

CHAPTER FIVE: THE CHAMELEON.

The heading for this chapter is derived from Erhard Rechwitz from the English Department at the University of Essen. Rechwitz, who is interested in Breytenbach's enquiry into identity, writes:

Where identity is never stable, 'the law of metamorphosis' is the only generalisation that can be arrived at: the chameleon, the mythical *animal semper mutabile*, is the apt metaphor or image for that ever-changing quality of human identity (Rechwitz 1993:138)

Breytenbach recognises the image of the chameleon as one of transformation. He captured this notion in the watercolour, *Mot (Word)(C-1)*. For Breytenbach (1993:60) the watercolour is perhaps his favourite though they demand a limitless attention. For him there is something metaphysical and astounding in their slow marriage with water, and the excitement when a wash suddenly coagulates in an edged line. Similar to his preference for multiple identities, Breytenbach subjects his artistic endeavours to different mediums and methods. With him there is not a fixed recognizable style that is endlessly repeated. His artwork is rather the recognition of a constantly changing blue print. One could thus also regard Breytenbach's identity as a changing blue print.

Breytenbach's whole enquiry concerning the notion of identity is a very strong argument for his wish to move against fixed structures, dogmas, ideas and so forth. A list of some names that he has given himself read as follows:

Bullebach
Braakinpag
BB breitenbog
Prenten Prentenbach
Breipen Breytenbach
Panus
Elephantia
King Fool
Don Espejuelo
Geta Wof
Jan Blom
Vagina Jones
BB Lazarus
Comrade Elix
Afrika Aap
Bangai Bird
Buffalo Bill
Bién Tóng
Juan Breyten
Christian Jean-Marc Galaska
Kamiljoen
Ganesji Galp
Tuchverderber
Fremkörper
Galgenvogel
Negesj
Maruphy
Bibberbek
Bewebek
Buitendag

The chameleon is surely the apt image and metaphor to represent the notion that Breytenbach's art, writing and thinking are that of movement and change. The movement and change that the chameleon represents are one of being against fixity. To show that his own identity is not fixed, Breytenbach constantly subjects his own name to change. Some of these names represent identification with historical figures like Camiljoen. Others, like Comrade Elix, refer to his involvement in the revolution. Bangai Bird, Buffalo Bill, Galgenvogel refers to the time of incarceration. Bién Tóng is the Chinese name for Breyten Breytenbach, which if translated into English would mean, Broad River. "Bach" is the German name for river. This is an example of the interconnectedness of everything in Breytenbach's work and life. Breytenbach has a sharded self.

5.1. The sharded self

The image of the chameleon that Breytenbach uses, leads us to the concept of the sharding of the self. In the poem, *pogonological self-portrait*, Breytenbach (1984:109) writes:

**"i" am and remain as monument of a process
the turd in the saucepan**

The meaning of these lines embodies paradoxical qualities. Although Breytenbach refers to the "I", he acknowledges that he is part of a process. He also writes in a derogatory way and calls himself the "turd" in the saucepan. The process of change to which the self is subjected is obviously painful.

From relations between multiple identities, we now move on to explore the shards of the self, by looking at images Breytenbach presents in his painting. Viewing his work hurt. It causes pain. Formulating what the paintings are about is often difficult and also what aspect causes

pain. This inability to reflect upon what touches one most may be caused by a momentary loss of self. Breytenbach's paintings and drawings appear to be about self-loss. His work hits the nervous system. This is precisely what seems to happen in the paintings. It explains the distortion of bodies and faces, dissolutions of boundaries, mouths opened as if screaming, agonies, paralyses, dismemberment, the confrontation with death. This is the crisis of the masculine. The figures appear, as nervous systems lain bare.

Breytenbach's paintings transform viewing to a painful experience; they render viewers speechless. Breytenbach (1993c:63) writes about his view on aesthetics and says:

To look at a painting with conceptions of beauty and harmony (*etcetera*) in the head is to prance a cock which has been taught how to crow the song of the times while being oblivious of the flesh-knowledge of being promised for the pot. It is a scratching of the surface. You have to strip yourself (you have to close the eyes) to allow for the confrontation with the naked mirror which knows no aesthetic hierarchy.

