Breyten Breytenbach's "Middle World": the "Middle World as diaspora, identity, and consciousness"

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Summary: The concept "Middle World" in Breytenbach's work is a metaphor for an inter-cultural space in our increasingly globalized world. This space moves beyond a mere geographical position to encompass identity formation. This concept also takes shape within the context of literary theory and the interpretations of artistic creations.The "Middle World" and the possible implications of this concept for literary studies will be investigated.

The infinitely complex concept of the "Middle World" will be explored by utilizing some of the theoretical insights from a post-structuralist approach, some notions from postcolonial theory, and by looking at the process of consciousness formation through metaphorical triggers and sensory experiences. The main theorist against which Breytenbach's "Middle World" will be read is Homi Bhabha, and his references to the location of culture in an increasingly globalized world. He investigates the situation by looking at mimicry, hybridity, 'unhomeliness', history versus historicity, and the time lapse before signs become symbols in the space of negotiation between the self and the Other. Diaspora studies done by Bhabha, Cohen, Boehmer, Appadurai, Parry, and Said will be contrasted and explored to determine the extent to which "Middle World" add to the existing discourse. In looking at the relevance of the post-structural view, work that has already been done by various critics will be taken into account: Louise Viljoen, Grobler, Dimitriu, Anker, Hein Viljoen, Sienaert, Ampie Coetzee, Burger – to name but a few. Breytenbach's work will also be viewed from within the assertions of Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Kristeva, and others.

In looking at the genealogy of the "Middle World", the evolution of the concept from "No Man's Land" with its related aspects (exile, incarceration, the philosophical and political implications) are explored in order to establish the nature of "Middle World", which does not designate a specific place or space or nationality. "Middle World" as socio-economic and political alternative to globalization is discussed, as well as the relevance of "Middle World" as a theoretical spring-board from which to interpret Breytenbach's work. Seeing that Breytenbach's work cannot be interpreted from a single vantage point, "Middle World" and the fluidity of identity, space, and time, may prove to be useful in this regard. Finally, "Middle World" could also serve as metaphor of consciousness formation and thus be a guideline with which to 'read' (subversive) art.

Opsomming: Die konsep "Middelwêreld" in Breytenbach se werk is 'n metafoor vir die interkulturele ruimte in 'n toenemend globaliserende wêreld. Hierdie ruimte beweeg wyer as die blote geografiese gesitueerdheid daarvan, en omvat uiteindelik ook die vorming van identiteit. Hierdie konsep neem vorm aan binne die konteks van literêre teorie en het implikasies vir die interpretasie van kunsskeppings.

Die oneindig komplekse konsep van die "Middelwêreld" sal ontgin word deur sommige teoretiese insigte vanuit die poststrukturalistiese benadering te gebruik, sowel as sommige postkoloniale idees, en deur die proses van bewussynsvorming te ondersoek - met die verbandhoudende metaforiese en sensoriese snellers as vertrekpunt. Die hoofteoretikus teen wie Breytenbach se "Middelwêreld" ingespeel gaan word is Homi Bhabha, en wel deur die gebruikmaking van sy verwysinge na die plek waar kultuur gesitueer is in 'n toenemende

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globaliserende wêreld. Hy ondersoek hierdie situasie deur na mimiek, hibriditeit, 'unhomeliness' (die verdwyning van 'n tuiste), en geskiedenis teenoor historisiteit te kyk; én na die gaping in tydsverloop tussen die vorming van tekens en die identifikasie van hulle verwante simbole binne die spasie van onderhandeling tussen die self en die Ander. Diasporastudies gedoen deur Bhabha, Cohen, Boehmer, Appadurai, Parry, en Said sal gekontrasteer en ondersoek word ten einde die mate waartoe die "Middelwêreld" tot die bestaande diskoers bydra te bepaal. In 'n poging om die relevansie van die poststrukturele oogpunt te bepaal, sal die werk wat reeds deur verskeie kritici gedoen is in ag geneem word: Louise Viljoen, Dimitriu, Anker, Hein Viljoen, Sienaert, Ampie Coetzee, Burger – om maar 'n paar te noem. Breytenbach se werk sal ook vanuit die raamwerk van sekere stellings deur Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Kristeva, en andere beskou word.

Met die ondersoek van die genealogie van die "Middelwêreld", sal die konsep van "Niemandsland" met die verbandhoudende aspekte (ballingskap, gevangenisskap, die filosofiese en politiese implikasies) ontgin word, met die doelwit om die aard van "Middelwêreld" – wat nie 'n spesifieke plek of ruimte of nasionaliteit aandui nie - te bepaal. "Middelwêreld" as 'n sosio-ekonomiese en politieke alternatief vir globalisering word bespreek, sowel as die relevansie van "Middelwêreld" as 'n teoretiese vertrekpunt waarvandaan Breytenbach se werk geinterpreter kan word. Siende dat Breytenbach se werk nie vanaf 'n enkele uitkykpunt beskou kan word nie, mag die "Middelwêreld" en die vloeibaarheid van identiteit, ruimte, en tyd nuttig wees in hierdie verband. Uiteindelik sal "Middelwêreld" ook gebruik word as 'n metafoor vir bewussynsvorming en dus dien as 'n riglyn by die 'lees' van (subversiewe) kunsvorme.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Bibliography

CHAPTER 1

1.1.   Introducing the concept "Middle World"

> I'd like to taste the breeze and take a stroll through the Middle World,
> which is, and is not, the same as the Global Village. Let's say that those of
> the Middle World – I think of them as *un-citizens*, the way you have un-
> American activities as in contrast to those considered non- or anti-
> American – are Global Village vagrants, knights of the naked star. They are
> defined by what they are not, or no longer, and not so much by what they
> oppose or even reject. They ventured into zones where truths no longer
> fitted snugly and where certainties did not overlap, and most likely they
> got lost there.
>
> In the course of doing so, proceeding by interrogation and comparison
> discovering/uncovering the way and the ways of my hand, I hope to
> outline the territory and identify some of its inhabitants.
> (Breytenbach 2009c: 135)

A central and infinitely complex concept that is recurrent in the writing of Breyten
Breytenbach, and which he specifically focused on in his trilogy - *A Veil of Footsteps,
Intimate Stranger, and Notes from the Middle World* - is that of the "Middle World".
Breytenbach pointed out in an interview with Sandra Saayman, that these publications form
part of the Middle World Quartet: "this manuscript, *A Veil of Footsteps*, is conceived to be
part of what will ultimately be *The Middle World Quartet*" (Saayman 2009: 202). The fourth
and final book, *Doggod,* has not been published yet.

Even though the term "Middle World" has gained in prominence in Breytenbach's work in
the last decade or two, there is evidence of its existence evident in his earlier work,
referenced differently and In containing some alternate aspects (as I will point out in this
study), but sharing a similar central idea of estrangement and nomadism.

The goal of this study is to unpack various possible meanings and applications of this
concept. As is the case with so many images, themes and concepts in Breytenbach's work,
this concept is multi-layered and rich: it includes a wide spectrum of themes ranging from
globalisation to human consciousness. Breytenbach has always been subject to unusual
controversy resulting from his subversive approach to literature and art. The concept of the
"Middle World" could be regarded as a revolutionary concept, refined over time in his
writing (prose and poetry) into a cumulative understanding of various forms of art, theory
and philosophy, and proffered by the acutely socially-conscious outsider activist.

The "Middle World" is a poetic metaphor that opens up a variety of ways to understand the
situation of people in flux: this concept is closely associated with physical wandering,
travelling, moving between different cultures, languages and religious convictions and, in

doing so, seems to be representative of the idea of a globalised world: "I'd like to taste the breeze and take a stroll through the Middle World, which is, and is not, the same as the Global Village." (Breytenbach 2009c: 135). Breytenbach's "Middle World" goes beyond the accepted views of a global village into defining a new space, beyond exile and the erstwhile "No Man's Land" of his earlier work: "…I tried to suggest that the concept (and it is actually also a physical location) is an emerging archipelago somewhere beyond exile." (Breytenbach 2009c: 162). It is a space within which one can find refuge and asylum but where one remains an outsider.

In a globalized world, characterized by the high mobility of people beyond national borders: refugees, emigrants, exiles or migrants, the "Middle World" is a concept used by Breytenbach to broach the situation of these so-called "*un-citizens*" Breytenbach (2009c: 135). A systematic investigation of Breytenbach's concept of "Middle World" can contribute to the growing field of diaspora studies on the one hand, and can add to the existing literary criticism of Breytenbach's work on the other. Finally, the broader relevance of "Middle World" within the literary and artistic contexts will be explored.

This analysis will engage mainly post-structuralist thinking, post-colonialism, and a theory about consciousness formation, as the three main theoretical pillars around which to define Breytenbach's work. Before setting in motion an interplay between Breytenbach's work and theoretical bases, the evolution of "Middle World" in his work must be investigated, taking into account the imposing influence of his private and political stances.

Breytenbach has always had a complex relationship with his country of origin: he left the country of his birth in 1960 to live in a self-imposed exile. After his marriage to a Vietnamese citizen, classified by the Apartheid government as "non-white", he could not return to SA. He has always had an acute political awareness which he has already integrated in his earlier anthologies, and he overtly expressed his hatred towards the Apartheid regime and his aversion to the implications for the Afrikaner and the future of the Afrikaner, in Die Burger in 1965, and according to Francis Galloway, this is indicative of the central force in his work from this date onwards:

> Sedert 1965 figureer die Suid-Afrikaanse apartheidswerklikheid as die spil
> waarom Breytenbach se verbittering draai en waarteen sy verset gerig is -
> in sy uitsprake oor die skrywerstaak, in 'n hoë mate in sy skryfkuns self, en
> in sy politieke optrede wat in 1975 sou uitloop op sy skuldigbevinding
> onder die Wet op die Onderdrukking van Terrorisme. Reeds in die brief
> aan Die Burger (2.6.65) waarin hy reageer op die visumweiering aan
> Yolande rig hy hom hierteen: 'Ek haat en verafsku apartheid met al sy
> implikasies.' /
>
> Since 1965 the South-African apartheid reality becomes the spindle
> around which Breytenbach's bitterness evolves and at which his resistance
> is aimed – in his statements on the task of a writer, to a large extent in his
> writing itself, and in his political actions that would result in his conviction
> under the Law of the Suppression of Terrorism. Already in a letter to *Die
> Burger* (2.6.65), in which he reacts to the refusal of Yolande's application

for a visa, he expresses himself against the system: 'I hate and despise apartheid with all its implications.'

(Galloway 1990: 1 – my translation)

As a result of an array of elements and limitations, some of which were created by the Apartheid movement, Breytenbach became part of the resistance movement Okhela - whose aim was to undermine the Apartheid government with its oppressive regime, and later he was arrested as a result of these political activities, and sentenced in South Africa. Since his release from prison, after having served a seven-year sentence, South Africa has not become his place of permanent residence. He often visits the country, however. He has expressed his revulsion towards the government and the Afrikaners on various occasions, yet he keeps on returning to the country and keeps on writing in Afrikaans. An illustration of this paradoxical situation appears in "Mother City" (Breytenbach 2008a: 142), where he claims to be "an invisible visitor reading the news of a foreign culture and blue skies". These elements will be further detailed in chapter 3.

Breytenbach, clearly perceiving himself as a "Middle World" un-citizen, does not have a sense of belonging to South Africa or to any other country: "I call it Middle World because of its position somewhere equidistant from East and West, North and South, belonging and not belonging" (Breytenbach 2009c: 136), and to further reinforce his displacement, he alludes to his first language as the language of the "Poor and the Homeless" (Breytenbach 2008: 143). The relationship between "Middle World" and diaspora will be developed in chapter 4. The idea of the "Middle World" appears in an earlier form already in *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* as a "No Man's Land" (as I argue more comprehensively in chapter 5). In this work, it is closely associated with prison, a place where identity is lost: : "… after seven and a half years of lying in prison like a pulse beat in the heart of "No Man's Land" (Breytenbach 1988: 130). This barren isolation is developed over time and takes on an altered manifestation. He describes Gorée – which is one place of residence for the Breytenbach of the "Middle World" – as a space where "Winds blow and shots are fired and stories are made from the hybridisation of reality and imagination and memory" (Breytenbach 2008a: 178). In this hybrid space there is a fusion between reality, imagination and memory, emphasising that the spaces on the outside of the "Middle World" are imported into and interrelated to the inner spaces, and thus to the creative process. Hybridisation transpires within the dynamic construction of identity, as well as on a cultural level, when an un-citizen interacts with her/ his environment.

Focusing on the cultural hybridisation in a global world, Homi Bhabha explores the concept of "unhomeliness" in *The Location of Culture,* which has a certain resemblance to that of the "un-citizens" of the "Middle World": "that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (Bhabha 2004: 13). He defines this space as hybrid, as a 'difference', an 'in-between' reality (Bhabha 2004: 19). This interstice opens up a space for self-definition – a central theme to both Bhabha's and Breytenbach's arguments.

This process of the investigation of identity formation is essential to Breytenbach's oeuvre and evidently central to living in the "Middle World": "…we are constantly defined and undefined by the narrative of self-invention" (Breytenbach 2009c: 152). This process initially manifested itself in the forms of masks, mirrors and doubling – all of which are typical to

Surrealist writing. Characteristic of his work is the disintegration of the 'I', for which there is a simultaneous compensatory doubling of the 'I', according to Sienaert (2001: 45). The mirror is specifically prominent and versatile, suggesting a reflection on identity: "die bespiegeling oor identiteit" (Coetzee 2003: 28). In *Dog Heart,* Dog is looking from the mirror at the narrator and the emphasis is on the multiplicity of identities Breytenbach constructs for and of himself in his oeuvre: "Hierna word Dog een van die groot verskeidenheid identiteite wat Breytenbach vir homself in die loop van sy oeuvre sal konstrueer"/ "From this point onwards, Dog becomes one of a great variety of identities that Breytenbach will construct for himself during the course of his oeuvre" (Viljoen 2005: 11 – my translation). Breytenbach also explores the African identity, in the sense that writing or painting becomes a ritual of the "dancing of the bones", enabling the establishment of a link with ancestral identities. Another African ritualistic aspect featured in his work is that of the mask: "for him the concept of identity is closely linked to the concept of masking: "Not only does it embody identity as something which cannot be fully revealed or understood, it also suggests a constantly transforming 'I' – a perpetual shedding of identities which evoke the mysteriousness of being. This is indeed the traditional African point of view" (Sienaert 1999: 83).

An extension of the hybrid nature and fluidity of identity is the paradoxical motif of amputation that Breytenbach often introduces. Woundedness presents the opportunity for change and transformation. Amputation equally illustrates that there is no author per se who can be identified as solely responsible for the creation. Several hands partake in the writing process in *Woordwerk* for instance*,* resulting in multiple narrators and authors and facilitating the process of metamorphosis: "As die hand egter afgekap word, dui dit op 'n oop- en / of uitbreking van en uit die organisme, die subjek of die betekeningstrukture na die kreatiewe potensialiteit wat vry beweeg op die konsistensievlak"/ "If the hand is being chopped off, it indicates the breaking open or out of the organism, from the subject or the structures of meaning to the creative potential that moves around freely on the consistency level" (Anker 2007: 7 – my translation). The creative potential or space thus opened up is also highlighted by Heilna du Plooy: "Ultimately, the representations of the self do not project an enhanced self-image, but are, rather, in Breytenbach's case, a way of opening up the self by creating spaces within and around it, by creating emptiness which can always be filled again with momentary but new processes of becoming" (Du Plooy 2009: 152).

Identity is continually shifting in Breytenbach's work and the exploration thereof is maintained. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha investigates identity formation extensively as well, and I believe his exploration can shed light on Breytenbach's work. Bhabha's assertions often coincide with notions within Breytenbach's oeuvre. Moreover, his rather unconventional 'poetic'/ metaphorical approach to writing theory and literary criticism ties in with Breytenbach's emphasis on the metaphor as aid to concept formation. Bhabha points out that "the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (Bhabha 2004: 64), which echoes the fluidity upon which Breytenbach insists in relation to the question of identity.

However, the concept of the "Middle World" goes beyond the exploration of identity. In *A Veil of Footsteps*, Breytenbach justifies Breyten Wordfool's wandering by stating that: "…he

is exploring some Middle World in this continuum of time that has neither beginning nor end…" (Breytenbach 2008: 15), and hereby introduces the vastness of this concept which encompasses a wide variety of themes - both concrete and abstract. In this quotation, the focus is on wandering and exploring the interstices hidden in our conception of time and space. This exploration is qualified in *Intimate Stranger* as an artistic endeavour, as poetry. Subsequently, poetry is defined as consciousness: "Poetry is the breath of awareness and the breathing thereof… verses are 'natural units' of consciousness sculpted by rhythm, by recall, by movement reaching for the edges of meaning and darkness" (Breytenbach 2009a: 15). The wanderings of "Wordfool" therefore, do not only become an existential and artistic preoccupation, but an investigation into and constitution of consciousness.

This study is thus also an attempt at illuminating the process of consciousness formation, which provides the reader with tools to liberate her-/ himself from the confines of rational, linear thought-processes, in order to partake in the mind-altering exchange between the reader and the text. The main aim in this case is not to engage in the semiotic game of signs and signifiers that are constantly shifting in typical post-structuralist fashion, but to expose a 'reality'/ a beyond or and 'in-between' that overrides a mere preoccupation with the constantly indefinable signification. This 'reality' is fleeting and disappears as it is 'realised', leaving behind the ashes - the burnt fingers of the poet – for to write poetry is to play with fire - according to Breytenbach - as the poet touches the heat (or intensity) of the fleeting instant. The moment of consciousness opens up a new perception. This ephemeral instant cannot be captured but only reflected in the empty mirror, the corpse of the poem, in dust and stones. Breytenbach is at once creating an alternative possibility within which to exist in our contemporary global context, and situating the interaction with the text (art), within this possibility as a tool to delineate this alternative.

1.2.   Breytenbach, Theory, and the "Middle World"

Before exploring the in-between space or 'reality' as a space within the "Middle World", one has to look at theoretical interfaces between Breytenbach's oeuvre and existing concepts.

The author has expressed vociferous disregard for the post-structuralist literary and philosophical trends on numerous occasions: "the deconstructionists who were so homo-infatuated they believed the outlaw mind could be in-lawed, […] They subscribed only to the thrust for power of Nietzsche's will and autonomy of language and conveniently forgot about the breakdown" (Breytenbach 2009c: 151-152) and "The post-modernist discourse with its facile moral feel-good spin-off, has led to a wallowing in the troughs of the self" (Breytenbach 2009a: 36-37). Despite these criticisms, the concept of the "Middle World" does overlap with and could shed light on post-structuralist ideas and preoccupations. Concept-formation within the conscious and unconscious mind is evidently also a postmodernist field of interest. Intertextuality is ever-present in Breytenbach's work, and he is always pushing the boundaries of accepted literary genres - writing what could be classified as the "(post) modern experimental novel" (Reckwitz 1993:142). Signification is also constantly slipping and deferring: "The deferral of meaning involved in this incessant sliding of signification along a chain of signifiers is bound forever to thwart (and thus

reorientate) our readerly desire and expectations as to the 'true' nature of what is being said" (Reckwitz 1993:142). Thus, even though Breytenbach does not subscribe to the post-structural values and ambitions, his work seems to have distinctly post-structural features.

As the "Middle World" is both an existential and artistic concept, a traditional classification of the manifestations thereof and of its inhabitants is incongruous. Distinctions between texts spill over into each other and traditional definitions become lacking. The "Middle World" is also the ultimate space where play becomes possible in the post-structural sense of the word. There is a constant refuting of binary oppositions and the centre keeps shifting. As a result, a traditional deconstructive reading becomes impossible: "A deconstructive reading thus reads a text against itself, looking for the holes and the shaky parts of the system of stable meanings the text tries to set up" (Klages 2006: 60). In Breytenbach's work, meaning is in constant flux to such an extent that comprehension as a foregone conclusion constitutes an undesirable outcome, seeing that ultimate comprehension implies a static state - which is death. Breytenbach accordingly creates the anxiety of being faced with a structure without a centre: "With this certitude (of a fixed centre) anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably a certain mode of being implicated in the game" (Derrida 1993: 224). This anxiety or discomfort is Breytenbach's way to trace a path to the "unthinkable". Poetry is "thought on its way to the unthinkable" (Breytenbach 2009a: 39). "Poetry is a world (the world inside and outside us) shaped by breath. It is the breath of dreaming drawn from a hunger of awareness – the awareness that tells you that to be awake is also the result of dreaming expressed in the internal vibration of rhythm" (Breytenbach 2009a: 46). A purely deconstructive reading of Breytenbach's work will be unsatisfactory, however, and "understanding", in the sense of pinning down a conclusion, should not be the goal of the exercise. The value of his work is clearly in the evolution of post-structural concepts and not in the mere appropriation of post-structural philosophy.

In a typical anarchic manner, Breytenbach investigates power structures (which again shows similarities to Foucault's deconstructive ideas): the "Middle World" being the ultimate subversion of any political power structure. Political structures are exposed in his essays, which refuse to conform to the conventional format of political debate and manifest themselves within the context of artistic expressions instead: "European farmers are subsidized not to produce crops, and millions of people are starving to death" (Breytenbach 2009c: 89). Furthermore, there is the exploration of body politics, which tie in with the theme of identity formation and subvert accepted norms, values and power structures related to a person's perception of sexuality, sexual identity and male-dominated societies. This process is visible in his writing about his experience in prison: "There they went by numbers and specialised in subduing, by rape, males into 'females'…" (Breytenbach 2008a: 133), but extends further and is visible in his art, where he focuses a lot on overcoming and/ or overthrowing the binary opposition between male and female, when his central figures are portrayed as transsexual.

