

CHAPTER FOUR: MEMORY.

4.1. An introduction.

Twilight is that moment of the day that foreshadows the night of forgetting, but that seems to slow time itself, and the in-between state in which the last light of day may still play out its ultimate marvels. It is memory's privileged time (Huysen 1995:65).

In memory of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Nagasaki, Hiroshima, Vietnam, Cambodia, Korea, Angola, Biafra, Uganda, Mozambique, Eritrea, Somalia, Liberia, the Congo, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Kalashinokov, Anna, a character from the chorus in Breytenbach's mortality play, *Life and Times of Johnny Cockroach*, comments on the nineteenth century. Breytenbach (1999c) writes: "Sixteen men in the latrine of some garage rape a teenage girl, the whole night long. Children comb the rubbish heap outside a big city in India. Others live in the glass towers of prosperity. In the play, Anna says: "See the oil rigs, see the burn-offs, see the nuclear plants, see the charred forests, see the oceans choked with plastic, see the zoos, see the palaces and the senate and the congresses and parliaments and the stock markets. Visit New York; buy yourself a Vincent van Gogh. ... See the torture rooms. See the snot and the shit and the blood. Smell it". And Scweik, a soldier in a dirty, bloodstained, early 20th - century uniform, carrying an ancient rifle with a fixed bayonet, answers 'It is time to bury this century' ". Events in the twentieth century have been horrific. When twilight settles around the memories of this century and their carriers, with the memories of Apartheid being the most salient example in the public mind of South Africa, the revolutionary poet/painter, who was incarcerated will be remembered.

4.1.1. Notes on memory, writing, imagination and death.

In contrast to the realistic recording of history, memory deals with imagination. Memory moves into the region that is against fixity. The process of remembering is the filter of events. Memory has been an important and enduring concept in Breytenbach's work. He writes about memory in the following way:

To write is to make memory visible, and this memory uncovers a new landscape. ... Distance is chronology and memory is imagination. It is a given, constant near, a breathing space, a veritable heartland: a lung of time singing our movement towards death, and maybe even making it possible. Just as you cannot survive without dreams, you cannot move on without the memory of where you come from, even if that journey is fictitious. Is what we call identity not that situation made up of the bits and pieces which one remembers from previous encounters, events and situations? Is memory not hanging from the branches?

With time some images will fade away, only because memory territory, like a ship's wake or a bird's cage, is circumscribed. There cannot be room for everything. The catchment area, the observations field, becomes saturated. The tree groans under its weight. One may say the road finishes when one can no longer see the peaks and the twists, when the land of sleeping becomes barren and bread is changed to stone. Now I am dead, the distance and scape will be dust. Memory will be emptied like a glass held to lifeless lips.

And imagination? It must be the discovery of new possibilities to dress of memory, like going back on my tracks to explore another direction, an option of resituating myself before that which happened in the meantime's screwed up my choices. Death is the birth of imagination Breytenbach (1998d).

In the lecture *The Long March* held in New York during 1990, Breytenbach (1996a:38) said that memory and imagination are biological necessities. These two actions are the breathing space of the creative mind. Breytenbach writes:

The individual creative act is certainly an attempt to make consciousness. This implies drawing upon memory. Memory, whether apocryphal or not, provides the feeding ground or the requisite space for the outlining of imagination. Imagination is a biological necessity for inventing a future.

4.1.2. Notes on memory, writing and creativity.

Writing is the mould of memory, or its image. Without memory there is no possibility of imagination, or imagined memory. Without imagination space becomes stratified and stifled. When we are deprived of creativity, we end up in a state of emergency, in the convulsions and convolutions of a “total strategy”, and then we have state totalitarians.⁶⁸

4.1.3. Notes on memory and revolution.

During a paper, *The Memory of Bird in Times of Revolution*, delivered in Berlin (1989) Breytenbach (1996a:166-167) equals memory to revolution. Both actions lead to events opposed to fixity. Breytenbach said:

A revolution cannot be thought. And when it is imagined it will only be as the

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Coetzee & Polley (1988:80). From 9 to 12 July 1987, a group of mainly Afrikaans-speaking academics met a delegation from the African National Congress in Dakar, Senegal. The Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South African (IDASA) arranged and hosted the meeting. Most of the people invited were writers, and Afrikaans. The Afrikaner writer had been part of the cultural hegemony on which the ruling class built its political regime. Since the sixties writers had, however, been resisting Apartheid and national party authoritarianism; but as the ANC had been banned and demonised by the ideological state apparatus since the sixties, these progressive voices were left without a means of discourse. For the writers of that decade and their literary descendants to meet writers in exile and ANC political workers became a opportunity for them to be more actively involved in a solution for South Africa to realise that this country can have a future separate from *Apartheid* and violence.

memory of birds. Birds don't have to invent flying (Breytenbach implies that painting is not the servant of the revolution and its life and memory cannot be encapsulated.)

4.1.4. Notes on memory, prison and death.

In an unpublished lecture, *Foreword. Travelling towards identity (a digressive itinerario)* written at Thekwini during 1996(b), Breytenbach writes about his experience while he was incarcerated. He describes the unchanging(fixed) parameters of the prison which is in contrast to what happens when events are remembered. Memories are like dreams. In our dreams the sequences of events are dramatized and strange. When remembering the same can happen. Like in a dream Breytenbach merges his memories of his father with prison events. A totally new reality is created and thus there has been a movement against fixity.

In prison I was introduced into the traumatic but vibrant *milieu* of gangs, pimps, lifelike criminals and male women and other innocent – all innocent – specimens of what was then an incarcerated lumped proletariat.

Such a crossing nearly always means a break with the known references of the past. It provokes a double vision – new impressions and habits are imprinted on the unquestioned landscape of your youth. This double-track of perception makes you more acutely aware of the places of memory and of the interaction between memory and exploration. Memory becomes a resonance, a gland secreting the digestive fluids of comprehension. Utopia, you could say, reveals itself as the unchanging past. It is further more the lost past – or, at least, the past from which you have been expelled. The nomad knows he is not going to a better world. This accentuates what one could call a certain schizophrenia: you are living perpetual change against a backdrop of the unchanging. You continue travelling so to keep one step ahead of the Dancer, *La Chingada*, the fucked One, and Death....

Your father came stumbling from the burning house, clad only in his pyjamas. Because it was still night and since smoke was blurring the scene's outlines except for your father silhouetted against a backdrop of flames, you assumed at first that the dark stains on his night-clothes must be scorch marks. But when he came closer, so near that you could distinguish his grey hair and make out the white anguish of his eyes, when he fell repeatedly and struggled to his feet again with great difficulty, and when the sombre blotches spread wider and started glistening like black snake skin, then you knew it was blood. Blood also bubbled over his lips, dribbled down his chin and neck and dirtied his jacket even more. You called out loud but he probably couldn't hear you against the crackle and hiss and whoosh of the raging background. Still he kept on trying to move in your direction. You wanted to go towards him but the warders were gripping your arms very tightly just above the elbows.

In an interview with van Bosch (1999:4) Breytenbach mentions that he does recognise the notion of memory as operative in his artistic endeavours and is aware that it is presented in his art as the repetition of themes and images. Some paintings or drawings are even memories of themselves. He returns too, to older works and echoes of these are invoked in the new ones. There are also memories of other artists and writers and revolutionaries as portraits. In the space of memory, everything is both itself and something else. The image coming from the mind is also a memory.

Nevertheless, memories and representation go hand in hand. Certain forms of representation, whether in language, narrative, image or recorded sound, is based on memory. Representation always comes after the memory of an event although the media will try to give us the delusion of pure presence. The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory. The fissure that opens between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable. Rather than lamenting or ignoring it, this split should be understood as a powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic creativity. The "twilight of

memory”⁶⁹ is given in the very structures of representation itself the obsession with memory in contemporary culture, must be read about the double problematic (Huysen 1995:66). And for Breytenbach the image without language coming between is much more powerful and direct.

The Swiss cinematographer, Richard Dindo, who made the documentary, *A Season in Paradise*, based on events leading to Breytenbach’s imprisonment, the court hearings, scenes in the prison and his cell, concentrates on the portrayal of revolutionary figures. For both Breytenbach and Dindo “memory” is the crucial factor and the motor of their work. For Dindo, whom Marcel Proust (1871-1922) influenced, creative work and memory are interdependent. From Proust Dindo got the idea that a work of art concerns the reconstruction of things past. For him film is always reconstruction.

Dindo’s work has frequently been classified as “political cinema”, his choice of subjects being anti-fascism, Switzerland in the Second World War or the Zurich youth revolts. Thus, because of his anargical stance against the facsim of Apartheid, the obvious choice of Breytenbach. It is not easy to forget the recapturing of the scene in the film, *A Season in Paradise*, where Yolande broke down in the courtroom in Pretoria or the memory of her shaking her hair and letting the reflected movement flow with the rippling water of a stream near the house where Breytenbach was born. Forgetting the image of the cell near death row where Breytenbach was kept in solitary confinement is not easy. There are also reels containing images of the area of his birth and a moving sequence where he and Yolande meet each other in a suburb of Cape Town after a long period of separation.

When Dindo made *A Season in Paradise*, everything about the film, the way it was composed,

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The twilight of memory implies uncertainty. When light fades away, objects are not easy to delineate.

the way it was shot, the way the protagonists spoke, served as a reconstruction of memory. For Dindo it has nothing do with nostalgia or *passé*-ism. In his films one watches people remembering. In *A Season in Paradise* Breytenbach is meticulously reconstructing events in his own life for the cinemagoers.

Breytenbach chooses the realities of life as the aesthetic point of departure for his art, events of his life and himself. Dindo does likewise. Dindo says he is working on a long story that weaves through all his films. All the characters he portrays, belongs to his family and his to theirs. The fighters in Spain are his fathers and mothers. Max Frisch (1911-1991), is a father figure, Rimbaud and Breytenbach are his brothers. Dindo tries to see the world through their eyes, and to speak with their voices. The symbiosis with his characters is so strong that he does not need to make a conscious effort to include himself. Breytenbach also says that everything painted by him is related to him. When he paints the landscape, he paints himself. Every portrait is in some way, a self-portrait.

