

CHAPTER TWO: THE MOVEMENT OF BODIES

Breytenbach's more metaphysical depiction of movement is found in the image of the angel. In this instance the intertext is the alchemy. Stanislas Klossowski de Rola, the brother of Pierre Klossowski (1905 -), wrote the *Book of Alchemy*. Alchemical texts are obscure: they constitute a challenge to the heroic nature of those who seek to "innerstand". Like Theseus, the enquirer confronts the labyrinth. This labyrinth is a defiance of linear logic, which in this context is totally useless. The assault on the logical sense is made by the Minotaur of the absurd, who will promptly rout the would-be hero who cannot withstand his attack. Only through reliance on inspired intuition, the golden thread of Ariadne, will the puzzle fall into place and light replace darkness. Zen masters, for instance, use the koan, a kind of riddle, which, while unbalancing the intellect, may suddenly trigger satori or enlightenment.

The pictorial language, in which not a single detail is ever meaningless, the alchemical image exerts a deep fascination on the sensitive beholder. This fascination does not even necessarily depend upon understanding. If the viewer contemplates these images, or goes beyond their surface, he or she will often conceive that they correspond to another timeless dimension which we all may find deep within ourselves. These profoundly haunting pictures have polyvalent symbolism, and lend themselves therefore to various interpretations. In alchemy the depiction of the two lovers, represent the perfect solution of the (solar and lunar) opposites in the first water – the central event of the First Work. In a further image the conjunction is repeated, with the two bodies in a volatile state (hence the wings); this is what is known as the fermentation (Klossowski de Rola 1973:8-9).

In the watercolour, *Remnants of my Story (MB-1)*, Breytenbach depicts the alchemical image of two figures engaged in the movement of lovemaking. Two figures embrace each other on an orange platform while a third figure is "swimming" through an endless green landscape.

Movement (MB-2) once more depicts two love-birds. The seagull as the strong *male* figure is hovering over the slender female bird with human arms instead of wings. In *Sheltering Sky (MB-3)* the alchemical image is extended and enriched by placing the lovers on a tropical beach, with the words, *The sky is the limit*, written on the backdrop of a palm tree. A masked back peacock-like figure with rich plumage is hovering over the white woman on the beach.

A further reworking of this theme by Breytenbach, presents a depiction of Yolande and himself in *Engelpaar (MB-4)*. The images of bondage, the box and the fish, are included in this work. Both are naked, and the alchemical theme of fermentation of decay is depicted – the angels have black feet. The Breytenbach angel-figure is androgynous. Both of them are wearing the dunce cap. The scroll, *Stompengel (MB-5)*, is again a transformation of the alchemical theme: here Breytenbach has painted the menacing angel in a night landscape and walking over a hilltop in the direction of the female figure lying on the ground. Other angel figures are *Head and Fish (MB-6)*, *autoportrait pour plus tard (MB-7)* and *You Can't Go Home Again (MB-8)*. The angel-figure is chosen to carry many meanings.

2.1. Movement and the landscape of the eluding horizon

In the watercolour, *Jade or Alabaster (MB-9)*, two figures are leaping over a hilltop. The first figure is holding on to a rope which extends to the moon. In *Dead at Last (MB-10)*, the angel-figure is hovering in the air. Three black birds share the space of the picture with him. The main black bird is crying. In *The Bobbing Lights of the Harbour (MB-11)*, a seagull flies over a yellow plain, over a masked suspended figure with crossed legs. Flames are extending from the third eye and the heart chakra. *Nature morte (MB-12)*, is an ecstatic artwork of movement. The landscape with its cypress trees is probably that of Spain. The galloping male angel is embracing its own wing over which a snake is curled. In the foreground Breytenbach has placed a still-life of two fish and a hat.

Movement has constantly been an important aesthetic concept in Breytenbach's work. In three unpublished public lectures given by him in The Netherlands and South Africa during 1996 notions of the process, or different notions of movement were continually seen as an important creative principle. In *Cadavre Exquis*, (presented as a Vincent van Gogh lecture at 's-Hertogenbosch in June 1996 – unpublished) for instance, movement, whether in the form of transformation or as the vanishing of the borders of time, space and the ego, is seen as an important prerequisite for creative writing or painting. The two Pessoa unpublished lectures (Durban, November 1996) are titled *The Writer as the Bastard* (1996d) and *Foreword Travelling towards an Identity (Notes from the Middleworld)* (1996d). In both these texts, the travel motif is important (likewise in *Seisoen in die Paradys, Return to Paradise* and certain essays from *The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution*), metaphorical movement is explicitly linked to the identity of the writer/painter. Breytenbach (1996a:101) writes about movement by saying:

The dichotomy is between observation and narration between breathing and thinking, between what you see and what you invent – because the two cannot be separated: we never proceed from no-where, and yet there can only be movement (breathing) because there is the void, both inside and outside us. Words are slippery stepping stones across the frothing river of consciousness. Two constants remain, process (which is change, movement incorporating jumps and ruptures) and the temporariness of self (which is movement, change incorporating ruptures and jumps)

He also writes about the noble art of walking in his novel, *Memory of Snow and of Dust* (1989:94):

It is dark, pitch, black, blind, blunt. With hand-palms one may stroke the darkness, fur-staining skin. In this big ship we move up river, in land, deeper, not knowing. Neither knowing where we are or what the where looks like. We bend, grope, and pick up any loose object on the deck: wrench, bar, bolt, grape, grass, monkey, gullet, stone, brass. Which we cast in silence on the banks to hear

the sound be it muffled or sharp or impact. The echo, the distance, the ultimate direction, the substance. We do wish to remember where we are. To establish. To make contact. To be circumscribed by rejection. To hit the darkness and limit it. To find what we are. Also becoming. ‘And consciousness when it doesn’t clearly understand what to live for, what to die for, can only abuse and ridicule itself.’

No man’s land could be interpreted as being a land where the inhabitants have not yet ripened to consciousness. In his wish to become conscious, or to leave the darkness or the blind, blunt groping on the ship’s deck behind, in his wish to understand what to live for and what to die for, his wish to bring light to the dark landscape, Breytenbach takes up his pen and writes in a language charged with metaphors or takes up a brush and paints images which are the building blocks of consciousness. Breytenbach could be thought of as an artist, writer, philosopher and social critic of movement, as the above quotation shows. “Noble art of Walking”, in *Memories of Snow and of Dust*, can be seen as “the faculty of letting go of the called self within a specific environment”. It is the way one becomes aware of one’s relationship with one’s environment. The universe is not a collection of loose fragments, but a web of interconnected relationships. The more direct the path one takes the smaller is one’s chance of finding something at the end of it. One has to walk the long way round.

In the essay *Tortoise Step* (1987) Breytenbach (1996a:10) also uses the Zen code to stress his point. In this regard he writes:

Somewhere during my time inside I came across the remnants of a verse written by the Buddhist philosopher Maitreya. He lived during the fourth century. The lines, translated this way and that, are probably partly eaten by time and frequently transcribed:

It is not suggested
That all the elements are unreality;
Not that they are all reality;

Because there is being
And also non-being
And (again) being:
This is the Middle Way!

What strikes me about the innovation of the Middle Way, the way I understand it at least, is that it embodies the necessity of movement; it is a line along which you *go*. Not a *fuite en avant* circumventing and obscuring irreconcilable contradictions, running away ahead so as to run out of road as it were – but, rather, a suspension of the extremes, admitting that all is possible and so is nothing, and then recognizing the practical reality that you have to move along, that it would be futile to sink into the static stance of waiting for the opposites to be resolved, that only the new shoot escapes the duality of the bean's two lobes, that clarity of mind is a peristaltic practice and not contemplation – the way the finger writing the moon is not a satellite of the earth and the word 'moon' on paper can never shine since paper is not light-fracturing infinity but born of trees. That life can finally only be lived. Let me add before leaving the track – it is also said: if you can lose it you never had it, and, unless you can laugh at it, it is not the way.

According to Suzuki (Melino:1998:31) the movement on the Middle Way is to have no-mind in all circumstances that is to say, not to be determined by any condition, and yet not to have any affections or hankerings. That is to face all objective conditions, and yet to be eternally free from any form of stirring. This is a living experience in its deepest sense.