Even in his narrative structure and approach, this subversion is maintained. His micro-narratives function as rhizomes, showing the interconnectedness of the physical world and the world of writing and erasing any hierarchy between the two: "What does this watery surface further remind you of? The stream of his thoughts is fretting the submerged and reticent stones of experience (like a beheaded cock)." (Breytenbach 2009b: 147). These

worlds are entwined and no precedence is given to either the natural or the mental. Immutable power or importance is not given to the author or the narrator and therefore the pun of the "beheaded cock" is aptly introduced.

The scope of the study will range from identifying the concept the "Middle World" and establishing its genealogy, to situating this concept within contemporary theoretical and philosophical frameworks and indicating its function. The following research questions need to be answered in this regard: what does the "Middle World" represent in Breytenbach's work; how is this concept related to the phenomenon of the diaspora; which theoretical framework can be used to illustrate the definition of identity and culture within the "Middle World"; what is the relationship between writing and consciousness and to what extent are these relevant to the "Middle World"; and finally – how could these findings influence our approach to reading Breytenbach's work and do these findings have a bearing on reading literature in general?

1.3. "Middle World" – a brief overview

> The Middle World, on the other hand, inhabited by us bums of the Global Village, is the position of *being* on your way to the vacuous, for you can neither return to where you came from nor will you ever be integrated to the point of unconscious belonging in the place you fled to for asylum. Perhaps I should say it is the *process* of being neither fish nor fowl. In a way it heralds the end of exile, but to accede to the Middle World it is not necessary to have been geographically displaced: Kafka, I pointed out, lived there even though he never really left Prague.
> (Breytenbach 2009c: 162)

The concept "Middle World" represents a place that is neither here nor there, that cannot be stipulated or located geographically, which comes into being wherever the "Middle World un-citizens" reside. This place or space shapes the consciousness of its inhabitants as a constantly changing, mind-altering existence.

The definition of the "Middle World" cannot be separated from its inhabitants. The space within which the un-citizens develop a cultural identity from a migratory position constitutes "Middle World", and as such, this concept is closely related to the cultural phenomena stemming from diasporas: albeit as a result war-torn countries propelling their citizens into fugitive status; impoverished people seeking better opportunities; or the voluntary migrations of curious minds. "Middle World" encompasses these peoples who belong nowhere and who are content being in a perpetual liminal, "in-between" state.

"Middle World" is neither discriminatory nor indulgent. Yet, there is a decisive selection process determining the un-citizen status of an individual: outsiders and outlaws sketch the outlines by blurring distinctions between them. Another cross-section is constituted by people who have lost attachments to a specific language or country. Artists recreating the "beyond" also form part of this space, as well as people who travel ceaselessly – whether in

the mind or geographically. Un-citizens are of the periphery and centrists are excluded. To qualify as an un-citizen, one has to be perpetually moving and changing, reinventing oneself: this existence is all about metamorphosis and evolution - "of living in the possible tense" (Breytenbach 2009c: 155). The specific space within the consciousness where these alterations take place also forms part of the "Middle World".

The question arises as to how the "Middle World" and the manifold processes that it entails unfold in time. The relationship between the passage of time and the "Middle World" is one of a-temporality where there is no beginning nor ending, and where one exists on the continuum of time where a seamlessness exists between life and death:

> to write is as well
> to be half-healed
> of death
>
> what remains is to walk on
> with life a shadowed
> smoke from the burning body.
> (Breytenbach 2008a: 38)

The concept of "Middle World" forms part of the creative process – as mentioned previously: "As I went along (I said), I found that when you 'de-localise' a discipline, disrupting the conditioned expectations of the viewer by bringing it into the presence of another, a new space opens" (Breytenbach 2008a: 152). The 'new space' is the "Middle World" of consciousness formation. This process is evidently subversive and revolutionary in its alteration of accepted and expected ideas and identities, of the very fabric of our concept formation. And as far as Breytenbach is concerned, poetry is a medium through which these alterations can be achieved: "I'm suggesting that poetry can be a discipline of consciousness" (Breytenbach 2009a: 48). Therefore, poetry becomes instrumental in the creation of "Middle World".

"Middle World" equally moves outside of the deconstructionist imprisonment within the confines of language: "... provoked by image and metaphor, "lucid objects of language", to open on to a "third dimension" beyond the references of word-meaning" (Breytenbach 2009a: 48), a dimension constituting "Middle World" consciousness. The non-conceptual dimension reiterates Breytenbach's engagement with Zen Buddhism in the sense that a beyond becomes visible, which can also be referred to as the nada – nothingness.
Time in the "Middle World" can be perceived as the process of creating space, concepts, poetry. Each of the above-mentioned elements are of primary importance to the delineation of "Middle World" and as such, will be extensively covered in this study: to ultimately show the relevance of the "Middle World"- metaphor to the artistic experience, and the function of this experience as a way of warding off and embracing death in equal measures.

Before moving into the interconnectedness of time and space and artistic production, a global angle or view should be adopted with which to look at Breytenbach's work. The following chapter in an exploration of these possibilities.

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Chapter 2: "Middle World" as diaspora, identity, and consciousness formation: establishing a relevant approach

The dilemma encoded in any critical approach to Breytenbach's work is in providing a logically coherent rendition of a body of work, which is often characterised by the irrational. What is the value of a rational approach to work emphasising the strictures of such an operation? What is the point of academic writing on a text where tactile awareness becomes a tool with which to expand one's consciousness? The opening lines to the chapter entitled "Mind Shadows" in *Intimate Stranger* (2009) depict the extent to which pure reason and a simple attempt at understanding Breytenbach's work are insufficient, if not entirely irrelevant.

> "*Poetry is about repetition,*" Karen Blixen wrote. And when we repeat, as long as it is not just empty patternmaking, we bring about space because the 'super-structure' of meaning is weakened and other aspects of writing are foregrounded. In a similar vein, I already suggested several times that writing is a consciousness-expanding activity for both writer and reader, if only because it brings sharpened awareness of what we cannot say or would have liked to say better"
>
> (Breytenbach 2009a: 131).

In order to discuss the concept of the "Middle World" in Breytenbach's work, a theoretical framework that will provide adequate scope within which to explore anthropology, literature, philosophy, politics and consciousness is desirable. One would assume that an appropriate style of critical writing, positing elements, which defy understanding and interpretation, while being consistently subversive in approach, is required. However, the strictures of academic writing could easily restrict such freedom. Moreover, one is restricted by a logical approach and I am bound to adhere to conventional methods in an attempt to overcome this nearly insurmountable difficulty. In this attempt, the following information is invaluable: Breytenbach creates tension on various levels on his canvasses and in his writing: the tension can be tactile, auditory, or visual. The source of the tension is the incongruous elements brought together by his visual or literary metaphors. The seemingly incomprehensible combinations of elements confronts the reader/ viewer with a challenge: to take the leap of the imagination, while engaging the senses, to open up a field beyond linear thought, to propel one into the "beyond", the "in-between", the interstice, or the mindspace of the "Middle World". This experience is central to this study: a consciousness-altering experience outside of rational thought-processes.

An inspiration and guide in the effort to find a theoretic basis within which to anchor Breytenbach's "Middle World", who will also provide me with the main theoretical framework against which Breytenbach's "Middle World" can be reflected, is Homi Bhabha's take on cultural hybridity, as he is moving on the continuum of Fanon, Said, Derrida, and Foucault, to name but a few. He furthermore sees cultural hybridity as a negotiation but is painfully aware of the breach in communication, resulting from the lapse in time before a sign has been absorbed to the extent that communication becomes successful. Bhabha therefore focuses on the omissions in history, where these lapses pass by unidentified. In

my opinion, Breytenbach's concept formation taking place in the interstices, does acknowledge these lapses. These two authors' work therefore become complementary.

Bhabha's refined and creative approach to critical writing, within which he has succeeded to erase the previously existing barrier between critical and creative writing, by creating a "literary critical" approach, will direct my thinking:

> ...many complexities in reading Bhabha's work derive from its poetic qualities: it is unsurprising that he once aspired to be a poet. The modes of reading to which Bhabha is attracted are literary: they are literary critical, attentive to language and its ambiguities, hesitations, excesses, and silences. His readings of other writers, from many different contexts and disciplines, have this literary quality in common.
>
> (Huddard: 2007: 14)

Homi Bhabha focuses extensively on the current cultural hybridity of people in all its complexities and as such, will serve as a sounding board for this study:

> The synchronicity in the social ordering of symbols is challenged within its own terms, but the grounds of engagement have been displaced in a supplementary movement that exceeds those terms. This is the historical movement of hybridity as camouflage, as a contesting, antagonistic agency functioning in the time-lag of sign/ symbol, which is a space in-between the rules of engagement.
>
> (Bhabha 1994: 277)

As far as Bhabha is concerned, the hybrid identity takes shape in the space where engagement takes place, where there is some kind of confrontation: the confrontation stems from difference and the imposition of power structures onto others (as is extensively illustrated by colonialism). These differences has as an impact on the colonised - the desire to imitate the coloniser ("mimicry"), and the coloniser has the desire to subjugate and inflict change by overpowering the colonised. Even if, during this confrontation, there is a defiance in view of the "Other", there are still exchanges taking place. Given the fluid nature of the relationship between signs and signification, a "time-lapse" occurs in establishing signs or symbols within the altered context, and the hybrid develops herself or himself within this lapse. Bhabha equally explores the cultural hybridisation within a postcolonial context, and on a gender level.

In Breytenbach's work however, the hybrid identity is developed on a wider scale: he/ she moves within and beyond the political and socio-economic implications of this hybridisation, he/ she refutes the "subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse" (Bhabha 1994: 95) of the dialectical colonial discourse and the subsequent "mimicry": "*Almost the same but not white:* the visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction" (Bhabha 1994: 128). In Breytenbach's work, the refutation lies in the subversion of stereotypes and the blurring of boundaries, thereby erasing the "site of interdiction". Breytenbach allows for "mindcoming" and "dreamatory" (Breytenbach 2009a: 29) in the "Middle World" just beyond the moon, equating "*fictionality* and *factionation*"

(Breytenbach 2009a: 69), making "manifest the magic in which we still live, even in a globalized, post-modernist world" (Breytenbach 2009a: 19). In other words, Breytenbach does not draw a distinctive line between fiction and fact, nor does he deny the healing power of poetry, of the consciousness-altering administration of the poet-shaman's impact. These are elements that evidently are not included in Bhabha's discussion. The importance of "Middle World" is not only in defining a condition of cultural hybridity in a globalised world, nor of delineating a space of consciousness formation, but also of healing, of magic, of ritual.

However, to a certain extent, the hybridity delineated by the "Middle World" does have commonalities with globalisation and the migrations triggered by diasporas. Breytenbach therefore, also perceives the un-citizen of the "Middle World" as a migrant, an outcast, an illegal. He explores the conditions of these migrants on a wide scale, as well as the impact of global capitalism on the poorest of the poor. Being forever the political activist, he alerts the readers to the dangers and iniquities of the global system. In this manner, the "Middle World" then serves as a platform from which to explore the socio-economic impact of globalisation, along with the impact on the individual and his/ her identity-formation.

In a literary and artistic context, Breytenbach's works usually confront the reader or viewer with incongruous elements, and the process of relating these elements opens up formerly ignored or unknown realities. This space of "unknown realities" is the "Middle World", which equally constitute a space of healing. I strongly feel that the metaphor of "Middle World" can be used on a broader basis and be adopted as an approach to "reading" art in general. The importance of "Middle World" thus does not solely lie within Breytenbach's own oeuvre. This concept can be extended well beyond an approach to his personal visual art or texts.

Another obstacle to commenting on Breytenbach's "Middle World" is the fact that Breytenbach's prose in general, deliberately evades the confines of a specific conventional genre definition, and one therefore cannot situate his work within the framework provided by such classification as a springboard from which to approach an analysis. Neither is it possible to insert his work within a specific, identified literary movement. Moreover, the vastness of the intertextuality in his work makes it very challenging to establish a network of authors or literary works with which his oeuvre has entered into a dialogue. This fluidity further supports the concept of expanding consciousness, as the reader is continually challenged by Breytenbach's novel approach, which illustrates that form and content coincide even on this level. I will discuss these points below.

Furthermore, there is an ephemeral quality to his work and specifically the concept of "Middle World" because the main preoccupation is often consciousness formation on a cultural level, which is need not be separated from fleeting instances of consciousness formation embedded in the interaction between author and creation, and reader and creation: "In a similar vein, I already suggested several times that writing is a consciousness-expanding activity for both writer and reader, if only because it brings sharpened awareness of what we cannot say or would have liked to say better" (Breytenbach 2009a: 131). When a reader is confronted with a poem, for instance, the interaction with that poem will alter the way in which the reader perceives certain objects or concepts. The reader has to build

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constructs of interpretation. The constructs of interpretation by the reader result from the multiplicity of possible interpretations embedded in Breytenbach's metaphors. In literary theory, an increasing awareness of these variables amongst a variety of readers has been defined:

> The metaphor 'Achilles is a lion' can be teased out to give 'Achilles is like a lion in respect of the following features …' However, after Max Black's influential paper in which he proposed what he called an 'interaction' theory, philosophers have become acutely aware of the way in which different hearers or readers pick out different common features between the terms of a metaphor. Metaphors are interpreted and they are interpreted differently by different readers and hearers. Consequently, the idea that there can be a literal paraphrase of a metaphor which preserves its sense is no longer widely held, for such a literal paraphrase would have to command common agreement as expressing what the metaphor means.
> (Honderich 2005: 135)

In Breytenbach's work, as a result of the incongruous elements and the focus on the relationship amongst these elements, the question is not merely one of multiple interpretations of the same metaphor by various readers. The metaphor moves to a new vantage point, from which multiple possible interpretations shift in a single reader's mind in relation to a single metaphor, from one reading to another, and one moment to another. Breytenbach deliberately and consciously utilises multiple interpretations. I will discuss the metaphor in Breytenbach's writing in more detail later in this chapter.

All these aspects have to be taken into consideration in attempting a critical analysis of "Middle World" in Breytenbach's oeuvre.

Before looking into defining a critical analysis to his work, the fluidity between his work and other texts must be highlighted, as his work cannot be considered in isolation or separately from a wider scope of artistic creations. Breytenbach's work deliberately remains within an ephemeral instant where they overlap with other texts, thus creating a "Middle World" where other textual "worlds" equally hover for a moment between the past and the future.

2.1. **Intertextuality in Breytenbach's oeuvre**

The dialogue between Breytenbach's work and numerous other artistic creations has such scope, and there are so many interfaces with other art movements, that his work takes on an incommensurate quality; resulting in the fact that a process of selection of movements might be reductive: "Breytenbach, who had chosen to be a "war machine" right from the start of his mission as artist, engages in a dialogue with the **whole legacy of art and art history**" (Grobler 2002: 2.3 - my emphasis). Personally, I find it unfeasible for any single individual to be able to cover such an enormous field but accept that Breytenbach has a wide frame of reference. With this acknowledgement, Melanie Grobler underlines one of the main obstacles in writing about Breytenbach's work: the multitude of texts with which

his work interacts. Intertextuality – a typical post-structural element - is ever-present in Breytenbach's work, in a web of multitudinous direct references: "In *Fugitive Pieces* Anne Michaels said..." (Breytenbach 2009 a: 40), or implicit references subtly layering the text: "Vrede op aarde in die mense 'n welbehae" / "Peace on earth to those with whom He is pleased" (Breytenbach 1971: 44), where he plays on a quotation from the Bible.

These recurrent references to and quotations from existing texts add a multitude of layers of meaning to Breytenbach's works, constituting an interplay amongst all these images and texts within a fleeting interstice.

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned difficulties, the existing critical texts and their relationship with specific literary movements will serve as a guideline.

2.2. <u>Literary movements and critical approaches in relation to Breytenbach's work</u>

I will try to establish a few overarching existing critical approaches to Breytenbach's work and point out the related – if any – literary movements. The concept of the "Middle World" needs to be integrated within a broader literary context to facilitate access to this metaphor which involves an investigation of the existing stances.

In previous research, the concept of the "Middle World" and what it represents in Breytenbach's work, has been touched upon. It is yet to be developed comprehensively and no studies have to date been dedicated to *Intimate Stranger* – a text within which all the philosophical and existential nuances of the "Middle World" are explored. Bearing in mind the relevance and scope of this concept and all the related aspects and ideas, it appears crucial to dedicate a specific study to this concept.

There are several publications referring to the basic outline and principles of the "Middle World" in Breytenbach's work – mostly situating his work within a post-structuralist context. The most prominent and extensive of these are those by Louise Viljoen.

In her article: "'n Tussenin-boek": Enkele gedagtes oor liminaliteit in Breyten Breytenbach se Woordwerk" (Viljoen 2005), Viljoen labels residence in the "Middle World" as a liminal state. She explores the wealth of creative material and energy that is generated within the space that is inevitably opened up by the liminal domain. Moreover, the focus shifts to the necessary splitting and shattering of identities within the liminal state and she follows this annihilation of the self - even beyond this point of multiple and broken identities - to becoming the embodiment of death. The liminal state consists of three phases, according to Viljoen (2005): the preliminal, the liminal, and the post-liminal, where the person is reintegrated into the new context and culture. The liminal state of the un-citizens of the "Middle World" is a perpetual state however, as they will never reach the post-liminal state of integration into their new surroundings.

The multifariousness of identity or the definition of 'self' is also prevalent in Heilna du Plooy's article: "… the representations of the self … […] … are, rather, in Breytenbach's case, a way of opening up the self by creating spaces within and around it, by creating emptiness which can always be filled again with momentary but new processes of becoming" (Du Plooy 2009: 152). Again, like Viljoen, she highlights the potential creative space that this emptiness makes available.

The multiplication of identities is also explored by Willem Anker, from the angle of amputation which allows for this multiplicity in identities to assert itself:

> Bostaande voorbeelde uit *Woordwerk* dui enersyds daarop hoe die hand wel die lokus van singewing is, maar andersins impliseer dit ook dat Breytenbach in sy boek *Woordwerk* talle hande versamel, wat beteken dat hy homself juis in die eerste plek losmaak uit sy self deur die skryfhande van ander in sy werk te versamel /

> The above-mentioned examples from *Woordwerk* indicate, on the one hand, the extent to which the hand effectively is the locus of meaning being transmitted, but on the other hand, it also indicates that Breytenbach collects lots of hands in his book *Woordwerk*, which implies that he initially, in effect, disengages himself from the self by collecting within his work the hands of other authors/ writers.
> (Anker 2007: 7 – my translation)

The annihilation of the self is extended to the point where the author surrenders the creative process to others. The "death of the author", as Roland Barthes termed the condition, evidently forms part of Breytenbach's approach (despite his criticism of this theoretical stance) to the creative process and situates his work firmly within a post-structural context.

In her earlier analyses of Breytenbach's work, Louise Viljoen focuses specifically on the "Middle World" as it is developed in *Dog Heart* (Breytenbach 1998): "Hartland en Middelwêreld: die hantering van die spanning tussen die lokale en globale in Breyten Breytenbach se *Dog Heart"* (Viljoen 2002). The unstable self in this "Middle World" is emphasised, as well as the blurring lines separating fiction and reality. Moreover, she points out the relevance of and relatedness to postmodernist thought and to globalisation. History is reproduced by Breytenbach in a consciously and deliberately subjective way in this novel, which is a typical postmodernist theme, and she introduces similar themes when drawing attention to his shifting identity, the fluidity in the establishment of his roots and links between his present and his past cultural contexts. This continual exchange between past and present results in metamorphosis – which again underlines the creative process that is inherent to the experience.

Viljoen points out (Viljoen 2002: 171) that Breytenbach chooses Montagu as heartland because it corresponds to his experience of feeling marginalised, which is characteristic of the liminal state. He perceives himself to be of mixed origin and this perception is reflected by the geographical location of Montagu: the town lies on the border between two areas in

the Cape. The poverty and simplicity found here are representative of Montagu's appeal and beauty – it is his "barren paradise" (Breytenbach 1998: 69). The idea of bastardisation, springing from rootedness in this area, is prominent and relevant to the un-citizens of the "Middle World". This idea is stipulated by Jacobs: "…he traces his own nomadism back to the residual Khoi blood in his Afrikaner veins, the ethnic and cultural legacy of his South African "heartland" (Jacobs 2009: 100). He draws parallels between this nomadism of Breytenbach and the African diaspora, in a comparative study between Breytenbach, Coetzee, Gordimer and Mda – a theme that will be explored extensively in this study, focusing exclusively on Breytenbach however.

Viljoen (Viljoen 2002: 182) concludes that Breytenbach remains on the outskirts of both the local and the global, creating a dialectic between the specific and the general, which is an ongoing process. This process is similar, in many respects, to that of a diasporic postcolonial experience. She specifies however, that Breytenbach's oeuvre is an attempt at reaching beyond the binary oppositions typical of the postcolonial situation (Viljoen 2002: 182).

Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez's contribution on diasporas is a valuable study called: "Notes from an Unrepentant Border Crosser", within which he compares the un-citizens of the "Middle World" to people crossing the border between the States and Mexico. He explores the power structures and the extent to which the "Middle World" subverts these structures: "The Middle World posits a counter-narrative to the flows of power that would attempt to control, to delimit. Language may be one such marker of a Middle World identity" (Vaquera-Vàsquez 2006: 711). Furthermore, he tries to delineate the "Middle World" identity, pinpointing the commonalities between Breytenbach's "Middle World" and the "un-citizens" crossing the borders. The restriction imbedded in his study is its applicability solely to this specific geographical area and its related components. My study will be less specific and encompassing a broader field and focusing on abstract concepts as well. Thus far, literary critics have pointed towards the post-structural elements and the postcolonial touchstones.

In Moon's article, the focus is primarily on the "Middle World" as a space resembling exile and diaspora. In this study on *Dog Heart,* pointing at the ongoing creative process, Moon is equally exploring liminality: "Het zijn het vreemdelingschap en buitenstaanderschap die typerend zijn voor de meeste diasporische identiteiten. Op deze manier bevat het concept *diaspora* de discoursen van 'thuis' en 'verstrooiing' in vruchtbare spanning, zodat het diasporische subject zich in een permanente overgangsfase bevindt"/ "It is the condition of being a stranger and an outsider that is typifying most diasporic identities. As a result, the concept *diaspora*, contains the discourses of 'home' and 'scatteredness' as co-existing and as creating a fruitful tension, to the extent that the subject of the diaspora finds himself or herself in a permanent in-between phase" (Moon 2011: 76 – my translation). An extensive analysis of "exile" within Breytenbach's oeuvre will be provided in chapter 4. This constant transitional phase ("oorgangsfase") that Moon and Viljoen identify, can be directly related to consciousness formation – the third theoretical pillar of this study.

Consciousness and concept formation as a prerequisite to living in the "Middle World", are explored by Melanie Grobler, in her thesis on Breytenbach's visual art and she states that: "The Middleworld person will be obliged to create concepts. The security of the repetition

of the known is forbidden to him. […] Breytenbach's pattern of consciousness is based on a continual play of concepts. Death, decay and movement are interlinked" (Grobler 2002: 166). A central and complex aspect of Breytenbach's work is the interwoven nature of death and movement, which is illustrated by Burger when he states that consciousness is "dus niks anders nie as om voortdurend die opeenvolgende ketting van "hedes" dood te maak"/ "is none other than the continually killing the successive chain of "present moments" (Burger 2009: 12 – my translation). This assertion provides one with an angle from which to explore the relationship between death and movement. The present cannot be captured but if movement persists, the unknown unfolds by participating in the challenging interplay of concepts, enabling the "Middle World" un-citizen to experience the present moments in the 'beyond'.

Concept formation is a complex rhizomic structure, which is explored by Petrus De Kock in his article: "Die risoom is 'n beeld, metafoor of idee wat Gilles Deleuze en Felix Guattari aanwend om die gedagte van verspreiding, konneksies en verstrengeldheid aan te dui"/ "The rhizome is the image, the metaphor or the idea that Gilles Deleuze and Gelix Guattari apply to indicate the concepts of distribution, connections and interrelatedness" (De Kock 2000: 280 – my translation). In his investigation of the relativity of 'reality', he looks at the density, complexity, heterogeneity, and the non-hierarchical structure of identity yet again, still situating Breytenbach's work within a post-structuralist context.

Another study focusing on the postmodernist and postcolonial aspects is that of Nancy Pedri, within which she explores the relationship between mirrors and identity in Breytenbach's work: "In this short story, as in many other texts by Breytenbach, the mirror is postulated as both a measure of mimesis and a mode of private alienation. It is a descriptive and a destructive surface that underscores the dissolution of boundaries separating the reflection of self and the invention of self, objective identity and subjective identity, the real self and the imaged or fictional self"(Pedri 2002:299). This point is again made by Erhard Reckwitz: "A mirror that is more of a filter than a truthful reflector of the past is thus a highly unreliable affair, it is, to use Derrida's graphic image, a mirror without a reflexive coating at the back that transforms or distorts everything reflected by it" (Reckwitz 1993: 143). Multiple studies have been dedicated to the function and meaning of the mirror in Breytenbach's work. I have selected only the ones most relevant to the context of this study.

This Postmodernist debate is further explored by Dimitriu in "The Unbearable simulacrum of being: the double vision of "Home" and "Exile" in Kundera and Breytenbach" (2007) and "Unsettled and unsettling others": The 'double vision' of local and global in Breytenbach's later travelogues" (2008). In the first publication, she focuses on the rhizomic character of the "double vision" (both from the periphery and the centre), that these migratory figures (Kundera and Breytenbach) are able to generate, in order to develop - what she identifies as - "interstitial postcolonialism" (Dimitriu 2008: 110) with its hybrid sensibility.

In the second article, she explores the relationship between the "Middle World" and the "Middle Way". The Middle Way is a Zen Buddhist ontological concept indicating a state where anything and nothing is possible. There is an obvious parallel with the "Middle World" which does not have any boundaries and where no rules or locus is prescribed.

The main shortcoming in the above-mentioned research is that Breytenbach's most recent work and the evolution of the "Middle World" therein, have not been wholly explored.

Melanie Grobler also briefly situates Breytenbach within the existentialist and surrealist context without pretending however, that any one of these movements encompasses his work: "Breytenbach is one of those *angry young men* who echo the outsider's experience of the Absurd" (Grobler 2002: 2.54). The impact of his Parisian context on Breytenbach's work situates him within the existentialist movement. In an interview Grobler conducted with Breytenbach on the influences on his visual art, she concludes: "Art movements of interest were New Realism, which he (Breytenbach) and a few Dutch artists initiated, and also Surrealism" (Grobler 2002: 1.10), thus broadening the spectrum.

Firstly, I will proceed to further explore the relationship between post-structuralism and Breytenbach's work, followed by the Zen Buddhist context from within which he expresses himself and within which he anchors his philosophical evolution, and finally Breytenbach's metaphors and the triggers that shaped them need to be explored to understand the general background to his work.

2.2.1. <u>Post-structuralism</u>

As I have mentioned previously, Breytenbach subscribes to structures without centres that have similarities with the initial revolutionary post-structural assessment of texts and language, as specified by Derrida in 1966: "This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the centre is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it" (Derrida 1993: 224). Derrida continues to show the incoherence in the accepted logic of this argument and in doing so, shatters the traditional view of a structure. Evidently, the arbitrary relationship between signs and signification, added to a centreless structure, accentuating the game or play where one sign directs a reader to another signification, which again points the reader towards another sign. This process is endless and without a central point or authority or grand narrative. This revolutionary theoretical discovery posed problems on many levels – the metaphysical amongst others. Deconstruction thus spelled the end of structuralism, even though Derrida later on realised that all structures cannot indefinitely be disintegrated. Post-structuralism thus enters into an endless inadvertent interaction with structuralism.

Structuralists believed in the discovery of a central idea in a text which would then enable the pursuit of a fixed analysis of all the elements working together to reinforce the main structure:

> The label "literary critic" applied to an investigator of literature is as erroneous as "grammatical (or lexical) critic" would be applied to a linguist. Syntactic and morphologic research cannot be supplanted by a normative grammar, and likewise no manifesto, foisting a critic's own

> tastes and opinions on creative literature, may act as substitute for an
> objective scholarly analysis of verbal art.
> (Jakobson 1988: 260)

For Jakobson, a verbal text is a piece of art of which one could find an ultimate interpretation in an objective, scientific manner - provided one was able of such an analysis. Jakobson is equally defending the link between literature and linguistics in line with Saussure's linguistic models. Roland Barthes defines the operations effected upon an object as an activity that involves two typical operations: dissection and articulation. To dissect the first object, the one which is given to the simulacrum-activity, is to find in it certain mobile fragments whose differential situation engenders a certain meaning; the fragment has no meaning in by 'structural man' as follows:

> The structuralist itself, but it is nonetheless such that the slightest
> variation wrought in its configuration produces a change in the whole …
> […] … Once the units are posited, structural man must discover in them or
> establish for them certain rules of association: this is the activity of
> articulation, which succeeds the summoning activity. The syntax of the
> arts and of discourse is, as we know, extremely varied; but what we
> discover in every work of structural enterprise is the submission to regular
> constraints whose formalism, improperly indicted, is much less important
> than their stability; for what is happening, at this second stage of the
> simulacrum-activity, is a kind of battle against chance; this is why the
> constraint of recurrence of the units has an almost demiurgic value: it is by
> the regular return of the units and of the associations of the units that the
> work appears constructed, i.e., endowed with meaning.
> (Barthes 1988: 298)

The stability within the object or structure is therefore of utmost importance and is accepted as inviolable by the structuralisms.

Derrida contradicts this order and stability by introducing "difference": "It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the *pure* movement which produces difference. The *(pure) trace is difference"* (Derrida 1988: 306-307). The patterns that are inevitably traced within a text and add to the embedded message, are rejected by Derrida's theory, which consists of deconstructing signs and signifiers and binary oppositions. By erasing the centre, he erases the humanists' view that man is at the centre or that there is a metaphysical presence of a god. At the same time, binary oppositions disappear: nature versus culture, or male versus female, because the signs and signification cannot be pinned down, these opposites become less delineated. He illustrates the fluidity of meaning as it slips from one sign to the next and shows the random quality of this process.

Said heavily criticises Derrida for his imprisonment within language ('writing') and his lack of social consciousness, however: "For the moment my interest is in Derrida's positing of the metaphysical, logocentric world and in how the writers he examines as instances of that world become a part of it" (Said 1978: 681). Said goes so far as to call Derrida's

preoccupation with 'writing' and 'signs and signifiers' a "logocentric fallacy". Said is more positive regarding Foucault's ability to move outside of 'writing' and to look at the impact of power structures from within language on society: "In a society like ours, the procedures of exclusion are well known. The most obvious and familiar is the prohibition … […] … In the taboo on the object of speech, and the ritual of the circumstances of speech, and the privileged or exclusive right of the speaking subject..." (Foucault 1988: 318). Said feels that Foucault has been instrumental and directional in devising a new critical approach to signifiers and what they signify: "Its greatest value is that it awakens criticism to the recognition that a signifier occupying *a* place, signifying *in* place *is* – rather than *represents* – an act of will with ascertainable political and intellectual consequences and an act fulfilling a strategic desire to administer and comprehend a vast and *detailed* field of material" (Said 1978: 710). Thus Foucault is liberating the despotic abuse of power to a strategic articulation thereof. Breytenbach's engagement has always been intertwined with the analysis of power structures and their impact on the oppressed or the victims within a specific context. His work is therefore politically and socially more concurrent with a Foucaultian approach. The "Middle World" evolved as an alternative to the confinement of nation states and ideologies.

Marthinus Beukes (2009), as opposed to Grobler, draws on the post-structuralist framework as a theoretical background to Breytenbach's poetry, in order to explain the relationship between the duplication and multiplication of images. Despite Breytenbach's vociferous disregard for the postmodern literary and philosophical trends, certain characteristics of his work do overlap with and could shed light on post-structuralist ideas and preoccupations. A common field of interest is concept formation within the conscious and unconscious mind: "... that it is innate to the act of telling (perhaps even to language itself) to transform what is told – because of the techniques we use in order to fix consciousness" (Breytenbach 2009 a: 79).

Breytenbach is always pushing the boundaries of accepted literary genres, which has become prominent within the post-structural context. Signification is also constantly slipping and deferring in his work, which is an essential indicator of the inability to pin down meaning and establish one ultimate structure or truth within post-structuralist thinking. Breytenbach focuses on the relativity of signifiers and identity: "The empiricist insistence on refraining from trespassing beyond the immediate data ends up by eliminating both an independent world and an independent, persisting self. Both dissolve and, moreover, flow into each other, and both disappear" (Breytenbach quoting snippets from Gellner 2009a: 105). Thus, even though Breytenbach does not subscribe to the post-structuralist values and ambitions, his work seems to have distinctly post-structuralist features.

In a similar vein, Willem Anker reads Breytenbach's *Woordwerk* against the backdrop of Deuleuze and Guattari's philosophy on language: "Deleuze & Guttari daag die voorveronderstelings van strukturalistiese formalisme uit deur aan te voer dat daar 'n voortalige dimensie van die beeld bestaan wat die lokus van taal en enige betekenisvolle artikulasie is."/ "Deleuze and Guttari challenges the preconceptions of structural formalism by putting forth that the pre-linguistic dimension of the image exists which is the locus of language and any other meaningful articulation" (Anker 2007: 4 - my translation). He is arguing that there is no structure preceding this pre-linguistic condition and that we find

evidence of the application of this theory in Breytenbach's work. Both Ileana Dimitriu and Louise Viljoen situate Breytenbach's work within a post-structural context: Dimitriu (2007) exploring the political implications of postcolonial literature (on which I will focus at a later stage), while Viljoen (2005) reiterates the liminal space within which *Woordwerk* (Breytenbach 1999) situates itself and the rhizomic character of this 'novel'. She equally emphasises the disintegration of the "I" as a typically post-structural characteristic:

> This remark about the variety of names Breytenbach has used in real life steers one in the direction of poststructuralist theories about language and the subject when dealing with the even bigger variety of proper names in his poetry. In contrast with the Saussurean explanation of the signification process in terms of a movement from signifier to signified, the poststructuralist philosopher Derrida sees *différence* as the constituting force in language.
> (Viljoen 1993: 38)

Louise Viljoen further supports her argument of the post-structural characteristics in Breytenbach's work by showing the intertextuality involved in the multiplicity of names or identities he inscribes in his work: "The proper name in Breytenbach's poetry derives its meaning not only from the immediate context in which it functions, but also from the complex intertextuality constituted by his person and his writings" (Viljoen 1993: 38).

Hein Viljoen adds to this line of argument by stating that "the multiple meanings that Breytenbach creates in his poems by permutation: the arbitrary manipulation of signifiers. Permutation is a principle of arbitrariness, of the entry of pure chance into the poem" (Viljoen 2011: 116). The poems become illustrative of the post-structural precept that in language signifiers and signification are arbitrary.

All these critics are of the opinion that there are post-structural elements present in Breytenbach's work and specifically in the identification of "Middle World", a concept which is yet again a metaphor that mutates.

The "Middle World" on another level, serves as a way into Breytenbach's otherwise often opaque work: the interstice, the in-between, the beyond. By penetrating into this space which is the "Middle World" within Breytenbach's work, one is able to fully participate in the process or exchange, and to allow permutations to manifest themselves within one's consciousness. These fleeting experiences are moments of the "real", touching an awareness outside of language, which transcends the confines of the definable:

> All creation, be it in words or visually, is a transgression, lifting the skirts of existential darkness, and manipulating the mysterious power this ability bestows is not only human but possibly obligatory if you want to communicate with the unknown.
> (Breytenbach 2009a: 220)

This awareness is based on and related to Breytenbach's knowledge and experience of Zen Buddhism. The "Middle World", as defined by the Zen Buddhist nada and nothingness, sheds a different light on a crucial part of the concept.

2.2.2. <u>Reading Breytenbach against a Buddhist backdrop</u>

A popular stance has therefore also been to analyse Breytenbach's work based on his affiliations with Zen Buddhism. André P. Brink already wrote extensively on the topic in 1971: "Die Surrealisme en die Nuwe Realisme kan beskou word as Westerse kunsuitdrukkinge wat spontane raakpunte vertoon met die Zen-Boeddhisme: en dié is stellig die grootste enkele vormende invloed op Breytenbach se poësie"/ "Surrealism and New Realism can be considered as Western expressions of art, which overlap spontaneously with Zen Buddhism: and this is, in fact, the single biggest formative influence on Breytenbach's poetry" (Brink 1971: 8 – my translation). Brink draws attention to the line moving from the East to the West in Breytenbach's work. He identifies the value and impact of surrealism and new realism on Breytenbach's work, and elaborately illustrates the similarities between the two mindscapes at the time: the eastern philosophy, on the one hand, and the interfaces it had with surrealism and new realism – two art movements constituting part of western theory – on the other.

The tendency to approach Breytenbach's work from within a Buddhist context is also pursued by Melanie Grobler: "As a Zen outsider of many voices, Breytenbach is aware of the contingent character of things one is confronted with" (Grobler 2002: 2.69), and by Heilna du Plooy: "In Breytenbach's use of imagery and his creative activity as a whole, the Zen Buddhist mode of living and thinking plays an important role. He explicitly identifies with the Soto school of Buddhism, from which he develops his views on knowledge and relativity" (Du Plooy 2009: 153). Similar arguments are put forth by Marilet Sienaert: "One is reminded of the Zen-Buddhist dictum which states that the finger pointing to the moon is not the moon" (Sienaert 1995: 14). She is highlighting an important aspect of Breytenbach's work in this quotation, namely that the experience is paramount and that this experience cannot be described. Another aspect that filters through from this Buddhist dictum is that the relationship between objects, people, and ideas, is the focal point and not the objects themselves. Thus, the relationship between the finger and the moon is important and not the moon or the finger as such, considered as separate entities. The relational aspect takes on predominance when considering metaphors within Breytenbach's oeuvre in general.

The relational aspect forms an important part of the "Middle World" experience because the un-citizens redefine themselves in relation to new circumstances, cultures, and languages. This process mirrors the post-colonial question on which I will focus later. The identity of the un-citizen is altered in relation to stimuli and people. Breytenbach always reaches towards the ideal state of non-being, of nada, and his metaphors strip away illusion and the veil that has been imposed upon what is commonly perceived as 'reality'. He thus introduces unexpected relationships between objects or concepts. This process is part of consciousness formation: when new elements are brought together in a metaphor for

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instance, the altered awareness lies in the way in which these elements are related in novel and unexpected ways. This awareness forms part of the "Middle World". Zen is therefore clearly central to "Middle World" consciousness.

The focus must therefore now shift to Breytenbach's metaphors and their constitution and function, in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of "Middle World" existence.

2.2.3. <u>The relationship between language and imagination: Breytenbach's metaphors and the difficulty in classifying them</u>

Attempts at analysing Breytenbach's metaphors and situating them within a theoretical framework are numerous. Ampie Coetzee moves between Aristotle and Paul Ricoeur in his article "Die vlugtige taal van vergeet: Die Metafoor by Breyten Breytenbach"/ "The transitory language of forgetting: the Metaphor in the work of Breyten Breytenbach" (Coetzee 2006 – my translation). He continues his exploration by focusing on the "similitude" of concepts that are compared or superimposed in metaphors. Willie Burger equally uses Ricoeur to explore metaphors in *A Veil of Footsteps* (Breytenbach 2008). He concludes that: "Die metaforiese beeld is nie gekoppel aan die wêreld van persepsies en handeling nie en skep sodoende 'n "neutrale ruimte" van "opgehefde betekenis" – die ruimte van fiksie"/ "The metaphorical image is not linked to the world of perceptions and actions and thereby creates a "neutral space" of "suspended meaning" – the space of fiction" (Burger 2009: 5 – my translation).

In his analysis of the relationship between language and imagination, Willie Burger draws on Ricoeur's work on metaphor as a theoretical basis. The analogy drawn between Ricoeur's concept of imagination as "prints/ footprints" and Breytenbach's application of writing as 'prints'- already reeking of decay in relation to the establishment of identity, and the subsequent reference to 'prints' as seed counteracting decay – provides an indication of the complexity of the concept of leaving traces on paper in Breytenbach's work. Burger equally uses Ricoeur's theory on the metaphor to analyse and define the function and form of the metaphor within Breytenbach's work: "Die metafoor is nie vir Ricoeur bloot "die assosiasie van idees" nie, maar word 'n nuwe konsep waaraan 'n nuwe beeld gekoppel word" / "The metaphor is not the "mere association of ideas to Ricoeur", but becomes 'n new concept to which a new image is attached" (Burger 2009: 4 – my translation).

However, the metaphors in Breytenbach's poetry are approached by T.T. Cloete on a completely different level. He uses cues from related words to provide apt substitutions either anticipated on a syntactical, lexical, or homophonic level, to open up an interplay of meanings, to create a new concept with the associated image or images conjured up through substitution. He calls this approach the "met ander woorde" / "in other words" or "in plaas van"/ "instead of" method (Cloete 1982: 47).

In looking at Breytenbach's metaphors a few options have so far been stipulated: a new context generating new ideas (Ricoeur, Burger), tensions between elements in the text as one can clearly pinpoint from Cloete's method of close reading of the text – in other words,

seeing the text as a separate unit functioning with a logic internal to itself (which constitutes a typical structuralist approach). "Middle World" as metaphor is thus a very apt device to introduce new meanings and experiences via multiple tensions created on various layers in the text.

Numerous people have tried to find an adequate approach to Breytenbach's work. The post-structuralist solution seems to be the overarching one (Reckwitz, Deleuze and Guattari) with some overtones of Buddhism, supplemented by Surrealism.