There seems to be some resemblance between the art movement, *New Realism*, which Breytenbach follows and Dindo's views that film is the medium best suited to getting close to the truth of a human being. Dindo understands the word "truth" in Rimbaud's sense of the word, as illumination. He feels that film can be understood literally as the art of biography. A documentary film can present eyewitness reports, show documentation and places, use voices and music. A documentary allows you to entice a person, to get close to him and express the complexity of his truth in a variety of ways. Although they are drenched with imaginative passages, Breytenbach's travelogues can be compared with the documentary medium used by Dindo. For Dindo human intelligence is essentially nothing other than memory and forgetting is a form of unconsciousness and cowardice. Only people, who would rather not know, forget. They are afraid of themselves. Wanting to remember is a form of resistance. Dindo wants to make people unforgettable and imperishable. In this way his films are also imperishable (Küng & Dindo 1992:5-35).

4.2. The Wall

In this section history as the memory of the stratified order as illustrated by Kafka's story, *The Great Wall*, will be highlighted. Since Breytenbach is engaged in a lifelong conversation with Kafka, turning to Kafka's writing will be apt, to illuminate Breytenbach's confrontation with the stratified aspects of society. The power of the stratified memory system and the stratified space must be understood before one can understand the poetics of space and memory as imagination as drawings. A reading of the power structure is required because non-corporal punishment, the abstract and anonymous mechanism of the punitive system, has shifted emphasis from body to soul.

The stratification and binding of the order of Chinese society were caused by the transformation of the Chinese educational system. It was put in place fifty years before the building of the Great Wall when it was decided that architecture and the act of building construction were the most important forms of knowledge. The idea of a border, limitation or control, as manifested in the activities of the state memory system, is well illustrated in Kafka's short story, *The Great Wall of China*. When he wants to introduce us to the Great Wall (symbolising the stratified order) Kafka (1988:248) writes :

The news of the building of the wall had penetrated into this world – late, too, some thirty years after its announcement. The boy was standing with his father on the riverbank holding his hand. An unknown boatman – the boy knew all those who usually passed by, but this one was a stranger – had just told him that a great wall was being built to protect the Emperor. For it seemed that an infidel tribe, among them demons, often assembled before the imperial palace and shot their black arrows at the Emperor.

The Wall was built from the southeast and the southwest it came up in two sections that finally converged there. This principal of piecemeal construction was also applied on a smaller scale by both of the two great armies of labour, the eastern and the western. Gangs of some twenty workers were formed to accomplish a length, say, of five hundred yards of wall, while a similar gang built another stretch of the same length to meet the first. However, after the junction had been made, the construction of the wall was not carried on from the point, let us say, where this thousand yards ended; instead the two gangs of workers were transferred to begin building again in quite different neighbourhoods (Kafka 1988:235-247).

These blocks of wall left standing in deserted regions could be easily pulled down repeatedly by the nomads, especially as the nomad tribes, rendered apprehensively by the building operations, kept changing their encampment with incredible rapidity, like locusts, and so perhaps had a better general view of the progress of the wall than we, the builders.

In this story, Kafka indirectly criticises all forms of boundaries and control. The Chinese initiated the project of the Great Wall to protect them from the people from the north. In the story, they emphasise the aspect of being broken and they thus describe the building of the wall as a project that unfolds in a peculiar way that is never completed; the building of the wall thus becomes irrelevant. It is the resultant territorial demarcation that becomes all significant. This phenomenon is not unique to China. All states participate in such processes, some even taking it further by territorialisation of ideas to form a certain memory system. On an abstract level, the Wall illustrates the inherent necessity for the territorialisation of national unity, to sustain a memory system, which facilitates the navigation of the order. The memory system, as well as the order, which builds it, symbolises the ideal of closure. For China, the building of the Wall illustrates the closure (de Kock 1999:40).

The Maximum Section of the Central Prison in Pretoria is a surrounding ring wall, five to six metres high, with an inside court, and within that court the prison is situated. In the gate of the ring wall is a double gate. Two heavy steel gates on rollers, are electronically operated to prevent both opening simultaneously. This is controlled from the gate room. In the inner courtyard against the ring wall are the watchtowers that are manned day and night. Not coming from any particular spot, the light beams from these towers spreading along the surface of things, onto the prison and across the stonework of the walls. It is like a coating or a very faint film, but clear nevertheless, like an active resistance against the dark. In the absence of the full moon, spray lights are used to lighten up the courtyard. The building itself has a wood and iron door. Through the peephole, which Breytenbach often calls “the Judas eye” in this door, the warder peers out, before opening the latch. It is here that one passes through the entrance wall. There is a steel gate, a similar opening and another steel gate before one ascends a few steps to a higher level to be faced by yet another steel gate. When one has passed through the fourth gate, one finds oneself in section C. To enter the small side passage one has to pass through yet another locked gate. This makes six locks between the prisoner and the main courtyard. When one reaches Section C, the doors of the cell open into a passage. A window also opens onto this passage. There are vertical steel rods, with louvre slips between – a structure almost one metre above the walkway, and rising one metre high.

Some most important writings concerning incarceration came from Foucault’s pen. When he died of AIDS-related complaints in 1984 Foucault had become the most influential French philosopher since the Second World War. Foucault is the archaeologist of thought, a genealogist of power/knowledge and historian of the present and with his anatomical gaze he scrutinises madness, sexuality and power (Merquior 1985:2). His vividly readable studies of the origins of modern medicine, prisons, psychiatry and methods of classification have influenced contemporary historians, critics, and novelist. He attempted to identify the systems of power that we make to entrap ourselves. His important book, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, was published in 1977. Herein Foucault considers power. By reaching into the very grain of individuals, power touches their bodies and inserts itself into actions and

attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday life. Power, which can also be considered as a complex stratified memory system, is web-like. One can neither identify with it nor control its direction, nor ultimately can one impact on it any more than one can find the beginning and end of a spider's web. The analysis and questioning of the bowler-hatted society, and the struggle between power structures and negotiated freedom, are the continuous and permanent political tasks inherent in our way of living. The multiplicity of relations of force exercised within the fabric of society, is what Foucault sees as power. Everyone has a measure of power and the *locus* of this power is the human body. This is the actual reason for Foucault's interest in penology, the asylum and sexuality. For Foucault, genealogy is the unconditional analysis of the production and exercise of power. Power in the contemporary world is agent-less as it does not flow from one person, institution or sociological realm to another. This view would be too linear and too constricted. Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplication of relations of force immanent in the sphere in which they operate which constitute their own organisation. These are kept in place by sets of stratified memory.

In contrast with this idea of boundaries and control, as manifested in Kafka's short story and in the state memory system, Breytenbach uses memory as an aesthetic and revolutionary concept, embracing the constantly changing or moving spaces of reality. In the face of this pliant and imaginative reality the possibility of fixing, bordering and controlling seems to be out of the question.

The images of his prison drawings arise out of the artist's fantastic journey through the landscape of consciousness and memory. These images are placed in a space. It is a space of becoming, not only of the images, but also of the artist himself. This also includes the "reality" which encompasses him and the political and the social climate in which he finds himself. By using memory as an aesthetic concept, the images of incarceration convey a reality where things are intertwined. They become a binding of desire. Wings of insects, a

dead praying mantis and even snakes on corpses are linked together in a breathtaking process, nodding backwards in the direction of a complex process of becoming and desires the dismantlement of Apartheid.

The grotesque drawings, like the corpses in the coffin, infer elements of decay and the moments of the creative annihilation of the institutionalised memory system. The artist's position as revolutionary implies a sense of torment excited by the memory system built through the superstate, or the state, of a given order; it moves rather in the direction of the energetic flow of actions.

Breytenbach has painted many works depicting the hat. *T/15 (M-1)* depicts an exchange of different hats. *Ein Gespräch über Sehen (M-2)*, depicts the bowler hat. In *la Famille Sainte (M-3)* the hat hovers above the head of the black woman. In *les Poids (M-4)*, the painter's hat is burning.

The question that one has to ask is how to rid the world, not only of the people in the bowler hats,⁷⁰ but all other hats. Not those worn by Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977) or Laurel and Hardy, or those depicted by Magritte representing the questioning of modern consciousness, nor the hat worn by Sabina in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera's novel (1984), but the soft tailored hats worn by Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) or Mussolini. Those worn by the politicians in the regime of South Africa. The question we have to ask is in what way, can we free our ways of speaking and our actions, our hearts from the memory of the fixity of fascism?

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These hats are in fact chosen to explode the myth of power and its "uniform" dress.

4.3. Space between Walls: the labyrinth, the cell, the poetics of space and the void.

In the charting of societies that institutionalize prisons and in his “cratology” (Foucault’s theory of power) Foucault (1977:141) calls the legal system “expansionistic”. He is referring to the gradual and persistent invasion of the individual’s privacy and sense of identity in prison, where they carry out a routinised and systematic depersonalisation of the victim. Here the will to control life is understood as the will to freeze it to a point at which it becomes a petrified structure having its own life. The place of incarceration is the mechanistic structure where meaning is inserted through abstract dogmas, stratified memory systems and ideologies, which had called it into being in the first place. By that the mind of the incarcerated is subjected to the labyrinth. According to Dimitriu (1992:10), the labyrinth is a comprehensive, polyvalent symbol, associated with caves, tunnels, anthills and, at a deeper level, with the innards of living beings, monstrous, devouring stomachs or the womb, where digestion and gestations are permanently overshadowed by the risk of death. It is therefore, not fundamentally the physical reality of the place of confinement that appears to be inimical to the prisoner’s sense of identity; what is inimical is the psychological terror that is imposed on him. Albeit through the coercive structure of the prison enclosure itself.

4.3.1. Notes on the labyrinth.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1954), written by James Joyce (1882-1941), Stephan Daedalus is placed at the centre of the labyrinth, evoking the Greek myth of Daedalus, builder of the labyrinth for the Minotaur that escaped from it. Joyce’s character attempts to free himself from the bondage of the church, his country, his family and his loved ones. They imprisoned Breytenbach in two South African prisons for seven and a half years under the terms of the Terrorist Act, from 25 November 1975 to 20 December 1983. His prison drawings, poetry and memoirs appear not only to propose both radical restructuring, but also

to contain the quiet consolation of Buddhism or Taoism, which seems to mesh easily with a refined existential despair. In his cell, he rediscovered the complexity of the spirit as an aesthetic category and through contemplation, which he practiced in the zazen position, aspects, which seemed irrelevant, gained significance. Through this awareness he was able to feed his soul.

