, like others, often galvanised by the power of singing and of song.⁹ The lyrics of the song are cast in the voice of a young man addressing his companions. He calls on them to take up their sticks to search for their fathers' lost cattle. The song, in addition to its most obvious meaning, is also a disguised call to arms, to stealth and dexterity in a time when the "sun has set" on ordinary life, making it unendurable. It is a call to find ways of returning to people that which has been taken from them or lost through colonisation and apartheid. Thus words, on the surface referring to a rural way of life and forms of social organisation and economy that have long been eroded, carry a cluster of contemporary meanings that are particularly satisfying. The weight of such words and the objects to which they refer are portable, carrying multivalent possibilities into the landscapes of burgeoning cities and genres of contemporary music and performance.

As I witnessed it in July 2013, *Exit/Exist* opened with Maqoma standing with his back to the audience, barefoot, wearing a yellow suit. He began to move to an aural landscape, a loop of electronic sounds undergirded by a driving rhythm and a deep basal phrase of repeated notes. The uppermost layer of sound was high-pitched, crystalline and pure. As Maqoma moved, his shoulders rotating and his legs crisscrossing, the cloth of his suit broke into a slippery surface of gleam and shadow, a mercurial jigsaw puzzle in which each piece lurched into a new form, only to dissolve and morph momentarily into another. Maqoma's hands stretched roofwards. His fingers created small, extended and articulate gestures, as if he were feeling out the textures of the air, simultaneously cautious and resolved.¹⁰ These gestures shimmered with life, tension and release and seemed to track his cautious yet systematic journey into the past. If there was anxiety here, there was also a consummate elegance, an unequivocal presentation of self, a sense of emergent urbanity, a repertoire of repeated gestures out of which strength and poise were made manifest, movements that could nevertheless be retracted at any moment, or extended into newness. They suggested a jagged, trickster-like occupation of the world — a trope long familiar to anthropologists.¹¹ I had observed what Hayley Kodesh has also noted about his choreography, describing his style as "a tension of opposites: fluidity and truncation, holding and releasing, depth and lightness, momentum and control" (Kodesh 2006, 46).

In the performance, Maqoma symbolically travelled back in time by moving away from the audience with his back towards it. He then disrobed, insinuating his body into a narrow costume made of a cow-hide sheath. From its edges on his upper thighs and front dangled long black strands of thread that, with his bodily movements, created trceries of motion. The performance was dense with symbolic gestures. Maqoma raised one arm, a pair of sculptured wooden cattle horns clasped in his hand. He poured libations of maize meal onto the floor in four small piles. Behind him a veil materialised and, as he poured the meal, a figure emerged in line with each pile, but at a distance behind the veil, as if each had been offered a gift in a palpable yet parallel world. Lastly, a guitarist who had created the high-pitched, delicate notes I initially experienced as a cascade of metallic sounds emerged. I later learnt that he was world fusion guitarist, Giuliano Modarelli. The music evolved into an extraordinary transposition of Simphiwe Dana's compositions, backed by the harmonies of the four men who were veiled behind the cloth membrane. These men, Happy Motha, Bonginkosi Zulu, Bulele Mgele and Linda Thobela from the quartet *Complete*, produced a soundscape made of the modulations and melding of their different registers of voice. In particular, the warm and reverberating qualities of the base singer's voice encircled the audience, its penetrative vibrating power rendering it almost tangible. The depth of this voice lent dignity and seriousness to the performance. It was immediately apparent that the four men represented ancestral shades. They later emerged to take part in various ways in the performance.

At one point, Maqoma wore a white cloak over his cow-hide costume. Diagonally across it were sewn geometric rectangular shapes in black thread, from which long tassels hung. It was a cloak of great beauty. It evoked in me a memory of a colonial image of a local leader in a similar garment with its distinctive elegance. Into Maqoma's repertoire of movements established "traditional" elements of dance were woven, in particular the challenge of elements of *ukugiya* — a form of stylised warrior-like posturing translated into dance. Yet Maqoma's unfolding and constantly developing range of movements melded into one another. As Kodesh writes: "His body has become a mixture of all of his influences, the origins of which cannot be identified in particular movements because of how he has combined them" (Kodesh 2006, 46). Maqoma himself has described his work as being made up of "a cocktail of cultures and histories integrated with biography and autobiographies" (Maqoma 2006, 35).