The impact of surrealism on Breytenbach's work is incontestable and I would go so far as to say that he is still heavily leaning on certain surrealist elements in his work. The absurd and the irrational are prevalent throughout his oeuvre. In the introduction to an encyclopaedia on surrealism the following claims are made:

> Those poets, intellectuals, and European artists, many of them Marxists, who in 1924 were attracted to the magazine "La Révolution Surréaliste" and to André Breton, recognised that the time had come to liberate expressive form, to release the world of the subconscious, of dreams and of 'pure psychic automatism'. They were willing to give shape to their nightmares, paranoia, suppressed by eroticism, and to the dark side of the mind. The "surrealism" defined by Breton was "outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations." Humour, extravagance, cruelty and anguish present in disturbing metamorphoses recur in the poetic outpourings of Elouard and Aragon, in the plays of Artaud, of the ciné poems of Bunuel and Cocteau, as in the art of Max Ernst, René Magritte, Salvador Dali, Paul Delvaux, Yves Tanguy, Joan Miro, Jean Arp, Henry Moore, Man Ray. And while it is easy enough to trace the beginnings of literary surrealism to the death of Dada, it is harder to trace its eclipse: the liberating effects of Surrealism were still enjoyed by the generation of artists following the second world war … […] … It helped to shape the spirit of May 1968, when written large on the walls of Paris and elsewhere was the slogan "All power to the imagination" echoing the speech made by André Breton in autumn 1942 at Yale University.
>
> (Surrealism: Visual Encyclopaedia of art: iii)

Breytenbach is still focusing excessively on the liberating function of the imagination, and his dreams often find expression in images or metaphors of anguish, eroticism, cruelty, and humour – however dark – enabling metamorphosis to take place: "The world is full of strangers. Finally, it is a simple equation playing with invisibles and unsayables as if these could be seen and said, and they are, as "consciousness running away through words" that can carry but not keep... […] … The function of the poem is to fuck the words good and hard" (Breytenbach 2009a: 23-24). These "invisibles" and "unsayables" form the territory of the "Middle World" of expression and liberation.

Surrealism seems to be a logical precursor to the concept of the "Middle World", as this concept is representative of the space of the imagination, similar to surrealism where images took on a variety of meanings and defied logic.

There is no final consensus as to which approach constitutes the ultimate and most encompassing basis, and all the critics seem to find reducing Breytenbach's work to a single art movement inefficient. I feel that in order to make progress towards a clearer delineation of "Middle World" as a metaphor, as well as the functioning of metaphors within the "Middle World", one has to further explore Breytenbach's work and let the work itself be a guide into finding more options for critical writing on "Middle World" as it manifests itself in his work.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework to establish the possible role of the "Middle World" within a critical context

The theoretical context within which one decides to situate Breytenbach's "Middle World" is of primary importance in defining his work as a whole, as this will determine the perspective adopted towards this concept and could possibly limit the interpretation thereof. In this section, I will touch upon the different recurrent aspects in Breytenbach's work – which constitute the concept of "Middle World" – and relate them to other literary theories on aspects relevant to the concept, showing the contrast and/ or continuum between his work and existing arguments. A particularly relevant theorist to use in relation to Breytenbach's work is Homi Bhabha, as I have previously illustrated. Bhabha has been able to develop and refine concepts such as ambivalence, hybridity, mimicry, and unhomeliness and has, in so doing, made a valuable contribution to postcolonial studies and thought. Working on globalisation and its relation to previous power centres: the impact on discourse, history as it was previously perceived, and transnational cultural identity, he has furthered the research and understanding of our current situation – a situation embodied by "Middle World" complexities according to Breytenbach. The ultimate goal of this chapter is to establish the extent to which "Middle World" can be treated as a theoretic and critical approach or alternatively, whether "Middle World" is a concept that serves as a metaphor to help us understand consciousness formation.

In the words of Homi Bhabha, theory and its very nature are shrouded in assumptions: "There is a damaging and self-defeating assumption that theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged. It is said that the place of the academic critic is inevitably within the Eurocentric archives of an imperialist or neo-colonial West" (Bhabha 2004: 28). Breytenbach echoes this criticism: "… postcolonial discourse is firmly and authoritatively embedded in the syllabus of the Center's academies" (Breytenbach 2009c: 140). The 'Center' is the 'North' – more or less coinciding with what Bhabha refers to as 'Eurocentric'. In furthering the postcolonial debate, Bhabha points out that binary oppositions and inverted polarisations do not provide solutions: inverting the roles of oppressed and oppressor does not provide an escape from the Eurocentric approach, as dualism and binary opposition have as engrained qualities the originary models of imperialism and Western domination. The contamination of depoliticisation of critical theory results in the delineation of the imperial binary oppositions of self and other: "This time round, the term 'critical theory', often untheorized and unargued, is definitely the Other, an otherness that is insistently identified with the vagaries of the depoliticized Eurocentric critic" (Bhabha 2004: 29). Bhabha is not arguing in favour of militant rhetoric but stresses the "politics of cultural production": "Forms of popular rebellion and mobilization are often most subversive and transgressive when they are created through oppositional *cultural* practices" (Bhabha 2004: 29). He argues for the convergence of political awareness and subversive action encapsulated in culture, rejecting the theorist posturing as independent of political connotations. Bhabha points out that embedded in communication, there is a discursive division between the First and Third World: "Despite the claims to a spurious rhetoric of 'internationalism' on the part of the established

multinationals and the networks of the new communications technology industries, such circulation of signs and commodities as there are, are caught in the vicious circuits of surplus value that link First World capital to Third World labour markets through the chains of the international division of labour, and national comprador classes" (Bhabha 2004: 30). Within the articulations of this 'internationalism', the independent 'Third World' nations (Less Economically Developed Countries - LEDCs) dissolve. Bhabha is clearly showing himself as an engaged theorist/ philosopher with very specific aims to improve the situation of the deprived and depressed – contrary to Parry's accusations which I will highlight at a later stage.

Edward Said already hinted at the danger of the LEDCs dissolving: "That struggle (over geography) is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings" (Said 1993: 7). In this statement, Said is equally emphasising that one cannot always intervene in a confrontational manner but that ideas and images are of the greatest importance, which is equally a contradiction of Parry's stance (as will point out in detail in chapter 4).

Bhabha encourages a movement towards a hybrid form of theory and politics: "the difference of the same" (Bhabha 2004: 33). He defines the place of literary criticism as follows: "The language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of the master and the slave, the mercantilist and the Marxist, but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other,* properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics" (Bhabha 2004: 37). Rebecca Walkowitz defines critical cosmopolitanism as "reflecting on the history, uses, and interests of cosmopolitanism in the past – how, for example, cosmopolitanism has been used to support or to tolerate imperialism. And it also means reflecting on analytic postures, the history, uses, and interests of "the critical" – how, for example, a commitment to collective agency may be a style rather than an index of transnational politics" (Walkowitz 2006: 4). Her opinion concurs with Hollywood and Breytenbach's on this matter as I will shortly indicate. In this manner, Walkowitz reiterates Bhabha's mistrust of epistemological historical models of and the reduction of the agency to a dialectic between self and other, whereas he is trying to introduce fluidity and liberation from these fixed centres and peripheries.

Hybridity is a key concept in Breytenbach's work and having outlined the hybrid un-citizen of the "Middle World", he has come a long way in establishing a new political discourse based on the constant redefinition of culture. The migrations of the nomadic un-citizen allow the fluidity of cyclical rediscovery and imaginings positioning the Third World citizen within the discursive structures by opening up a 'beyond'. The question remains whether "Middle World" should be perceived and used as a theoretical basis for a critical approach or a metaphorical concept.

As the complexity of the impact of globalisation, and the resulting nomadism, the fluidity of cultural identity and hybridity, are prominent themes constantly being explored in Breytenbach's work, postcolonial criticism could contribute towards establishing a useful

angle from which to approach his oeuvre, provided that there is an attempt to move beyond mere dualistic dialectics of self and other, centre and periphery, and the position of the agent; an attempt to move to a space and a time that signal the in-between, the beyond: "As far as the in-between goes there is a philosophical tradition which is not just about spatial in-betweeness but more about time, where in-betweenness can be seen as a temporal disjunction" (Bhabha 2008: 42).

Before drawing parallels between Breytenbach's oeuvre and the desired integrated approach, the very nature of theory is worth exploring.

3.1.   <u>The relevance of theory for Breytenbach</u>

An overview of literary theory and its position in society is required before I can proceed in establishing the relevance of literary theory for Breytenbach.

> If there is such a thing as literary theory, then it would seem obvious that
> there is something called literature which it is the theory of. We can begin,
> then, by raising the question: what is literature?
> (Eagleton 1986: 1)

Eagleton proceeds to explore a plethora of possible definitions from the 16th century English novel, which blurred the distinction between fact and fiction; to Jakobson's theory that literature intensifies ordinary language; looking at the Russian formalists who shifted the attention to the material reality of the literary text itself; to showing that there are no immutable criteria distinguishing and categorising a text as literature. He concludes by showing that the relationship between social ideologies, power structures and value-judgements (which remain historically variable and are context-driven) is inevitable in labelling a text as 'literature':

> What we have uncovered so far, then, is not only that literature does not
> exist in the sense that insects do, and that the value-judgements by which
> it is constituted are historically variable, but that their value-judgements
> themselves have a close relation to social ideologies. They refer in the end
> not simply to private taste, but to the assumptions by which certain social
> groups exercise and maintain power over others.
> (Eagleton 1986: 16)

For a text to be established as "literature", it has to conform to certain value-judgements and as such, becomes part of the hegemony existing in intellectual circles at any specific time. Despite the dated opinion put forth by Eagleton, the debate is still as relevant as before.

One can therefore infer, that literary theory equally conforms to hegemonic structures and powerful social ideologies proffered during a specific era. Breytenbach, however, unequivocally opposes the cumbersome power structures existing on a political, intellectual

or social level: "We need to start from the terrible recrimination that recognizes we have descended from liberation euphoria to the heart of darkness" (Breytenbach 2009c: 65). This quotation bears witness to the fact that Breytenbach never accepts the status quo: despite his incarceration as an activist fighting to empower the ANC, which largely constitutes the current South-African government, he never refrains from reassessing the situation and expressing criticism on the abuse of power on any level. In typical Breytenbach style, he encapsulates an inter-textual reference in this criticism, by referring to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Ironically, the current power structures, imposing themselves on Africa, are compared to the Belgian colonists of the Congo and the horrors committed by them in the name of enlightenment, democracy and religion. Simultaneously, he is also referring to the elusive theme in the novella - where Kurtz seemingly becomes the epitome of darkness seated in the human psyche, and consequently, the novella poses a criticism to the expansive world at the time and the discrepancy between the ideal of enlightenment and the reality of the conquest: "As Marlowe is a narrator in 'the outside', Marlowe detects the ineluctable discrepancy between the idea and the achievement in the human confrontation with nature, others and the self" (Kissack 2000: 375). The criticism, on Breytenbach's part, of the current situation in Africa is quite pronounced, if one accepts Kissack's viewpoint on the novella. Breytenbach is distancing himself from the corrupt liberation ideologies, subjugating Africans to dire poverty, while dishonest politicians enrich themselves.

In the process of rejecting power structures on numerous levels (economical, political, intellectual, social), Breytenbach's work and his person, raise the question as to who has the power to identify a text as literature – the intellectuals, the publishers, or the political powers: "You see, comrade – there is no paradise anywhere anymore, and few parades. Even Breyten Wordfool could tell you that. We are suffering from a generalised mad human disease" (Breytenbach 2008a: 66). He established an independent publishing house to enable artists, who are not being promoted by the current hegemony, to be published. The Piroque initiative serves a similar purpose.

Kissack reiterates that literature is inseparable from culture: "Literature is a component of culture, and its formation is influenced (not determined) by its historical context. Its immersion within and dialectical relationship with cultural legacy, clearly implies that its articulations embody, reflect and affect the values and predilections of its formative cultural environment" (Kissack 2000: 366). The "Middle World" un-citizens move outside of a defined culture and have access to a more diverse and fluid approach towards cultural heritage.

Moreover, if one now considers a very basic definition of literary criticism namely: "Literary criticism is primarily concerned with discussing individual works of literature […] There are, in fact, two contexts in which any work can be seen: a generic or genre context, and a historical context" (Peck & Coyle 1986: 1), yet again, positioning Breytenbach's work within the context of genre often poses a problem.

In order to determine the relevance of a broader theoretical framework to Breytenbach's work, one has to explore the very nature of literary theory and literary science, over and above the nature of literature and literary criticism. Science is defined by Van Dale as "niet zozeer om kennis als zodanig, maar om het *verkrijgen van* verdere kennis" / "not concerned

with knowledge per se, but the *acquisition of* further knowledge" (Brillenburg Wurth & Rigney 2012: 19 - my translation). A theory is "een abstract model waarmee patronen in het empirische domein worden beschreven" / "an abstract model with which patterns from within the empirical domain are described" (Brillenburg Wurth & Rigney 2012: 21 – my translation).

Given the unpredictable quality of Breytenbach's work and the inherent irrational trait, trying to fit his texts into a scientifically viable quest for knowledge and empirically verifiable models, seem far removed from adopting an authentic approach to his work. In a similar vein, such an endeavour will deliberately annul crucial aspects and intrinsic messages in his work. The "method" employed by Breytenbach is estranged from and even contradictory to scientific method as defined by Brillenburg Wurth & Rigney: "een specialistische werkwijze om systematisch naar antwoorden te zoeken" / "a specialised approach to look for answers in a systematic way" (Brillenburg Wurth & Rigney 2012: 21- my translation). Breytenbach defies reason and systems. These decisions are not random but form an intrinsic part of his approach to identity, consciousness, the creative process and political convictions.

In my opinion, "Middle World" is ultimately a poetic metaphor for consciousness formation. An exploration of the nature of consciousness has been reiterated in Breytenbach's work. I feel that this process is central to his work but falls outside of the traditional strictures of literary theory, even though the concept "Middle World" has strong roots in literary movements, theory and philosophy - as I have already pointed out in chapter 2. The organic process and innovativeness involved in this exploration can neither be reduced to a mere quest to expand scientific knowledge, nor does the process conform to scientific "method" - as stated above. The process comes into being through the creation of poetic metaphors.

"La métaphore est, au service de la fonction poétique, cette stratégie de discours par laquelle le langage se dépouille de sa fonction de description directe pour accéder au niveau mythique où sa fonction de découverte est libérée"/ "The metaphor is, in the service of poetic function, this discourse strategy by which language is stripped of its purely descriptive functions to gain access to a mythical level where its purpose of discovery is liberated" (Ricoeur 1975:311). This essential function stipulated by Ricoeur is central to the 'beyond' of the "Middle World". The moment of enlightenment when the metaphor opens up a new perception or perspective to an individual, alters the consciousness of that person. The 'space' and 'time' within which this process takes place is the "beyond". A more overarching approach to adopt to Breytenbach's work is the one stipulated by Bhabha, as indicated previously, which is in opposition to accepted empirical models of critical theory.

The process of metaphorical existence becomes essential to the participants belonging to the nomadic tribe of "Middle World" un-citizens. This process becomes a survival tool. In the following section, the nomadism and diaspora involved in "Middle World" existence will be discussed and looked at from within a contemporary framework.

3.2. <u>Nomadism and diaspora</u>

Diaspora can be defined as:

> A **diaspora** (from <u>Greek</u> διασπορά, "scattering, dispersion")<u>[1]</u> is a
> scattered population with a common origin in a smaller geographic area.
> Diaspora can also refer to the movement of the population from its
> original homeland.<u>[2][3]</u> Diaspora has come to refer particularly to
> historical mass dispersions of an involuntary nature, such as the <u>expulsion
> of Jews from Judea</u>, the African Trans-<u>Atlantic slave trade</u>, Europeans from
> north western Europe, the southern Chinese or Hindus of <u>South Asia</u>
> during the <u>coolie trade</u>, or the century-long exile of the <u>Messenians</u> under
> <u>Spartan</u> rule.<u>[3]</u>
>
> (Wikipedia 2014)

Cohen identifies what he refers to as the "prototypical" diaspora: "...the idea of dispersal
following a traumatic event in the homeland, to two or more foreign destinations" (Cohen
2008: 2). In this regard he highlights the Jewish diaspora, the 'first' African diaspora, the
Armenian diaspora, the Turkish diaspora, the Irish diaspora, and the Palestinian diaspora.
These victim diasporas have certain commonalities: the dispersion from a core or centre; a
collective vision or myth; separation from the new context and a yearning for the homeland
(dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance). The second type of
diaspora that he highlights is the trade or labour diaspora, which define people who migrate
in search of work; the imperial diasporas – also known as settlers or colonists – define the
Russian and British colonists; the trade diasporas are related to trade as a motivation for
migration; and finally, he mentions the deterritorialised diapsoras – the post-colonial, hybrid
diasporas. The last-mentioned is the type of diaspora with which contemporary analysts of
our current situation are preoccupied.

> **Colonialism** is the establishment, exploitation, maintenance, acquisition,
> and expansion of <u>colonies</u> in one territory by people from another
> territory. It is a set of unequal relationships between the colonial power
> and the colony and often between the colonists and the <u>indigenous
> population</u>.
>
> (Wikipedia 2014)

The increasing displacement of people in contemporary society bears witness to a new kind
of colonialism encapsulated within globalisation: "...our age – with its modern warfare,
imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers – is indeed the age of
the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration" (Said 2001: 138). The persistent
hegemonic structures inevitably entail diaspora and conversely, people migrate – if they
have the skills required – to where more favourable financial situations present themselves.

An adequate method to define culture in the contemporary society is tenuous. This difficulty
results from the nascent fluidity in our world:

It has now become something of a truism that we are functioning in a world fundamentally characterized by objects in motion. These objects include ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques [...] The greatest of these apparently stable objects is the nation state, which is today frequently characterized by floating populations, transnational politics within national borders, and mobile configurations of technology and expertise.

(Appadurai 2001: 5)

The mobility of people and ideas, triggering the potential disintegration of the nation state - with a specific cultural context delimited by this political delineation - requires an altered conceptual perception. Breytenbach attempts to furnish such a concept about people floating in this undefined state: a space within which "Middle World" "un-citizens" can situate themselves: "To be in the Middle World is to have broken away from the parochial, to have left "home" for good (or for worse) while carrying all of it with you and to have arrived on foreign shores (at the outset you thought of it as "destination", but not for long) feeling at ease there without ever being "at home" (Breytenbach 2009c: 143). These "un-citizens" have specific characteristics and attitudes towards their changing environment: they are nomads without a sense of attachment to a new environment, nor a sense of loss of their previous one. Despite a level of unease or estrangement in relation to their condition, they remain relatively comfortable in this in-between state.

This is a perpetual in-between space that Louise Viljoen refers to as a liminal state:

Binne die *communitas* van die liminale staat domineer die basiese menslike bande wat uitstyg bo die kategorieë ingebed in sosiale struktuur. Die liminale is dus die domein waarin universele morele waardes uitgedruk word en waarvandaan kritiek op *struktuur*-gebonde gedrag en norme uitgespreek kan word met die gevolg dat die liminale staat en liminale *personae* oor 'n potensieel transformende krag beskik/

Inside the *communitas* of the liminal state the basic human bonds that rise above the categories embedded in social structures become dominating. The liminal is thus the domain within which universal moral values are expressed and from where criticism of *structurally* bound behaviour and norms is voiced with the result that the liminal state and the liminal *personae* possess a potentially transformative power.

(Viljoen 2005: 4 – my translation)

The liminal phase is closely related to Breytenbach's "Middle World":

Die eerste hou veral verband met die pre- en postliminale fases en omskryf die samelewing in terme van 'n gedifferensieerde en dikwels hiërargiese struktuur van politieke, ekonomiese en wetlike posisies. Die tweede, wat veral in die liminale fase na vore kom, sien die samelewing as 'n ongestruktureerde en relatief ongedifferensieerde samesyn van gelyke individue /

> The first is especially related to the pre- and post-liminal phases and
> define society in terms of the differentiated and often hierarchical
> structure of political, economic and legal positions. The second that comes
> to the fore specifically in the liminal phase, perceives society as an
> unstructured and relatively undifferentiated co-existence of equal
> individuals.
>
> (Viljoen 2005: 3)

The ambiguity of the liminal individuals, stemming from the inability to classify them, enables their escape from cultural hegemony. In Breytenbach's work, a lot of emphasis is placed on the equality of all "un-citizens": "He (the un-citizen) will assiduously exercise the necessary art of being invisible among the poor but will have scant patience with bureaucrats and culturocrats" (Breytenbach 2009c: 150). This space provides freedom from classification and hierarchy.

This liminal space only partially conforms to the deterritorialised diasporas as defined by Cohen, seeing that the person in question is "feeling at ease" in his new environment, whereas the deterritorialised person yearns for her/ his homeland but has been displaced: "... this applies particularly to groups that have been multiply displaced, to those whose homelands are for all practical purposes lost to them, and to some religious communities" (Cohen 2010: 8). Breytenbach's un-citizens do not conform to this model of exaggerated patriotism and solidarity: "...the least attractive aspects of being in exile emerge: an exaggerated sense of group solidarity, and a passionate hostility to outsiders, even to those who may in fact be in the same predicament as you" (Said 2001: 141). There is a clear distinction between the fractured individuals who are desperately trying to reassemble a sense of a whole and a homeland, and the un-citizens who accept the liminal state as permanent without any objection. Even though the roots of the un-citizenship are clearly to be found in the diaspora and scattering of peoples, the "Middle World" existence does not coincide with traditional classifications and the expected needs of exiles.

To further develop the definition of un-citizens within their new context, extensive focus has to be placed on Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness and the tangent points with "Middle World" existence.