In the cell, Breytenbach or his alter self, which is called Don Espejeulo, the black one with the illusionary face, Panus, the one with broken wings, Jan Blom, the one with dead flowers in his headband, Lazarus, the white one in a winding-sheet and Bird, the guilty one, defending the very centre his own selfhood as he finds himself in the labyrinth (Viljoen 1993:46).

The measurement of Breytenbach's cell was approximately four metres wide and seven deep. Against the opposite wall was a built-in bench with a mattress. In some cells, his included, there was a lavatory. He moved away from the toilet and walked to a shining surface that served as a mirror on the opposite wall. As in Jean Cocteau's (1889-1963) *Orpheus Filius*, the shining surface became a further opening or entrance into another world. It could be seen as one revolutionary shard of identity of the man born somewhere between the hills on the road winding from Barrydale to Ladysmith from Amaliensteyn to Calitzdorp. Then the man, whom they stripped of his clothes when he entered the jail, emerged from the depth of the mirror, donned the head of the parade horse. This image that would later be captured in a painting can be compared with the Trojan horse, the Minotaur or the mirror of a Taurus, the figure of death living at the centre of the labyrinth of the place of abhorrence. To understand this place is something one does best once one has been declared a terrorist. Breytenbach wrote a poem to capture his experience in prison.

**When you are handed a bar of soap
and the warder with the fetid breath
tells you to wash your face**

then it is the late night
too many expressions and gestures of loved ones
from the nothingness
the light is snow
when the hangman looks at you
through the judas-eye
then the day breaks from night's belly
and your right wrist is tied to your left ankle
and you are taken down the corridor
of lost footfalls
like a crab on a leash
already a dead hat
to the yellow room
where neither light nor sound ever penetrates
just the articulation of flies
then the white sheet and a pencil
here with the final word scape
the noose from the pole and the shit hole in the floor
the howl dies a black flower in the mouth
oh people, death is but an anus
secreting life (Breytenbach 1996a:60)

Breytenbach later recaptured some of his emotions in an artwork used as band cover on *Mouir* (1983) (M-5). This work is a piece of visual paradox, executed in the seventies, during the ethos of Apartheid and terrorism. It positively bristles with terror foreshadowed with a sense of darkness already present. The Minotaur is an ancient figure deep in the consciousness of humanity. Out of the depths of our past, it had reemerged on the stage of memory. Half-man, half-bull. In the mind of Breytenbach it dominated the landscape of the place of incarceration. The Minotaur was out of its lair. It is the enigma at the heart of the modern age. For Camus, the Minotaur is a boredom that devours the vitality of the young. For Breytenbach it manifests itself rather as an image of incarceration. In modern times the roles have been reversed and the Minotaur is striking back. Because we have failed to transform

the animal inside our own labyrinth, the animal within is conquering us. Vengeance is unleashed. Breytenbach captures this process in the awesomeness of the Minotaur reflected in the frenzied contortions of the horseman, while three androgynous figures, having lost their senses, form the backdrop.

4.3.2. The poetics of memory-space (or the outcome of the labyrinth)

In analysing the effects of space on the artistic imagination, Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) (1996:10), uses two basic concepts, namely incarcerated space and the possibility of the poetics of that space. In this sense the space in the prison cell may be transformed into a metaphysical cell, where human atoms seek to become part of the vast interstellar space. Whereas the “habitable space”, which nourishes poetic creativity, the “hostile spaces” of hatred and bitterness stifle imagination by gradually destroying it and reducing it to nothingness. Being hostile and fixed in its very nature. The prison space offers extremely difficult conditions for the incarcerated imagination to unfold by itself. The prison-house is an aberration, because of its mechanistic structures. It is given meaning by the abstract body of doctrines, ideologies and memory systems that called it into being in the first place. Yet there are hostile implications of emptiness in a space which is, at the same time, “crowded with voices of the condemned singing their death songs, mingled with the interrogators’ voices whispering, ‘write’” (Breytenbach 1984d).

It was in his cell that Breytenbach first experienced the infinite possibilities of limited space. The presence of one person crowded the room. Two choked it. He found it extraordinary, even in the midst of his experience, to feel his feet swinging from the bed to the ground or to fill his lungs expanding and contracting with the air he breathes. He found it extraordinary that on some mornings, just after he had woken up, as he bent down to tie his shoe, he was flooded with happiness so intense, happiness so naturally and harmoniously at one with his

world, that he could feel himself alive in the present. He experienced the complexity of his environment as an aesthetic quality.

Then the void of Breytenbach's penal universe teems with life, with images large and small. The prisoner's concentration on natural minutiae is one of his strategies for coping with incarceration. The poetic miniature that haunts his hostile space is that of the ant. The prison house (or the anthill of the living) is not only inhabited by real ants, moths and other insects, but also by other (human) ants, who are anonymously carrying on their hopeless lives, while faced with their own deaths, both physical and spiritual. There is a strong will to invest the meaningless with meaning and to give meaning to suffering. Another significance may be attached to the concept of ordinariness. It possesses its own aesthetic implications. Here, the aesthetics of ugliness is transfigured, because, through a sense of heightened awareness within the enclosed space, Breytenbach rediscovers the complexity of the ordinary as an aesthetic category. In a state of disciplined meditation cultivated while in prison, Breytenbach could perceive unsuspected significance in things that, as a rule, no one gives any importance, but regard as part of the banality of everyday life. He learnt that, if the prisoner can "feed his soul" on the rediscovered complexity of his apparently denuded environment, he managed to survive. In making this "discovery", he succeeded in moving beyond suffering, and this became a springboard for new awareness. It became a coping mechanism in its own right. In the essay, *Painting and Writing for Africa* (1991), Breytenbach (1996a:63) comments on this with the words: "Creation is the making of death ... there is a difference between exploring the void and adding to the emptiness".

4.3.3. The Void.

Meditating on the number of years he had to spend in prison need not be a constant reminder

of slaughtered time only. It might have recalled the nine years that the first Zen patriarch had spent freely facing the wall of a cave. The number nine has magical connotations for Breytenbach. It denotes Buddhist infinity. It is also the number of years of Bodhidharma's iconoclastic encounter with the Chinese Emperor, Wy Wu, whose merits he denied when he held the First principle of Buddhism as vast emptiness. This is the true spiritual space, the Zen acceptance of the void, which rises to the diurnal breathing exercise.

The concept of the void, which embraces both the philosophies of the carnal and the spiritual, plays an important role in Zen Buddhism. It implies such notions as stillness and emptiness (*thahata* – suchness). A complex reading of the notion of *thahata* helps one to understand the prison space. It is the empty space as one in which the perception of prison as damnation is coupled with its very opposites. In the void, the *thahata* or such-ness of things are discovered. This state of flux leads to an experience of the world in which one move beyond dualities, past a need for permanence and structuring. In this state of being, the human becomes a mere knot or a connection. Through memory, he might project certain perceptions into the future. For a paraphrase of *thahata* one could look at a proposal by Dogen (1992:95).

Bodhidharma said: 'Each mind is like wood and stone'. Mind here spoken of is the such-ness of mind, it is the mind of the whole earth; therefore it is the mind of self and other. Each mind, of all people on earth, as well as the enlightened ones in all worlds, and the celestial and dragons and so on, is *wood and stone*. There is no other mind outside of this.

The meaning of this becomes apparent when Dogen calls such-ness a shared condition of all entities, of the self and others. This is the intrinsic nature of things to which Breytenbach (1984d:99) refers. In prison, the very notion of emptiness is sublimated. Emptiness becomes a very rich heritage from the sea, a habitable space full of possibilities, such as a "memory of sky" lying hidden in an empty inkwell. Death becomes harmless "just a continuation or a slight modified rhythm, a deeper space". The very notion of emptiness is thus sublimated in

which “the very rich heritage from the sea and death itself becomes harmless”(Breytenbach 1984d:300). This is the space of what one might call the spiritual realm, the Zen acceptance of the void. The prisoner Breytenbach is inhaling and exhaling the flow of emptiness during the daily yoga breathing exercise, thus taming emptiness itself. (1984d:297).

The void teems with sounds of life. There are sounds, images, birds, wind and the multiplication of nothingness. Breytenbach is familiar with the creative potential of “centripetal emptiness and its organic insecurities”. There is no solidity in this structure, not even a rearrangement or dismantlement. Thus true structure awakes and here no boundaries exist. Everything is in process as moments of thought and this process is the floating form of life. The absence of structure serves as an indication of inner freedom and the acceptance of the uncertainties of life as part of freedom. What one must be aware of is the radical otherness that this infers. It is an implication that places one on the track of the non-substantial (non-fixity), which is defined through a continual process of birth.

In the surrealist fictional piece, *Between the Legs*, Breytenbach (1990a:11) writes about the death of God. According to him the death is caused by thoughtless manhandling by humans and their lack of attention to him. In this regard Breytenbach writes: “... People didn’t look after him, to the extent that he might have been no more than an image in People’s mouths”. In this piece Breytenbach illustrates a certain image of presence. The story continues:

I ask People what he did with God’s corpse. We spirited it away into the earth so as to beef up the subsoil, he says. Does it make the plants grow, I ask? No, the ground in these parts has a weird white taste but there is a sweet-water fountain not far off. People is wont come here to be reminded that there’s something he ought to remember. Then he has a sip of water and promptly forgets himself in the clear liquid. I tell People not to worry, that there is no sense in thinking about what has been forgotten, that there may have been Nothing to remember in the

first place (which naturally sends the mind frantically fumbling for presence), and anyway that the subconscious is quite old enough to take care of itself. I also point out that water is the soul of the mirror.

That the people come to drink of the water to remember points to the fact that there might be nothing to remember and that the intellect grabs on to some form of presence in which we are interested. What this implies is that man, in the face of nothingness or the void, tries to grasp an image or a form that he can invoke to remember his own presence.