Breytenbach describes some of these conditions in an unpublished lecture, *Travelling toward identity*, (1996b). This movement becomes a form of creation, by moving you make. The identity is crystallized or reshaped by confrontation and change. The Other may be flushed out or seen in a new light, the point of view shifts, you bring something more to the landscape, and you rewrite the world. The writer/painter is recognized by his mobility, not so much physical mobility but in terms of his psychic and intellectual pliancy. According to

Breytenbach there is no landscape that is a reflection of another. It is the reflected landscape we must remember. The place within the place. Here, already, is his chance to move over the landscape. But the process of painting/writing is the opening out of the non-landscape, which immediately closes behind one again. With every movement, Breytenbach displaces a frontier and another body or image crops up. A new concept or another mutation. Nothing can be bound forever. He lifts an arm and violates a new space. He turns his head or risks a step forward and is no longer in the same space. In this sense, Breytenbach sees the past of all movement as a memory of death.

2.1.1. Notes on *Totleben* (MB-13).

According to Galloway (1994) it is dangerous to search for a definite interpretation of Breytenbach's work. Confronted by the painting, *Totleben*, in the Pretoria Art Museum, the viewer will not be assisted in interpretation of the work by a popular book on symbols. A particular kind of looking is at stake when one views his paintings and drawings. The role of the viewer is a painful one, because all the deceptive certainties of the visual regime we are used to are challenged. All the modes of relationship between looking and what (we think) we see, all constructs of reality as we know them are questioned.

The painter is far more interested in the process of creating possibilities than in so-called truth or fixed meaning. In an interview (Dimitriu 1996:90) Breytenbach states that he thinks that South Africa, particularly, suffers from an addiction to orthodoxy. This is the case because of the diversity of the country and the horror of the past. Somebody said that the past is a horrible place to visit. There is a tremendous pressure on people to be good. Breytenbach notes that generally, control implies being "good", being on a "good" side. He thinks that one of the results of this attitude is that people have become very vulnerable to the imposition of orthodoxy, of hegemonies. According to Breytenbach (Dimitriu 1996:90-101), orthodoxy

stifles creativity. He goes on to say:

What I do is to subvert the orthodoxy, the going conventions, the accepted norms, as they exist here at the moment. ... I'm intuitively attracted to the clash of the unexpected, to the break, to the jump, to discontinuity, to the rupture. ... It's way of trying to explode the little illusion of order and security that's imposed by the capacity for using words correctly, in a certain order.

Breytenbach is the thinker of movement away from the direction of the uniform toward that which is the chaos-machine. That which undermines the instrumental intellect and the fascistic grip on things. The demarcating of a stratified space or the fixation of the body as the stereotype is an act of egoistic control. Kundera (1988:151) discusses this fixation of the body as the stereotype in his work, *The Art of the Novel* (1988:151). He writes the following on this aspect:

The Land-Surveyor K. is engaged not in a search for brotherhood but in a desperate search for a uni-form. Without that uni-form, without the uniform of the employee, he cannot 'keep up with what is real,' he 'gives the impression of being something unreal'. Kafka was the first to grasp this shift in this situation. Since Kafka's time, because of the great systems that quantify and plan life, the uniformization of the world has made enormous advances. But when a phenomenon becomes universal and omnipresent – we no longer notice it. In the euphoria of their uni-form lives, people no longer see the uniform they wear.

The self, as painted in *Totleben*, is an expression of movement away from fixity of a self, such as one would find in the desire toward uni-formity shown by Kafka's characters. There are, however, a few clues regarding Breytenbach's working method, which can be unravelled from his work and which can be of assistance in one's progress through his landscape. Certain metaphors or motifs in his other works are also found in *Totleben*: the butterfly associated with metamorphosis; the candle implying the paradoxical coexistence of light and darkness; the string around the candlestick suggesting wholeness and unravelling; hands in an attitude

of prayer, like growths from the body, have an own life, an own dynamic – allowing the “I” to grow and blossom. The titles of his paintings are often just as strong a code as the visual images themselves. The title, *Totleben*, is strongly reminiscent of the collection of poetry, *Kouevuur*, and indeed contains the same elements of the paradoxical coexistence of opposites, which is his central theme: death is the laboratory of life. Viewers’ reactions to the painting will differ and Breytenbach would prefer it so, believing the viewer to be an accomplice in what he sees. His own expectations, preconception and memories tint each person’s view. On the one hand, there will be discomfort and a lack of peace, especially when no fixed meaning can be attached and the viewer feels estranged. Awaiting the viewer is an adventure for those who have the courage to submit to an eternity of possibilities of meanings and the “stuff that dreams are made of” as Hamlet said.

In *Totleben* we are also confronted with decay already setting into the face of the self. Thus, we are confronted with temporalities. In this instance, the painting deals with the difficulty of knotting the border between life and death. In dealing with life itself, the convulsive movements are bound to end in death. And after that decay sets in. The image is thus the endowment with a movement on a fold, on the fold where life and death are bound in solidarity, which is the token of a seam of shamelessness, where the shift from the one to the other is indistinguishable, irretraceable, smooth and unpredictable. A painting, however, needs form and line to give expression to the notions of the artists. Breytenbach (1987:157) writes in an imaginative way about form, line, movement and expression. He says:

Beyond the eye in the labyrinth where everything has existed since all time – dogs and Minotaurs and lovers and emptiness and moon and handkerchiefs and blood and howling and Africa and freedom and laughing trees and eclipses and memorized imagination which is imagined memory – a form is struggling to take shape. Form cannot exist without expression. Expression flows from movement. Movement gives birth to stillness. Stillness suggests absent movement. A line is born: the navel-string of decay is written in leads. Coffins are lined with black

lead, writing the environment, which eventually digests the contents.⁴³

During his imaginative process (movement), Breytenbach ends with a description of coffins. By interacting with one's environment, one actually digests it. It is a complicated view of the creative process. By viewing the painting, the viewer also shares the borders, ruptures and shifting spaces of life. There is an awareness of shifting boundaries. It is in this moment that Breytenbach will declare that life is doggedness, transformation; death perhaps the raw extension. By continually defining himself through resemblance, probably the face of death, thus in a paradoxical way, the artist captures your face or the Spanish landscape or the red stool in his studio or the tree-sitting grandfather in the images presented on the canvas. *Totleben* is a resemblance and is part of the vast interconnection between the "songlines" of selves trodden on the desert of consciousness.

2.2. The Zennist

According to tradition, The Buddha (Siddhārta Gotama Buddha [c 563-c. 483 B.C.]) had passed through many previous existences before reaching the human stage at which he could achieve enlightenment. The stories of this existence (*Jatakas*) are perhaps the commonest material of Buddhist narrative art, representing the Buddha in both animal and human incarnations. This progress serves as the pattern for the ordinary Buddhist's search for release. The human life of the Buddha is also a fertile subject for art. It is often compressed into a series of canonical incidents; conception, birth, first meditation, enlightenment, first sermons, incidents of his mendicant life, and death.

Following the Indian belief in endless cycles of self-repeating time, reason suggested that

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Translated by M. Grobler.

historical uniqueness should not be attributed to our historical Buddha, who died as an old man C. 480. The Buddha's were therefore postulated, both past and future. They often appear in art as a group of five to seven. Later Buddhism of the Mahayana schools employed one or all Buddha's in its system of figurative expression. The "Buddha-principle", being in essence one, was simultaneously infinitely divisible. This concept is illustrated by the "Thousand Buddha" icons, and the figures of the Buddha in the aureole of icons of Vairocana, for example. Bodhisattvas are beings partaking of the Buddha-nature, who because of their unlimited compassion remain in contact with the world of everyday existence to help suffering humanity. They appear alone, or as supporters or interlocutors of the Buddha, and are usually dressed in royal regalia of jewels and crowns.

According to Osborne (1979:170-172) theory recognizes three bodies of the Buddha: the *Dharma* body, ineffable and beyond representation; the *Nirmanakaya*, the human individualized envelope, substantially irrelevant; and the *Sambhogakaya*, the glorious body constituted of symbolic characteristics following ancient astrological and medical theories. The last is the bodily form represented in Buddhist icons. Golden colour, a head-protuberance (*ushnisha*), tufts of hair, appearing between the brows of the Buddha, webbed fingers and long arms are among the canonical established characteristics.

Zen is not a religion or a philosophy, but an all-encompassing way of experience. Our ordinary ways of thinking are linear, separating all things into categories: we give names to things and work with separate ideas. The Zen, however, does not separate the world and the "I" from each other and everything is experienced in its relation to the other. (The reflection of the moon in a pool of water is neither the moon nor the water, but a combination of both and each is the result of the other.) Zen tries not to judge, but transform the spirit to a space through which the birds can fly without leaving a trace. All things together are the big and wonderful Body of the Buddha. Therefore, we must, in order to discover suchness, the *thahata*, of all things, tilts us toward the whole. We must submerge ourselves in the whole.