3.3.   Bhabha's concept of 'unhomeliness'

The condition when one does not appertain to a specific territory or culture, and where the division between the private and public spheres of social life becomes blurred, is referred to as unhomeliness by Bhabha: "They therefore have a hybrid identity, something marked by an uncanny ability to be at home anywhere, an ability that always might become the burden of having no home whatsoever. The uncanny, Bhabha suggest, is also the *unhomely*" (Huddard 2006: 79). This uncanny state is what Breytenbach explores in his "Middle World" theory.

Bhabha, moreover, feels that during this phase of displacement typical to colonial and post-colonial peoples, the public encroaches upon the private because of the inevitable dissolution of the borders between the home and the world. The inexorable ambivalence resulting from these super-imposed areas can be traumatic on a personal and political level: "The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (Bhabha 1994: 15). To Breytenbach the 'unhomely moment' in all its convolutions presents a site - "an outcrop of the Middle World" - within which "the dialectic between space and movement can be enacted" (Breytenbach 2008: 221). Given Breytenbach's own experience of what was initially self-imposed exile and later became banishment, Breytenbach is able to speak from within the experience on various levels.

Bhabha does not necessarily perceive the "dialectic" identified by Breytenbach as fluid or facile: "The jarring of meanings and values generated in the process of cultural interpretation is an effect of the perplexity of living in the liminal spaces of national society that I have tried to trace" (Bhabha 1994: 223). Bhabha explores the moments where these cultures clash and overlap and investigates the confusion generated by such an experience. These moments are referred to as instances of hybridisation: "It is a hybridity, too, which is form-giving and diagnostic, lending meaning to the bewildering array of cultural translations which the writers of diasporas both established and emergent must make" (Boehmer 2009: 227).

According to Said, while exploring the cultural hybrid, one should distinguish between the spiritual and lonely quest of writers in self-imposed exile and that of refugees: "The word "refugee" has become a political one suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas "exile" carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality" (Said 2001: 144). He criticises the novel written by writers in exile as a compensatory measure for disorientation and loss by creating a new world: "The novel, however, exists because other worlds *may* exist, alternatives for bourgeois speculators, wanderers, exiles" (Said 2001: 144). Based on this criticism, the question does arise as to whether Breytenbach's "Middle World" is mainly the fabric of elitist fiction.

Said responds to this question by stating that exile is mostly not chosen and not a privilege but an alternative to the "mass institutions that dominate the modern world" (Said 2001: 146). In Breytenbach's work, there are also counter-arguments – the first of which is the fact that he does not predominantly perceive himself as having been an exile – even though he sometimes does acknowledge the possibility of assessing his experience as such. Secondly, "Middle World" un-citizens mostly consist of outcasts, refugees, and misfits: "Refuge and asylum, persecution and hospitality, indifference and difference, solidarity, home and exile – all these concepts figure in the Middle World" (Breytenbach 2009c: 139). Thirdly, both Said and Breytenbach put forth a similar take on exilic existence: "The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, home is always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience" (Said 2001: 147). Embracing an openness of the ever-changing world and acknowledging this attitude as part of our existence, is to an extent what Breytenbach emphasises through the concept of "Middle World": "Isn't striving for transgression,

transcendence, becoming other – that distinguishes us from the animals?" (Breytenbach 2009c: 142). Finally, Breytenbach also perceives people who travel in their minds as un-citizens of the "Middle World": "The best-seasoned nomads are those who never travel" (Breytenbach: 2009c: 149). Bhabha's unhomeliness largely coincides with Breytenbach's "Middle World" to the extent that these nomadic individuals are hybrids content with their fluctuating nondescript environment.

The contiguities between Breytenbach's personal experience as a wanderer and the evolution of the "Middle World" philosophy are clear and need be explored in more detail.

3.4. Interfaces between "Middle World" and Breyten Breytenbach's private life

The incommensurable task of establishing causality between Breytenbach's personal life and the contingent dialectic with the concept "Middle World", demands a speculative delineation of a generic subject position occupied by a single historic identity.

Despite New Criticism's strong stance on the predominance of poetry and the nature of the poem as a separate self-sufficient unit: "If the poem was really to become an object in itself, New Criticism had to sever it from author and reader" (Eagleton 1986: 47), and Barthes' aim to know the text as a 'science of forms', treating it as a disconnected ahistorical object which is complete in itself (Eagleton 1986: 137), I would like to argue that Breytenbach's personal life has had an undeniable impact on his oeuvre and that concepts such as nomadism, un-citizenship, diaspora, exile, multiple identities, and "No Man's Land" (later "Middle World"), spring directly from personal exposure to a specific set of circumstances.

> Die ouer digter se oeuvre word getipeer deur 'n toenemende sin van vervreemding (met die intenser wordende bewussyn van onontkombare, onwrikbare dood), in verse van elegiese, liriese skoonheid. Sy persona is dié van die hibriede baster, die misfit, 'n wêreldburger wat oral inpas, maar nêrens tuis is nie/
>
> The older poet's oeuvre is typified by the increasing awareness of estrangement (with the intensifying awareness of death as inescapable and irrefutable), in stanzas with elegiac, lyrical beauty. His persona is that of the hybrid bastard, the misfit, the citizen of the world who fits in everywhere, but who does not belong anywhere.
>
> (Van Vuuren 2006: 54 – my translation)

Van Vuuren identifies the constitutive elements of "Middle World" un-citizens from Breytenbach's personal life and, moreover, puts these characteristics (misfit, hybrid bastard etc.) forth as resulting directly from Breytenbach's incarceration and ambivalent relationship with his country of origin, swept up in a maelstrom of estrangement, alternated by engagement. I would like to point out, however, that Breytenbach has always experienced a feeling of separateness – even as a child.

Breytenbach continues this cycle of engagement with and extraction from his country of origin and his mother tongue – Afrikaans, after completing his prison sentence:

> Die sirkel is voltooi. Poëties is in dié oeuvre lankal die afsterwe van Afrikaans en die lesers aangekondig, hoewel dit eers later in die openbare ruimte sigbaar geword het. Afrikaans se grootste lewende digter ly aan sy moedertaal, soos "asyn aan die lippe"…/

> The circle is complete. Poetically the death of Afrikaans and its readers have been announced long ago in this oeuvre, even though it only became apparent later within the public sphere. The greatest living poet of Afrikaans suffers from his mother tongue, like "vinegar pressed to the lips".

> (Van Vuuren 2006: 55).

As a hybrid bastard, fashioned on his rejection of his Afrikaner identity, Breytenbach indeed has a resulting multitude of personas and projections of personas upon him, as is pointed out by Karien Coetzee (in Weschler 1998: 170): "The thing you realize is that Breyten has always been a figure who can carry a lot of projections. He was almost like a Jesus figure, even physically, for the Afrikaners, this hero who had to be sacrificed so that the rest of us could live". The Christ-like terrorist, who sees himself as a continuum of a variety of identities, can hardly be accurately referred to as a single entity, as proffered by the following line from a poem by the Zen master Dogen: "Looking inward or outward, see there is no fixed self" (Dogen in Tanahashi 2000: 28). Through his writing, the influence of Zen Buddhism is pervasive and therefore inevitably shaped his perception of identity and consciousness. The influence of the personal adherence to Zen Buddhism is conspicuous and undeniable in Breytenbach's oeuvre, carrying inscribed within this conviction the decision to expose (initially specifically Afrikaans) readers to oriental images and belief systems, a decision that illustrates the political conviction to break the barriers established by a Western hegemony:

> Ons gewone denke is lineêr, en dit werk kategoriserend: ons gee name aan dinge, maar "vat" nooit die ding sélf nie, en ons werk met begrippe een vir een. Hiervan bring Zen 'n bevryding, deur nie meer die "ek" en die "wêreld" te skei en teenoor mekaar te stel nie maar alles gesamentlik te belewe; deur nie so seer belang te stel in *dinge* nie maar die *verhoudinge* tussen hulle. […] Zen probeer nie oordeel nie, maar maak van die gees 'n hemel waardeur alle voëls kan vlieg sonder om spore na te laat/

> Our ordinary thought-processes are linear, and these function through categorizing: we give names to things, but never "capture" the "things" themselves, and we work with concepts one by one. Zen liberates us from this, by no longer separating and opposing the "I" and the "world" but by experiencing everything at the same time; by not displaying an interest in *things* but rather in the *relationship* existing between these. […] Zen tries not to judge, but transforms the soul into a heaven through which all birds are able to fly without leaving any traces.

For the purposes of this section of the chapter, the tryst of "Middle World" and the protean historical identity known as Breyten Breytenbach, will be explored.

3.4.1. <u>The early years</u>

With the publication of his first anthology and short story collection in 1964, Breytenbach broke into the South-African literary scene from an outside vantage point, articulating a different and much appreciated voice: "Breytenbach erupted on the Afrikaans literary scene with a volume of short stories *Katastrofes (Catastrophies)* and a volume of poetry, *Die Ysterkoei moet Sweet (The Iron Cow Must Sweat)"* (Brink in Breytenbach 1980b: 12). He soon established himself as a central figure within the "Sestiger" movement: "Breytenbach who had been a nerve centre of the movement" (Brink in Breytenbach 1980b: 14). The affiliated solidarity within the group regarding political ideals and the adopted challenging attitude towards Afrikaner institutionalized religious, political and moral icons, resulted in a strong conservative opposition to the "Sestigers". Breytenbach had at this point been living outside of South Africa, in what started out as a self-imposed exile and nomadism in 1959. His exile became state-inflicted (Galloway 1990), once he married Hoang Lien - a Vietnamese person - who was classified as "Non-white" under the South-African Apartheid law – a pretext behind which the then prime minister (Vorster) hid to ostracise Breytenbach and his work from South Africa, as he was perceived as dangerous: "He (Breytenbach) always claimed that the reason was that his wife was a Vietnamese woman, but Vorster told his publishers that this posed no problem. However, he considered Breytenbach an enemy of the Afrikaner people and his poetry as 'morally pernicious and politically repulsive" (Giliomee 2003: 556). This privileged information was divulged to Breytenbach by his publishers and they also threatened to provide funds to an anti-terrorist organisation from the royalties they were going to make out of the sales of his poetry: "Breytenbach's publishers wrote an open letter to him in which they stated that the real reason for the rejection of the visa application was his support for a bloody uprising in South Africa. They added that they were considering contributing a similar amount to an anti-terrorist fund as the royalties they paid the poet" (Giliomee 2003: 556). Subsequently, Breytenbach turned his back on these publishers and cut all ties with them. In this way, he became even further removed from South Africa and certain literary circles within the country.

In 1965, Breytenbach acknowledged in a letter to *Die Burger* the extent to which he despised Apartheid: "If Apartheid was representative of Afrikanerdom', if the two could not be divorced, he saw no hope for the Afrikaners, 'If I could renounce my being an Afrikaner I would do it. I am ashamed of my people" (Giliomee 2003: 556).

Re-inscription within the confines of the country of his birth became increasingly impossible for Breytenbach, whose political awareness was exacerbated by his alienation from South Africa and his exposure to an outside perspective on the Apartheid regime. The peripheral nature of his involvement in the South-African situation is clearly expressed in the following quotation from notes written in 1972: "He must force himself to maintain a dialogue with

the inside. He can be a conduit through which ideas that may be upsetting for the self-satisfied Establishment on the inside can be filtered back. He must bark all along **the borders"** (Breytenbach 1986: 76 - my emphasis). He perceived himself as some sort of sounding board on the periphery, reflecting the distortions to the Establishment in South Africa.

As a founder member of the Okhela movement, Breytenbach became active in his opposition to the regime of the day and as such, to the majority of the white minority ruling South Africa at the time. Having converted to Zen Buddhism, he started carrying the label of "Zen Communist" - two disjunctive concepts. Breytenbach did not find the tension between these two extremes unbearable and he later admitted that "Buddha helped me understand Marx" (Breytenbach 1996: 36). There were no other Buddhists within the Okhela movement and no communists in his dojo: "To be a Zen Communist seems a contradiction, or at any rate peculiar – I believe I was the only clandestine activist in my dojo, I know I was the only Zen student in Okhela" (Weschler 1998: 155). Again Breytenbach's singular stance within every context comes to the fore, distinguishing him from the other participants.

The sense of being an outsider does not surface for the first time within a political context, however. It is already visible in his references to his childhood, as they appear in *A Season in Paradise*, even though these might be fictional: "My childhood years were one long waste. As an economic unit I wasn't worth much" (Breytenbach 1980b: 27), and "When I was leprous, I was able to stare longingly in the mornings from the garden at my school friends" (Breytenbach 1980b: 29). In an interview with Lawrence Weschler, Breytenbach acknowledges feeling marginalized during his adolescence: "I began to feel increasingly marginalized. And from feeling oneself marginalized it's only a small step to beginning to question the values of your society. I mean, nobody at that age is going to accept himself as a marginal case. There must be something wrong with the society when it puts you on the sidelines like that" (Weschler 1998: 146-147). This perception of being excluded from and of lacking purpose within the established institutionalized context, persists into adulthood, blossoming into Breytenbach leaving the country and adopting a lifestyle he identifies as that of a "tramp" and a "nomad" (Weschler 1998: 148). An inherent quality to being a "Middle World un-citizen" is exactly this geographical and conceptual nomadism and outsider status, opening oneself up to people from all areas and layers of society.

3.4.2. <u>The prison experience</u>

Breytenbach's nine-year prison sentence (of which he served seven and a half, from 1975 to 1982) turned his outsider status into a harsh reality, during which he was not only incarcerated but also in solitary confinement for two years. With the publication of *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist,* in which Breytenbach relates the prison experience, he illustrates the "transformation of the psychic constraints of the prison cell into the metaphysical state of internal exile" (Dimitriu in Lutge Coullie & Jacobs 2004: 118). His feelings of isolation shape his metaphysical philosophy in prison: "We are the aviaries of birds without amplitude which have smashed into mirrors because they/ we wanted to be aeroplanes. Thus we live in death. The black traces in the glass. And in this way life is a

growing death. There is only one tense. The dead season. Isolated in the temporal" (Breytenbach 2009b: 98). The "internal exile" Breytenbach suffered in prison is evident from the darkness and hopelessness encompassed in this quotation.

During the first two years in solitary confinement, he wrote *Mouroir*, *Boek*, and *Voetskrif* (the last-mentioned constitutes the first published Afrikaans anthology of prison poetry). According to Van Vuuren (2009), the disintegration of the self within these circumstances forms part of the psychological pathology resulting from incarceration, torture and loneliness and this state manifests itself particularly amongst political prisoners: "The thought consumes the mind – or can it be the other way around, that the mind, that ever-expanding void, cannibalizes the thought?" (Breytenbach 2009b: 148). The pain and disintegration are palpable in these lines from *Mouroir.* Moreover, Breytenbach dedicated the Afrikaans edition to his cell mate "Don Espejuelo" which means "small mirror" in Spanish, illustrating the multiple reflections and images of the self, as well as the loneliness within the prison environment – triggering the need for an imaginary cell mate: "... dat Breytenbach gedurende sy gevangeskap vir 'n tydlank in eensame opsluiting was en verder in 'n enkelsel, hierdie leser sal rig om "Don Espejuelo" te vertolk as "spieëlman", "mirror man", alter ego" / "that Breytenbach, during his imprisonment, was for a certain time in solitary confinement and afterwards in a single cell, points this reader towards interpreting "Don Espejuelo" as "mirror man", as alter ego" (Botha 1988: 410). In his prison poetry, Breytenbach is painfully aware of the absent "outside": "In Breytenbach's prison poetry he is continually trying to create new space to make up for the absent "outside" (Van Vuuren 2009: 50).

Breytenbach goes even further by stipulating that one never leaves prison: "That's one thing about spending a long stretch in prison," he commented. "You never really get out afterward: part of you is continually being drawn back in" (Weschler 1998: 192). Once again, one finds links with the concept of "Middle World", where fixed identities dissolve into the fluctuating dialectic of what they were and are not any longer, or what they are not: "They are defined by what they are not, or no longer and not so much by what they oppose or even reject" (Breytenbach 2009c: 135).

3.4.3. <u>Released!</u>

Immediately after his release from prison, Breytenbach had certain difficulties adjusting to everyday life outside, however. In an interview with Laurence Weschler, Breytenbach explained his dilemma:

"It can be terribly disrupting being forced out of prison like that, having freedom forced upon you," Breytenbach explained to me several years later, during our conversation in his Paris studio.

Because it's the opposite of what I was saying the other day about how life inside prison consists of the intensification of experience wrapped inside its mortification. Because now, coming out from that zombified world of prison, I felt I was moving into a different sort of zombified world. It was a complete turnabout. I kept feeling that these people really don't know what life's about. *They don't see the colors, they don't hear the sounds*.

(Weschler 1998: 184)

In his autobiographical record of the early moments after his release, Breytenbach states the following: "I recollect being embarrassed, afraid nearly of the tumult of objects in the building; of being scared that I might bump my head against the unfamiliar ceilings; instinctively lifting my feet very high" (Breytenbach 1984b: 325). An interesting observation in relation to his prison experience is this attenuated focus on a single element, which enabled Breytenbach to literally experience synaesthesia: "…on occasion you'd look up into the sky and *you heard that star – you heard it!*" (Weschler 1998: 184), a feature which is very prominent is his poetry.

After having served his sentence, despite an initial refutation: "Breyten's first political impulse, in the months after his return, was to shed his South African identity and fixations altogether" (Weschler 1998: 186), Breytenbach emerged with enthusiasm and dedication, still the activist attempting to achieve reconciliation and change within the South-African landscape, participating in negotiations and co-organising round-table meetings like CODESA. He was instrumental in the release of Nelson Mandela by organising a meeting, along with Van Zyl Slabbert, on Gorée Island in 1987, of sixty prominent Afrikaners and seventeen top ANC leaders. Mandela later told François Mitterrand: "Gorée had been one of the keys that unlocked the door, making his own release and everything else possible" (Weschler 1998: 188). Despite his prominence in organizing these events, Breytenbach remained an outsider: "He had been an odd presence at Gorée, not really belonging to either delegation – he was neither any longer a native Afrikaner nor a member of the ANC-in-exile – and, in fact, the entire event represented an edgy, tentative reconciliation between himself and the ANC leaders, some of whom may well have been partly responsible for his seven and a half years of incarceration" (Weschler 1998: 188). Breytenbach never again saw himself as part of the Afrikaans community: "Free, free at last not to endure my South Africanness as a burden or a shame or a job or even an example, free to be finally a footloose painter of metaphors and scribbler of colours" (Breytenbach 1996: 86).

In order to undermine Afrikaner Nationalism and the ideal of the Afrikaner as a super race (pure race), he proffers the opinion that the Afrikaner is a bastard nation with a bastard language; a label which shocked the wider Afrikaner community when first used by him in 1973: "In 1973 the South African Breyten Breytenbach stunned the Afrikaner establishment by calling the Afrikaner a bastard nation with a bastard language" (Viljoen 2011: 109). Breytenbach is able to identify himself with this image of the Afrikaner, as he has always perceived himself as a bastard, despite the mainstream South-African preoccupation with a pure white Afrikaner race during the Apartheid era: "By underlining the diverse, impure and mixed nature of Afrikaans as a Dutch creole with Malay-Portuguese and African elements,

he (Breytenbach) is attacking the accepted view of the pure European descent of the language and the Afrikaners' concern with racial purity. He equates creolization with crossing accepted schemes and opening-up new spaces of consciousness in the name of freedom" (Viljoen 2011: 111). The hybrid nature of a bastard, creolised nation and language is also central to "Middle World un-citizens", who do not belong to any particular national or linguistic group: "And indeed, the way you are positioned to and in language may be one of the defining traits of the Middle World un-citizen. More often than not he/ she will no longer be living untrammelled in the subtle regions of the birth-tongue" (Breytenbach 2009c: 141). At the same time, being a bastard implies being "afflicted with the schizophrenic consciousness of the bastard" (Coetzee in Lutge Collie & Jacobs: 1991: 94). The multiple personalities that manifest themselves from within the liminal space where the "Middle World" un-citizen resides, bear witness to the 'schizophrenic consciousness', which is evident in – amongst others – *Woordwerk* (1999): "In hierdie teks manifesteer dit veral in die verskillende identiteite van die verteller, naamlik ek, Dog, kek en Walker"/ "In this text it manifests itself above all in the different identities of the narrator, namely I, Dog, kek, and Walker" (Viljoen 2005: 10 – my translation).

Despite his impressive political involvement world-wide, Breytenbach lacked a defined political theory: "It should not be held against Breytenbach that he is not a systematic political theorist. Such theorists all too often find systematic ways of justifying whatever political order is currently hegemonic" (Nash 2009: 12). The latter criticism of underground movements by Breytenbach further estranged him from popular camps:

> His critique of the underground is a quest for a different kind of underground, an Archimedean point more simply constituted, not that of clandestine manipulation but that of "becoming strong by making yourself vulnerable", finding a still point at the heart of the world's restless movement where its deepest aspirations can become lucid and clear. Rather than seeking to conduct politics in secret, this different kind of underground (middle world) accepts that social change is the result of processes so barely perceptible as themselves to be secrets, which guide us even when we do not entirely grasp their meaning.
> (Nash 2009: 12)

With this approach, Breytenbach defines the quest of the "Middle World un-citizens" very aptly, suggesting that social reform lies in a different arena to underground revolutionary movements: a change has to be effected at the very essence of the being of a person.