4.4. Space in the prison drawings, the drawings as war machines.

Remembering the Czech writer, Kundera (1980:3) we note that the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. Memory can become a category of existence and an anarchical act to disable power. Breytenbach spent two years in solitary confinement, without suffering severe intellectual or emotional scars or experiencing spiritual disintegration. Thoroughly aware of the spiritual dangers confronting the self, he disciplined mind and soul. He embodied the pervasive fear that he was subject to. The essence of this was presented as drawings of memory, poems or confessions, which are not only narratives of persecution, interrogation and incarceration, but also a meta-fictional excursion into the internal exile of the artist. Much of the impact of Breytenbach's drawings lies in its graphic confirmation of the prisoner losing his identity.⁷¹

During the time of incarceration the pressure Breytenbach felt from within to paint or to create images, at least became almost overwhelming. He managed finally to create and smuggle out

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The writer and artist Klossowski, is convinced that Foucault's goal was, like that of their mutual friend Gilles Deleuze, "the liquidation of the principle of identity". This implicates the de-centering of the Postmodern subject' (Macey 1993:xv).

to his wife, in Paris, about a dozen drawings, small, intimate drawings. They were counter-memories. These imaginative drawings (tools of the region of non-fixity) opposed the memory system of the stratified order. There were a few letters between Paris and Pretoria smuggled out and posted by the young warder, Groenewalt. Breytenbach wrote a moving letter to his wife:

Daar's hy Kleintjie,

Deur 'n indirekte roete het ek die moontlikheid — hoop ek — om 'n woordjie by jou te kry. As jy dit ontvang, sal ek graag daarvan wil weet. As jy in 'n volgende brief enige verwysing na die man van my tandarts (my kollega) kan inwerk, sal ek weet dat jy dit ontvang het. Maar moet niks verder sê nie.

Ek het ook die broer gevra om vir jou 'n paar krabbeltjies te laat kry — van hulle kan jy ook praat al sou dit gaan om dié van die man van my tandarts, dan sal ek weet hulle het veilig aangekom. Jy moet drie, of een uit vyf, neem vir jou versameling vir jou verjaarsdag. Ek soen jou baie sterk vir dié verjaarsdag, met die hoop dat ek self daar sal wees om dit te doen by die volgende een. Moenie dat hierdie tekeninge uitmekaar gaan nie. As ek uitkom sal ek graag, as hulle die moeite werd is, 'n boek daarvan wil maak. Jy mag natuurlik aan 'n paar mense wys, op voorwaarde dat daar nie gesê word waar hulle gemaak is nie. Jy mag ook, deur noukeurig daaruit te kies, die boekvertaling waarvan ek gepraat het, illustreer. As jy hulle verkoop, sal ons minstens 500 frank elk wil hê, en hulle behoort vir ons beskikbaar te bly vir reproduksies. Wys hul ten minste vir die vriend Mouffeteur (die Switserse teringlyer wat so swak skaak speel) en die vriend in die land van die koeie (Welz 1977:50).

His prison images were the products of solitude. Breytenbach's images work like memory. Images spill out of him at the speed of thought, each image coming from a different source. Sometimes a thousand images clamoured inside him at once. The din of the different images echoing through the maze of cells and corridors. These were portrayed in images of decapitation, copulation, mutilation and confinement. Others, almost as if in compensation, may be exercises in minute observation: a scuffed shoe, a folded blanket, a draped jacket, a

burnt note and an extinguished match. Somehow these modest images seemed more affecting than the more imaginary ones. Birds, too, were depicted, these being frequent self-tropes in his poetry. There were birds of passage. Birds of prey, lovebirds, birds unhindered in movement, birds in migration, caged birds, and jailbirds.

He set the dramatic situation, then selected the actors. He wrote the words *jouant aux quilles* (*life is not a game*) (M-6) at the top of the drawing paper. Breytenbach drew an old man, squatting, probably his grandfather, with the revolutionary three-finger sex. Wearing a bowler hat, the old man transports the viewer to the forbidden, which is the transgression of the identity of power. Repeatedly Breytenbach drew the three-finger sex, a repetition that manifests itself as memory. Standing next to the old man, is someone like a Boer general, displaying the vulnerability of his own sexuality.

In another drawing *Cadavre Equis. Memoirs Ce Pise/Campo Santo (Exquisite Cadaver. Memories of Pisa/Campo Santo)*(M-7), he depicts the darkness of bones and a woman with a swollen belly lying in a coffin (in Traini's fresco it is a man). Next to her, another coffin and a skeleton who, in the moments of decay are being metamorphosed into a bird. This drawing is based on the famous fresco, *The Triumph of Death*, by Francesco Traini (c1321-1363) at the Camposanto in Pisa. Elegantly costumed men and women on horseback have suddenly come upon three decaying corpses in open coffins and are shocked. In still another drawing Ettiene le Roux is sitting with crossed legs in a box (M-8).

Breytenbach is in conversation with the ancestors and draws Napoleon, (M-9) D.H. Lawrence at the billiard table, (M-10) and Charles de Gaulle (M-11). Daily he talks with his companion, the dog of pain. Breytenbach depicts himself holding onto his own decapitated head. Accompanying him are the hatted man, two dwarfs, a woman with bared breasts and the execution of a hooded prisoner. The drawing carries all the innuendoes of a complex drama.

(M-12). Nevertheless, it is on the subconscious level that the lessons he has assimilated from Goya surfaces, through his own *Los Caprichos*.

During 1984, Adriaan van Dis, the Dutch writer, had an interview with Breytenbach in Amsterdam in which Breytenbach said the following:

Als Yolande, mijn vrouw mij in de gevangenis kwam opzoeken, trok zij altijd bonte kleren aan. Rode, groene en gele bloempatronen, criante shawls and flonkerende kettingen. Zij wist dat haar kleurrijk bezoek een lavenis voor mijn ook zou zijn. Woorden door een spreekvervormende buis waren dan even overbodig. Het werd een stil opslurpen van kleuren achter glas. Een half uur extase van tinten.

'n Selwoner ken twee maniere van droom. Hallusinasie of kopvreet, 'n verskynsel wat die legionnaires in Noord-Afrika ook geken het. *Le cafard* – 'n soort woestijn gekheid. Dit oorval mens tussen de grens van wakker word en slaap. Kleur het dikwels deur hierdie drome gebreek. Ik zag eruit als een pasgeboren kameleon, die dieren zijn doorsigtig bij hun geboorte (Van Dis & Breytenbach 1984:22).

(When my wife, Yolande came to visit me in prison she always wore colourful clothes. Red, green and yellow flowery patterns, silk shawls and bright chains. She knew that her colourful visit would be refreshing. Words through a speaking-tube would then be unnecessary. It became lapping up of colours behind glass. One half hour of ecstatic tints.

A cell inhabitant knows two ways of dreaming. Hallucination or mind-gorging as the *légionnaires* in North-Africa knew it. *Le cafard* – a sort of desert madness. It overtakes you on the border between being awake and falling asleep. Colour often broke through.

The place of incarceration is deeply connected to graphic depictions. There might even be the wish to leave a mark of his individuality of the walls of his cell. The *memoir* or prison

drawing might also be part of this wish. In prison they did not allow Breytenbach to paint. The prison authorities did not allow Breytenbach to see colours and he fled into a nightmare world of monochrome greys and browns. *Caca d'Oi* (goose-shit)[sic] is the French word for the overriding colour of the incarcerated. His wish to make images became overwhelming. In his despair to remember an image, he placed the imaginative image on the tip of his tongue. He depicted this act in the drawing of an insect man, double bodied and multi-legged, doing a gig in the mouth opening (M-13). In the nightmare universe of grey and brown and *caca d'oi* he imagined crusaders on their way to the Holy Land. He saw a whale washed-out on a beach. Breytenbach often transcended the small space of the cell by an imaginative trip on the back of a bird. Then again he returned to the realities of his surroundings and drew men lifting weights in the courtyard of the prison (M-14).

4.4.1. Space in the prison drawings.

In some prison drawings we find a space that is surrealistic, as if Breytenbach is remembering the lessons of de Chirico, who emptied objects themselves of their usual associations and set them in new and mysterious relations (Picon 1995:77). To empty the objects of his compositions of their natural emotional significance, de Chirico painted tailors' dummies as human beings, and used statues, plaster heads, rubber gloves and the like, depending entirely on juxta position and the formal qualities of his picture space to create the disturbing qualities, which belong to certain dream situations (Osborne 1979:237).

Breytenbach draws a landscape containing de Chirico's pillars and sets a billiard table in their midst, with three (possible) convicts standing around it. One is balancing a cockroach (reminding us of the "Metamorphosis" of Kafka) on the palm of his hand, the other standing by. The third is playing the game with a *sambok* and focus on shooting a dead cockroach. Another cockroach is scurrying away to the corner of the table (M-15). As an indication of

the deprivation of their surroundings, the convicts are drawn with closed eyes.

In the prison drawings, Breytenbach continually works with the closing of the orifices, thereby inferring the loss of the senses. *Espèce de (the species)*(M-16) is an example of such work. Other works like, *ek was ook hier vir niks (I was also here for nothing)* (M-17), depicts erotic encounters. The most disturbing commentary on space is probably to be found in the drawing *der Beobacher (The viewer)* (M-18), where the place of incarceration is contained in a square box covered by a dome with insects crawling all over it. The numbers of the cells have been put on the sides of the square and the man with the soft tailored hat is, as always, present. A small dog of “pain” is entering the space and moving in the direction of the man, while another is lurking around the corner.

These are the subliminal lessons of alienation and the impersonal that Breytenbach transposes from de Chirico into his own paintings and drawings, leaving his viewers with the uneasy sense of not being able to explain what they are seeing. With his paradoxical approach to life, Breytenbach is able to take both the transgression of Dada,⁷² and the metaphysical approach to space found in de Chirico, the work of the true precursor of Surrealism, and transform an own sense of space into his work. De Chirico’s influence is diametrically opposed to that of Dada. There is nothing here of the aggressiveness of anti-art, nothing of the unbounded demands of Marchel Duchamp (1887-1968). As a tribute to de Chirico’s technical innovations, his degree of intelligence and his dreamworld, Breytenbach transforms his cell into a metaphysical place and thus imagines a way of not becoming part of the vast interstellar space. Breytenbach conjures up a dream style of his own.