At what seemed a point of incarceration within the performance, Maqoma balanced an enamel plate on his head, creating smooth and undulating movements with his lower body, his head remaining relatively still. Suddenly his presence had become feminised. The transformation was subtle and could not be compared, for example, with the burlesque qualities of drag. His body, morphing into different gendered surfaces and shimmering with an ambiguity that mirrored the fragmentation of the material of his suit at the beginning of the performance, further facilitated the audience's identification with him, rendering his vulnerability as the double of his ancestor at a point at which he had been brought low.

Towards the end of the performance Maqoma bathed his body in oil, conveying a sense of having been cleansed, possibly of death, on behalf of his ancestor Jongumsobomvu and himself. At the conclusion of the performance, Maqoma transformed again into his contemporary self, returning to the present, facing the audience and wearing the suit with which he began.

In its circular form, moving from the present into the past and back again, *Exit/Exist* seemed to evince a compelling form of doubling, Maqoma having inhabited the story of his ancestor within his own life and body, carrying lingering traces of the past. Just as one might argue that Maqoma came to embody his ancestor, through his enactment he created a "bridge," as it were, for his ancestor to travel into the present, as a witness to the contemporary world where he still has a tangible presence through his descendants and various forms of memorialisation.

At the performance I attended, the diverse audience included a large party of Maqoma's relatives who claimed Chief Jongumsobomvu as their forefather; South Africans from every walk of life, including descendants of those who fought on both sides of the frontier wars; and visitors

from other parts of Africa and the world. The audience remained silent when the performance ended. Then, as if it were one entity, it rose to its feet, some people weeping, in thunderous and sustained applause.

Performance and theory in conversation

In reflecting on the performance, I draw on a contemporary strand of theorising in anthropological and philosophical thought, in particular on recent work by Henrietta Moore, Elizabeth Grosz and Elizabeth Povinelli.

In *Still Life: Hopes, Desires and Satisfactions* (2011), Henrietta Moore suggests that there is currently an enormous interest in self-making and self-stylisation and that this, in line with Michel Foucault's later work on care of the self, "is not just about self-cultivation as a form of individualization but an attempt to imagine the present other than it is, and to transform it by grasping what it is" (2).¹² She writes:

Stylization in music, in dress, in politics and in all aspects of personal and intimate life is part of a drive to give form not only to the self, but to the world, and to relations with others. It is an obstinate search for a style of existence, a way of being. (Moore 2011, 2)

In a context of globalisation, we are called to leave behind inherently moralising distinctions between tradition and modernity invoked in antinomies between authenticity and loss, or archaic residue versus progressive invention (Moore 2011, 4). In his work and life, Gregory Maqoma is much more concerned with forms of irreverent *bricolage* or life-giving "cocktails" (to use his own term) that he develops through a playfulness that nevertheless involves painful forms of self-examination and social critique. In his writing, he refuses to be defined by narrow forms of African nationalism or an exoticising European gaze, in which tradition and culture are reduced to a stereotypical repertoire (Maqoma 2011, 66). He thus rejects what Moore describes as culture viewed as "proprietary asset" or "primordial identity" (Moore 2011, 20).

Reflecting on his work, Maqoma explains, "As an African contemporary creator, I am creating a domain of reality in which social and emotional conflicts can be brought out into the open and made available for public discussion." For him, "[c]ulture is not only a set of symbols, values or beliefs of people, but also a response to circumstances, to socio-economic imbalances. It changes, it is evolving" (Maqoma 2006, 35; 2011).

Piecing together multiple and emerging influences, his work is orientated towards an expansiveness of being. He frequently reminds interlocutors that his second name, Vuyani, means joy, and that his dance, while provoking discussions about social realities within South Africa and the world, nevertheless does so from the point of view of creating space in which to live a meaningful and truthful life. He takes issue with the fact that many accounts of South African life, except for the seminal work of David Coplan on urban performance styles (Coplan [1985] 2007), "undermine ... a ... vibrant past" or erase "the many voices" or "varied and unfolding forms of identity that make up urban communities within the country" (Maqoma 2011, 68).

Moore's work also unsettles our notions of belonging, emplacement, identity and culture. She argues that recognition of diversity and difference is not about "differences that exist between pre-existing individuals, entities or units, because the making of selves, social relations and social imaginaries always involve both being yourself and being other to yourself in ways that create new possibilities for imagining self-other relations" (Moore 2011, 13).