For Breytenbach, each poem or painting can be seen as a small moment of awakening (*satori*), wherein the essential relation of aspects of the world is discovered. The Body of the Buddha is not something, but is Nothingness: it encompasses all polarities – light and dark, birth and death, creation and destruction, inside and outside. This is one step away from Breytenbach's *ars poetical* viewpoints.

The poetry and painting of Breytenbach point to the scatological, the obsession with destruction, decay and excretion. Yet these aspects, in a paradoxical way, imply life, growth, birth and becoming. Decay can thus very easily be seen as a sign of life. The poem, *Populous death*, illustrates this aspect of Breytenbach's (1969:83) work where he says:

come
green jeroen:
give me –/a wormy kiss

This is the kiss of death (compare Bosch's painting, *The Paradise of Earthly Delights*), but it is also the kiss of inspiration, a life-giving kiss (green is both the colour of decay, gangrene, cold fire and new life).

2.3. Movement through multiplicity and repetition (the shifting 'I' and the landscape of mirrors)

According to Hardt (1991:119-122) multiplicities (like the Buddha's) suggest things that change their dimensions and magnitudes by altering or expanding their relations. This qualitative transformation of the multiplicity is referred to as assemblage. It is a multiplicity that escapes structural normalization and hermeneutic interpretation. In the paper, *Fragments from a Growing Awareness of Unfinished Truths* read at the University of Stellenbosch in 1990

Breytenbach (1996a:24) uses multiplicities in the following way:

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the police, the security police, National Intelligence, Military Intelligence, Civil Co-operation Bureau, Special Operations, Municipal security, spies, agents, infiltrators, grasses, grey shirts and grey shirts, moles, operators, hitmen, handlers, car bomb artists, paymasters, broederbonders, and other intriguers and plotters and schemers and wangers limited, inner-sanctum strategist, public saints and private sinners, deeply troubled intellectuals, Total Responders, ex-torturers, inquisitors, confidential advisors, stable-lads, courtiers and courtesans, frustrated functionaries and jacks-in-office, future élite of the people, fellow-travellers, deserters, runaways, movement groupies, hangers-on, henchmen, musketbearers, quitters, hand-uppers, scabs and scally-wags, blue-eyed boys, moral reamers of the National Party, federated Afrikaner culture carriers and cultural crust and cultural workers and vultures, blithering bell-goats, lapel nibblers, anus suckers, traitors, backstabbers, masters of gossip and character assassination, agitators, trouble-makers, floor-cloths, scenario constructors, yuppies and buppies and immaculate yooof generation, rugby players, dog-catchers, helminths, bar-room heavies, hemeralopic hermaphrodites, haemorrhoid heroes and smelly snails, reporters, negotiators, patriots, undertakers, resurrectionists, sacristans, beadles, clerks and cowboys and choralists, contact cultivators, informers, closet revolutionaries, wankers and voyeurs and aesthetes and gourmets, leaks, facilitators, unidentified sources, co-opted and structured flunkeys, canaries and converted consensus-seekers, professors and doctors and eggheads and go-betweenes and bathroom toughs and teat-tutors, stupidity stirrers and Stellenbosch students and star athletes and midnight streakers and hysterical halleluya-singers and highway whores, high cockalorums and gibberish gobblers and cocyz cognoscenti and coitus cohorts and capped wheateaters, witch doctors and lay preachers and divinity students and alligators, seedsocks of the nation, hedonists and heathens and anarchists and kitchen communists and Bolshies and fish hawkers and green fanatics and faint fighters and objectors and heavy hearts and hail-fellows-well-met and bum steers, buddies and mates and chums and chinass and ministers and other poophole pilots, companions and comrades and ex-convicts, brothers and

sisters – in short (because I don't wish to be ill-behaved toward anybody), my dearly beloved fellow South Africans.

How and why did Breytenbach develop his own aesthetics for representing multiplicity and difference? This stemmed from a desire to create a matrix of polyphony, a plurality of voices and vestiges that reverberate in the halls of identity. One might perceive the emphasis placed on this act of splintering the One voice into a choir as a way of opening up new spaces in the prison-house of language and representation. Postmodernism, in its common drive to resist the authority of a hegemonic voice allows the muted to speak out. The comparison lies between metaphysics of origin and the aesthetics of pluralism; Breytenbach has opted for aesthetics of pluralism and hybridization. Consciousness will be multiple. Consciousness, even when it is centred, is multiple. He will create multiplicities, but non-duality.

There are similarities between the way Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), the Argentine poet, essayist and short story writer and Breytenbach conceptualize things. Breytenbach and Borges share metaphors of the labyrinth, mirrors and books of shifting silk-like sand in a nomansland. In a Chinese encyclopedia, mentioned by a certain Doctor Franz Kühn in one of Borges' short stories, the cataloguer, who demolished the comfortable, ordered scheme, confronts us with the fallibility of reality and overturns the neat boxes in which we live, ordering our lives by concepts and beliefs. In his book *Labarinths*, Borges says:

A certain Chinese encyclopedia in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed and tame (c) sucking pigs (d) sirens (e) fabulous (f) stray dogs (g) included in the present classification (h) frenzied (i) innumerable (j) drawn with a very fine camel hair brush (k) etceteras (l) having just broken the water pitcher (m) that which from a long way off look like flies.

There is something in Kühn's encyclopedic approach resembling the breathtaking heterogeneity in Breytenbach's work. Breytenbach (1995a:335) is the inhabitant of emptiness, icon with pipe and beard, the bard, co-navigator of the Titanic of Western eschatology,

bastard, fetisher of the parrot, wearer of the dildo, zennist with the bitter laughter of words searching for fragrance, the “I” as a hollow resonance chamber, a Chinese shadow in a poem,⁴⁴ the angel-man, the devil-man, the Tantric-man, the chameleon-man, the ape-man, the cattle-man, the fish-man, the horse-man, the goat-man, the body embracing the insect, the bird-man, the destroyer of fixed concepts (as in the drawing *Distribution méthodique des Oyseaux par le Bec et par les Pates* – MB-14). This list does not only point to Breytenbach’s movement between different personas, but points to the fracturing of the stable identity. There is a complex movement between different identities, all housed under the name of Breyten Breytenbach and where the body becomes organ or vegetation, and the body metamorphoses to continue life in a Kafka-like state of being. Breytenbach’s paintings and drawings are an inquiry into death, decapitation, the mouth, vulnerability, transformation and metamorphosis, the intestines and shit, grotesques, transgression, the androgynous, movement, power, not seeing, the mask, the prisoner, the other, the body as a collage, dismemberment of the body, crucifixion, posture, the boxer, the fornicating body, the doppelgänger, the painter, body in the position of *zazen*, the blind one who carries the pumpkin, the bard with dunces’ cap, the one donning the dildo and the body in the landscape. This list is part of the concept of multiplicity. In *Cold Turkey* (1992), a paper read in Saint Louis, Missouri, 1992, Breytenbach (1996a:94) says that these are his brothers and sisters, as well as his ancestors. This heterogeneity is, in itself, the revolution, which is the negation of “the art of the possible”, in contrast to politics which is the arcane craft of disempowerment of the population.

Multiplicity is a concept⁴⁵ and rejects prevailing centres, unities and rigid strata where the

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Die ek is h holte, h weerklank-kamer, h chinese skaduwee binne die gedig.

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Deleuze, & Guattari (1995:19-121) identify three basic characteristics of a concept. First: each concept will refer to other concepts, these will not only be concepts in the history of concepts, but also those in the process of becoming. Secondly; what is distinctive about the concept is that it renders the consistency of the concept, its endo-consistency. Concepts are distinct, heterogenous, and yet not separable. The point is that each partially overlaps, has a zone of neighbourhood, or a threshold or indiscernibility, with others. Thirdly: a concept is a point of condensation or an accumulation of “own” components.

subject is an “entity” or thing, or a relation between mind (interior) and body (exterior). Multiplicity instead, it must be understood as a series of flows, energies, movements and capacities, a series of fragments or segments capable of being linked together in ways other than those that congeal it into an identity. The process is the linkage between fragments – fragments of bodies and of objects. Desire does not create permanent multiplicities, which would produce what is stable, self-identical, the same. Deleuze & Guattari (1987:8) writes:

It is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, ‘multiplicity’, that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual, reality, image and world. ... Multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature.