Breytenbach is in conversation with the spectrum of Surrealism, not only with de Chirico but also with Magritte. Magritte refuses to follow the path of automatism, advocated by Breton

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Dadaism is an European artistic and literary movement (1916-1923) flouting conventional aesthetic and cultural values by producing works marked by nonsensical and incongruous features.

among other of the Surrealists, which was designed to librate imagery from the unconscious by the suppression of rational control. This point of departure of the Surrealist is yet another argument against fixity. Over the years Breytenbach has meticulously chosen to associate with movements that oppose fixity.

4.4.2. The war machine:

The philosophical map of Deleuze and Guattari give us a conceptual point of departure regarding the prison drawings as war machines. The war machine seems irreducible to the State apparatus, to be outside its sovereignty and before its law. It comes from elsewhere. The State can only have a war machine of its own through the erection of a military power, which can stand in stressful relationship with the State. Could it be that it is at the moment the war machine ceases to exist, conquered by the State, that it displays to the utmost its irreducibility, that it scatters into thinking, loving, dying, or creating machines, which have at their disposal vital or revolutionary powers capable of challenging the conquering State?

Breytenbach's disruptive prison drawings are concerned with exposing the energy dispersed by the State. The war-machine-prison-drawings are a manifestation of mutant co-ordinates in society. Co-ordinates are the strata of society, which cannot be bound into the memory system of the State.

In an attempt to control these "machines of desire", intensified attempts by the State to induce ordering and stratification are introduced. The aim is the ultimate creation of a perfectly administered memory system to serve the order. Countering this, Breytenbach's prison drawings infer disruption. This applies not only for the viewer, who as servant of the state carries the seeds of fascism and judgementalism in his mind, but also for the State itself. It

must be remembered that they did not allow Breytenbach to draw or paint in prison. He was, however, allowed to write.

Scenes of decapitation, maiming, incarceration and coupling, a tattered shoe (M-19), a folded blanket (M-20), a draped jacket (M-21), a burnt note (M-22) and a composition of an empty packet of *Gauloises* cigarettes (M-23), an apple (M-24) or an orange (M-25), and a used match (M-26) provide a network of bindings, and unbindings from which an extended view of society comes forth. All these carry within themselves that which undermines the fixed memories of a given society. In his cell Breytenbach draws a dog (M-27). Breytenbach has his own association and system for drawing the dog. It does not carry the conventional meaning of loyalty and vigilance. For him dogs are synonymous with pain.

As in the case of Goya, who created his *Los Caprichos*, Breytenbach makes his own series of prison drawings in which political injustices of nightmare quality overshadow the satirical content. Goya's drawings show us how prostitutes and fools, pimps and nincompoops, burglars and numskulls interact with each other, with malevolent birds and animals as spectators. Breytenbach's depictions are scenes of decapitation, copulation, death and a woman prostrate on a pig and, as always, the bowler hat. The drama goes to the *denouement*. Breytenbach's own "*Los Caprichos*" are part of a process of deterritorialization, is a process of looking back in the direction of a complex process of becoming. The hellish space of the cell is transformed into a metaphysical space where he practises his observance lest he become part of vast interstellar space. The movement from desire to disruption to the next idea-image, this is the tactic Breytenbach uses constantly and his viewer is propelled by means of a mechanism of unsettlement in which views and perceptions are shaken. The act of drawing is the unfurling of an unknown landscape that closes immediately behind the viewer. Through the process of repetitions, the prison drawings become a journey to an unknown landscape; a metamorphosis of consciousness.

4.5. In memory of the ancestor:

During 1994, Breytenbach (1996a:162) gave a lecture in Rotterdam. He said:

If you listen carefully you will hear, even in the movement of my hand, quotes and snippets of sighs and cries from the ancestors as from contemporaries.

The process of territorial demarcation was not unique to countries like China. All states participate in this process. In the case of Breytenbach, the Apartheid state, the institutionalized memory system of the Afrikaner, had taken on appalling proportions. In Goya's Spain, with the support of the absolute monarchy, the Roman Catholic Church, seriously shaken in every part of Europe, owing to the religious reforms (Lutheran, Calvinist), consolidated its power. Its gates locked against Protestantism or any other forms of spiritual worship, Spain, for a long period, became the stronghold of the most ferocious Jesuitism. It represented a kingdom of intolerance, oppression and superstition, in which, under the sinister threat of the Inquisition, one of the most bloody dramas of people played itself out. Many intellectuals were called before the Tribunal of the Inquisition, their heads covered by the caps worn by those burnt at the stake. Holding green candles in their hands, which were considered symbols of hope, they put them to death for the offence of having read the books of the Encyclopaedist. Spain felt the need of a Dante Alighieri(1265-1321), as Italy had once done, of a Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) of Rotterdam, as the Netherlands, had once done. Spain ultimately required a Voltaire (1694-1778),⁷³ a Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78)⁷⁴, to help rid itself of the Witches' Sabbath that had dragged it back to the Middle Ages. However, as it had done none of these, as a Cervantes, the one-armed man from Lepanto, who had created the sad story of "The Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance" had come too early, Spain created

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Voltaire was a French philosopher and writer.

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Rousseau was a Swiss-born French philosopher, essayist, novelist and musician best known for his theories on social freedom and societal rights, education and religion.

Francisco José Goya y Lucientes. Goya, the great revolutionary of painting and an ancestor of the main trends in modern art, whose soul broke loose, after he became deaf (Florea 1975:16). By 1792, the illness that Goya suffered from had reached a turning point. In some of his self-portraits there is a look of Beethoven. However, deafness played a part in his life, which makes it comparable to that of Jonathan Swift (1667-1745). Goya too, turned to satire, and satire led him to a vein of fantasy altogether deeper and more terrible than any satirical reference ever recorded. His head was filled with deep abysses, peopled with dim noises and fearful fantasies. Deaf, and with his mind haunted by hellish visions, it was only now that Goya discovered the real face of Spain. He was living in *Quinta del Sordo* (*The House of The Deaf*).

In Goya's terrible isolation, a nightmarish universe began to take shape, peopled by phantasmagoric creatures, monsters, witches, a universe in which man was the victim. The body of works that resulted consists of eighty plates, each a combination of etching and aquatint. In them are traces of Bosch, Bruegel even Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), and certainly Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-78). Right through the Middle Ages minds were haunted by fantastic imaginings and very often art and literature reflected such frames of mind. The chimeras in the Gothic cathedrals, the processions of monster and hellish creatures in the universe rendered by Bosch, the grotesqueness and obtrusiveness of Bruegel's engravings, the bizarre oddity of certain engravings such as *Melancholy* by Dürer, the scenes of the Northern Walpurgis Night by Hans Baldung Grien (1484/5-1545). All are evidence of a hyperbolic interpretation of reality and of an emphasis on the absurd side of life in which the fantastic plays a part. The fantastic is that which opposes the dogma that is fixed.

Breytenbach was introduced to the work of Goya and Bosch in The Prado in Madrid on a first visit to Spain after he left South Africa as a young man. By 1967 Breytenbach had written *Die Huis van die Dowe*. Even in the late sixties, by using gross metaphors and images, he realized that resistance in the form of poetry could be regarded as an obscene intellectual challenge.

For Goya and Breytenbach himself, the whole of experience, right down to the lowest and most private level of all, became equally pressing and equalling the subject of art. From the start of his artistic development, Breytenbach chose to nurture his imagination with lessons from both these painters, to which he added his experience the French intellectual world. He took up his stance with fellow painters like Reiner Lucassen, Pieter Holstein, Roger Raveel, Ettiene Elias and Spike Huismans against abstraction and he moved into the grotesque world of New Realism (Galerie Espace 1996:29). Fired with revolutionary ideals, he steeped his mind in Marxism. The concepts of decay and the birth of life arising from decomposition, resulted from this involvement. He also began an intense dialogue with Bacon, becoming involved in the whole series of spasms. These are the aspect of love, vomiting and excrement. The body always tries to escape through one of its organs to rejoin the flat surface, the material structure and the cry. Breytenbach held dialogue with the Existentialists, like Sartre, in their involvement with the Algerian question and the birth of Black Consciousness, under the influence of Fanon. He practiced Zen Buddhism, forming from it certain aesthetic concepts that emerged in his revolutionary political thinking and in his *Ars poetica*. And he becomes the artist who is constantly involved with movements of images through landscapes erected by consciousness.

4.6. (Zen) memory-mirror and its reflection of life and death during incarceration:

These two are intimately linked, the mirror and memory and both can operate simultaneously (Breytenbach 1986:14).

In a lecture, *A Reading of Place*, delivered in Paris during 1994, Breytenbach (1996a:161) said:

Arrested during a clandestine visit to paradise and sentenced for ‘terrorism’, I entered South Africa’s prison world as if traversing a mirror. This as the true heart of the country, the belly of the beast, a parallel universe complete with its own colours, smells, sights and sighs, myths, stories, dreams, relationships. The

language was both hackneyed and in constant metamorphosis. Death House, the Abattoir – all these walled cities of incarceration became blurred and concentrated in my mind as *The Place*. *The Place* also grew on the page. Not as if there were any such things as exorcism. Prison is the crucible of unmaking. *The Place* taught me the cold and splendid lesson that survival comes at the price of feeding small morsels of oneself to death.

In the T'ang dynasty, at the close of the seventh century by Western reckoning, Fa Tsang was invited to the palace of Empress Wu to expound the doctrines of Hiva Yen Buddhism. This he did through a demonstration involving a room, whose floor, ceiling and walls were completely lined with mirrors, in the centre of which he places a statue of Buddha. In each mirror an image of Buddha was projected together with the images in every other mirror. Holding a small crystal ball in his hand, Fa Tsang illustrated how all the mirrors and their images were thrown back, each in turn being reflected in each of the mirrors, ad infinitum. Not only was he attempting to illustrate the reciprocal inter-fusion of all things, but he wished to evoke a sense of the dependent co-origination of each object in turn.