Moore appreciates work that creates meaningful lives in the present, and the ongoing crafting of selves on the threshold of the future. Here culture ceases to become something inherited intact or constituted through a backward gaze, but becomes "a means of dealing with the alterity of the future, with the not-yet" (13). It is therefore not surprising that in this form of futurity, imagination and aspiration for a more liveable world are conjoined. In appropriating the past, culture becomes a

repository of radical potential for creating meanings, relationships and values between the present and the future.

Moore draws on biological and vitalist models to develop alternative views of sociality, social transformation and the human subject, an approach increasingly present within the humanities. The rapprochement between the natural sciences and the arts perhaps heralds a reconstitution of the very ways in which the humanities envisage themselves. Such models developed from the work of Deleuze (1994, 1997) and Deleuze and Guattari ([1987] 2005) in their insistence on energy flows or exchange of qualities engendered through unfolding and varied configurations of relationships between people, and the sensual, material and affecting dimensions of their environments. Their work recognises the capacity of embodied experiences and affective states to refuse and or exceed social subjection and social constraint (Deleuze 1994, 1997; Deleuze and Guattari [1997] 2000, [1987] 2005; Moore 2007, 14).

Moore argues that affectivity encompasses all sentient life, human and non-human, as well as non-sentient matter, with its obdurate qualities in relation to other objects and forms of life. Assemblages of these entities function through connections and potentialities that are not the possession of any single body or subject but are released through their particular configurations. Affect theory thus “displaces the centrality of the human subject, but reconnects it to the vitality of the world, where the potential for change resides in radical forms of relationality and indeterminacy” (Moore 2011, 14). She suggests that such ideas provide an antidote to the increasing “melancholia of the Left” evinced in the work of Giorgio Agamben, for example, in his depiction of bare life (Agamben 1998).

Although Michel Foucault’s earlier work was concerned with archaeological or genealogical forms of unearthing the hidden underpinnings of regimes of power within specific historical contexts, in order to describe the particular conditions out of which specific forms of knowledge and ways of creating the subject emerged (Foucault 1972, 1977, 1980), his later work focussed on the ethical project of care of the self, that is the governance of self and others with a goal of “capacitating modes of life” (Povinelli 2012, 19).¹³ For Foucault, the ethical imagination had to do with the effort required to prise oneself from particular kinds of subjugation. In Elizabeth Povinelli’s words, Foucault’s life work produced a kind of “insurrectional knowledge,” undergirded by “obstinate curiosity” or “wilfulness” (Povinelli 2012, 455–456). Insurrectional forms of knowledge brought what was discounted and invisible into view. Such processes allowed for the emergence of subjugated forms of knowing, excluded from dominant systematisations or rendered incoherent or non-conceptual by them. Part of the ethical relation with the self involves a regard for self-formation (Foucault 1985, 28–30), “the strategies that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other” (Foucault 1998, 300). The anthropologists João Biehl and Peter Locke have expressed a similar idea: “We are drawn to human efforts to exceed and escape forms of knowledge and power and to express desires that might be world altering” (Biehl and Locke 2010, 317).

Elizabeth Povinelli offers a notion of exhumation to accompany Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical methods of destabilising forms of knowing. She writes,

Done correctly, exhumation does not present us a mummified ethnological subject but a concerned ethical subject (*souci de soi*), a subject who is in a state of constant ethical reflection (*souci éthique*) and practice (*travail éthique*) in relation to her own constant ethical becoming. (Povinelli 2012, 456)

There are parallels here with Maqoma’s sense of cultural appropriation as an ongoing creative act within the present with the view to the future as a threshold for new kinds of becoming. Povinelli’s ideas resonate well with Maqoma’s rejection of deadening conceptions of culture in which no room remains for contestation or ambiguity.