Breytenbach has used the metaphor of the mirror to convey his aesthetic point of departure. For Breytenbach (1993c:66) the metaphor is an explosive device. The image, however, is the slow fuse. Fixing meaning to an image is much more difficult. The image is the "groping for the cracks by plastering an image (itself an illusion of coherence) over the abyss" (Breytenbach 1993c:66). In this way Breytenbach's conception of the image can be compared with his notion of identity and the way he depicts it. This explains the failure of his critics to analyse, rather than to describe or applaud, his work. A particular kind of looking is at stake. The role of the viewer is a painful one and there is no escape through conventional routes. All the deceptive certainties of the visual regime we are used to are challenged; all the relationships between looking, and what (we think) we see, are cancelled; and all the construction of bits of reality is questioned, wiped out.

The self constructs itself through the gaze of the other. The paintings constitute such a gaze. But, rather than benignly bestowing form upon the viewer's self, rather than providing that sense of wholeness, for which the self depends on the gaze of the other, the paintings expose their mortifying power to withhold the wholeness one so badly needs.

How does one experience reality when the self is deliberately, continually lost or shattered? How does one experience the self when it becomes disembodied or figuratively “becomes Brahman inhaling and exhaling the Afrikaans society”? How does one experience a painting done by a “sharded” self and when Breytenbach declares himself king of nothingness? Or when he declares himself to be a *nadaist*⁷⁶ as in the acrylic painting, *El rey de nada (C-2)*. For Breytenbach (1993c:60) the acrylic is a bastard [sic]. He says “that” they will lend themselves to any surface and will pass themselves off as easily for fish as for fowl, but they are ultimately difficult to know. In this sense, Breytenbach could be compared with acrylic paint as knowing him is virtually impossible.

However, the loss of the self does not develop from a weakening of the observing ego or a lowering of consciousness, but to the contrary, from attentive self-reflective awareness. The loss of self may be embedded in modes of consciousness that are not “primitive” or “infantile”, but that is extremely self-reflective. It is derived not from lowering but from a widening of consciousness (Sass 1987:1-34).

From the anti psychiatric perspective, this state is preferred to the mature condition of self-control. Unrestrained desire can characterise it. “Sharding” or schizophrenia, schizoid, and the shaman, stand for life, instinct and the freedom of “nomad thought”. In comparison to the schizoid, the mind of the normal provokes oppressive self-consciousness, the illusion of logic,

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Nadaist is derived from the Spanish word *el nada* – meaning nothingness.

and the beliefs of self-control (Hillman 1983:15).

Breytenbach's paintings and drawings undermine the most basic assumptions we hold. That is the conscious or unconscious reassuring effect of representation as a stronghold against inevitable death. The image of the subject, who has to die, is at least eternalized. Breytenbach deprives us of such illusion because he declares himself king of death. In the letter to his friend, Ampie Coetzee, *Een-been te perd in die saagselkring met die mond 'n dooie spieël: 'n brief* (One-leg on horseback in the sawdust-circle with the mouth a dead mirror: a letter), Breytenbach (1995a:334) describes himself as death's blue-eyed boy. How do we read his poetry when he describes an anthology as a *dessecador*, meaning a place for drying out to which they bring the deceased for embalming? He is describing the catacomb in the honey nest of the caves under Palermo. It is in Poble Gran, near the hill where he and Yolande stayed. There the monks cared for dead bodies for two years and then presented them, clothed in the vestments of the order and exhibited for the neighbours to see.

Representation is not life; instead life is shown to be sheer representation. Representation, then, cannot preserve life, but only expose its undoing. Nor can representation reveal the essence of life. Representation, which attempts to uncover life, to find its true essence, can only reveal death or nothingness. In a paradoxical way the only life is in the representation; because representation is all there is. So, Breytenbach's figures are represented as lacking substance. They are either overflowing or hollowed out, skinless and shapeless. For the viewer, there is no escape by means of the conventional catharsis. The viewer cannot sympathise with the threatened victim of violence, and then breathe again once the execution has taken place. The suspense of looking, the excitement of looking behind the curtain of representation, is not relaxed, but violently brought to an end. The viewer realises that there is ultimately nothing. This although there is a strong connection between the narrative and the visual in Breytenbach's work as he has recently incorporated poems on the "nomadic" canvas-scroll. In the works, *Hoe treurig. Helemaal helder (C-3)*, *Die Woordenaar (C-4)* and

Stompengel (C-5), the homely boundaries of a story are refused. What is suggested, however, is the purposeful interplay of image and text as regard representation of self.