But repetition is not a repeat of the same, there is always the process of becoming, which implies moving, a transgression of the initial form.⁴⁶

2.4. The nadaist:

This chapter is a study of the fragmented self in nine different landscapes. Movement embraces everything, and according to Breytenbach there is no place for a subject that is not in motion: the relative horizon recedes when the subject advances, but on the plain of immanence we are always and already on the absolute horizon. A coming and going define infinite movement. It does not advance toward a destination without already having turned back on itself. The needle also becomes the pole. An infinite network of binding and

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What must be kept sight of is that Deleuze’s concept of “difference” is essentially an anti-transcendental one; he is trying to preserve the integrity of surfaces of difference from any reduction to a unifying principle lying outside of all planes of immanence (May cited in Boundas & Olkowski 1994:41)

becoming present them on the plain of immanence: movements, streams and energies are set free in an endless spell (Deleuze & Guattari 1996:37).

The philosophies of immanence⁴⁷ deny all appeals to transcendent causes, essences and universal and unchanging principles. Instead, they emphasize the ways we are part of the world that we experience, and the ways we construct, interpret, and change it in order to make new and different things, interpretations, and experiences possible. For these philosophers, change is inherent in the immanent world. Certainly Epicures, Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677), Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883) and Nietzsche are early voices of this tradition. To these we can add Breytenbach and Deleuze & Guattari.

As in philosophy, there is a movement away from transcendentalism to immanence, so also in art. While high modernists sought the eternal and immutable in abstract form, so-called postmodernists, turn from the ideal to the ephemeral, the fugitive, and the contingent. The shift from the transcendent to the immanent is not, however, simply a movement away from the religious to the secular. On the contrary, the return of repressed figuration, which disfigures the purity of the abstract work of art, coincides with the death of the transcendent God, who reappears as radically incarnate in natural and, more important, cultural processes (Taylor 1992:145). The movement over the plains of immanence (The Way) requires the dismantling of orthodoxy. Here, the inquiry concerning the field of reference is the absolute plain on which thought or philosophy or art or the nadaist, the zennist, the un-citizen, the nomad, the revolutionary, the insect, the exile or the carnival-goer gestates. And this is Nietzsche's dance on the clouds of chaos.⁴⁸ The dance is also the corporeal image of a given process, or of becoming, or of the passage of time.

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⁴⁸Indwelling, inherent (*in*); (of God) permanently pervading the universe.

Nietzsche's dance – that dynamic response to “the spirit of gravity” – that which does not become stuck in any one viewpoint and yet stops short of flight by keeping in touch with the ground. The dance is most understood as a wandering, a mode of cultural nomadism (Parks 1993: 585-590)

The concept and the philosophy circulate on the field of immanence. For our purpose it is important to note that an aspect like intuition, a very important facet in Breytenbach's way of thinking, functions in the field of immanence. Concepts, in Breytenbach's work, for instance, the concept of inside/outside, disclose intensive characteristics and intentions. The concept of inside/outside suggests movement. In the same instance, it also becomes a network of rhizomatic becoming. Concepts, metaphors and images of a given reality are knotted in a process of decay, but paradoxically also by constant rebirth (de Kock 1999:19).

Movement in art can now be discussed. It was the same sense of arbitrary possibilities that drove the work of Eadwaerd Muybridge (1830-1904),⁴⁹ one of the pioneers of the shifting image. In 1880, this English-born photographer began to develop the "zopraxiscope", which would eventually enable him to project his images at speed to simulate the appearance of continuous motion. Muybridge's subjects were humans performing a variety of athletic and everyday actions, a naked man running or throwing a javelin or descending a staircase, a naked woman picking up a jug or a cloth or climbing into bed, each sequence revealed the essential instants of these deeds. There are the twenty-four pictures from three different angles of a naked woman throwing cold water over her naked female companion, forty-four pictures from four different angles of the naked Muybridge walking a short poll, twenty-four pictures from three different angles of an obese woman lifting her stomach off the ground. It is a telling example of all those highly equivocal human attempts, from Newton to Linnaeus, from Messerschmidt to Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and of every historian and scholar you can think of, to record, order and try to make sense of the variety of the different forms of human chaos.

⁴⁹ English photographer important for his pioneering work in photographic studies of motion and in motion-picture projection.

According to Peppiat (1996), who wrote a biography on Bacon, he was probably the first twentieth-century artist to consistently use blurring to suggest mobility. He seemed to proceed from the assumption that the model moved while the picture was being taken; but the effect sought would not have existed, had Bacon not seen Muybridge's work.

Breytenbach and a group of fellow Dutch artists⁵⁰ chose to break away from abstraction in art, turning to the example of New Realism, as presented by Bacon. Two of the many works of Bacon in which movements are illustrated are *Seated Figure* (1974) and *Figure with Meat* (1954). The squirting or contorted human meat/paint creates the illusion of movement.⁵¹ What we find here is tension between the figure and the concept, which is movement. Here Breytenbach differs from Bacon in the undoing of the faces of his bodies. The surge from the head beneath the face he depicts, is the metamorphosis of the self toward the animal, whereas the figure of Bacon is that of the body, specifically a body in the process of a full and violent becoming, racked by spasms, wrenching cries, vibrant thrusts of transmuting flesh. When painting the notion of becoming the animal (becoming-animal is a major line of flight from identity), Breytenbach delves straight into the animal-like figure and the sensation of the movement of paint becomes the lifelong commitment to the metamorphosis of the body.

A series of Breytenbach's paintings that suggest the sensation of movement was exhibited at the *Galerie Espace* in Amsterdam. Examples of these are, *O die maan skyn so helder op my poephol* (MB-15) and *Les roses blanche (The white rose)*(MB-16). It was his intention to go beyond the surface fixities of a culture and find those forces, those energies, those fluxes,

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Private conversation with Breytenbach. February 1998. Paris.

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There is the need for an art of painterly disfiguration as it opposes the limitations of photographic cliché. If we delve in the dustbins of history, we will find that photography's chemical reproduction of images disregard the desire for realism.

and those sensations which specific socio-historical inscriptions have blocked and reified into social etiquette and stultifying patterns of representation.

In *Nature morte* (MB-17), the body gallops in a landscape toward the always-fading horizon, probably illustrating the small dance of death between chaos and complexity. *Passing Through* (MB-18) is a conversation with Goya's *perro se mi hundedo* – *Sunken Dog*. Both paintings point to pathetic powerlessness. Movement is also the main topic of the disquieting work, *The Dancing Warthog* (MB-19), Breytenbach depicts three swimming figures diving, swimming and climbing through a room; a pig dancing on a small block with innards trailing from a toilet (reminiscent of Bacon's toilet). This is also a painting concerning the movement between inside and outside.

Movement in the art films of the South African artist, William Kentridge, takes on other dimensions. In his predominantly handmade films, *Memo*, *Felix in Exile*, *Hotel*, *Weighing ... and Wanting*, *What a Friend We have In Jesus* and *Stereoscope*, Kentridge has developed a small cast of characters which, at first glance, seem to represent a fairly insular field of reference: Soho Eckstein, a Johannesburg real estate developer, Mrs. Eckstein, his dissatisfied wife and Felix Teitlebaum, the poetic dreamers, who yearn to make Mrs. Eckstein's dreams come true. Each of the three is also an alter ego of the artist himself. In his drawing, Kentridge has become a master of finding the single gesture that sums up an entire personality. He consistently provides unexpected insight into how a single person can become the repository of an entire culture's ideas and history, and how this can be transmitted in turn through the audience's instinctual responses to a character's behaviour, bypassing temporally the ideological basis for the beliefs underlying that behaviour (Kentridge 1999:43).