This mutual-arising⁷⁵ provides a further ground for disregarding the isolation of causes, a view expressed in the art, literature and philosophy of Breytenbach “everything may be transformed into anything else, since nothing is, in reality, anything. Language is history which looks at herself in the mirror” (Breytenbach 1995:335). That which alights on the surface of the memory-mirror gives the space for the “knotting” of an image, a thought or a becoming which is gathered in that brief second. The knotting is an endless network, where succession of metamorphoses and concepts are in constant communication with each other. The memory-mirror is a radical space of sensation, which encloses a space of energetic relations between things, indicating that a chair, table, roof, mountain, cloud, as well as oneself, are elements of an own spirit. In this way, things serve as mirrors imaging and reflecting one another. The

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A “trans-actional” view of the world according to which our consciousness “produces” the universe which, in turn, brings about our consciousness.

central question opened up by this line of thought is the problemization of reality. The mirror must be thought of as part of a constantly changing landscape. Images, intensities of awareness and political activities should be seen as changing and metamorphosing deeds, caught in the multiplicity of reality. This free-flowing process implies that any hope of a stasis will be destroyed.

In contrast to the stratified order that stultifies memory into a system of remembering, Breytenbach experiences memory as imagination. Memory as imagination is a recapturing of events that requires reinterpretation. What is important here is to note the radical difference being suggested. It is a proposal which places the human being and the things that surround him on the plain of non-substantiality, like that which floats. In other words that which alights on the surface of the memory-mirror is subject to a constant process of birth (de Kock 1999:106).

During incarceration, daily, at a fixed time, Breytenbach would go on his knees to start his Sisyphean task. This entailed the making of his floor into a mirror, which could capture and return his face and which would immediately be walked over and sunk back into greyness. He invented an *alter ego*, Don Espejuelo, literally meaning, “the little lark of the mirror”, who became his closest companion in the cell. In a disparate attempt of memorization, he drew a mirror and placed a depiction of the decapitated head of Yolande on the dressing table. It is difficult to remember the beloved during the time of incarceration. The bowler-hatted man is reflected in the mirror. Another faceless one peers through the bars at the intimate scene in the cell, where the nude Breytenbach is bending down to fasten a shoe (M-28).

The prisoners in the cells at the main entrance of Section C exercised daily for a few hours in the walled-in exercise yard in the form of a small courtyard without lawn or flowers. More or less ten yards further down the passage was the gallows room. Breytenbach’s cell was next

to this place of execution. The place of execution or of the rope songs, lies more or less ten yards further on. Every time Breytenbach went out to exercise in the courtyard, he took his memories with him and, in his absence, his cell emptied. On returning, he had to reinitiate the process from the beginning. It required true spiritual discipline to stabilize his equilibrium. In that moment the door opened, in that moment that he had to regain control over the void, his spirit fluttered around in wordless panic. On entering the cell he stepped into another dimension. It was as if he was taking an endless journey into the labyrinth, to the very heart of the dark labyrinth, where the condemned, all through the night until sunrise, when they are led to the gallows, sing the “rope songs”.

In an interview with the Dutch newspaper, *NRC Handelsblad*, Breytenbach remarked to the interviewer, Herman de Conick (1983:44) that one execution took place once a week. There were always seven days between the executions. December and January are quiet times, but the rest of the year saw about two hundred executions, up to seven persons being hanged at one time. Seven days before an execution the condemned start singing the “rope songs”, endlessly, day and night.

It is significant that the restless chant of the condemned prisoners moved Breytenbach to compassion, but also to intensely self-reflective speculation on what it might be like to be hanged. Together with this, a feeling of guilt at participating, if only by listening to the slam of the trapdoor, in the execution. He was so disturbed that he pleaded to be distanced from the chanting – “my nights are populated and punctuated by the terrible outpourings in songs of the so-called ‘condemned’ or ‘ropes’. I wrote one day a desperate plea ... going in my words on my knees, asking to be removed elsewhere because I couldn’t stand this stench of death” (Breytenbach 1984:46).

Like a mandala or a nimbus, the rhythmic repetition of decay would form patterns, which

would hover over his head. And the decayed began walking again. They became more human than phantoms and they began sweating in their very humanness. Like one of the dying, the sweat streamed from Breytenbach's skin as he slept. He woke dripping and his dreams were filled with sickly repetitions, which placed themselves in front of his narrow bed. He remembered and drew the image of the kneeling, imploring Bruegel (M-29), receiving arrows in his back. While the rope songs are being sung: *We are the wind and we are the birds and the singing of weighted ropes*, there was a constant dripping of images of delusion into his memory. To listen to these songs is to recognize the patterns and repetitions and, through the patterns, repetitions and clustering of themes, the images appear on the horizon. It is in the absence of God, in this house of aberration, in a moment of wordless fear, that the inmate started drawing.

And when the outlines of the phantom world inhabiting Breytenbach's apocalyptic cell began again, in the same order, to the same rhythm, their breathless steps appear on the horizon. He drew a grotesque image of a figure; he sorted through the lines as a bird does seeds in its gizzard. Every line must be perfect and he formed the image with his saliva, finally, spitting from his mouth Shiva/ Shava, wearing a rosary of skulls around her neck, indicating a release from the worldly. In her one hand she is holding a decapitated head and in the other a sword. The howling dog of pain lifts its head and howls at the skull, serving as a bird perch. Shiva is preparing to dance the dance of life and death on the two corpses depicted in the drawing of his beloved lying in a bed of tree branches (M-30).

"The Place taught me the cold and splendid lesson that survival comes at the price of feeding small morsels of oneself to death," Breytenbach wrote. Life and death are recurrent motifs in Breytenbach's writing. It is a notion which constantly alights itself on the memory-mirror of his mind. One of the images he uses in his drawings to address death is the dance of Shiva (M-31) In *The Double Dying of an Ordinary Criminal*, Breytenbach (1984e:24-26) writes about the sea kaffirs [sic]:

Here and there among the rippling and sharply whispering sugarcane they erected rudimentary single-roomed temples for their gods, the inner walls decorated with bright representations: often the swarthy mother god, Kali, she who also at times assumes the aspects of Parvati or Sarasvati on the winged throne of a swan, or that of Shakti – the bird, companion and *alter ego* of Shiva the destroyer.

Shiva's "be not afraid" gesture could be interpreted as pointing out that the apparition, the world as experienced through the senses, is another form of Maya, one of the "million masks" of God. Why should incarceration as one of the "million masks" of this deceptive existence be feared? Spiritual observance and highly creative acts could transform the death-in-life experience to life-in-death (Buscop 1993; Zimmer 1946 and Douglas & Slinger 1989:374). Breytenbach invokes Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom in 1984 with the following words:

I invoke thee, I concentrate on thee, I salute thee,
Come onto my tongue and never leave me again
may my intellectual faculties never go astray
may my errors not weigh unduly on my becoming
Give that I be freed from the vicissitudes of life
In time of peril, may my spirit not go mad
may my intelligence function without obstacles.

In remembrance of "Kali dancing on Shiva/Shava," he draws Shiva/Shava. The words at the top of the drawing read: "*par ses mouvements Durga (Kali) redonne la vie au cadavre de Shiva/Shava – d'après une peinture tantrique du dixhuitième siècle, de Kangra*". Freely translated, this would mean: "through her movements Durga (Kali) restores life to the corps of Shiva/Shava." According to a Tantric drawing of Kangra dating back to the eighteenth century, "Shiva/Shava" is the juxtaposition of the opposing figures, Shiva and Sarasvati. "Shava" means "death" or "corpse"; and "Shiva" ruler over "death" and "life".

4.6.1. The Dance:

The dance implies that there is nothing static, nothing abiding, but only the flow of a relentless process, with everything originating, growing, decaying and vanishing. This wholly dynamic view of life of the individual and of the universe is one of the fundamental conceptions of Hinduism.

Death is neither static nor limited. It is a movement against fixity. Death is a process. The mutual parts and hollows of the body serving as the holder or point of reference for life, these start fermenting, disintegrating into richer possibilities. The possibilities become boundless, resolving into limitless degeneration. Death, which is concealed, should not be confused with life and slides away. It is set free; if we could anthropomorphize it as a bird, for instance, then we might say that it could now stretch its wings and glide off, where and how it wished. In the place of incarceration we find the folds of life and death are interwoven. This coherence is a sign of the seamlessness, in which the smooth and treacherous shifting from life to death are concealed. Breytenbach a thinker, writer and painter of movement, is at home in this treacherous state of flux.

4.7. Fragments of identity:

“Breytenbach’s determination to refuse a specific identity reveals just how dependent regimes are on fixed identities, on reliable, identifiable (and manageable) civil subjects. Breytenbach survives, or, in his terms ‘un survives’ his experience of imprisonment and interrogation, both by paradoxically accepting his captive’s insistence upon his stable identity during the experience and by radically refusing such an identity in his subsequent written accounts. In South Africa, the entire political and legal system, aided and abetted by the police and prison authorities, was engaged in playing the ‘reality game’ of constituting a just and democratic society, where everyone abides by the rule of law and where individuals with intact identities

can lead fulfilled lives, though this was blatantly not so” (Rechwitz 1988:205-213). This conventional idea of identity is based on the existence of a structure, which remains more or less the same throughout life. This teleological structure of the self and life is generally shattered by the prison experience and is thus proven not to be illusory.

To emphasize the utter destruction of his own selfhood from the very moment he was put in prison and had his personal belongings taken away from him, one simple phrase from Breytenbach was enough: “I was dead” (Breytenbach 1984d:13). Throughout *Confessions*, prison is referred to as “a place of death” and it never allows the reader to forget that the purpose of detaining and grilling and convicting people and then holding them, is to disorientate them, to destroy their sense of self. The solutions lay, to all intents and purposes, in the fact that in prison he, the narrator, gained a new insight into the nature of identity, of life, and of structures in general. What constitutes life for Breytenbach at that level, is both a deeper and humbler: rhythms, routines, elements of this understanding and experience of himself and the environment; moments of life which make one weaker but, as always, within the weakness the strength lies.