The figures are isolated in their space by the fact that they have been painted differently. Except certain works depicting himself as a caricature, like in *Woord (Ik ben zo fucking [sic] alleen)* (C-6) and a depiction in *Hommage au Pinceau Décédé* (C-7), he himself and figures of the group-portrait never becomes fully characters. The figural events never explained and never embedded in a sequence of events. The figures, even when they interact, are distanced from each other and their environment and they are often placed in boxes and closed rooms. An important aspect for Breytenbach, however, is that poetry and painting are the prolongation of one to the other. Breytenbach's conception of identity can be compared with the relation between art and poetry. It is a process of metamorphosis or an infusion.

In *Judas Eye*, he writes about the "sharding" of the self into bits of onion, vibrant thoughts, rolling hills, scattering shadow, holes in the ground, the ant, God. He cannot write [paint] about himself, he can only write [paint] the "I". Breytenbach writes about his multiple identities. He comments on the problems one counters when writing or painting an unstable self. Breytenbach says:

Worse, I am still creating it and I may stop at any moment. Why is it unpleasant then? Because consciousness is open-ended and subject to constant change and it is frightening, if not perilous, to keep on caressing the unknowable I. The hidden nature of awareness is that it cannot be stilled for long enough to be defined, not even temporarily like the dead person. If I do thus write about some id or other oddment it must be dead. Therefore I cannot write [paint] about me; I could only write [paint] I. And immediately the writing is blanched, staunched. Becomes *it*. The fly in amber. God in his grave. The ants will not go hungry. Writing as a weak form of awareness, a minute manifestation of movement. It would be more illuminating to trace the trajectories of Panus, Elephteriá, King

Fool, Don Espejeulo, Geta Wof, Jan Blom, Vagina Jones, Lazarus, Comrade Ekx, Afrika Aap, or Bangai Bird (Breytenbach 1988:123).

There is a kind of nomadism, a perpetual displacement in the intensities designated by proper names, intensities that a single body experiences. Schizophrenic laughter or revolutionary joy, this is what emerges from this body carrying the different names (Deleuze 1983:166).

5.2. Selflessness and Buddhism

According to Sienaert (1993:139-155) it is well known that Zen Buddhism forms a primary inter-text of Breytenbach's art and writing and that without at least some knowledge of Buddhism in general, his work often remains largely inaccessible or misunderstood.⁷⁷ In *Painting the Eye*, Breytenbach (1993c:74) refers to Dogen and uses a quotation from this work:

To learn the Buddhist Way is to learn about oneself. To learn about oneself is to forget oneself. To forget oneself is to perceive oneself as all things. To realise this is to cast off the body and mind of self and other. When you have reached this stage you will be detached even from enlightenment but will practice it continually without thinking about it.

It was Dogen who experienced the nature of sitting in the *zazen* position, entering the void and reached selflessness. Japanese Zen (C'han in China) is a combination of the ancient Chinese Taoist philosophy and Indian Mayahana Buddhism. It retains as essential principle the Tao's Yin-Yang relativity, and the Mayahana ideal of selflessness. As embodiment of the cosmic

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In a personal conversation with Breytenbach, he stated that the book of Dogen Zenji, *Sjōbōgenzo*, is the most important book he has ever read.

process, the Tao designate that which constitutes the entire universe. It is in perpetual flux and represents a constant process of transformation. As illustrated in the Sanskrit word *Tantra* (to weave), the universe is experienced as a network, a harmony or symbiosis of patterns, which cannot exist without each other (Watts 1997:51). This concept abounds in the work of Breytenbach. Breytenbach (1988:87) writes:

**and our grasp of the city
no one else could know
that was in reality
a rhythmic intertwining flow**

Studying his paintings one is indeed struck by the frequency of the artist's own face in the pictures. "As elsewhere in both his art and writing, these images of interchangeability and metamorphosis persistently foreground the question of identity. In an unpublished manuscript, *The Shattered Dream*, Breytenbach (1991) writes that according to the Buddhist philosophy, which informs his way of life, (for art in his case is a way of living), the notion of shifting or constantly transforming identity can be understood as the compassionate projection of the self into the other" (Sienaert, 2001:68). So Breytenbach's claim that every portrait, landscape or other depiction, is a self-portrait. According to Sienaert (1998:43-46) such (Buddhist) dissolutions of ego and subsequent fusion with the depicted objects as *Other* are playfully expressed in the many images of half man, half beast. There is also the fish with human face in *Hommage au Pinceau Décédé (C-7b)* as well as the copulating or numerous androgynous figures, which absorb and dissolve the notion of opposites contained in "I" and "Other". The series of *mirror angles (C-8)* are further illustrations of this notion (Sienaert 1998:43).