A comparison between the art of Breytenbach and that of Kentridge reveals the following: Both are concerned with the body and both work with a variety of mediums – Breytenbach

with poetry and novels, paintings and drawings and drama; Kentridge with short films, drawing and theatre productions. With Kentridge we do not have a veritable echo chamber of voices interfering with each other. Although his work is multimedia, its mirror is monological and thus does not leave the viewer with the sense of intense discomfort that he or she experiences when viewing the work of Breytenbach, with its inherent estrangement and funky-up (a word used by Breytenbach to express a certain emotion, a certain feeling regarding his interaction with society...) disruptive and transgressive bodies. In Kentridge we do not find the aspect of the surrealist convulsive beauty. Breytenbach's work is dialogical, and to use Bakhtin's (1979:251) terms. Kentridge, in the portrayal of his own body and his alter egos, manages to establish a sense of selfhood, while with Breytenbach this does not happen; through paradoxical desires of his consciousness there is a disruption of a fixed, stable identity. His paintings and drawings of bodies are Chinese boxlike affairs, where the voices of the real, implied and explicit protagonists, accompanied by those of the various, strange other embodiments, are bound to create a multiplicity of body-images, within other body-images, forming an almost endless regress to become the alternative body.

Kentridge, is very much concerned with movement in his art. He deliberately exploits this in his depictions of the body, using animation, theatre and short films. Breytenbach again in his art, writing, aesthetics, philosophical discourse and social criticism, is engaged in a discussion concerning the movement of consciousness. This is an instance of structuring or the small dance of death, which is the poem or the drawing or painting of the body, or the travelogue or the concept. Kentridge provides meaning by referring to known personae, like Faustus and Ulysses, who finds himself in an exposed and vulnerable position and projects himself into the returning hero. *Il Ritorno D'Ulisse* becomes a journey or a longing for a journey. It is a journey through time: from the South African 20th Century, to the Italian 17th Century and from there again to Classical Greece. The imagery is set. Ulysses is addressed and they bring all the mediation of this figure into play (Kentridge 1999). Breytenbach's portrayal of bodies opens a dynamic and constant flux, where things are presented momentarily within an unfolding order. That which comes to the fore leaves the previous horizon of meaning behind.

2.5. The bodily movement towards death and decay:

Death is not an end. Rather, it is part of the process, a mere station on the nomad's itinerary Al-Hallaj. The well known Sufi poet-martyr (Jouay Mohamed 1994:10)

The observation of the movement of the self (the body) towards death and decay is what Breytenbach is exploring. Here temporalities confront us. In *Die ysterkoei moet sweet* (1964a), he writes the poem, *Death sets in at the feet*. This poem is very important, for already then, Breytenbach introduces us to the notion that dominates his art and thinking for the years to come. The whole process of dying is compared with asters that are rotting, stinking carnations and a rose which already has a “deeper bloom on its skin”. He describes the process of dying, which begins at the feet and writes:

Death sets in at the feet

One should simply drift off

**(but they say that for 48 hours at least the consciousness
keeps beating against the steamed-up windows of the skull**

like a fish in a basket

or a space traveller in his space capsule beyond control

or a jew under a pyramid of jews

or a kaffir (lover) in a cell)

with a prickling of pins that begins in the soles.

But is it?

This giddiness as the floor tilts

and a membrane of water comes over the trees

and a zealous hand clutches the throat more tightly

And what a farce, this fumbling for images.

Last week's asters are already rotted away

on their stems the green veins now perished rubber pipes;

The one-time yapping parrots
are now limp and shriveled wigs.

The day before yesterday's carnations stink,
slumped old women.
Yesterday's red rose already has a deeper bloom on its skin,
disjointed fists.

People usually die flat on their backs
with feet cold and erect like petrified rabbits
blossoms on a branch
with a prickling of pins that begins in the soles.

My feet are hostile towards me and I must appease them
swaddle them in cloth, because I am not yet ready
because I must still learn how to die
because I must still decide about the way

Because now I look through a mirror into a riddle
but tomorrow it will be face to face

Breytenbach is interested in conveying the complexity of things during the time of *suchness* (temporality). He also points to the inevitable movement of things, the crossing of the border between life and death. What we have to keep in mind is that this movement in the direction of death must simultaneously be read as the self, which is in a constant state of becoming. Or one could even see it as the 'self' which is in a constant state of loss. Breytenbach (1993a:65) writes:

This goes without saying. I suppose people continue living because they don't know what else to do. In my family, as far back as we can reach, people have died so often that death itself in time becomes hereditary. No matter how you twist and shout, death is the last-dance partner; you might as well enjoy her flesh

and her wily charms. And whereas everything that goes up must come down, it doesn't necessarily follow that which has fallen will rise again.

Breytenbach's work creates an intense awareness of the energetic flow of things. He is the thinker who attempts the nearly impossible act of destroying all forms of fixity, of the grey areas between things, of greyness between life and death. The constant birth to the present is inherent in his thinking. What it infers is the abolition of borders, the absence of borders between things and then also between life and death. What we know and experience as death is that moment in which things are set free. Breytenbach's viewpoint regarding life and death infers a nomadic movement over the plains of immanence. It is the in-between-movement, or constant transformation – that which can be called life.

Breytenbach conceptualizes a viewpoint of no division between life and death. No one, however, is more keenly aware of the ubiquity and immanence of death than Breytenbach. He writes about himself as a nadaist (or the disillusioned self) who is the observer of this movement towards death. Death is what constantly preoccupies Breytenbach. He thinks about it and talks about it. In the art film made by Mary Stephen, *Vision from the Edge*, Breytenbach mentions that he would someday like to lie down under a tree and die. Breytenbach depicts it in the recurrent *cadavre exquis* theme.

2.5.1 Notes on *cadavre exquis*.⁵²

In an unpublished essay, *Cadavre Exquis*, Breytenbach (1996c) writes the following about the parlour game, which the Parisian surrealist called *cadavre exquis*.

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Cadavre Exquis is a Surrealist game based purely on chance. The first player draws an image and folds the paper in such a way that the second player cannot see what has been drawn. Each player adds to the drawing and folds the paper over it before passing it on to the next player. At the end, the paper is unfolded to reveal a (usually grotesque) figure or object assembled purely by chance

It consists of several people sitting down with a sheet of paper folded in strips. The first person starts a drawing (without letting the others see), permitting a few lines to slip over his fold of the shared fields for the next person to start drawing from, and so until the sheet is unfolded, you could say unclothed. You could say that the 'exquisite corpses' resulting in this fashion, are the fruit of shared instinctive inventiveness, maybe the subconscious.

In 1926, André Breton (1896-1966), Yves Tanguy (1900-55), Marcel Duhamel (1900-1977) and Max Morise (1903-?) drew the *Exquisite Corpse*, a colour crayon work, during an experiment in products of a collective unconscious. They showed (like the drawings of lunatics and mediums) that painting, and poetry, can be made by all. This work depicts a central box, inferring a drawing of a clock, with a tail-like extension growing from it. The figure, growing out of the box, resembles an elephant with a vaginal split on its tummy, a breast beneath the left arm, which ends in an umbrella and two testicles sprouting from the trunk (Picon 1995:87).

According to Durham (1993:17-33) the realm of imagery, *The Exquisite Corpse* produced remarkable and unexpected poetic associations, which could not have been obtained in any other way. Associations that still elude analyses and increase in value in the same way as do mental disease. The image of the *Exquisite Corpse* echoes the anthropomorphic stage and the haunting notion of metamorphosis in animate life. *The Exquisite Corpse* cares not for order, or how we fit in, or what we should like. It disorients, devalues the singular imagination and is anti-establishment in the crudest sense and exults in the anti-sentimental, the anti-individual, and the anti-logical.

In 1969, Breytenbach painted a sensitive watercolour painting capturing some elements of the *Exquisite Corpse*. This work, *Wooing the Angel and testing for immortality (MB-19b)* depicts an angel in a *tutu* doing a ballet step. Already we have the obliteration of genders in

this work. Later he would develop this visual idea into a strongly androgynous theme in his depiction of the self and other bodies.⁵³

However, other more prominent drawings have developed around the *Cadavre Exquis* theme. Breytenbach extended the notion of the Parisian *Cadavre Exquis* by incorporating it in his depictions of death. Important to note here is the drawing: *cadavre exquis* (MB-20), with the emblems of the maggot, the bird of movement, the drawing hand, and the eye ('I') of an old man, at the top of the drawing. The genderless body of Breytenbach is lying in a coffin, his feet already in a state of decay. In another drawing, the hand, which writes the words *blanc* and *noir* (MB-21), is also on the verge of being infested by maggots. Decay has already set in and the hands are black. The implication of this drawing might be found in the obliteration of borders between white and black.⁵⁴

2.5.2. Notes on the death of George Dyer.

The artist Bacon also wondered out aloud how he would die and whether he wanted to be buried or cremated. He saw death constantly at work, in the shaving mirror, in the ticking wristwatch, even in shadows, which he painted like emblems of mortality, seeping out of his figures. During the last few days of October 1971, when Paris basked in an Indian summer, Bacon entered the cultural Pantheon of Paris through what the French call *le grand porte*. An exhibition of his work was held in the Grand Palais and President George Pompidou (1911-

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A further similarity between Breytenbach's œuvre and this drawing is the portrayal of the vaginal split, although in this respect he might have been taking up a conversation with Klossowski.