Moore’s approach to the ethical imagination, as not purely cognitive but as saturated with emotion produced through bodily exploration and extension, fantasy and relations with people,

objects, technologies and the material world (Moore 2011, 21), enables us to appreciate the processes through which artists like Maqoma, Muholi, Sibande and Hlobo produce their works. All draw on personal and public histories, their bodies literally providing conduits through which to process memory, the submerged, the painful, and the celebratory in reaching into the new. Their practice is an embodied form of Foucault's call to insurrectional forms of knowing that require risk. In Povinelli's formulation, a truth-teller is willing to put him or herself at risk before creating a new world in which to exist securely. Here, where risk resides, audiences are constituted and confrontation and contestation becomes possible (Warner 2005). The content of such truth-telling lies outside of what is already authorised (Povinelli 2012, 459). We may say of the powerful work of the artists to whom I have referred that, although it has emerged within a context of new opportunities for a post-apartheid generation, it provides a space for unsettling provocations in its depiction of personal domains of experience, histories, meanings and pain. It unsettles any seamless occupation of the new nation-state.

It is in this sense that the brave becomings of the artists embrace art as a stimulant to life (Nietzsche 1968, 419–456). In *Chaos Territory Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, philosopher Elizabeth Grosz captures some of the reasons for both the affective influence of art upon its audience and its practitioners and the means through which submerged and evolving subjectivities and concerns become visible within the public domain with a declarative and celebratory presence. She too draws on Deleuze and Guattari (Grosz 2008, 2). With Nietzsche, she describes art as linked to seduction, excess and the call to life. Straddling the divide between nature and culture, she locates colour, sound, movement and display in the courting rituals of animals, forms of behaviour that have little to do with any reductionist view of reproduction. They become artful in that they are drenched with the force of sensual qualities. She writes:

The haunting beauty of birdsong, the provocative performance of erotic displays of primates, the attraction of insects to the perfume of plants are all in excess of mere survival, which Darwin understands in terms of natural selection. (Grosz 2008, 7)

Grosz shows how forms of sexual selection and attraction point to the excessiveness and overabundance of the body and the natural order in their capacity for mutual surprise, forms of surprise that cannot be reduced to the notion of survival (Grosz 2008, 7). Rather in their production of surprise, matter and life enter into forms of exchange linked to becoming and transformation.

Drawing on Erwin Straus's *The Primary World of the Senses* (1962, 351), Grosz suggests that in sensory experience both the self and the world unfold simultaneously in processes of becoming, a line of thought reminiscent of the thinking of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962). The art of seduction in the animal kingdom, and the art of seduction in producing art for practitioner and audience, involves a process of framing some of the chaotic flow that makes up life and the forces of the universe so that it may be experienced through sensation, a kind of selection. In Gregory Maqoma's performance, this involves an ordering and slowing down of the flow of the world and a deliberate concentration on particular sets of movement, sounds, and objects in relation to one another.

Grosz suggests that such processes also invite the possibility of discombobulation, discomfort or chaos and, through chaos, transformation. Her notion of chaos is related to the idea of open-endedness, potentiality and possibility, notions that underlie much of what has been written about here.

It goes without saying that not all people are able to create the expansive worlds that Maqoma and his colleagues have done through their art. In Elizabeth Povinelli's words, "Many have the capability for obstinate curiosity yet few may be called to bear its burdens ... Many people are crushed by the mere task of surviving given organisations of power" (Povinelli 2012, 470–471). Maqoma's call to life is particularly brave because it takes place within a social landscape in which there has been a layering of unremitting death and loss through time that continues to haunt the

present, as is born out in my account of Jongumsobomvu Maqoma's life and more broadly the utter dispossession of the amaXhosa in the nineteenth century. Death and loss have cast their shadows on life in South Africa in visceral contemporary ways through the HIV/AIDS pandemic, a process that I have documented extensively in my own ethnographic work in rural KwaZulu-Natal (Henderson 2012). The call to life, therefore, cannot be imagined separated out from death and loss.

In so far as Gregory Maqoma and the other artists described here produce forms of art that are expansive and evolving, processes that have simultaneously expanded their own forms of self-stylisation and that portray realities and sensibilities that cannot be anchored to any orthodox account of tradition, gender and emplacement, they bring a life-giving quality to the contemporary scene in South Africa. Their forms of self-making issue proliferating playfulness into the world, a playfulness that bears within it the lingering traces of the past and calls us to account. It is perhaps worth reminding readers that the playfulness I allude to is captured in my description of Maqoma's shimmering ambiguity in his opening dance moves in *Exit/Exist*. His minute movements reached into the unknown, but delicately so; at any moment they could be retracted. This kind of exploration bares the fragility in reaching, beyond habituated ways of being if only in the imagination. Even where members of the audience or of the publics, issued into being, through performance, return to living with subjugation and brute social realities, the space created by performance enables an affective experience; an ephemeral quality that has an afterlife in the imagination and opens up possibilities for and in the world.