It would, however, be a misconception to construe this as narcissism, just as it would be off the mark to interpret the continuing references to the "I" in his poetry as egocentrism. This "I" do not refer to Breytenbach as individual, separate being, but rather to the ideal of being in a permanent state of interrelatedness with all in the universe. The fixed and stable entity

becomes a “vessel of humanity” (Sienaert 1993:145). In this regard Breytenbach (1988:46) writes:

**what for? All over man
is death and dust
and only in others will he reverberate.**

Breytenbach’s *Mouiroir* (1983a) is an example of constant transgression between different levels of the text. Author, a character and dream personage, fuses only to separate again, and the conventional boundaries between fiction, reality and dream are completely abolished (Botha 1988: 404-416). This is perfectly embodied in the last line of the book, which translates as “form is emptiness and emptiness is form”. It is taken from the Prajnaparamita-sutra,⁷⁸ the whole of which is translated by Breytenbach in the beginning of the prison poems (‘*Yk*’). This notion is important as it equates two seemingly paradoxical concepts implying that nothing [also identity] can be fixed (Sienaert 1993:145).

According to Buddhism, our grasping intellect, which subdivides the universe into individual, fixed concepts, presents a major obstacle for the attainment of Enlightenment. Differentiation of objects, which includes the constitution of a separate individual ego, is considered an illusion, the result of our analytical perception of the world and our intrinsic inability to experience reality fully. The concept of a separate and individual ego resulting from the differentiation of objects is “the enemy to be overcome” (Versfelt 1991:16).

For Lankava-tava (1988:45) the undermining of conceptual thinking, however, often leads to the misconception, particularly in the West, of Zen being irrational or anti-intellectual.

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In Sanskrit literature, a short mnemonic rule in grammar, law, or philosophy, requiring expansion by means of commentary.

Buddhism does not deny the value of the intellect, but only stresses that it has to be transcended. Analytical thought should be taken to its full potential as this is the only way intuitive knowledge, as ultimate value, can be attained.⁷⁹ In Chapter One the watery basis of things was described. This is differential Zen, where there can be no centre. The Buddha-nature is differential and not centric, not a focus or stasis. Differential Zen disclaims “centred” experience of any kind. Magliola (1984:95-101) points to the difference between “centric Zen” and “differential Zen”. Centric Zen is logo-centric and aims to transcend *logos* understood as the language of *is* and *not is*, and to achieve the undifferentiated centre. This is mirrored in contemporary interpretation, where the meaning of a text is never final or “fixed”. Interpretation is always infinite. When Breytenbach (1984d:13) asks, “What did you look like before you or your father or your mother were born?”, it becomes clear there can be no “I”, nor an identity nor any fixed reality [truth]. And in *End Papers* (1986:79), Breytenbach as Zen Buddhist writes about this aspect in the following way:

There is in fact no Truth. We are too fragile and volatile for that; we work with too many uncertainties. There is rather the continual shaping of something resembling poorly, provisionally ‘truth’.

Within the Zen tradition, “the intuitive knowledge thus acquired by the realisation of the inadequacy of conceptual thinking is often compared with the opening of a third eye, which is a prerequisite for creative experience. Until one had a third eye opened to see into the inmost secret of things; you cannot be in the company of the ancient sages (Suzuki 1957:62). This immediately calls to mind the self-portrait of Breytenbach on the back book cover of (‘Yk’), a volume of poetry written while he was in prison, where the gaping wound on the forehead expresses the desire for intuitive knowledge, which leads to true creativity“(Sienaert 1993:143). *Man With Beard (C-9)*, exhibited at the Metropolitan Gallery during 2001, also

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According to Lankava-tave (1988:45) the transcendental intelligence rises when the intellectual mind reaches its limit and when things are to be realized in their true essence, its processes must be transcended by an appeal to some higher faculty of cognition. There is such a faculty in the intuitive mind which is the link between the intellectual mind and the universal mind.

carries this third eye. This work overclouds the question of identity with its hint of pornographic details. Breytenbach used a collage of the female sex to form the mouth. The beard in this work is a substitute for female pubic hair. For Breytenbach the collage in itself is a method of breaking down the hierarchy of “values”. In *Painting The Eye* (1993c:67) Breytenbach writes:

The importance of the *collage* lies in the displacement of agreed-upon painterly conventions, thereby extending the reach of references, breaking down the hierarchy of “values” to bring us closer (in the juxtaposition of dead or re-cycled images and nascent areas of paint) to the flitting flow of impressions provoked by the oddity, the breaks in surface texture and in expectations, the sleight of mind, perhaps the “happy accident”, all of which –re-ordered or disordered–becomes the matter of consciousness.