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Marthinus Basson also made use of the *cadavre exquis* theme in the play, *Boklied*, using the body in the coffin as a prominent prop for the depicting of death.

1974), a keen collector of contemporary art, had decided to open it in person, by that turning the event into a state occasion. Bacon was waiting in the entrance to accompany the president round his exhibition. One may only guess at what the artist was feeling. They had brought the news to him the day before that his lover, George Dyer, had been found dead, apparently of an overdose of drink and drugs, in their hotel bedroom. After attempting to vomit a surfeit of alcohol and pills into the sink, Dyer had slumped back on the lavatory seat in the hotel bathroom and died.

Bacon became preoccupied with how to convey, in a modern painting, a fact as “definite” as the death of George Dyer. *Triptych: May-June 1973* was his last and most moving memorial to death. In the first panel, Dyer is in the locked bedroom of the Hôtel des Saint-Pères. He is depicted as a figure vomiting into a washbasin; blood streaming from his nose, he attempts at regaining life. The basin, the lavatory and the waste pipe all drain away blood, excrement and vomit. It is only by going too far that one can hope to break the mould and do something new. As Bacon said: “Art is a question of going too far”.

Breytenbach used the image of a toilet in his work for a considerable period in what is an obvious conversation with Bacon. The work, *le Cheval (MB-22)*, is a mixture of the Surrealist *exquisite corpse*, the tail-like extensions coming from a body with a toilet head, and Breytenbach (probably) with a five-fingered penis, touching the vaginal split of the woman in the drawing. The work, *Doué Vicenté (Gifted Vicenté)(MB-23)* also depicts the Bacon-like toilet.

Body-like experience, like the depiction of the turd, is also an emblem of the waste, which embodies life. The work *Femme (Woman)(MB-24)* a disturbing androgynous figure with bodily organs exposed in the fashion of the work of Kahlo, simultaneously masturbating and leaving a turd on a square box. The hand is depicted as a bird-like claw. Although shocking, this painting does convey vulnerability.

2.6. Breytenbach and Bacon's cry

Bacon's figures are one of the most marvellous responses to the question: how to render "visible", invisible forces. As for the particular role of the cry as a special strategy with Bacon: what does he see in the cry that he makes it one foremost subject of his painting? It has been suggested that the cry has a spiritual function. What are the forces that make the cry, that convulsion of the body, arrive at the mouth? To read the Baconian cry as a mere expression of horror is to be stuck in a representational frame of mind (Polan in Boundas & Olkowsi 1994:229-254). Bacons' portrayal of the mouth must be read against Pablo Picasso's (1881-1973) most disquieting image namely the combination of the sex and the mouth, or "vagina dentata" as the Surrealist named it. This metaphor of confusion, anger, and fear would dominate Bacon's work for two decades.

Bacon's cry is the process by which the entire body escapes through the mouth. The oval becomes a hole, an openness towards which the figure directs itself as if it has found a vanishing point. Breytenbach (1984) writes about Bacon's cry:

It has been pointed out that the black-mouth paintings of Francis Bacon are not particularly innovative, neither technically nor intrinsically – 'Life doesn't make sense', he said, "only our existence gives it some" – and that his pictorial grammar is quite classical, not really narrative or expressionist as we think at first shock. But the 'stitching' together of sumptuous and elegant backgrounds and squirting or contorted human meat/paint, this is unsettling. This tears a gap. This "un-natural" joining opens a wound, which sucks in our complacent convictions of understanding. It is like an unwelcome fall into the mirror.

Breytenbach too has made several of these open mouth drawings: *Black Scream* (MB-25) and *White Cry* (MB-26) are examples. A disturbing graphic work, done, by Breytenbach is *Chatte* (MB-27). In this work the female sex has been superimposed over the mouth of a man and

the recurring maggot is spread over the forehead of the living man, a man who has already engaged in a conversation with death and decay.

Bataille (1989:12) wrote that during intense moments in human life, bestiality is concentrated around the mouth. Anger causes one to gnash one's teeth, fear and atrocious suffering changes the mouth into an organ and terrain of cries. The fearful subject draws his strong neck and back into a position so that the mouth can be pulled back as far as possible; the spine is lengthened and man becomes an animal. The man/animal imagery of Breytenbach, Bacon and Bataille, is the direction in which the Surrealists has moved.

Bacon and Breytenbach in their art erected unbeatable figures – unbeatable in their instance, in their presence. At the very moment, where they “represent” horror, mutilation, and prosthesis: (the fall or failure) they give life a new power of laughter that is extremely direct.

In Breytenbach's unpublished essay *Cadavre Exquis* (1996c), which is true to his paradoxical approach to art and life, he quotes a beautiful Zen citation regarding the mouth:

In Dogen Zenki's *Shōbōgenzō* it is written:

The entire body is the mouth, hanging in the air (emptiness)

It does not matter from what direction the wind blows

– north, south, east, or west –

The wind-bell always makes the sound of *prajā*

– rin,rin,rin.

(In this context *prajā* would be supreme wisdom.)

In Breytenbach's, *Die Toneelstuk*, a drama performed at *Die Klein Karoo Nasionale*

Kunstfees in April 2001, the character opens the performance by screaming. There are echoes of Edvard Munch's (1863-1944) art work, *The Scream* and Sergei Mikhaylovich Eisenstein's (1898-1948) the screaming nurse on the Odessa Steppe from the film, *Battleship of the Potemkim* (1925). In *Die ysterkoei moet sweet* (1964), in the poem, *behinds windows*, Breytenbach presents his wife and readers with an immortal line: *the mouth is too secret not to feel pain*. This line is echoed in *Die Toneelstuk* when the character Hond says: *of the pudenda only the mouth will remain*. In Breytenbach's exhibition, *Dancing The Dog and other Pornographies* (April 2001), at the Metropolitan Gallery in Cape Town, Breytenbach uses the female sex in a very confronting and explicit manner in works like ***The Bearded Mouth (MB-28)*** and ***The Profile (MB-29)*** (Grobler Littnet 2001).

It is Breytenbach's depiction of these images in theatre, art and writing, which attributes to shift the parameters of consciousness. This is an essential tool of Breytenbach as the "war machine" and as consciousness shifter.

2.7. Fragments and other bodily pieces.

Dead birds litter the streets. Ants, small and black like words, are busy deconstructing the body's mouthful, remembering through dismemberment
(Breytenbach 1996: 163)

Bosch, who lived in s'Hertogenbosch, died in 1516. Together with Bosch we get the seminal figure of Martin Luther whose central message of Christianity was that earthly things must be shunned. With Luther, however, we find a separation between the Scholasticism and the irrational Mysticism of the Gothic period, an event that led to the Reformation. The doctrine of the Reformation centred on the notion of the human body as being in a constant process of decomposition. Mysticism has never been espoused in the Roman Catholic Church so that Scholasticism, with its emphasis on human reason, gained the upper hand. But St. Anselm

(1033-1109)⁵⁵, Meister Eckhart (c.1260-1328)⁵⁶, St. Bernard Clairvaux (1115-?)⁵⁷ and Jakob Boehme (1575-1624)⁵⁸ believed that human reason was not sufficient. They emphasised that all people had an emotional bondage with God. In Flanders a movement known as the *Devotia Moderna* with its celebration of the body, combined with traditions of fasting, flagellation and martyrdom, started to flourish. The artworks of Bosch were based on the dogmas of this movement.

Throughout his oeuvre, Breytenbach has continued his conversation with Bosch. He discovered Bosch when hitch-hiking through Spain. He visited the Prado Museum in Madrid during that first important trip after leaving South Africa at the end of 1959. Breytenbach even presents us with a painting, *Untitled (MB-30)* which is essentially a replica of Bosch's work, *The Conjuror*, a small oil painting, housed in the Saint-Germain-en-Laye Municipal Museum, which could probably be within walking distance from where Breytenbach now lives.