Having always played a game of shifting identities, which deterritorialize the fixed structures of society, the “terrorist” becomes intensely aware of the multitude of personae lying hidden in his identity. In his schizoid role as “an albino in a white country,” an instance that reveals himself lies in the following passage: When a warden asked him who he in actual fact was, Breytenbach pretended not to be quite sure. A metaphysical question admittedly, but he took the risk of saying “yes” to one of the identities. The irony is explicitly directed at the warden’s unquestioning and complacent belief in labeling. There is, however, also an implicit mockery on Breytenbach’s part of his own programmatic internal questioning of the “skin-encapsulated self,” as if it were a real problem for the Zen Buddhist who knows that the ego is but an illusion.

Breytenbach became an expert at surviving in prison. He bartered a ration of tobacco in exchange for fresh fruit, pinches pen and paper from the accountant's office, and thus managed to write in order to keep his mind occupied, learnt to steer clear of quarrels between prisoners and to read the signs when to expect a shakedown by the authorities.

Playing with his own identity could also take on more exteriorized forms. That became evident from his listing of all the other names he seemed to consider appropriate for defining the various circumstance he found himself in. Also that which called forth the different frames of mind he had experienced. Thus Breytenbach may refer to his own person as Dick, Antoine, Heryé, all of which represents various political aliases adopted by him in other contexts. Jean-Marc Galaska is the name under which he returned to South Africa in 1975; it is under this name that he finally got caught. Upon removal to prison he became Mr. Bird, the representative of all jailbirds. While in prison, he came to be known by various other names, such as Bangai Bird, the Professor, Professor Bird, these latter names being the forms according to which his less educated inmates addressed him. After his hair had been cut and his head shaven by the prison barber, so that he came to resemble a billiard ball, he called himself Billiard Ball. There was also a Jan Blom, an earlier poet-mask of his, as well as Don Espejeulo, "the knight of the mirror," who was responsibly for the metaphysical meditations of the prison book. All these personae had their common denominator in the trickster, whose taste for nominal transformations seems to point to the conclusion that there is no one person that can be named and in the process of naming be fixed for all eternity (Breytenbach 1984d:28).

In trying to escape labeling, Breytenbach actually fights for the freedom to be a heretic. And, in using these terms, he in fact issues a challenge to those conformists whom, complacent in their unquestioning acceptance of the prevailing outlook, would view such ascriptions as simply derogatory.

4.8. Memories of Yolande

Breytenbach, in the paper, *The Invisible Guest*, presented in Rotterdam during 1996(1996a:162), says:

Every poem is the memory of all poetry. Similarly, a site of creation (of transmission and transgression) is also always one of remembering.

Memory as a notion becomes utopian as it has to lead us from violence to better places, even a site as disparate as imagination. The creative act of memory is important. For the artists it is the way of survival. Writing poetry and remembering past events also became a way of survival for Breytenbach during the period of incarceration. In the collection of prison poetry, *Lewendood* (1985:21), in the poem, *Bubi/jy is die tussenganger*, he remembers Yolande and carries her in his throat during the night. When he forgets the beloved, he sketches a gruesome image of his Milady, as one with half-a-breast full of pox scars. For eight months she dies in his dreams. There are rumours that she is training to receive the rope of the gallows. For this event she will wear a waterproof panty and the seam of her dress will be caught at her knees as to catch the vulva, the womb and the ovaries. He hears the hammer on the coffin lid. It resembled the wing-beat of an owl, caught in light. In ('YK')(1984c:121) in *Ryliedjie van 'n bruidegom*, Breytenbach's memories of his wife become an imaginative poem, where he will know her by the *kohl* around her eyes, the carmine on her cheeks. He addresses her as his little desert buck, asking her to be a prop for his tent. He remembers being intimate with her and imagines stripping her wedding clothes revealing her sweet tattoos, then riding astride through the cleft toward heaven. During more clear moments he recalls a journey through Italy.

hey there

you with your smile in my ear

I should take you again, my nearly-French love,
all along the outlines of a Sung-period poem
along the misty slopes above Chamonix's ski-huts and abbeys
through the eleven-and-a-half kilometre long
tunnel beneath Mont Blanc
and out in a cascade of sunlight
on the crown of the world above the Val d'Aoste

and down the mountain zigzagging down the mountain
as far as the greened nearly eastern shades of Turin
for a hollow plate of anti paste and a carafe of wine
and then further with the Autostrade del Sol
with the sun a spot for the arrows in the rice fields
the cemeteries shining from the framed heroes
as far as old ox blood and ocher Bologna
build around the spider-hive of pillars
and the shadow-splattered gardens
to overnight with Bill and Patti and to celebrate the night
where a speckled antelope guard the green courtyard

further over smoke red Firenze and the spiraling hills of Sienna
as far as Rome of the ruins and the palms of dust
to drown in a cup of coffee
with a blood-red mouth
wonderful small and black like a wound
on the Piazza Santa Maria in Tratevere beneath
the bell tower next to the water-moon fountain

tell me, cara,

will we again call out *Thalassa* tomorrow and
will I again see your black eyes tomorrow
where the mirror nostrum message
see me laughing
on a free beach other side Ostia?

Breytenbach chose the name “Lotus” for his dusky-skinned Vietnamese wife, Ngo Thi Hoang Lien (Yolande), when he was writing a volume of poetry as “Lotus”. Their complex relationship reminds one of intimate relationships between other artists and lovers or of similar situations in which one’s love partner became an art object in the other’s artistic oeuvre. Kahlo and Diego Rivera (1886-1957) are one such example.

Artistically, Breytenbach has been continually engaged in dialogue with Kahlo. He refers to her in many essays, writings and paintings. Frida’s husband, Rivera, was world-famous in his lifetime. Largely thanks to feminism and multiculturalism, Kahlo has recently become a cult figure. They encouraged legendary status, Kahlo by playing the role of a heroic sufferer and by playing beauty to Rivera’s beast – Diego Rivera (1886-1957) by his mania for publicity and his talent as a teller of fabulous tales. He loved to talk while he painted, to entertain groups of admirers with tall stories. He tells about the time he fought in the Russian Revolution alongside Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov Lenin (1870-1924). Or in another instance he ate female flesh wrapped in a tortilla – “It is like the tenderest young pig”, he said (Herrera 1996:119-135). The writer, Carlos Fuentes(1928-) wrote an intimate self-portrait of her (as introduction to her dairy that they published). He saw Kahlo for the first time when he was attending a concert in the Palacio de Bellas Artes, the Palace of Fine Art in the centre of Mexico City:

As Kahlo entered her box in the second tier of the theatre, the jangling of her jewellery drowned to the sounds of the orchestra. But something beyond mere noise forced them all to look upwards and discover the apparition that announced herself with an incredible throb of metallic rhythms. It was the entrance of an Aztec

goddess, perhaps Coatlicue, the mother deity wrapped in her skirt of serpents, exhibiting her own lacerated, bloody hands the way other woman sport a brooch. Frida Kahlo was more like a broken Cleopatra, hiding her tortured body, her shrivelled leg, her broken foot, her orthopaedic corsets, under the spectacular finery of the peasant women of Mexico, who for centuries jealously kept the ancient jewels hidden away, protected from poverty, to be displayed only at the great fiestas of the agrarian communities. The laces, the ribbons, the skirts, the rustling petticoats, the braids, the moonlike headrests opening up her face like the wings of a dark butterfly: Frida Kahlo, showing them all that suffering could not wither, nor sickness stale, her infinite variety (Fuentes 1995:7-24).

In March of 2000, during the *Karoo National Arts Festival*, Breytenbach's collection of love poetry, dedicated to his "First Lady", was introduced to the public. The hall, housing an exhibition of Naspers Publications, was packed, when Breytenbach and Lotus entered. She plaited her hair in a single long plait and she wore a red Chinese embroidered dress, tightfitting and above the knee. Echoes of the brutal Vietnamese War, G.I.'s hanging around in smoky bars with women on their arms, became for that moment part of the Klein Karoo town of Oudtshoorn. Breytenbach, wearing an elaborate shirt, was about to read poems from the new collection and had brought a French-speaking friend to translate some Afrikaans love poems.

Breytenbach and his wife, Lotus, had become icons in South Africa. The tenderness of his love poems (an admission of vulnerability) is paradoxical when contrasted with the "war machine" of radical metaphors and images that he constantly uses to bombard the stratified order and all other forms of power mechanisms. Yolande plays an important role in the administration of Breytenbach's busy schedule. She also documents their lives and interaction with other people photographically and, in times when he is absent, devotes her time to writing a book on African beadwork. Although Breytenbach has chosen to write openly about their lives, they are intensely private. They share a love for their homes. Breytenbach, whose whole (private and public) life is artwork, in the essay, *The Lines have Fallen Unto Me In Beautiful*

Places, writes about the houses in the following way.

There are small shards of paradise left in this shattered world – this house is one, so is Gorée Island, and Timbuktu with its mouth full of sand, there’s a *finca* in Spain called Can Ocells and the village of Poble Nou in the Ebro delta with palm trees set humming by mosquitoes, there’s an oasis in some russet mountains with a walled-in garden called Wildedruif, there’s a town on the brown Mekon there’s a tower in Paris from where you can observe the hurrying clouds (Breytenbach 1996a:110).

In Paris, in 1962, Breytenbach met and married “Lotus” (as he came to refer to her in most of his writings), the nineteen-year-old daughter of a Vietnamese widow, who had brought her entire family to that city soon after the Second World War, so that they could benefit from a classic French education. Four then, and like Breytenbach, the middle child in a swarm of siblings, her family was among the first Vietnamese to live in the capital. When she and Breytenbach met, she was still living at home. On the streets of Paris and in the classrooms of Sorbonne, her life was entirely French and cosmopolitan, while at home it was entirely Vietnamese and traditional.

The couple moved into a tiny two-roomed flat, Room no. 5 in the Rue du Sommerard, in the Fifth District of Paris. Sometimes, during the evening, Breytenbach would play pinball in *Malebranche*. He was also the owner of a red Citroen (Brink 1971:5). Here, in Paris, he experienced the city as a menacing place. In this space of place his crises or questioning concerning identity was instigated. Paris was the place he lived with illegally because his papers were not in order. He had a temporary visa he continually had to renew. He used to join the Que at six in the morning and waiting for the prefecture. He dogged the police during the Algerian War. It was a dangerous place and one where power games were played out. Breytenbach feels that one has to think formalistic or even conceptual to survive in Paris.