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Notes

1. Gregory Vuyani Maqoma founded the Vuyani Dance Company in 1999 while attending the Performing Arts and Training School in Belgium. As a young boy growing up in Soweto, he and his friends enjoyed dancing and developed new forms of self-stylisation inspired from a diverse set of local and international influences (Maqoma 2011). In 1990, Maqoma began training with the Johannesburg dance company, *Moving into Dance Mopahong*, and quickly became an important choreographer. He was the FNB Vita Choreographer of the Year in 1999 and the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year in 2002. A finalist for the prestigious Daimler Chrysler Choreographer Award in 2002 and the Rolex Mentorship Programme in 2003, he has taken up numerous residency directorships in different parts of the world and has performed in Africa, Europe, South America and the United States. In recent years, he has collaborated on many productions with theatre director James Ngcobo, who directed *Exit/Exist*. In 2009, Maqoma was the head choreographer for the Fourth World Summit of Art and Culture, as well as for the FIFA World Cup kick-off concert in Soweto, Johannesburg, in 2010.
2. Maqoma upholds Johannesburg as a multiplicitous, open-ended space of becoming, able to satisfy his "artistic cravings" through nourishing him with its "witty nature" (2006, 35).
3. On the work of Zanele Muholi, see Thomas (2010) and van der Vlies (2012). On Nicholas Hlobo's work, see Gevisser, Ratele and Mergel (2009) and Murinik (2012). For Mary Sibande, see Eyene (2013).
4. All of these internationally renowned artists require extensive exploration in their own right. I refer to them only in passing here to place them in conversation with the theoretical ideas I wish to explore in the paper and because of their similarities in relation to forging expansive ways of being.
5. See van der Vlies (2012) for an extended exploration of the gaze in contemporary South African art. The exhibition formed part of South Africa's contribution to the Venice Biennale in 2014.
6. In 1856, Nongqawuse, the young niece of the diviner Mhalakaza, was reputed to have met two ancestors at the side of Gxara River who told her that if her people slaughtered all their cattle, stopped cultivating, scattered the grain from their storage bins and built new houses and cattle kraals, the land would be renewed. Cattle, ancestors and new crops would rise out of the earth, and Whites, unbelievers and the Mfengu, who had crossed into the colony deserting the Xhosa, would be swept into the sea (Mostert 1992, 1181). For a sustained exegesis of the cattle killings, see Peires (2003). See Stapleton (1994) for a version of Jongumsobomvu Maqoma's life where he is depicted as at first resisting the slaughter of cattle.

7. For an online excerpt of the *Exit/Exist* performance, see Maqoma (n.d.).
8. See, for example, Hammond-Tooke (1974) and the more recent account of the importance of cattle among Zulu speakers by Poland, Hammond-Tooke and Voigt (2003). For ethnographic accounts pertaining in particular to the amaXhosa, see Soga (1932). See Monica Hunter (1979, 63–71) on animal husbandry among the Pondo.
9. I was a founding member of the Junction Avenue Theatre Company as a young student at the University of the Witwatersrand in the 1970s where we workshopped plays about the history of South Africa (see, for example, Junction Avenue Theatre Company [1995].) I went on to work with the Culture and Working Life Project based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and, in particular, in the workers' theatre movement in the 1980s, where I worked closely with the Sarmcol workers, among others, from Mphopomeni township, Howick, in the production of their plays, *The Long March* and *Bhambatha's Children*.
10. His movements were not unlike those of practitioners of the Japanese dance form *butoh* (the dance of darkness), in which performers show consummate skill in isolating small discrete parts of their bodies in controlled and delicate movements (see, for example, Barrett [2004]).
11. The trickster figure is central to many African folk tales, sometimes in the form of clever and amoral animals that outwit their friends and rivals in anarchic and spectacular ways. Their qualities also become an example of how to craft dexterous selves as migrants, dealing with the dangers of travelling to and from home to places of work, including the South African mines, or in navigating increasingly challenging urban landscapes (see, for example, Coplan [1994]).
12. Also see Foucault (1998, 311).
13. Also see Foucault (1990, 1998, 2005).

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