Throughout his oeuvre, Bosch presents us with mutilated and grotesque bodies. Bosch the painter of the fragmented body was a source of inspiration to the Surrealists. In his work bodily parts appear to be drifting across the canvas. There is a constant mutation of bodies into animal-like apparitions and birds and dogs, all of which would later become important themes in Breytenbach's work. The grotesque apparitions drawn by Breytenbach in the volume of poetry *Skryt*, could probably also be seen as conversations with Bosch.

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St Anselm was the Italian-born English philosopher and theologian.

56

Meister Eckhart was a German mystic, theologian and preacher. He emphasized on the soul's attaining 'emptiness' so as to give birth to God.

57

St. Bernard Clairvaux was the mystic who founded the Abbey of Clairvaux, which became the centre of the Cistercian order.

58

Jakob Boehme was a German Protestant speculative mystic.

Although the artist, Breytenbach, may not be aware of it, his work reflects some themes of the Reformation, namely the disregard for the body. With Breytenbach, however, the mutilation of the body opens up to the fugitive pieces of the self and the “sharding” of a fixed identity. One could compare it with the writing of a poem. In an interview, he states that moving with a poem is unconditional. It makes one vulnerable, and it probably moves one beyond the borderlines of conventional control and behaviour (Breytenbach in Dimitriu 1996:90-101).

2.7.1 The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge and BREYTEN 68.

The moving graphic work, **BREYTEN 68 (MB-31)**, is a depiction of a man with a penis growth instead of an ear. The mouth and chin become part of the innards that sprout across the inside of the body, innards replace shoulder muscles, the right arm can be seen as a leg, sprouting a hand, and the left arm-leg rests on grotesque entrails, trailing out of the body like a chimney. The legs are crossed and the penis changes into another growth, hanging from the creature’s body. This body has been mutilated beyond recognition. It is enlightening to make a comparison between this depiction and the *Notesbooks* by Malte Laurids Brigge, who like Breytenbach suffers from fragmentation of the self.

During the period June 1976 to July 1977, while he was in Maximum-prison in Pretoria, Breytenbach wrote the volume of prison poetry entitled, *Buffalo Bill*. In this work Breytenbach (1984b: endnote) reflects on the aspect of not knowing the self and he writes about Malte Laurids Brigge:

Ons ontdek dat ons nie ons rol ken nie: ons soek na ‘n spieël; ons wil die grimering verwyder en dit wat vals is afhaal en wêrklik wees. Maar iewers bly kleef ‘n stukkie van die vermomming wat ons vergeet het aan ons. ‘n Vegie oordrywing bly agter in die wenkbroue; ons bemerk nie dat ons mondhoeke

gekrul is nie. En so loop ons rond, 'n bespotting en slegs 'n halwe: syn het ons nie bereik nie, nóg is ons spelers. (We discover that we do not know our role: we search for a mirror; we want to remove the make-up, that which is false and be true to ourselves. But somewhere remains a piece of the forgotten masking. A trace of exaggeration remains in the eyebrows; we do not notice that the mouth corners are curled up. And so we walk about, a piece of mockery and only a half: being that we have not yet reached: we are still actors).⁵⁹

The way Breytenbach paints and writes about the self, reminds us of Rainier Maria Rilke's (1875-1926) character, Malte, from the book, *Notebook*. Like Breytenbach, Malte, the 28-year-old aristocratic Dane, came to Paris with artistic and intellectual aspirations and began to record his life crises in his notebooks; those of ego-loss, de-individualisation and alienation. Often his disintegration of the ego was attributed to Malte's city experiences alone and his childhood, which also features dissolutions of self, resulting in the haunting imagery of the body, Malte's own body and the bodies of the members of the Paris lower class as they collide with him in the streets. The text is obsessively littered with descriptions of body parts (the hands, the abscesses, and the torn-off face of the poor woman, the second head, and the big thing) and of bodily sections. Such images of threatening body fragments, which take on a life of their own, are parallel to descriptions of people (the patients at the Salpêtrière hospital, the woman on the streetcar) that focus almost in a fetishist way on separated body organs. Every time, the imagined unity of the body surface is disrupted.

Neither Breytenbach nor Rilke's fictional character sees holistically. Their portrayal of the body is fragmented, and this bodily fragmentation causes anxieties. Anxieties concerning bodily organs grow out of bounds to explode inside the body and to blast it open. This entails the swelling of the body beyond recognition and the laceration or destruction of its surface unity. These are anxieties of excess, of overflowing, of unstable bodily boundaries.

⁵⁹

Translated by M. Grobler.

Significantly, these anxieties are often followed by a sensation of a total dissolution of boundaries, a merging of inside and outside that is also experienced by Malte and Breytenbach as threatening and invasive. Breytenbach has painted many works about the concept of the inside/outside.

Breytenbach and Rilke's constant use of the imagery of disease and filth, violence and death clearly point in a different direction. We face the paradox that these visions of bodily excess are simultaneously experiences of loss. It is a totalling loss, wiping out of identity, a voiding of a sense of self. After his experience with an epileptic on the Pont Neuf, Malte states: "What sense would there have been in going anywhere: I was empty. Like a blank piece of paper, I drifted along past the houses, up the boulevard again". The nothing that begins to think, the blank piece of paper that, it seems, is waiting to be written on, suggests a connection between the voiding of self and writing.

Throughout Breytenbach's work, the dissolution of boundaries affects the boundary between the body and things, the animate and the inanimate. His portrayal of himself is rooted in the phantasm of the dying and fragmented body. The poem, *Menace of the Sick*, illustrates the connection between Breytenbach and Malte's experience regarding the sick body of Paris in which they find themselves. In an opening poem in *Die ysterkoei moet sweet* (1964a), Breytenbach writes a poem, *Threat of the Sick*, which reminds one of Malte's experience of the sick body of Paris. Breytenbach writes:

Threat of the Sick

(for B. Breytenbach)

*Ladies and Gentleman, allow me to introduce you to Breyten Breytenbach
the lean man in the green sweater; he is devout and braces and hammers his oblong head
to fabricate a poem for you* *for example:*

I am scared to close my eyes
I don't want to live in the dark *and* see what goes on
the hospitals of Paris are crammed with pale people
who stand at the windows and gesture threateningly
like the angels in the furnace
it's raining the streets slaughtered and slippery

my eyes are starched
on a wet day like this they/you will bury me
when the sods are raw black flesh
and the leaves and jaded flowers are stained and snapped with wetness
before the light can gnaw at them,
the sky sweats white blood
but I shall refuse to coop up my eyes

pluck off my bony wings
the mouth is too secretive not to feel pain
wear boots to my funeral so I can hear the mud
kissing your feet
the starlings tilt their smooth leaking heads like black blossoms
the green trees are muttering monks

plant me on a hill near a pool under snapdragons
let the sly bitter ducks crap on my grave
in the rain
the souls of crazed yet cunning women move into cats
fears fears fears with drenched colourless heads
and I shall refuse to comfort (soothe) my black tongue
Look he is harmless, have mercy on him yet.

2.8. Notes on decapitation and the intellect.

The bleeding beheaded, organ-less phantom bodies of Breytenbach's canvases weep for their lost organs and bodily parts. The untouched body has no memory, because only the pain of dismemberment is remembered. The loss of a bodily part is traumatic and both the body (the physical component) and the mind (the spiritual component), have to come to terms with the new bodily image that has to be formed. This confronts us with the Zen notion of the paradoxical. In this sense there is the desire for disembodiment that has meaning only in the untouched body. The two spheres are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the one is a prerequisite for the other. When engaged in *zazen*, the body is not negated. In contrast to this, are the excessive misuse and overindulgence of the intellect (the head). – This notion is depicted in a work like *Le Conquérant de Byzance (the Conqueror of Byzance) (MB-32)*, where Breytenbach portrays a man with a hydrocephalic head. In extreme scenarios of new technology, specifically movement through virtual space and not acknowledging the fragile web of energies seated in the human body, hyper-technology literally sucks the 'head' further down the tunnel of looming future.

In the art work, *My Life and I (MB-33)*, the disembowelled body trailing its entrails through space. This body is at odds with the social body and life. It could reflect the stultifying ideology of a nation, where ideas concerning engineering of human lives have gained the upper hand over the matters of the heart.