Man With Beard is a graphic drawing where Breytenbach used the pencil. Of the pencil Breytenbach (1993c:60) has the following to say:

Using pencil is for me to be speaking Afrikaans – it is a private language which lends itself to instinctive expression.

The way Breytenbach speaks about using a pencil and comparing it with his feeling of speaking Afrikaans, is an important example of Breytenbach’s preference for crossing borders. Again this is one step away from looking at Breytenbach’s awareness of multiple identities within himself.

5.3. Multiple identities

During the period before the dismantlement of Apartheid Breytenbach (1993c:70) wrote that if he wants to jot down on the public noticeboard as a cliché the capacities he aspires to, one

will find the words, *anarchist, communist and cynic*. For him anarchism is the understanding of the causes and mechanisms of injustice and the belief in the necessity of the transformational potential of the struggle. The birth of parties lays down the line of power by the so-called correct interpretation of reality. For Breytenbach this ended in the “shit-house” [sic] of bureaucrats. Breytenbach chooses the early Marxist’s views. Those views that existed before the “killing machines of the Communist Parties”.

Breytenbach (1993c:72) is a cynic and writes about the cynic in the following way.

A cynic (which is Greek for ‘dog’) in the tradition of outspokenness, shamelessness, unconventionality, idealised anarchy, anti-materialism and identification with the poor.

In the exhibition *Dancing the Dog and other Pornographics*, Breytenbach exposes the viewer to the image of a snarling dog. In *Self Portrait as a Dog (C-10)* Breytenbach again uses a collage of the reproduced image of the female sex, which are in this instance, the dog’s ears. The howling dog of pain or the image of Breytenbach as the cynic is provided with the traditional third eye that we find in Christian iconography. Breytenbach is the cynic dog who digests and defecates an awareness of being thus to imagine knowing whom he is (Breytenbach 1993c:72). For him the “I” is a border crossing between inside and outside.

5.3.1. Relations

In a footnote in poetry, *Voetskrif* (1976:55), which appeared during his incarceration, Breytenbach comments on the nature of his poetry. He writes:

Terugskouend: byna al my verspogings (geflapper) gaan om verhoudinge; skep

selfs verhoudings waar dit tot dusver nie bestaan het nie. (Looking back: nearly all my verse-efforts (flapping) are about relations; creating relations even where they do not yet exist.)

From *Bedreiging van die siekes* (*Menace of the ill*), the first poem in the first collection of poetry, *Die ysterkoei moet sweet*, published in 1964 up to *Die woorde teen die wolke* (*The words against the clouds*), in *Skryt* published in 1972, Breytenbach was continually occupied with being a poet, the nature of verse as the form for that which cannot be said, and with the relationship between the poet, the poem and reality. The poet has to look at reality with the cutting edge of vision. If there were a reality, which compels the poet to write, it would be the restrictive political system (Coetzee 1977:introduction).

Relations in Breytenbach's (1987:170) poetry is between the poem and anti-poem, between the word and the silence, via the sentence, between the said and the unsaid, via the overlapping, relation between the reality and a-reality. Relations concerning the process of writing (painting) can be traced from his "self-portrait" in *Judas Eye* (1988). Here Breytenbach poses the dichotomies of I/Other; Black/White; African/European; Interior/Exile; Clarity/Consciousness; Responsibility/Subversive; To Be/or Not to Be and Free/Unfree. His exile, despite the entire trauma it encompasses, provides a new relationship with the world. He is the foreign observer, who is depending on himself. Breytenbach (1988:123-134) writes about this condition and says:

Or you turn in upon yourself, turn yourself over, and observe the albino insects scurrying away from the light. And you taste distaste, bloated as the tongue in its orifice of saying.

Freedom, because that is where you're at, is a nasty taskmaster. You have so much more to learn. You are conscious of the *éstrangeté* of life, and your senses are sharpened to needles with which you skewer the grey flesh of dull daily acceptances. You head to be crammed with clichés and stereotypes, but at least you recognise them for what they are – in several languages! For better or for worse you are the outsider.