In this regard, the stark evolution in Breytenbach's political reflection is undisputable. He yet again situates himself on the fringes of mainstream politics by adopting an unconventional take on political debate. The prominence of his position in the political arena cannot be disputed however, regardless of his unusual and imaginative approach.

3.4.4. <u>Post-Apartheid to the present day</u>

As an outsider, Breytenbach continues to travel widely and rotates on a regular basis between Gorée Island, Paris, Catalonia and South Africa, to name but a few. His work bears

witness to his nomadic lifestyle: he pins down numerous accounts of experiences in different locations in *A Veil of Footsteps* (2008); his numerous visits to African countries and his political involvement are strongly featured in *Return to Paradise* (1993); the constantly shifting locations also surface in *Mouroir* (1984) and *Woordwerk* (1999); his numerous academic papers delivered in an array of countries yet again emphasise the nomadic principle and can clearly be perceived in *End Papers* (1986) and *The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution* (1996); and the most explicit account is featured in *Notes from the Middle World* (2009) with echoes from *Intimate Stranger* (2009). The nomadic tendency ingrained in his essence is attributed to the "residual Khoi blood in his Afrikaner veins" (Jacobs 2009: 100).

Breytenbach, subsequent to his prison experience, refuses to adopt any country as his heimat and lives across and beyond borders: "Much of Breytenbach's work is concerned with borders, especially the border between homeland and exile. His work seems to need a yearning for somewhere else" (Viljoen 2011: 109). Viljoen is sensitive to the yearning to move beyond borders from a homeland perspective in Breytenbach's prison poetry. The quest later on moves beyond this tension of "homeland" and "exile" into the "Middle World", where the un-citizens choose to remain unattached. This evolution from homeland and exile to homeless and liminal is very prominent in his later work.

Even on a political level, Breytenbach has indefinitely extricated himself from the ANC and has criticised their actions vehemently on numerous occasions during the aftermath of Apartheid: "Again similarly, the African National Congress is not and never was a tolerant organization – except, of course, in its theoretical stance against certain intolerant practices of capital and minority white rule" (Breytenbach 1996: 85). This relatively mild criticism of the movement later developed into a profound disgust with the state of affairs in South Africa: "Mettertyd word die een-party-heerserskap en kultuur van toe-eiening en patronisering omgesit in 'n beleid van staatskapitalisme verdoesel as sosialisme – op voorwaarde dat die staat aan die ANC behoort – en opgedoek as die Nasionale Demokratiese Revolusie"/ "In due course the one-party-rule and culture of appropriation and patronising are transformed into a policy of state capitalism concealed as socialism – on condition that the state belongs to the ANC – and are presented as the National Democratic Revolution" (Breytenbach 2012: 2), and ultimately a vehement attack on the current leader of the ANC in South Africa – Pres. Jacob Zuma – and a call for change: "Ganôg" / "Enough" (Breytenbach 2014: Rapport).

Breytenbach does not subscribe to any movement or ideology and remains incorruptible, voicing his counter-hegemonic opinion through his work. He is equally free and unattached from political party convictions, which reinforce his un-citizen status.
In Breytenbach dissociation from popular culture, he is again positioning himself as an outsider by heavily criticising certain elements:

> Maybe one sensed in a confused way that world history had reached a turning point and was now supposedly coming to an end, that this was a last stand before we all fall before the onslaught of self-glorifying consumerism, of neo-conservative fascists rubbing our noses in the glitter

and the gore of 'globalisation', of indifference to the indignities of poverty and misery elsewhere in the world.

(Breytenbach 2008a: 42)

His vociferous objection to the excesses of globalisation and the disquietude in relation to the ugly underbelly of this status quo are often reiterated in his essays.

He furthers this debate in his political essays, highlighting the plight of the poor repeatedly:

I dream, as I want to believe you have dreamed, and I will continue to strive, for an integrated continent of generosity, economic justice, creativity, civil and civic responsibility. A continent that will develop its own sustainable modernity far away from Western "universalist" models of globalization serving only the masters.

(Breytenbach 2009c: 38)

Breytenbach is still voicing injustice and fighting to create awareness of the plight of those oppressed by the global system – as reiterated above in the quotation from the essay to President Mandela: "Mandela's Smile" - and in upholding this engagement, Breytenbach remains involved in human rights issues, in Africa specifically, as well as the furthering of free artistic expression. The opportunity provided to upcoming artists, of publishing or exhibiting at the Pirogue Initiative at the Gorée Institute, or appearing in print at Archipelago Books in New York – an independent publisher - also promotes the visibility outside of the hegemonic, globalised publishers, who have to reinforce the latest accepted viewpoints. These artists, who would alternatively have remained on the periphery or would have been silenced, are furnished with an opportunity of expression. These initiatives move outside of nationalist, political or linguistic affinities and as such, tie in perfectly with Breytenbach's "Middle World" status.

One can therefore infer that Breytenbach might have drawn heavily on his personal experiences – consciously or subconsciously - in shaping the interstitial cultural space called "Middle World".

In advancing towards a coherent perspective on the "Middle World", one cannot deny the impact of colonialism on the current migrant people which have constituted the field of postcolonial studies and it is therefore useful to draw on these resources in this regard. Homi Bhabha's work is equally a reaction to and development of postcolonial theory and exploring his contribution to this debate will positively inform Breytenbach's work.

3.5.   Postcolonial theory

"It is radical perversity, not sage political wisdom, that drives the intriguing will to knowledge of postcolonial discourse."

(Bhabha 1994: 303)

This controversial statement by Bhabha summarizes his take on the motivation behind postcolonial discourse. He furthers this aversion by adding that postmodernity provides a cultural logic for capitalism: "…postmodernity provides the periodizing narrative of the global transformations of capital" (Bhabha 2004: 306). This economic model gains in complexity when one attempts to fashion it on an aesthetic model: "… the dilemma of projecting an international space on the trace of a decentred, fragmented subject. Cultural globality is figured in the *in-between* spaces of double-frames: its historical originality marked by a cognitive obscurity; its decentred 'subject' signified in the nervous temporality of the transitional, or the emergent provisionality of the 'present'" (Bhabha 2004: 309). Thus Bhabha highlights the dilemma facing a postcolonial critic. These flaws – the fact that postcolonial discourse seems to be mainly shaped along capitalist borders, with the focus on a fragmented agent or 'subject' who/ which leaves traces that cannot be stipulated within a historical model - need to be addressed and he does so in the following manner:

> What must be mapped as a new international space of discontinuous historical realities is, in fact, the problem of signifying the interstitial passages and processes of cultural difference that are inscribed in the 'in-between', in the temporal break-up that weaves the 'global' text. It is, ironically the disintegrative moment, even movement, of enunciation – that sudden disjunction of the present – that makes possible the rendering of culture's global reach. And, paradoxically, it is only through a structure of splitting and displacement – 'the fragmented and schizophrenic decentring of the self' – that the architecture of the new historical subject emerges at the limits of representation itself, 'to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual to that vaster and *unrepresentable* totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole.
>
> (Bhabha 2004: 310)

Bhabha identifies the value of the 'in-between', the break in the temporal fabric, the moment of disintegration. He feels that these moments are significant to try and form a notion of a 'global text'. He recognises the importance of the way in which culture is translated within the space of 'borderline negotiations' as opposed to more commonly acknowledged spaces of integration: "To revise the problem of the global space from the postcolonial perspective is to move the location of cultural difference away from the space of demographic *plurality* to the borderline negotiations of cultural translation" (Bhabha 1994: 319).

These negotiations take place when people from different origins are exposed to each other: diasporas form an integral part of postcolonial writing and nomadism and have been perceived as a threat to the nation-state: "The sudden proliferation and recognition of diasporas have triggered a considerable degree of apprehension among Western academics and commentators, who have expressed a heightened consciousness that diasporas can represent a threat to the nation-state and the liberal-democratic order" (Cohen 2010:170-171). The threat to the nation-state is not only constituted by physical migrations but also by the increasing deterritorialisation of the construct of identity by the mass media: "More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered

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by mass media in all their forms. That is, fantasy is now a social practice, it enters, in a host of ways, into the fabrication of social lives for many people in many societies" (Appadurai 2010: 54). These exchanges complicate the pursuit of ethnographers and render the process of identity formation infinitely complex, escaping national limitations in the dynamically constructed social fabric.

In Breytenbach's work, there is constant undermining of the concept of the nation-state and a global democracy: "We are all of us creaking and cracking under the pressure of globalized greed and a homicidal lust for power draped in the pious pretensions and the moth-eaten purple cloak of "One-God" religion or "democracy." Democracy is killing us; at the very least we are choking as it is stuffed down our ungrateful throats" (Breytenbach 2009c: 8). Breytenbach's palpable revulsion of the foul underbelly of globalisation is reinforced by the sarcastic tone used in this extract. Bhabha equally questions the new power-structures taking shape in society: "Post-coloniality, for its part, is a salutary reminder of the persistent 'neo-colonial' relations within the 'new' world order and the multinational division of labour" (Bhabha 2004: 9). He continually points out the imbalanced relationships that have manifested themselves over centuries between the oppressor and the oppressed, and he rejects the historical model relating the situation of the oppressed as infected with the desire of the coloniser, and the mimicry of the coloniser by the colonised. The language equally becomes infused with these insubstantial yet projected ideas. Instead Bhabha opts for a different model that he refers to as "enactive, enunciatory cultural site" to escape from this snare and to attempt empowering the "objectified others":

> My shift form the cultural as an epistemological object to culture as an enactive, enunciatory site opens up possibilities for other 'times' of cultural meaning (retroactive, prefigurative) and other narrative spaces (fantasmic, metaphorical). My purpose in specifying the enunciative present in the articulation of culture is to provide a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience.
>
> (Bhabha 1994: 225)

Breytenbach delineates an "in-between" space in the "Middle World", within which this process of articulation and interaction - aimed at by Bhabha - is possible, while concurrently rejecting the epistemological as providing an operative cultural model or site furnishing an accurate account of cultural history: "You – we – are the inheritors of reality, and reality is an expanding field of awareness, and growth implies growing up and growing together, and conscious growth is expressed in involvement. In the friction and symbiosis between you and the other a new dynamic will be released for which you will share accountability" (Breytenbach 1996: 31). His angle is wider than Bhabha's, in the sense that the emphasis falls on the accountability of all participants in this experience – as opposed to focusing only on the "objectified others". There is a fluidity of perspectives and the "I" is not predominant or exclusive, thereby precluding mimicry.

History in itself poses a problem to Bhabha, as there is a certain fluidity to time: he challenges "the historicist idea of time as a progressive, ordered whole" (Bhabha 1994: 59). He argues that Western history is posturing to portray reality in "homogeneous, serial time"

(Bhabha 1994: 54), whereas "liberatory people" are "caught in the discontinuous time of translation and negotiation" (Bhabha 1994: 55). Bhabha argues for a space that will make negotiation possible, that will allow for a dialectic that does not lead to a "teleological or transcendent History", and thus defines a "discursive temporality", where time is not sequential: "The challenge lies in conceiving of the time of political action and understanding as opening up a space that can accept and regulate the differential structure of the moment of intervention without rushing to produce a unity of the social antagonism and contradiction" (Bhabha 1994: 37). Breytenbach also rejects a linear historical perception of time in our perception and awareness of our reality and in the realm or the artistic creation, equally focusing on a "discursive temporality": "The past is the ink with which we write the present [...] time, which is the future of the present movement of surfacing" (Breytenbach 2009a: 174). Within the space of the "Middle World", Breytenbach feels that the un-citizens can escape "historical determinism": "... as bastard offspring of the state and sons-and-daughters-of-many-struggles and runaway slaves of historical determinism, we must and still can outlive ourselves as the happy bums of the global village" (Breytenbach 2009c: 155).

The process of crossing borders and of bastardisation are of particular significance in Breytenbach's oeuvre, as Hein Viljoen points out: "The focus will fall on the crossing of boundaries, the creolization of the self and the mother tongue ("moertaal") and the creolization of the boundary between word and image" (Viljoen 2011: 110). Here again the fields of the geographical, the personal and the artistic overlap. Viljoen continues to define creolisation as follows: "Creolization I regard as a principle of rhizomatic understanding – trying to understand literary phenomena in networks of dissemination, multiplicity and diversity […] I also regard it as a principle of deconstruction – of taking leave of foundations and entering into new relations and communitas with others" (Viljoen 2011: 110). Creolisation within this context overlaps with Bhabha's formation of hybridities: "... the overlap and displacement of domains of difference" (Bhabha 1994: 2) where negotiation takes place.

Breytenbach furthermore questions the validity of historical fact or its supremacy: "What remains of the differences between fact and fiction? Certainly there's much less of a contradiction between these two 'opposites' than we're led to assume. For starters, we need to imagine (visualize, format, relate and situate) even the simplest fact in order to grasp it. Making sense necessitates a constant telling to self of the observed phenomena, and thereby it becomes a story" (Breytenbach 2009a: 70).

The imagination is comprised of images and the metaphorical and fantastic are prominent aspects of Breytenbach's writing. In this respect his philosophy coincides with Bhabha's concepts. Bhabha defines metaphor as meaning being transferred and communities being imagined across cultural differences. Breytenbach sees the metaphor as part of the consciousness formation, as a main constituent of the imagination: "The image, unclothed by understanding or even meaning, cannot be fixed. It moves against the dullness of information. It is movement. It is metaphor" (Breytenbach 1996: 136). The metaphor opens up an 'in-between' space in the mind, in the reflection and perception, it opens up 'reality'. The displacement comes to fruition in the altered consciousness.

Clearly, the cultural coalescence takes place on various levels – specifically on that of consciousness formation.

Postcolonial theory therefore proves relevant to Breytenbach's oeuvre in the sense that the debate has been started and concepts delineated within post-structuralist theory that enable the evolution of these ideas by both Breytenbach and Bhabha: the position of the agent/ subject, the deconstruction of the text, the disappearance of signifiers pointing to signifieds, and the rejection of the grand narratives of science. I have pointed out that both Bhabha and Breytenbach relativise scientific knowledge, that the agent is questioned by both, and specifically erased as a subject by Breytenbach as can be perceived in his adoption of multiple identities. The inability to establish fixed meaning, which is substituted by poetic metaphor opening up the beyond and altering consciousness, moves beyond the previously introduced language games of the postmodernists. The postcolonial has been a directional point from which both Bhabha and Breytenbach have moved forward.

3.6.   <u>The Beyond, the in-between, the hybrid</u>

A core aspect to "Middle World" is the interstice, the in-between, the beyond. This aspect touches upon many other components: identity, space, consciousness-formation, the irrational, death, and as seen in the previous section – culture.

Bhabha defines this in-between space as follows: "In place of the polarity of a prefigurative self-generating nation 'in-itself' and extrinsic other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the 'in-between" (Bhabha 1994: 212). The myth of "self-generating" nations has been dispelled and the internal complexities within a specific nation have become a space within which signification takes place and minority discourses invade histories. He describes the "contentious internal liminality" as appertaining to the "minority, the exilic, the marginal and the emergent" (Bhabha 1994: 214). Breytenbach defines his "Middle World" as: "Not of the Center though, since it is by definition and vocation peripheral, other, to be living in the margins and on the live edges" (Breytenbach 2009c: 136). The marginal quality of the minorities is inherently present in both delineations.

Apart from the 'beyond' representing a space for minorities, this concept equally resonates on a poetic level: "…for underlying the flow and the fall of verse are 'natural units' of consciousness sculpted by rhythm, by recall, by movement reaching for the edges of meaning and of darkness" (Breytenbach 2009a: 15). The periphery of negotiation coincides with consciousness formation as proposed by poetic metaphor and form and style – "edges of meaning and of darkness". The reader is taken to new spaces, borderline experiences, to the beyond.

Breytenbach continues his articulation of the beyond by showing the complexity of this space: "This sense of place will emerge from "the interplay between geography, memory, and invention" (Breytenbach 2009c: 164). The reference in this quotation to an essay by Said on Palestine further adds to the complexity of the formation of place, of space, of consciousness and yet again, the emphasis is not solely on the multitudinous constitutive

elements but it also signals the creative aspect "invention" without which the process cannot take place.

Breytenbach also defines the beyond as "opgaan in die onbegrensde innerlike ruimte"/ "ascending into the unlimited inner space" (Breytenbach 1987: 67), hereby clearly reiterating the importance of exploring the inner recesses which is made possible through imagination and invention.

3.7.   <u>Hybridity and Identity</u>

The peripheral un-citizens of the "Middle World" have a hybrid identity, resulting from continual internalised changes and a constantly altering inner narratives: "a cardinal Middle World law – that you can only survive and move forward by continuing to invent yourself" (Breytenbach 2009c: 148), and "In fact, I don't imagine one can locate and identify 'self' except through narrating, and thus at least partly inventing it to the self" (Breytenbach 2009a: 66), and "Culturally such a person will be a hybrid" (Breytenbach 2009c: 149). Identity is to a large extent embedded in culture and the cultural hybridity will inevitably result in a hybrid identity. According to Bhabha, hybridity is ambivalent and a challenge to authority: "The displacement from symbol to sign creates a crisis for any concept of authority based on a system of recognition: colonial specularity, doubly inscribed, does not produce a mirror where the self apprehends itself; it is always the split screen of the self and its doubling, the hybrid" (Bhabha 1994: 162).

Breytenbach's definition of the hybrid is more open and fluid and is not enclosed in signs and significations of language and the related dialectic doubling and rhizomic splitting. To him, the hybrid is a space within which to exist successfully, and where one can find reality in the interstice opened up by this space: "Winds blow and shots are fired and stories are made from hybridisation of reality and imagination and memory as passed from mouth to mouth to paper" (Breytenbach 2008a: 178). In Bhabha's definition of cultural hybridity in a conflictual situation, however, there are some echoes of Breytenbach's perspective: "The margin of hybridity, where cultural differences 'contingently' and conflictually touch, becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience" (Bhabha 1994: 297). Even when a person is in a confrontational situation, there is contingency between cultures and hybridity arises. The space within which the exchange takes place is referred to in the following manner by Bhabha: "... the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (Bhabha 1994: 56).

Breytenbach defines culture in the following manner, distinguishing between the African and the European:

> In Africa culture is a tissue of experiences, the uttering of cohesion, both a
> perception of social and natural environment and the environment itself
> (a tree can be a cultural artefact) – thus history, myth, tradition,
> relationships, taboos, magic, all to situate yourself within the immutable
> whole. In Europe, more torn apart, having moved through momentous

accelerations, culture is a conscious tool in the continuing effort to
establish identity and to 'master' natural forces.
(Breytenbach 1996: 89)

Culture is incontestably integrated with identity formation. Dimitriu challenges the view of the postcolonial culture being exclusively a Western phenomenon and argues that: "Instead, we have multiple, often local or regional stories, all relevant to an increasingly "multi" or hybrid world" (Dimitriu 2007: 107). Thus bridging the divide between Western and African/ Eastern critical approaches, she insists that: "More commonly, it (postcolonialism) concerns the peripheries of the globe" (Dimitriu 2007: 107). This viewpoint slots in with Breytenbach's 'un-citizens' in their 'in-between' state, despite his vehement criticism of post-colonial ideologies and practices:

> Few pimps and popes are as expansively, grandly and self-satisfyingly
> "understanding'" and thus "accommodating'' as those "iconoclasts"
> working in Comp. Lit. and Cultural Studies in the North. The leftist
> intellectuals' commitment to ambivalence, complexity, and fragmentation,
> to making of the penis a phallic symbol, to the death of the author and the
> demise of the male, and particularly to the rebuttal of "excellence," which,
> as it was mockingly decreed, could only be racist and pig-like – all of it
> originally subversive – has now led to an ideological obtuseness of
> decayed ethics, confusion, and the incapacity to recognize morality (since
> only the "self" is immoral, or rather *guilty*) or to act upon the need for
> solidarity.
> (Breytenbach 2009c: 140-141)

Breytenbach touches upon many fields in this comment, mainly signalling the insufficiency of the area of postcolonial studies and the sedentary approach adopted by the universities of the 'North' in their departments of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies. He attempts to move in a different sphere, where nothing is cast in stone and everything is in flux and creatively changing. There are nevertheless, multiple similarities between the post-colonial concepts and Breytenbach's work. Even Bhabha, however, notes the inadequacies of the 'post' approach: "Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other that the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': *postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism....*" (Bhabha 1994: 1).