The interest in decapitation has been a continual thread in the history of humanity. Prominent examples can be postulated: Salome brought John the Baptist's head to Herod. Klossowski's *Roberte is being made love to by the Colossus, the beheaded man*. Goya paints a scene of beheading while Danielle Ricciardelli (of Volterra), Saint John the Baptist and Lucas Cranach (1472-1553) paints *Judith and the Head of Holofernes*. Bataille's *Acéphale* Group and Julia

Kristeva are also interested in decapitation. The *Acépehale* Group was active between 1936 and 1939. This group met in secret and wanted to revive old myths and rites. The *Acépehale* group inscribed the idea of a headless figure into their banner. It is a figure that echoes certain Gnostic figures, but especially Dionysis, the god of ecstasy and derangement. For them the headless figure was the celebration of the irrational so that they absolutized headlessness (du Preez 1999:149-158).

Du Preez (1999:149-158) sites the example of Kristeva (1998: 3-4) who wrote a lament for a head in a mystery novel, *Possessions*, which begins with a decapitated body. She describes the headless body:

Nothing is heavier than a dead body. And it weighs even more when the head's missing. A face – whether peaceful, purple, or distorted by death – gives meaning to a corpse and so makes it lighter. ... but without eyes or mouth, head or hair, a corpse is no more than a hump of butcher's meat ... deprived of a death mask's baleful exuberance, the dead are dead twice over. It's not that the victim has lost his or her humanity or even personality; on the contrary, humanity and personality both survive, minutely present even in the headless trunk. ... But the madness that is the mark of what is human, and that is revealed in the face, becomes literally invisible when that vital clue is missing.

In contrast to René Descartes (1596-1650), who placed the intellect (in the head), as an indivisible entity loose from the body, Kristeva sees the head as part of the body – a headless body is lamentable. She sees madness and the irrational (which traditionally is described as female) seated in the head. Breytenbach also shows interest in decapitation.

For Breytenbach (1996a:102), exile has been dismemberment from the social body of his country of origin. In his poetry, travelogues, novels and philosophical essays, he constantly writes about this phenomenon. When the head has been severed from the body and placed on

a table, as in the painting, *Untitled (MB-34)*, imagination pours from the head in an irrational and never-ending stream. In this work, the bird-man left the streets and the carnival and sat at the table to lift a fork and knife in a gesture of consuming food. The severed head on the table is a metaphoric pointer that intellect has gained the upper hand in Western society. The lament is directed at cyber theorists, who disregard wholeness, and pursue the bodiless head.

2.8.1. The intellect.

In the prison book of aesthetics *Boek Deel Een* (1987:15), Breytenbach stated that everything represented, is digestion. Intellect is a plaint of entrails or flight cells. Before being incarcerated, Breytenbach worked on this theme in his paintings. The notion of entrails was conceptualized as early as 1965. *En Afrique (MB-35)*, has as intertext, the catacombs of Palermo. Images of the fly, entrails and the dog, are placed in the resting place of the mummies. In the foreground we find the grotesque image of an anthropomorphic figure. Words written beneath the figure read as follows: *en Afrique mêmes le mouches sont contents*. *My Life and I (MB-36)* is another work depicting the entrail-theme.

2.9. *Ars poetica*

In the first hand-story or working notes, Breytenbach (1993c:60) remarks that “the hand is a whore endlessly trying to please all fantasies”. Breytenbach also comments on the relation between the song and the hand. He writes:

The remembering and the opening up, and then the creation of the world is a road that has to be sung, as relation between imagination and fulfilment
(Breytenbach 1996a:34)

Cervantes describes a painter whom when asked what he was painting, answered: ‘That which will come from my brush.’ Matisse said: ‘ I continue working until my hand sings’ (Breytenbach 1996a:20)

The movement of the viewer’s eyes throughout Breytenbach’s œuvre reveals the important position of the hand. Not only the singing hand holding a paintbrush before an empty canvas in *Paysage Intérieur* (MB-37), but also the hand of vulnerability in *Mortait* (MB-38). In memory of the prison notion there is the bird like claws in *Personnages avec oiseau* (MB-39) The hands clutching a lamb in *Voici la Saison* (MB-40) reminds one of Breytenbach feeling of being a “political” lamb led to be slaughtered. The hands folded above the penis in *L’emballage* (MB-41) is an image of vulnerability. Then there is a hand self-consciously becoming a still-life and holder of a signature in *Songe de sept ans et demi déjà* (MB-42). A hand is interacting with the hat of power and the pen in *T/15* (MB-43). The multiplicity of hand-feet mutations of the rooster in prison *T/14* (MB-44), carries the important notion of multiplicity. The shackled hands in *Portait de famille* (MB-45) reminds one of Breytenbach’s time of incarceration. A hand giving the two beloved an orange peel, reminiscent of the prison orange, in *T/17* (MB-46). The hand writing on the wall in *T/16* (MB-47) carries Breytenbach’s views of the interconnectedness between writing and painting. Here the hand is also a trace of the history of art, echoing the hands of Ernst’s *At the First Clear Word* (1923), where the cross-fingered hand of a woman is positioned in one of two square openings in a wall. The hand holds onto a little red ball, which is linked by string to a long insect-like form. Breytenbach has painted hands holding onto a mask and a strange object in *De vogelspinvrouw* (MB-48). A hand with the painted eye (‘I’) in *Ein Gespräch über Sehen* (MB-49) points to a questioning of identity. The masturbating hand in *Femme* (MB-50) carries Breytenbach’s strong erotic feelings. The five-fingered penis growth in *le Cheval* (MB-51) is a further transgressive erotic emblem. The red hands in *Totleben* (MB-52) are the hands of revolution. Then there are the hands of the multi-armed man in *The Arm Man* (MB-53), the fetishising hand in *Mirror of Fire* (MB-54), hands clutching the fish in *Gorée Fish* (MB-55), and also the red hands of revolutionary pain in *F.G.* (MB-56). A hand is holding onto the mirror in *Hommage au Miroir* (MB-57) The hand in *blanc* (MB-58), carries the

notion of decay. Further examples are the hand writing the name in *I have been rediscovering the joys of painting* (MB-59), a hand taking an oath before God in *juré pistolero* (MB-60), praying hands in *Pieter l' Angenouille* (MB-61)(prison drawing). This interplay of hands reveals numerous themes, emotions, obsessions and biographical details in Breytenbach's work. It is also the hand that begins to sing when the painter takes up his brush to paint.

Breytenbach is a collagist, juxtaposing images drawn from some fantastic archive, tracing erudite coincidental narrative within his collection of books, bringing together these narratives with Buddhism and Borges and Bataille and Bacon in a bizarre collection of eroticism. He throws ideas around like confetti, ideas that are both about painterliness and French intellectualism. There is unashamed political and extravagantly bold sexual-imagery, fierce images of chthonic potency, and a concentration of painting as endless repainting, in the grips of mortality. Each body, mostly his own, is perpetually on the verge of metamorphosis. There is a need to create taxonomies of disruption. And the movement of decay in his work is a step further than the movement of figures in the Muybridge photographs, also a step further than the convulsive figures of Bacon.

Borg, a character in the television series, *Star Trek The Next Generation*, sees death as irrelevant. In contrast there is the smell of death on Breytenbach's breath as he thinks of life. There are scenes of decapitation strewn all over his canvases. This is the conscious movement over the immanent landscape in the direction of the hovering horizon and an energetic flow; the discomfort at the chaos of the flow of things. Nomadic consciousness creates the possibility of inhabiting the immanent border of life and death and the insights gained while in this intermediate position, become important.

2.10. Summary

Chapter two dealt with movement against fixity. The argument started with two quotations, one from Breytenbach's novel, *Memories of Snow and Dust* (1989) and another from the essay, *Travelling Toward Identity* (1996b). In the essay Breytenbach wrote about the process which is change, the movement which incorporates jumps and ruptures. In the introduction we have stated that Breytenbach's art is one of disruption and a strange "gear-mechanism of the war machine" drives his poetry. There is the movement from the one idea-image to the following.

We have investigated the notion of movement (which is always the movement against fixity). One of Breytenbach's important notions against fixity is that of "death and decay". By being in a constant process of dying there is no possibility of stultifying. Death occurs from one moment to the other and even the act of lovemaking is one of experiencing the small death.

The notion of multiplicities and repetition works against all forms of fixity (Oneness and wholeness). We have mentioned that Breytenbach sees himself as the bastard who has different strands and different nationalities running through his blood. His mind and body is a host to many images, metaphors and identities. There is no resemblance to a stable and whole identity.

The acceptance of the notion of immanence introduced us again to movement. Movement in art was thus discussed. Breytenbach presents us with a depiction of a fragmented body in his paintings. This is an important argument against fixity.