More than in relationships embedded in writing or painting, there is also the aspect of relations between different identities. Breytenbach's painful experience of the shattering of the self intensified when he re-entered life after the period of incarceration. Pressure from constant public demand by giving lectures in Europe and the United States and exhibiting in various countries; publishing in South Africa, France, The Netherlands, England; drawing the attention of journalists on an international level; managing a constant flux of projects involving himself and his creative work by other people. He initiated projects like the "Poetry Caravan" at Gorée Island, which travelled from Dakar to Timbuktu. Another venture is the "Poetry Africa" initiative at the Creative Centre of the University of Natal. Intense involvement with taking on professorships in Creative Writing at the University of Natal, the University of Cape Town and the New York School of Creative Writing; living in different countries and travelling constantly; and speaking many languages complicate his life and transforms him into the walker of the Global Village or the knight of the naked star. Being writer, poet, painter, philosopher, public figure, political dissident, exile, intellectual, nomad, *nadaist*, Zenist, friend, the brother of his brothers and sister, father to a daughter and husband to a Vietnamese wife all lead to an awareness of multiple personalities harboured in himself and others.

According to Coetzee (1994:8) Breytenbach had been dragged into the factionalism, intrigue and backstabbing of exile politics, he has made himself part of the anti-Apartheid circuit, attending conferences, giving speeches and reading. Breytenbach asserts that his role in the future will be as it was in the past. He will be against the norm, orthodoxy, the canon, hegemony, politics, the State, power.

In both his writing and his art this is embodied in the use of the "I". Critics, since his first debut as writer, have noted the frequent use of the "I". Some scholars were critical, while others are more aware of the deeper meaning of this phenomenon. Criticism varied from a repudiation of the sickly use of the "I", to arguments about the poet's creating an entire oeuvre on the behalf of himself.

Many of his exhibitions go under the prevailing genre of the name of *autoportrait* with titles like *Autoportrait Masque (C-11)*, *Autoportrait "Nuit" (C-12)* and *Autoportrait "Jour" (C-13)*. The self-portrait/I is a living structure, a growing body, which is manifested through the metamorphosis of the orifices and projecting parts of the body. These are the eyes, the nose, the ears, the mouth, the fingers, the female sex slit and the penis. Conversely the body closes in *L'emballage (C-14)*. There is a merging of different figures in other paintings, which metamorphosised the human being into an ape, a bird, a horse, a dog, etc. This is a natural process in the "passage of consciousness" of which Breytenbach writes in *Memories*.

Continually Breytenbach shows us how he takes the "eye" from a subject, as in *J.E. Liotard (C-15)*. In this work, the painter whose hands are placed at the bottom of the painting, have taken out the eye of Liotard.⁸⁰

In the work, *Like a Whiplash (C-16)* Breytenbach extended the "eye"-theme by removing the painter's right eye. A tear falls from the empty eye socket. He paints a self-portrait of the removed "eye" weeping blood. The painter inserts the brush into the painted subject's mouth and there it takes on the function of a cigar or pipe. An all-seeing "weeping third eye" has been painted at the top of the painting, but instead of using eyelids he has placed the eye between two lips. This "parable" on the "eye" could serve as a pointer that could lead one to acknowledge the complexity of the "I". The painted eye ("I") is just a Judas eye (eyelet and loophole) for the "I".

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Jean Etienne Liotard (1702-90), a Swiss pastel painter and engraver, who lived in Geneva, travelled widely in Europe and the Near East and painted fashionable sitters in eastern costume (Osborne 1979:663).

5.3.2. The Hybrid

According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* the word “hybrid” is the offspring of two animals or plants of different species or varieties. It is also a person of mixed nationality. It is also things composed of incongruous elements. The Hybrid, Creoleness and bastardnesses are words that hang about Breytenbach like a cloak. He experiences himself as a bastard having a bastard language, Afrikaans, as his mother tongue. Breytenbach (1999:3) has opted for aesthetics of a pluralism and hybridness. Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one. His oeuvre takes on a mongrel form when he writes poems across his canvases. He writes that culturally he is a bastard. He prefers, however, the description, *The Afrikaner*, which claims to be of a Creole nature. As the bastard, Breytenbach is European of different sources, Dutch, German, French, African, through interbreeding and rape of the indigenous Khoisan people. Blood of the black probably flows through his veins by the importing from slaves and craftsmen from the east. A part of him could also be Malgasse.

Mercer (1990:49) states that Berbabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, three Caribbean authors, wrote in their *Egole de la creolité* of 1989: “The world is moving towards the condition of Creoleness. Old national crispations are giving way before the advance of federations, which will perhaps not exist for long.” This move towards Creoleness is not because certain transnationals try to transform the planet into one immense market, but because cultures are working to think of themselves as relations. People, languages, histories, cultures, nations are touching another and traverse each other. They traverse each other in an infinity of networks which “national flags” know nothing about. The world is resonating wholly in each of its particular places.