Identity formation within the present cultural context is one of hybridity and fluidity. Breytenbach, as a "Middle World" un-citizen, does not – as I have previously pointed out - see himself as a single identity. There are multiple references pointing towards the author known under this name: Breyten Wordfool, Simon Snow, Kaggen, Jan Blom, Jan Afrika, Mshana, Doggod, Breyten Wordbird, Breyten, Picaro, Bangai Bird, kek etc. The elusive character of identify is continually emphasised in his work. The almost invisible nature of the "I", though approached from a different angle by Bhabha, does have contiguities with Breytenbach's viewpoint: "The reader is positioned – together with the enunciation of the question of identity – in an undecidable space between 'desire and fulfilment', between perpetration and its recollection. Neither future nor present, but between the two" (Bhabha

1994: 77). The desire for the Other is an ongoing process of bastardisation, according to Breytenbach: "Remember, there is no 'purity' of race or culture, only a seamless life of mixing, a ceaseless hunger for Other, an ongoing bastardization" (Breytenbach 2009a: 242). He develops the definition of the 'Self' and its duplicitous nature along different lines from Bhabha: "As regards Self, it is only one of a pair. God or Void (to give the Unknown a name) begins wherever the I stops. […] It may be said that you (the I) are God's imagination, its dog, since you will begin where his I-ness stops" (Breytenbach 2009a: 162). There is no mention of the Void, of God, or the ineffable or untouchable in Bhabha's theory on identity. He perceives the duplication of identity within two frames: firstly, the visual demand to observe the totality of the Other; secondly, the act of articulation and enunciation in representing the Other: "The desire for the Other is doubled by the desire in language, which *splits the difference* between Self and Other so that both positions are partial; neither is sufficient unto itself" (Bhabha 1994: 72). Ultimately, according to Rushdie "The migrant intellect roots itself in itself, in its own capacity for imagining and reimagining the world" (Rushdie 2010:280). In order to understand the need to 'represent' reality, another point made by Rushdie on Gunter Grass' work is noteworthy: "This is what the triple disruption of reality teaches migrants: that reality is an artefact, that it does not exist until it is made, and that, like any other artefact, it can be made well or badly, and that it can also, of course, be unmade" (Rushdie 2010: 280). Unless the Self and reality are created, they do not exist. Breytenbach affirms this viewpoint: "Writing as (is) weak awareness, a minute manifestation of movement stilling death" (Breytenbach 2009c: 187). To establish our existence, to ward off death (and reaffirm our inextricable interconnectedness with death), we need to 'write' or 'create', for in doing so, we access the beyond.

The creative process takes shape in the 'in-between' space and in a moment of consciousness-formation integrating alterity into the field of awareness: "Dit is hierdie alteriteit, hierdie andersheid, wat deur die skeppende flitsmoment, die vlammehaal, ontbloot word deur die kunstenaar"/ "It is this alterity, this singularity, that is exposed through the flashing creative moment, the stroke of flames, by the artist" (Burger 2005: 12 – my translation). The moment of awareness is extremely important in consciousness-formation: "True works of art happen, I suspect, only when inner and outer come together" (Breytenbach 2009a: 89). This moment is very rare and does not encompass a full motivation for what Breytenbach calls "being-with-word-in-the-world", but commences by tracing an outline of how to react to life. He goes further, suggesting that poetry is a form of consciousness, a form that entails metamorphosis and opens the reader up to the "unthinkable": "A poem is not just a statement or a lining or limping up of words; it is also the actualization of metamorphosis in process" (Breytenbach 2009c: 39).

Bhabha refers to the "unrepresentable" as opposed to the "unthinkable". The "unrepresentable" is a domain indicating the inability to represent the "totality which is the ensemble of societies' structures as a whole" (Bhabha 1994: 310). There is a clear distinction between the two definitions and their respective references, despite the overlapping delineation of "interstitial passages" relevant to the "Middle World". The moment of suspense (as Foucault refers to it) opens up new possibilities, this is the interstice, the crack paving the way to the "unthinkable". Deleuze echoes this idea by giving a related definition of these interstices:

Ces visions ne sont pas des fantasmes, mais de véritables Idées que l'écrivain voit et entend dans les interstices du langage, dans les écarts de langage. Ce ne sont pas des interruptions du processus, mais des haltes qui en font partie, comme une éternité qui ne peut être révélée que dans le devenir, un paysage qui n'apparaît que dans le mouvement. Elles ne sont pas en dehors du langage, elles en sont le dehors. /

These visions are not fantasies, but real Ideas that the writer sees and hears in the interstices of language, in the spaces of language. These are not interruptions of the process, but pauses that form part of it, like an eternity that can only be revealed in its becoming, a view that appears only in movement. These ideas are not outside of language, they are the outside of language.

(Deleuze 2010: 16)

The 'primacy of discourse' posited by Bhabha, is heavily disputed by Parry, however: "The book which is distinguished by Bhabha's insistence on the absolute primacy of discourse, appeared at a time when there were already signs of a challenge to critical modes predicated on the autonomy of signifying processes and privileging the means of representation as the sole progenitor of meaning" (Parry 2004: 55). Parry feels that Bhabha's work is ambivalent and his lack of commitment to sequentiality, his focus on an ahistorical abstraction, his open-ended and vague terms, and the depoliticising of implications, render the theories he proffers inadequate: "In Bhabha's usage 'postcolonialism' does not indicate 'sequentiality', its gestures to a 'beyond' denoting a disjunctive relationship with that anterior condition by which it is indelibly marked, and by which it is claimed, enables a critique displacing the language and precepts of both colonialist and anti-colonialist writing" (Parry 2004: 57). She feels that his vision is dated, that he forms part of a leftist hegemony and that he clearly subscribes to the model of language and the circulation of meaning put forth by Foucault. Parry is insisting on the dialectical Marxist model in this world of 'internationalism', and feels that a dialectic is not possible within the Foucaultian model, where difference is liberated from an oppositional and negative system. Her conclusion is that "The problem of theoretical work then presents itself not as one of aligning reconciliation with remembrance, but rather of joining remembrance of the past with a critique of the contemporary condition" (Parry 2004: 193). Personally, her point of 'sequentiality' which is needed, points towards a relevant argument that is of dire importance to oppressed peoples world-wide. Her basis of reconciliation being aligned with remembrance appears to be problematic as the ultimate intervention can only be based on an assessment of the 'contemporary condition' and building a model of reconciliation on the memory of oppression feeds negativity, fixation, and destruction into the solution. We need creative solutions and the one she seems to suggest has not worked in any context so far. Breytenbach therefore tries to escape both the dialectical enclosure and the linguistic imprisonment by introducing imagination – and the related irrational thought processes – as the only possible solution to political and social issues.

The following two concepts feature in Breytenbach's work but do not have echoes in Bhabha's theoretical framework and provide creative paths to finding possible solutions: the irrational and death.

In Breytenbach's work, the irrational forms part of the 'beyond'. The first step towards defining the irrational in Breytenbach's work is acknowledging the importance of the intuitive: "Slegs intuïsie kan verder as die rede gaan"/ "Only intuition can go beyond reason" (Breytenbach 1987: 26). The rational is elucidated in the following manner, to illuminate the role of the irrational: "Die een faset van ons is rasioneel en wanneer ons onthou om daaran te dink kan ons redelik rasioneeel reageer – al word die rede dan ook merendeels ingespan om jouself te bluf, dat jou optrede en repliek vol vooroordele, emosies en instinkte, wel rasioneel is" / "One of our facets is rational and when we remind ourselves of it we are able to react in a relatively rational manner – even though reason is employed mostly to fool yourself, to convince yourself that your behaviour and replies - both filled with prejudice, emotions and instincts – are actually rational" (Breytenbach 1987: 45 – my translation). The lack of objectivity also implies a lack of rationality. Breytenbach is also very aware of the limitations of rational thought as a result of his Zen-Buddhist beliefs: "Meditasie is geen onderdrukking van denke nie, eerder 'n volkome beantwoording, 'n betasting van die limiete van die wete gekoppel aan die wil om daar verby te lewe" / "Meditation is not the suppression of thoughts, rather a complete response, a fingering of the limits of knowledge linked to the will to live past these" (Breytenbach 1987: 74 – my translation).

Death is another form of the 'beyond' and as such creation is a form of death, as well as the creative process: "Wat neerslaan is as op papier, die papier die boom se lykgewaad, gesif deur die bedorwe en stram en onskrandere maar koppige vuurherd van die self"/ "That which is deposited is ash on paper, and paper is the shroud of the tree, sifted by the spoilt and rigid and unintelligent but stubborn fireplace of the self" (Breytenbach 1987: 39 – my translation). Writing is both the only defence against death: "...writing is always against death..." (Breytenbach 2009a: 64), and a manifestation thereof: "Dood woon in die holtes van die verstand, soos in die ravyne en die pens en die kamers van so 'n stad. Dood is 'n voël"/ "Death lives in the enclaves of the mind, like ravines and the paunch and the rooms of such a city. Death is a bird" (Breytenbach 1999: 34 – my translation).

The irrational and death form constitutive elements of the hybrid existence of the "Middle World" un-citizen in the beyond, encompassing all facets of human nature and being in constant exploration of the instinctive through ritual and the cultural through metaphor, of which dancing creates the space.

Conclusion:

From the various concepts, one can affirm that a theoretical framework to Breytenbach's "Middle World" should encompass the impact of his private life on his work and on the evolution of the concept of the "Middle World"; the hybridity of the un-citizens; the interstices opened up by the new interaction between Self and Other; nomadism and the related diasporas; and the constant residence in a state of "unhomeliness".

A more detailed account of the philosophical and political implications of the concept of the "Middle World" is required to delineate the scope of this concept. These two aspects are also important in defining a theoretical approach to Breytenbach's work.

Chapter 4: Political and Philosophical aspects of "Middle World"

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide a brief genealogy of the concept of "Middle World", in order to establish possible applications of the concept itself as a critical framework from which to approach Breytenbach's work. In my opinion, the concept "Middle World" has far-reaching implications, and it may be beneficial to explore the extent to which this concept can act as a critical framework with which to read Breytenbach's work more comprehensively.

In order to get a grasp on the concept of "Middle World" in Breytenbach's oeuvre, one could refer to the work of Paul Ricoeur (as Ampie Coetzee and Willie Burger did in their articles on metaphors in Breytenbach's work – mentioned in chapter 2). The following quotation on the mode of texts in general, from Paul Ricoeur's work, might prove valuable. Although Ricoeur's work is often associated with hermeneutics, he has moved beyond a hermeneutical approach in his later work. This earlier mention is still within the frame of hermeneutics – even though it cannot serve as an adequate theoretical frame because the focus is on rational textual analysis and interpretation – it remains useful: "…this signifies that the mode of being of the world opened up by the text is the mode of the possible, or better of the power-to-be: therein resides the subversive force of the imaginary" (Ricoeur 2009: 93). Even though Ricoeur never mentioned anything about a "Middle World", this quotation is a significant evolution paving the way towards the concept of the "Middle World" as Breytenbach perceives it. The imaginary becomes potent, powerful, and subversive, and supersedes Eurocentric readings from the "North", by the creative source which is attainable regardless of origin, background, status, knowledge, or culture.

Ricoeur's "mode of the possible" could to some extent be compared to Breytenbach's "Middle World", as the "Middle World" is never a finality, never a place of arrival: "What if it were no more than the area of being lost, the vacant lot of nothingness" (Breytenbach 2009c: 137). The "Middle World" is always delineating parameters within which anything can crystallise, and it takes the shape of a dance between the author and the reader. The space that is created through the act of dancing is the "mode of the possible", where imagination acts as a transformative agent. Dancing opens up interstices within which consciousness formation takes place. Through the process of change, movement is triggered. Being in this in-between space or "mode" is at the core of the concept of "Middle World".

4.2. <u>Philosophical aspects</u>

4.2.1. <u>The philosophical implications of "Middle World"</u>

Before going into the impact of the "Middle World" metaphor on consciousness formation, the "mode of the possible" opened up by the "Middle World", one has to have a clearer understanding of Zen Buddhism as this philosophy is equally related to consciousness formation.

> All beings by nature are Buddhas,
> as ice by nature is water.
> Apart from water there is no ice;
> apart from beings, no Buddhas.
> *(Hakuin Ekaku BBC)*

Zen has its origins in Indian Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism and has become popular in the West in the 20th century.

 The following current definition is provided by the BBC on Zen Buddhism: "The essence of Zen is attempting to understand the meaning of life directly, without being misled by logical thought or language" (BBC 2015). If one considers this statement, the impact of Zen on Breytenbach's approach to literature and art is very clear. The process of stripping away all logical, learned assumptions and opening up to the imaginary in order to find the 'real' is a typically Zen practice and as I have already mentioned, these comprise typical characteristics of Breytenbach's oeuvre. Through meditation, the Zennist finds enlightenment within her/ himself. Enlightenment is to find your true nature and in doing so, to be completely alive. The Zennist does not focus on emotional reactions to situations but rather try to accept what is for what it is. Thus one will often find a mix of the wonderful and the horrible in Breytenbach's work as these exist alongside each other in 'reality':

> 9
> pa hoekom het jy my nie vertel
> van die swart vlinder van tyd
>
> wat terugkrul as 'n wurm in die oog
> onder winter aarde
>
> pa hoe kan ek die rug op eie vlees keer
> as die maan 'n stukkende mond is
>
> pa hoekom het jy my nie geleer
> dat die toekoms na dooie hond stink
>
> blinkblind onsigbaar soos 'n spieël

en tog 'n geduldige dansmaat vir al die tye

maar hoe moet die hond se musiek my verteer pa
as die hart 'n donker wond is
                papapapapapapapapa/

dad why didn't you tell me
of the black butterfly of time

that curls back as a worm in the eye
under the winter soil

dad how can I turn my back on my own flesh
when the moon is a splattered mouth

dad why didn't you teach me
that the future has the stench of a dead dog

blindingly shining invisible as a mirror
and yet a patient dance partner for all the times

but how must the music of the dog consume me dad
when the heart is a dark wound

daddaddaddaddaddaddaddaddad
                (Breytenbach 2007: 50-51 – my translation).

In this poem, the intrinsic negative elements woven into the speaker's existence are inescapable, unsettling, and ominous. This meditation is typically Zennist – no part of reality is ignored, beautified, or judged as a negative element. Everything is related and forms the whole: life and decay are different sides of the same coin and from decay and wounds and pain spring creativity and new life.

Another literary movement and philosophical approach to take into consideration when looking at Breytenbach's "Middle World" is Modernism, particularly the post Second World War style of the modernists who rejected structure, order, and religion, illustrating through their work the anarchy of the surrounding world and capturing the futility of human existence in revolutionary new artistic and specifically poetic forms. The impact of the modernists on Breytenbach's work is profound and persistent – anarchy, futility, and innovation are all characteristic of his approach to writing. In yet again referring to the above poem, the excruciating pain of the human existence and the helplessness of the isolated individual are portrayed. Even verbal expression is terrifying: "the moon is a splattered mouth", and the poem is a clear image of existential anxiety. The anxiety often manifests itself disguised as fulfilment and beauty. The combination of these elements leads to the in-between space of the "Middle World".

Closely related to the socio- and geo-political position of the un-citizens is the philosophical implication of "Middle World". The in-between space of "Middle World" is not only applicable to a geographical location or socio-political context, as the necessary impact of living in an in-between space has a vast impact on one's emotional state[1], and as such, peregrinates to the philosophical level:

> The poem is thing indeed – one should never underestimate its thing-ness. But then, I'd submit that thing *is* process. That is why I say it is written in the possible tense, because it is a take in progress, a visible and audible mouthing of the combat against death and nothingness, and a statement (or station) in becoming.
> (Breytenbach 2009a: 18)

As a shield of sorts against death and nothingness, and paradoxically and simultaneously also being a testament to nothingness and death - seeing that a poem is often referred to as 'mere ashes' and a corpse - is the in-between space or interstice that the poem opens up. This space constitutes an expansion of consciousness and this interstice is the breath of the mind:

> What's left is the ash of the poet's craft in which all fire will be remembered embers to be recalled and read like runes and stones and bones still smouldering in the streets of wind and water, so beautiful and so bleak.
> (Breytenbach 2009a: 19)

In this extract, the "Middle World" philosophy becomes evident. Memory - also identified by Breytenbach as 'imagination' - has enabled the reader to internalise the alteration effected upon her or him by the interaction with the piece of art or the text. The reader is playing with fire: "the fire of beauty", and trying to avoid getting burnt. This process involves the study of consciousness formation at the same time, and as such touches on the anthropological aspect of human nature – reading the "runes and stones and bones".

One can therefore conclude that the concept of the "Middle World" is a relevant approach to the human condition on a social, political, philosophical, and anthropological level through the medium of the arts, as will be discussed in the final chapter.

My intention is to further the conversation on Breytenbach's "Middle World" and to extend the existing critical debate. In order to experiment with literary criticism of his work from another angle, I will identify clues from Breytenbach's work itself to establish a coherent approach to his work. Firstly, one has to incorporate his political involvement and consciousness formation.

Breytenbach emphasises certain central concepts with which to look at literature, life, and poetry specifically, and these concepts tie in with the "Middle World" on a more

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[1]   See in chapter on Breytenbach's private life

philosophical level. My main source for this chapter, as one of his most explicit accentuations of an approach to poetry specifically is *Intimate Stranger*. This book will serve as a basis because it forms part of the "Middle World" trilogy and because the suggestions on "Middle World" are put forth explicitly. *Notes from the Middle World*, being given such prominence by Breytenbach, is of equal importance.

The most central process to living in an authentic way or being alive at all, is the awareness that is created through stripping away all illusions. Therefore my first element is breathing awareness.

4.2.2. <u>Breathing awareness: a peeling of the eyes:</u>

In *Notes of Bird* (1984a), there are a number of essays commenting on the different aspects of the creative process and the constituents of a work of art. In exploring space, which is a major constituent of the "Middle World", Breytenbach makes the following comments:

> You have learnt that space is not a matter of size. You create it – extend it
> – by structuring it, by having hides of the eye to seek out, and strokefields.
> You have also apprehended the dawning realization that the I is just a
> thing. The point of it all is – the paint – that it is a transportable mobility (if
> you see what I mean) – a shiverishness. You must take it out to have it
> shriven by the light.
>
> (Breytenbach 1984a: 15)

The relativity of space, based on the delineation introduced by the "I", simultaneously pinpoints the perspective on a specific situation and its subjectivity, and highlights the imprisonment enforced by the ego and identity. True effectiveness occurs when the light reaches the creation, the mind, the consciousness, and when mobility transports the brush strokes or the concepts of the poems.

Enlightenment of the mind - when light reaches the consciousness through art - requires a "peeling of the eyes" (Breytenbach 1984: 21). In the quest to find an adequate critical approach, one should focus on the process of "peeling the eyes". Breytenbach implements this process mainly through the method of using the imagery and absurdity in his writing. When the reader is confronted with the unexpected, the paradoxical, the surreal and the absurd, she or he necessarily has to "peel" away perceptions, conventional perspectives and "look" at every concept with new "eyes". The aim is to be able to open up life into a form of clarity: "Nou kan ek my laaste briewe skrywe, my testament optrek, die woordwerk afhandel, sodat my algeheel lewe mag oopbreek in klaarheid" / "Now I may write my final letters, I can compile my testament, complete the wordwork, in order for my whole living to be able to break open into clarity" (Breytenbach 1999:34 - my translation).

Clarity in this context equally implies finality. This concept is rather vague but refers, amongst other things, to that moment of enlightenment that a Zennist experiences when

glimpsing Nirvana: "Die suiwerste syn is ophou, is niesyn"/ "The purest being is ending, is non-being" (Breytenbach 1999: 78 - my translation), and this clarity is often attained through a process involving mutilation of sorts: "Dis 'n voortdurende proses van selfverbranding"/ "It is the ongoing process of self-immolation" (Breytenbach 1999: 109 - my translation). The "peeling" entails pain, disfigurement, amputation, and wounding: "die hande self vrot"/ "the hands themselves rot" (Breytenbach 2005: 445 - my translation); and "beweer dat die lyk se hande afgekap is en nou iewers in Havana bewaar word"/ "claims that the body's hands have been chopped off and are now being stored somewhere in Havana" (Breytenbach 1999:9 - my translation). Skin is stripped away, all layers of comfort disappear, and the reader is left naked and vulnerable to the outside conditions. In *All One Horse,* one finds a number of similar examples. The essay "be sploshing over your seat" is but one example:

> "Toilet uncompleted. No throne to sit on. You urinate. And now prick breaks off in your hand. Oh no! Asafoetida! You there with half the appurtenance lying in your palm, puckered, pinkish, perfectly shaped, long like palm. No bleeding. Try flushing it down. Won't go – swimming sluggishly on grey-green surface like sickly goldfish among detritus."
>
> (Breytenbach 2008b:13)

The absurdity of a floating penis scaring other passengers on an aeroplane, forces the reader to look at the emasculation of a person based on racial prejudice in a totally novel way. Rotting and decay are equally introduced as integral constituents of human life, and the parallel drawn between decomposition and savouring champagne further escalates the intensity of the socio-political criticism: "One hostess starts handing out glasses of champagne, moving down the aisle with her comfortable and friendly Tina Turner body" (Breytenbach 2008b: 13). Confronted with these incongruent images, the reader is stripped of illusions and a measure of "clarity" or 'reality' – the "Middle World" interstice – becomes accessible.

Another recurrent and related theme in Breytenbach's work is the lack of differentiation between people when faced with death they are stripped bare at this moment: "The way it all goes, the blue-eyed pilot says, terrible, into the earth with no distinction: books, cartons, mouse-shit, corpses. But ah, you must answer, exactly why it's wonderful; we all decompose similarly – corpses, mouse-shit, cartons, boots; couldn't happen unless we all share same thought, *life*" (Breytenbach 2008b: 13). Breytenbach's commitment to undermining social hierarchies in death as in life is reiterated. He strips the reader of the illusions constituting a perspective on reality which is inaccurate and he illustrates the beauty of and "seamlessness" between life and death: it is "All One Horse" (Breytenbach 2008b: 13). Forthwith, all hierarchical preoccupations disappear, echoing the "Middle World", where classism does not exist.