Throughout Breytenbach's life, Yolande has been the subject of many love poems, although she does not read Afrikaans. During the years of exile, she was his country, his family and his language. Later, during his incarceration, a time when she lost her hearing because of extreme stress, it was she who became the one who would become the prime mover behind his release. He writes that her efforts for him throughout his incarceration were tireless. In Paris, she ran a small boutique near the Beaubourg, specialising in antique clothing. Twice a year, she closed her little operation and flew to South Africa, staying with Breytenbach's parents or with Ampie Coetzee or with other friends, visiting her husband in prison, and endlessly lobbying journalists, cultural figures and government officials. "She even got in to talk to some top cabinet people", Breytenbach said, "the police and justice ministers, big tough men towering over her, despising her for being coloured and, since she was Vietnamese, obviously a Communist, and my wife to boot – where she found the bloody guts to do it, "I will never know". This is among other things, a love story. During the last years of her crusade on her husband's behalf, Yolande obtained a powerful ally in Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, who had shared the platform with him in 1973 at the Cape Town *Sestigers* conference. Slabbert who had shortly after that entered politics, and had quickly risen to become the head of the otherwise "English"-dominated Progressive Party's parliamentary caucus, which was the regime's principle legitimate anti-Apartheid opposition. As such, he regularly locked horns, sometimes ferociously, with the new Prime Minister, Pieter Willem Botha (1916-). Slabbert and the prime minister had barely exchanged a civil word in weeks, though they were required to sit next to each other every day in the parliament, when suddenly, one evening, in the midst of a particularly florid debate, Botha leaned over across the aisle and whispered to him, "Afrikaans is a beautiful language, is it not?" Slabbert replied that it certainly was, and then a few days later took advantage of this momentary outbreak of peace between them to raise the question of Breytenbach's status.

Things began to move thanks to a fresh offensive by the sympathetic local press, in part thanks to the ascension to power of François Mitterrand's new government with all its cultural pretensions and so a renewed interest in the fate of the martyred poet and quasi-citizen of

France. Breytenbach's legal team thought that they might be getting ready to revisit the whole question of the regime's apparent double-dealing at the time of his initial sentencing. This was early December 1982. Yolande was in the country, with a few days left on her current visa. When release, again, was beginning to look unlikely after all, Breytenbach took to consoling himself that he would be getting his Christmas cake in a few weeks' time. In his interview to Weschler, Breytenbach remarked:

Every year they allowed us to order five hundred grams of cake for Christmas,' he explained, ' but we had to put our order in early, sometimes late October. And that year, I had put in for a *forêt-noir* – fantastic, marvellous cake. And so then on the second of December, I got called in to the prison superintendent's office and was told very brusquely that I was now free, I was being released immediately. And my first thought – the very thing that flashed through my mind – was, "Damn it all to hell, there goes my cake!"

He was handed his various manuscripts – everything in immaculate order – and asked to sign for them. They handed him himself over to an Afrikaans - literature Professor, a regime man, who had been visiting him on occasion over the years to discuss his poetry, and who, they now informed him, would be serving as his protector over the next several days. The professor lent him the fifty Rand to pay off his outstanding fine. They asked him to avoid publicity. The regime would be announcing his release in a few days but had not yet figured out precisely how to do so, and want to keep things quiet until then. With that, they showed him to the gate. The minder drove him to the house of some friends, with whom Yolande was staying. Upon answering the man's knock, Yolande emerged from the house to find her husband standing by the car. Ever sensible, her first words were "What are *you* doing *here*?" As Breytenbach said, "That, of course, was a long story" (Weschler 1993: 78-91 & 1998:181-182).

4.9. *Ars poetic* -the carnival and the grotesque.

Under the regime of Stalin, Bakhtin, a highly gifted theoretical critic, voiced his concepts of the grotesque and the carnival; concepts filled with change, rebirth and with a sense of relativizing the authoritarian power of rulers. Both Breytenbach and Bakhtin use the carnivalesque interpretation as a strategy of survival or a means to implode the state memory system. One could make a comparison between physical incarceration and the very traumatic experience and spiritual incarceration by the suppressive ideology and fixity of Communism. Bakhtin survived the most appalling days of Stalin's rule, a time of total incarceration and political restriction, all of which caused him to draw an analogy with another time and place. It was the sixteenth-century of Rabelais and the method of the carnivalesque that he used to avoid confrontation with the rulers of that day. Bakhtin's work, as with that of Breytenbach emerges from a time of ideological totalitarianism, the South African gallows-humour and the Russian carnivalesque both pointing to the potential of laughter to destroy the monolithic gravity of the authorities.

Throughout history, the aim and scope of carnival festivities, the *festum stultorum* has largely been one of mimicking serious rituals and important events and, in so doing, gaining some inner freedom from official authority and oppressive official truths. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, of change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was seen as immortal and complete.

The trails of Breytenbach stirred considerable interest at the time of their occurrence. The tragic-comic register informing the autobiographer's description of the trails corresponds, to a large extent, to the ironic methods employed by the press at the time. Thus, Peter Dreyer, (Galloway 1990:244) describe the first trail in the following terms: "the public scarcely knew whether it was being presented as a Greek tragedy, a James Bond farce or an Agatha Christie thriller".

Although he was painfully aware of the destructive elements of his incarceration, Breytenbach could think of it as a game with its own rules. At the end of *Mouiroir* he refers to the entire experience as “this macabre dance, this fatal game”. But he keeps one step ahead of the Dancer, “*la Chingada*, the fucked (sic) One, Death”.

Kafka was interested in the aspect of the grotesque. He writes:

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. He was lying on his hard, as it was armour-plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed quilt could hardly keep in position and was about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes (Kafka 1988:89-13).

Involvements with the grotesque as presented by Gregor Samsa, implies a tradition that is characterized by highly exaggerated situations, frequent mixing of categories, subject and style, an amorphous style of writing, a tendency towards puns and plays on sound. The object transgresses its own confines and falls into decay.

Breytenbach's four prison volumes of poetry, *Lewendood*, *Buffalo Bill*, *Eklips* and ('Yk'), are given the title of *Die ongedanste dans* (The undanced dance). For the Zen Buddhist, the *undanced dance* animates all existence, pervading through all things. It is the inconceivable plenitude of existence itself, with all its infinite possibilities (Herrigel 1960:53). The *undanced dance* suggests a dance of unrestricted growth, meaning and creativity. What one must be aware of at the moment of creating, is the element of decay. The moment of decay is present in the very moment that the concept is first called up as an image. We find, as the basis of the grotesque imagery, a special concept of the body, as a whole, and the limits of the

whole. In the grotesque, meaning can never be repeated, it is there only momentarily. But his image is not one of fullness or completion; it is not only the initial idea or concept which causes the disintegration, or the spattering different directions; the grotesque Surrealist drawing is a process of creative destruction. The aesthetics of the grotesque are transformed through a heightened sense of perception. By using imagination as faculty of memory those disparate things, which have no connection one with the other, are bound through process of transformation and metamorphosis. In this movement new rhythms and new lines are interwoven. By interacting with that which is grotesque, the viewer is subjected to more or less the same process, namely one of opening up. Nothing is subjected to anything else and one enters onto a slipway or movement from one image to another. The grotesque drawings are parts of a journey to an unknown landscape. By entering one's own space of memory, events or images or sounds are transformed through a process of vision. This process is nothing more than the dislodging or purging of one image or another. The viewing process is the opening up of the non-landscape, which closes immediately behind one (Buscop 1993).

4.10. Summary:

Chapter Four, which concern itself with Memory, has paradoxical qualities, concerning the argument of Breytenbach's views and art which opposes all forms of fixity. Cope (1982:173) indicated that Breytenbach's "mere presence implied total rejection of racial domination by Whites in his hated/adored country".

After being set free Breytenbach (1984a:59) again declared that:

I believe, more than ever, that the system existing in South Africa is against the grain of everything that is beautiful and hopeful and dignified in human history; that it is a denial of humanity, not only of the majority being oppressed but of the minority associated with that oppression; that it is profoundly unjust; that it is totally corrupted and corrupting; that it is a system with which nobody ought to be allowed to live.

Brink (1983:86), has the following to say about Breytenbach:

He is indeed one of the greatest poets that Afrikaans literature has yet produced; but what makes him politically relevant is that to an overwhelming majority of people who have never read a single line of his verse, he has become a symbol of resistance to oppression. To many Africans Coloureds and Indians, he has given new hope: because of his marriage and because of his convictions. As a result, every line of poetry he writes – acquires political implications.

According to Galloway (1990) Breytenbach began campaigning against Apartheid as early as 1965. He advocated his views in his poetry and art, and also in his views concerning the task of the writer. He became involved in revolutionary politics when he visited South Africa in 1973. He initiated the secret organization, Atlas/Okhele. Okhele was formed in a tandem with Biko's Black Consciousness Movement. The formation of Okhele would provide a vehicle for white militants, who were barred from the Black Consciousness Movement and who could not engage in counter actions against Apartheid, which was the big institute of fixity. By 1974 Breytenbach entered South Africa under a false passport and was subsequently arrested and incarcerated.

Breytenbach's period in prison was mainly an effort to transcend the fixed structures of the place of incarceration. Memory belongs to the area of non-fixity and was chosen to interpret this period in Breytenbach's life. Kafka's short story, *The Great Wall*, embodies the history of fixity and movement (that which opposes the stable structure). From this story it is one step towards reaching the walls of the Pretoria Central Prison (the labyrinth) and the cell (the void), where Breytenbach spent two years in solitary confinement. Breytenbach was not allowed to paint during this time, but he made a series of prison drawings which can be considered as war machines. The aim of the State is to create the ultimate creation of a perfectly administered memory system that will serve the order. Breytenbach's prison drawings have a disruptive function. They are "war machines" of counter memory that deterritorialized the State.

The aesthetic point of departure of these drawings lies in the notions of the grotesque and the carnival. These notions are the carriers of laughter, which have the potential to destroy the monolithic gravity of the authorities. The novelist, Kundera described the function of laughter as a “war machine” by which the authority of Communism could be confronted within the country of his birth, Czechoslovakia.