According to Bhabha (1990:24), Creoleness speaks, writes, thinks and proclaims, and performs the certainty that nations are narrations. These narratives are also what makes it possible to

reinvent a community where there can no longer be a border, but an infinite zone of diversalism. This community is at once unique and diverse, but also displaced. Nevertheless, more important, our Creoleness of thought and process will keep in mind the ethics of the relational, which is the ethics of the Other.

In an interview, Breytenbach talks about multiple identities and Creolenesses:

For a start, let me say that we are, obviously, all far more of multiple personalities than we like to admit we are. We may all agree with the notion that one of the fundamental tasks of any form of creative or intellectual activity is to show things in their complexity, that is, beyond their bare simplicity. But we still prefer to simplify; we want to handle things sequentially and on a one-on-one-basis. We want to know exactly whom it is that we are dealing with. We are not comfortable dealing with the whole host of shifting people in us. But remember that the notion of self or identity is liable to change.

We are obliged by our times, with their breaking of orthodoxy, the disappearance of ideologies and the phenomenon of banning and exile, nomadism, and globalisation to – perhaps for the first time in mankind’s history – become far more acutely aware of the multiplicity that we have in us. In other words, this is a form of the need to compartmentalise, to develop to its fullest capacity the various characters, the various persons that one has within oneself.

One of the most fascinating things that is starting to happen more clearly in our times is perhaps our growing realisation that our wholeness is terminally fragmented. That our perception is fragmented too. That we work far more in shards and in notes and in torn-up pieces, that we are far more collaged than we are willing to accept. Another aspect, which is very important and is becoming increasingly clear to us, is that even our morals have become relational. What we live through is a stronger awareness of the relationships between the various parts that we are. And other things, which, I think, have become very important, are that we are far more aware of the transitions, the breaks, the moving from one part to the other part. Metamorphoses has become an integral part of our understanding, and perhaps even of our being; we are being metamorphosed into new beings all the time. But we develop, as in the case of any form of

hybridisation, a more acute awareness of the shifting components and of the moments of juncture, the moments of rupture. So, I would suggest that one way to attain a semblance or a season of coherent sanity would be to accrue, to deepen the processes of awareness, the actual awareness of what is happening to the extent that you are consciously aware of what is happening to you. Another way in which one tries to keep some form of coherence, perhaps, is by keeping alive what I would call a ghost centre. The ghost centre is like having had two legs, one of which is now amputated. They say you keep on feeling that one which is gone. It's still there, it's a ghost presence.

But we develop, as in the case of any form of hybridisation, a more acute awareness of the shifting components and of the moments of juncture, the moments of rupture (Breytenbach in Dimitriu 1997:72).

Breytenbach's views on identity have never been put more clearly than in this quotation and is a cardinal argument for the important argument of this thesis that Breytenbach's line of thinking moves against all forms of fixity. The self is in a constant process of change and our wholeness is fragmented. The notion of metamorphosis provides the key to understand human life, which is now engaged in a process of flux and transition.

5.4. The mouth is too secret not to feel pain

Although Breytenbach has suffered numerous incidents of wounding in his life, he has endured exile, incarceration, his intense involvement with the South African society has been a constant source of pain. Certain of his art works, (here the sticking out of the tongue) points to shamanistic instances. He has, however, never openly stated that he has taken the task of the "wounded healer" on himself. His "healing" of society is one of the constantly opening unknown avenues through his writing, painting and as social critic. His way is one of *fuck-ups* [sic], ruptures and shape shifting. He never tones down this dissection of society, but constantly inserts the "pen-brush" knife and the "metaphor- image" scalpel deeper and deeper

into the Afrikaner's wounds.

Breytenbach (1995a) is aware that he has a certain shape shifting (trickster) role to play in society. He writes:

Die ek is 'n holte, 'n weeklankkamer, 'n Chinese shaduwee binne die gedig. Jy laat jou in by ander se verwagtings, al is dit ook 'n skynswangerskap. Die 'historiese' ek-figuur, sê nou maar die ikoon met pyp en baard, word 'n gegewe, 'n karakter, die hand vol vere, die hanswors met 'n 'uitgeleende' been (soos SV, Utrillo se ma, wat nie net skilder was nie maar ook model en *mâtresse*) waarmee jy speel in die sirkus. (The I is a hollow, an echo chamber, a Chinese shadow in a poem. You let yourself into others' expectations, even if it is a mock pregnancy. The 'historical' I figure, say the icon with the pipe and beard, become a given, a character, the handful of feathers, the clown with the 'borrowed' leg (like SV, Utrillo's mother, who was not only a painter, but also model and *mâtresse*) with which you play in the circus.)

Breytenbach is painter, writer and thinker about death. Although his descent to the realm of the dead, home of deceased spirits, speaks of the fundamental helplessness of humanity, he sees it as a continuation of life. In the shamanist world, the encounters in the depths are with ravenous spirits that instruct as they destroy. The shaman's receptivity to the world of creatures opens after he or she has surrendered to a first death.

A comparison could be made between Breytenbach's works with the protruding tongue and a wooden mask of the Shaman Seton Tlingit of the Northwest Coast, which has a startled expression. The mask-image's eyes are open wide, yet expressionless, as though the "wits" have been frightened out of the subject and the extruded tongue tastes the wisdom of those who inhabit the wilderness realms. This transmission process is the "kiss of knowledge" when the shaman partakes of the raw nectar of the world of creatures.

The mouth carries the tongue and the lips the protruding tongue. *Mortrait (C-17)* is a self-portrait of Breytenbach sitting with folded hands (a sign of vulnerability), the eyes closed and the tongue protruding. The work is sombre and atonal. In the *King Breyten Series-4, (C-18)* Breytenbach depicts himself as Chinese. Although the tone of this work is light, we again have the protruding tongue.

Raw death and non-dualistic, amoral universes are revealed here. There is no morality in the stare of the hawk, nor morality in death. By wearing this mask, the shaman reminds the people of this fundamental condition of existence. The life way of the shaman is nearly as old as human consciousness itself, predating the earliest recorded civilisations by thousands of years. Through the ages, the practice of shamanism has remained vital, adapting itself to the ways of all the worlds' cultures. Today the role of the shaman takes many forms. He is the healer, who conducts ceremonials, the judge, the sacred politician and the artist, to name but a few. The shaman is at the very heart of some cultures, while living on the shadowy fringe of others. Nevertheless, a common thread seems to connect all shamans across the planet. This is the awakening to other orders of reality, the experience of ecstasy, and an opening of visionary realms from the essence of the shamanic mission.

The steps of the journey of shamanist initiation seem to have a patterned course. The call to power requires a separation from the mundane world: the neophyte turns away from the secular life, voluntarily, ritually, or spontaneously through sickness, and turns inward towards the unknown, the *mysterium*. Breytenbach had a good, working knowledge of the dismemberment, which is the gateway to the mystery, long before his incarceration. His shamanistic initiation started in his dismemberment from his Afrikaans community and his relationship with Yolande, who is Vietnamese. They willed and sought the incarceration after immolation. It was a deciding episode, but not the beginning at all. This change of direction can be accomplished only through obedience to awareness. Only through the development of discipline will the shaman's habitual ways of seeing and behaving dissolve, and the visionary

realms open. Thus, the initial calls of power takes the shaman to the realm of chaos, the *limen*, where power exists in a free and untransformed state (Halifax 1982:32).

Breytenbach had, throughout his artistic life, had an enduring relationship with death. A recent book, *Woordwerk*, and recent love poems written to Yolande in *Lady One*, constantly refers to death. It is as if death, which has enticed him his whole life, is gradually taking on “embodiment”. The deepest structures within the psyche are found in the themes of descent to the realm of death, where there is the confrontation with demonic forces, dismemberment, trial by fire, communion with the world of spirits, and creatures. There is also the assimilation of the elemental forces and an ascension via the World Tree and/or the Cosmic Bird. Further important aspects are the realisation of a solar identity, and return to the Middleworld, the world of human affairs. The shaman, however, has a social, rather than a personal reason for opening the psyche as he or she is concerned with the community and its well-being. Sacred action, then, is directed towards the creation of order out of chaos.

The shaman can tap into a “network of power”. The realization of power occurs most frequently in the midst of an ordeal, a crisis involving an encounter with death. It comes suddenly, in an instant. In many ways, the descriptions by shamans of their confrontation with power are comparable to accounts by yogis of the awakening of Kundalini and by Zen masters of their experience of enlightenment. The entrance to the other world occurs through the experiences of total disruption. The neophytes surrender to the realm of chaos, frequently using the experience of fear and dread to amplify the intensity of the situation. The neophyte underworld-voyager learns the battlefield that he or she will enter on the behalf of others in the future. Here, the shaman finds direct knowledge from awakening of empathy in the healer.