Furthermore, Breytenbach often underlines that there is no distinction in the mind of the un-citizens between the gruesome and the awesome:

Eintlik is dit lekker om terug te wees tussen my mense, gesprekke te hê, doenig te raak met die doenighede – ook die instituut s'n – en as ware op die rand van die wêreld te sit waar daar min sentimente is en lelik en mooi ewe intens ervaar word met weinig oordeel of selfs onderskeiding. Tussen die gruwelike en die verwaarlosing deur is daar momente van vervoering, ekstase selfs./

It is actually nice to be back amongst my people, to have conversations, to get involved in the activities – also those of the institute – and to, in actual fact, sit on the edge of the world, where there are very few sentiments, and where ugly and beautiful are experienced with equal intensity and with little judgement or even distinction. In-between the gruesome and the disrepair there are moments of elation, ecstasy even.
(Breytenbach 2013: Versindaba – my translation)

The Western mind, with its addiction to dichotomies, opposites, and duality, finds it challenging to partake in these mixed experiences and they form part of what one has to "unlearn" in order to be liberated from rational linear thought-processes into the clarity, depth, wealth, and freedom of irrationality. On some level, one is reminded of Kurtz' final words: "The horror! The horror!" in *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad 2010: 90), conveying the overwhelming paradox and the complexities of being confronted with the gruesome acts of which humans (Kurtz specifically) are capable. In Breytenbach's work, "the horror" is ever-present, along with "towergrotte en skoenlapperdrome" / "magic caves and butterfly dreams"(Breytenbach 2013: Versindaba – my translation), the magic of breathing awareness in the "Middle World".

A particularly moving passage in this regard, is an extract from *Woordwerk* depicting an altercation between dogs and wolves. Breytenbach is illustrating racial tension and discrimination which seem inherent to humanity. He is criticizing these artificial opposites that have been created by society and are continually reinforced: those of the "Pure" and the "Bastards". The fight illustrates how bloodthirsty and territorial humans are and the darkness embedded in human nature. The sad old naked human exposed inside the victim's entrails could indicate the age-old knowledge of this cumbersome, destructive behavioural pattern:

Honde en wolwe snou en tjank vir mekaar met flitsende tande en kwyl en skuim om die bekke. (Nog nooit was ek so bewus van die bodemlose wedersydse afgryse en veragting tussen 'suiweres' en 'verbasterdes' nie.) […]Bloed en modder spat as die bondel vegtende diere mekaar verskeur. Die doodskreet is skaars waarneembaar bo die bloeddorstige gehuil van die oorwinnaars. Bloed en modder word één bry. […] …en teen die einde het die triomfantilike troep sy vel nog lewend begin afstreep. Toe sien ons tot ons verbystering 'n witgrys wese blootgelê onder die buitenste laag, 'n ou naakte mens met 'n uitdrukking van treurigheid wat jou hart laat saamkrimp van verdriet, net 'n oomblik voordat bloed en ingewande alle herkenning vertroebel. /

Dogs and wolves snarl and howl at each other with flashing teeth and drool and foam around the mouths. (I have never been equally conscious of the infinite mutual horror and disgust between "the Pure" and "the Bastards".) […] Blood and mud splash as the bundle of fighting animals tear each other apart. The cry of death is hardly noticeable above the bloodthirsty yelping of the winner. Blood and mud become one paste. […] … and towards the end, the triumphant troop started stripping him of his skin while still alive. Then we saw to our confusion a greyish-white being exposed beneath the outer layer, an old, naked human being with an expression of intense sadness which makes your heart contract with sorrow, just for a moment before the blood and the intestines make all recognition indistinct.

(Breytenbach 1999: 156-157)

The mutual mistrust resulting from divisions and prejudices is portrayed in this horrific description of people devouring each other, with the emphasis mainly on the traditional nature of this ritual killing. Consequently, the echo of the title of a letter from *Notes from the Middle World* comes to mind: "How we kill, kill, kill" (Breytenbach 2009c: 115-124). Breytenbach explores the ideological intransigence behind the war on terror in this letter, and makes a common plea to humanity to rise above the distension of "macho bestiality" (Breytenbach 2009c: 118) and to "continue to honor our joint memories of dreaming about the possible dignity of human existence" (Breytenbach 2009c: 118). At the end of this letter the 'peeling' process, expressed by Breytenbach, coincides with the creative act: "May the ink of anger and sorrow somehow convey a memory of the blood of the innocents. Let's stay in contact. Let's survive" (Breytenbach 2009c: 124).

The process of 'peeling' does not only take place in space but also in time. Breytenbach has a specific experience of and perspective on time, however: "Augustinus skryf: "Daar is drie tye: 'n teenwoordige van dinge van die verlede, 'n teenwoordige van dinge teenwoordig, en 'n teenwoordige van dinge in die toekoms…" / "Augustinus writes: "There are three times: a present of the things of the past, a present of the things present, and a present of the things in the future…" (Breytenbach 1987: 60 - my translation). The idea of time remaining a present perspective is reiterated in Breytenbach's later work when he makes the following statement: "Yet, every poem is and will be a capsule of territory in the perpetual *present tense*…" (Breytenbach 2009a: 14). The perpetual present is peremptory because nothing other than the present exists. Poetry is the vehicle leading us to awareness and thus to being: "Poetry is also the wind of time and thus the movement and singing of being" (Breytenbach 2009a: 15). In this metaphor the absence and presence of time is emphasised. Time is only the wind – in other words – invisible, hardly perceptible and not of concrete existence. Time equals being. Poetry is time. Poetry is breath and breathing awareness. Awareness sets in when the process of 'peeling' of the eyes has been successfully accomplished, which takes place in the "Middle World".

One of the functions of Breytenbach's work is to help the reader 'breathe awareness,' and any critical approach to his work has to look at this process as an essential part of his work. The reader moves into a newly created space in her or his mind, as a result of the 'peeling' away of illusions, enabling an experience of 'reality' - which is both horrifying and

enchanting. Whether surreal dreams are used at times to achieve these objectives, or absurdities, or post-structural shifts in signification, Breytenbach's work cannot be confined to one or several of these movements. In a critical approach, one has to focus on the extent to which reality is 'breathed' and on everything embedded in these experiences of consciousness formation – the philosophy, the anthropology, the literature, and the politics.

One could perhaps use Breytenbach's own words on the creative process as a pointer: "Painting, writing – these are always, first and foremost, struggles for authenticity." (Weschler 1998:193). Set aside from all the other complex philosophical definitions of the creative process abundantly present within Breytenbach's work, the aforementioned decisive definition expounds an essential aspect, which should perhaps be echoed by the critical writing on Breytenbach's work. Critical writing on Breytenbach cannot be reductive and limiting if any attempt at an authentic reflection is anticipated.

Melanie Grobler, Marilet Sienaert and Sandra Saayman focus on the link between Breytenbach's pictorial and verbal art reaching for clarity (the moment of enlightenment) and authenticity. Melanie Grobler focuses on the multiplicity of voices and images in Breytenbach's art:

> Breytenbach's images, identities and conditions of non-fixity (and nomadism) are the clown, the androgynous, the hermaphrodite, the border intellectual, the bastard, the heretic, the outsider, the social critic, the revolutionary, the anarchist, the zennist, the exile, the dunce, the shaman, the cockroach, the underling, the nomad, the war machine, the pact, the mirror, the chameleon, the bird, the butterfly, the ancestor as the self, the landscape as the self, multiple realities, schism (multiple identities), movement toward decay, death and consciousness, convulsive beauty, the absurd, the grotesque, the obscene, pornography, masochism, sadism, irony, surrealism, new realism, non-representative thinking, heterogeneity, multi-culturalism, polyphony, plurality of voices, complexity, poli-theism, subversion, memory, intuition, the irrational, multiplicities, imagination, the Watercourse way, fire consciousness (*wou-nien*) , non-attachment, suchness, the void, the paradox, denial of opposites, the process, immanence, excrement, nudity, breaking of hierarchies, de-capitation, dismemberment, metamorphosis, transgression, transformation, transmutation, radicalism, disjunction, dialogue, the dunces cap and the hybrid
> (Grobler 2002: 34)

According to Grobler, reading his landscapes as mindscapes, with no sequence, beginning or end, enables the reader/ viewer to become part of the multiplicities of the subversive realities typical to Breytenbach's writing and painting. Thus the reader/ viewer partakes of an authentic and dynamic experience: "Numerous strings, (word)-strings, ropes, bandages, intestines and other permutations and transformations lie embodied within the paintings themselves…" (Grobler 2002: 22).

Sandra Saayman draws a parallel between Breytenbach's poetry and paintings in her attempt at underlining the 'transformative permutations' in Breytenbach's work. She explicitly states that "poetry is like painting" and continues to say "And, by extension, painting is like poetry" (Saayman 2013: 1). She emphasises the transformative powers of Breytenbach's writing and painting: "When Breytenbach writes or paints an execution, he does indeed 'dare to display the threshold of the human psyche', taking the reader and spectator beyond the threshold of easy contemplation; his art becomes an act of mourning, but also of metamorphosis, exorcism – and of resurrection" (Saayman 2013: 15). The focus is yet again on the authentic experience with its metamorphic qualities giving way to rebirth and ritual.

Marilet Sienaert equally emphasises the metamorphic quality to Breytenbach's work, referring to it as "an interrelatedness" (Sienaert 1995: 11). Painting infuses writing and vice versa: "…for him (Breytenbach) writing is simply a continuation of painting, just as painting is a prolongation of writing. As a means to consciousness or awareness they are in fact one and the same 'umbilical cord of survival'" (Sienaert 1995: 11). Sienaert points out that one may consider this interrelatedness from various theoretical perspectives: the surreal, the postmodern, and the semiotic. Other influences such as Buddhism, African art, Aboriginal art, and even quantum physics are highlighted.

The "peeling" of the eyes thus liberates the psyche, opening up an elation in the momentary metamorphic resurrection which is the privilege of the un-citizens in the in-between space of the "Middle World"

4.2.3. <u>Ritual: the joyfully seeking mind:</u>

The process taking place when one "breathes awareness" as a result of the "peeling of the eyes" has an outcome or consequence. The ephemeral experience of ''clarity' or this glimpse into the 'real' is related to the ritualistic and magic one finds in Breytenbach's discussions and work. The direct effect of a "Middle World" experience is healing. In order to heal, one has to seek, to write, to read, and to engage.

Dogen, an old Zen master said: "The joyfully seeking mind is primary" (Dogen 2000: 56). He hereby expresses a nexus of Breytenbach's work: the ritual of seeking. Seeking is of primary importance and an ongoing process and is encapsulated in the concept of the labyrinth in Breytenbach's work: "You must walk the long way around. Labyrinth – that's the in-thing, the name of the game. It's the dead-ends that count" (Breytenbach 1989: 251). The scathing irony is prevalent (perhaps an undertone of mocking the post-structuralist obsession with the labyrinth) but substance is transmitted despite its presence.

In "someroggend in Ortignano" Breytenbach shapes this 'joyful seeking' and 'breathing awareness' into the form of a sangoma's bones predicting the present or the future of the present: "elkeen het gepoog om 'n verbygaan vas te lê/ soos asemhalingtekens in as en in stof/ en die gebeentes self het woorde geword/ om soos geheue weg te waai in stof en as" /

"everyone tried to capture a passing/ like signs of breathing in ash and in dust/ and the bones themselves became words/ to be blown away like memory in dust and ash" (Breytenbach 2014: 51 - my translation). The presence of bones ("dolosse") - used by sangomas to seek, to divine - is featured repeatedly in this anthology (*Vyf-en-veertig Skemeraandsange*): "en die bleekgeskuurde dolosmaan" / "and the pale shaved moon of bone" (Breytenbach 2014: 35 – my translation), reiterating the presence of African ritual. Other indigenous cultures are intertwined with the African in Breytenbach's work – the dream catcher from the Native American tribes (to name but one), which in turn echoes previous imagery and anthologies, for instance *The Windcatcher*. Another indigenous diviner is the shaman who is ever-present in Breytenbach's work: "The poet [...] is a shaman, a priest" (Breytenbach 2009a: 18). Even within the context of Zen, the shaman and the bones feature prominently: "The word *wen* is among the oldest words in Chinese, going back at least three thousand years to the time of early shamanism and the oracle bones, where it meant, even then, *art*, including literary and plastic arts" (Hamill in Chi 2000: xxiv-xxv). In an extraordinary mix, Breytenbach has incorporated these ancient concepts into his art. The bones still take shape in and speak through his poetry: "In this most generic interpretation, *wen* means simply a pattern wherein meaning and form become inseparably united, so that they become one, indistinguishable" (Hamill in Chi 2000: xxv).

With characteristic felicity, Breytenbach fuses form and content, incarnating authentic being:

> Lourierbosse wat skaamteloos bloei
>
> bome wat uit hul koelte stoel
>
> woorde wat uit die stiltes groei
>
> dis alles dik-dik van die waarheid/
>
>
> baybushes that bloom shamelessly
>
> trees that stem from their own shade
>
> words that grow from silences
>
> these are all thick, thick with the truth
>
> (Breytenbach 2007: 17 – my translation)

The word "bloei" rhymes with "groei", creating a parallel between the two verbs: the process of blossoming ("bloei") inevitably entails growth ("groei"). "Bloei" can also refer to bleeding, which adds a field of meaning of pain and mutilation to the imagery of abundance in blossoming growth. The bleeding is not contained and indicates an open-ended state within which metamorphosis can take place: the shape or form can change. Thus, form establishes relationships between rhyming words, which in turn open shifting possibilities of interpretation and interaction amongst all the concepts to which the poem alludes. The rhetorical device of repetition is employed to emphasise the thickness of the stem or trunk of the growing bush, becoming a tree, from which words or poetry emanate. Poetry in turn enables access to some sort of "truth". The alliteration of the [s]-sound throughout these

lines imitates the soothing silence portrayed in this landscape of poetry-producing trees, signalling the peace and completion, the fullness of every moment, of every process taking shape. A moment of enlightenment is experienced in the thickness of the stems or boughs or trunks of the bushes growing into trees. Absence and abundance are united in the shadows bringing forth trees/ words, bearing witness to the absence of the signified in signification, the absence of experience in memory, the absence of presence and immediacy in poetry. Ultimately, this absence symbolises abundance, in the same way that nothingness gives access to fullness and entirety. The abundance is represented by the shameless blossoming of the laurel/ bay bushes, which could be a reference to blooming creativity, to prophecies, to healing, to success and victory, and to resurrection (within a Christian context). All these layers of meaning interact with each other in establishing an outlet for expression which becomes an experience of "truth" or 'clarity'. Clearly, form and content coincide to create the inter-relatedness of meanings and images in this extract, with references echoing the Roman, Christian and Buddhist worlds, which serve the ritual healing that is incarnated in the reading and writing of poetry.

As I have previously pointed out, Breytenbach's work focuses on the relational and it is through ritual that one discovers the "inner-connectedness of things" (Chi 2000: 6).

The integration of rite and ritual into Breytenbach's work is yet again also a political decision: he transcends post-colonial theoretical borders, within which there often is a manifest rejection of the oral tradition and of native beliefs: "Figures from myth could not simply be dismissed as outworn fetishes or heathen embarrassments. They offered a rich resource for cultures seeking redefinitions of locale, community, and identity" (Boehmer 2009: 193). In redefining 'locale', Breytenbach equally draws on indigenous cultural traditions but at the same time, using them to expose 'breathing awareness' and thus emphasising their contemporary value: "en die hart se klikklanke/ nog donker agter ooglede lê/ en te weet die wêreld is 'n oudste geheue" / "and the clicking sounds of the heart/ which still lie dark behind the eyelids/ and to know the world is an oldest memory" (Breytenbach 2014: 35 - my translation). In other words, through ritual we gain access to the oldest cultures, memories and origins of our world, access to stones, to dust, to the Khoi-San's singular clicking sounds.

Boehmer specifies the mixture of different cultural goods in postcolonial writing as follows: "Crossing the adventures of indigenous gods with European realism, superimposing images from other worlds on Westernized city landscapes, post-independence writers relied on an intensely practical hybridity – the blending of their different cultural influences, an upfront and active syncretism – to unsettle the inheritance of Europe" (Boehmer 2009: 194). One could conclude that Breytenbach's ritualistic mix serves to "unsettle" Eurocentric approaches. He is a creolised writer himself and even though he is originally from South Africa and a French citizen, he hardly needs to justify or rectify his position. Rather, Breytenbach creates a hybridity that is inherent to the "Middle World" un-citizen. One may assume that this hybrid un-citizen is not a primordialist – defined as follows by Appadurai: "all group sentiments that involve a strong sense of group identity, of we-ness draw on those attachments that bind small, intimate collectivities, usually those based on kinship or its extensions. Ideas of collective identity based on shared claims to blood, soil, or language draw their affective force from the sentiments that bind small groups" (Appadurai 2010:

140). Breytenbach is, in fact, identifying and encouraging the opposite movement of hybridity and creolisation by using rituals belonging to different cultures as mediators. He justifies the incorporation of ritual into his work in the following manner: "... we experience the *need* to merge or identify with primal movement in gestures and rituals shared by all of us since the very beginning of time. For, although creativeness breaks new ground, eroding or extending consciousness, it is also always recalling the underlying earth (ageless and timeless) of deep-sound, exorcism, incantation, the primeval gestures and movements outlining the ebb and flow of awareness" (Breytenbach 2009a: 41). Ritual forms an innate component of our awareness which needs inflection in the most creative of efforts.

One of the main moments - taking on ritualistic value in different cultures - is death, which is a recurrent theme in Breytenbach's work. Cremation and burial are common rituals in his work. Death takes on an ultimate value: "Dood is die enigste constant. Dood is die enigste volmaaktheid, die alfa en omega, die saaier en die verbruiker" / "Death is the only constant. Death is the only perfection, the alpha and the omega, the sower and the consumer" (Breytenbach 1971: 16 - my translation). The ironic reference to consumer is quite conspicuous and discordant with the rest of the passage and clashes with the Christian reference to the sower (Christ), which, in this context, is providing material to consumers of material goods, as opposed to giving spiritual nurture in accordance with the traditional symbolic interpretation.

The place of transition is incarnated by death: "The world over the grave is a symbol of man's transit on earth, the last deep footprint, a scratch made in a notebook" (Breytenbach 2009b: 205). Death is the purveyor of our existence and the grave is the place where everything is united: "... it is also a place of integration – the coming together of shadow and flesh" (Breytenbach 2009b: 206). This unison purports both disintegration and recreation: Breytenbach perceives the grave as a womb: "Womb, repository for the quintessence, the mouldering bones" (Breytenbach 2009b: 206). The grave is the place of ritual, of pilgrimage, of offerings, meditation, mourning, and preservation.

Death is incarnation and imitation in the sense that poetry is death which is incarnated, as well as being a corpse of a fleeting moment. One could therefore relate Breytenbach's embodiment of death to mimesis. Mimesis could, in itself, equally be interpreted as ritual:

> In relation to those direct artistic states of nature, every artist is an 'imitator', that is, either Apollonian dream-artist or Dionysian artist of intoxication, or finally – as for example in Greek tragedy – simultaneously artist of dream and intoxication: such as we have to imagine him as he stands alone to one side of the infatuated choruses before sinking to his knees in Dionysian drunkenness and mystical self-abandonment and as, through the effect of the Apollonian dream, his own state, that is , his unity with the innermost ground of the world, is revealed to him *in an allegorical dream image*.
>
> (Nietzsche 2000: 24)

Nietzsche's interpretation of the ancient Greek tragedy, enabling the unifying moment when the barrier separating Apollo and Dionysus is transcended through imitation

experienced as a "mystical self-abandonment" and oneness with "the innermost ground of the world", is an attempt at a definition of mimesis as incarnation as opposed to mere imitation.

The contrast between the Platonic and Aristotelian interpretations of mimesis is evident in relation to the function of the metaphor as it manifests itself in Breytenbach's work. According to Burger, Breytenbach's work ties in with the Aristotelian concept of mimesis: "Die feit dat Breytenbach taal beskou as 'n "ingeligte en intelligente ingang" na die weklikheid, dui daarop dat hy nie die afbeelding in 'n negatiewe lig beskou nie maar eerder soos Aristoteles *mimesis* beskou as 'n kreatiewe daad waardeur die wêreld toeganklik gemaak word" / "The fact that Breytebach perceives language as "an informed and intelligent entrance" (in)to reality, indicates that he does not perceive the imitation in a negative light but rather in the same vein as Aristotle perceived *mimesis* as a creative deed through which the world is being made accessible" (Burger 2009: 6 - my translation).

In Aristotelian terms, imitation is incarnation and the question arises whether this "entrance" into reality provided by Breytenbach's work, cannot be found through ritual, incantation and trance. Melanie Grobler touches upon the importance of the presence of the African ritual, shamanism and alchemy in Breytenbach's work. One could postulate that the "Middle World" might be directly related to the type of ritualistic transformative processes one finds in these practices. The typical flying angels scattered over Breytenbach's work (for example: "my lyf my ou vroutjie" in Breytenbach 1994: 13; "Englepaar" in Breytenbach 2009d: 42), echo the alchemistic solar and lunar solution. These angels are often androgynous – an element which constitutes a recurrent motif in Breytenbac's work. Androgyny can equally be relayed to an alchemistic influence: "The androgyne represents the conjunction of opposites – a cosmic principle exemplified and symbolized, in Eastern and Western thought alike, by eroticism" (Klossowski 1991: 32). Even the presence of birds is significant in alchemy as they refer to: "the successive volatilizations or sublimations which take place in the Work" (Klossowski 1991: 32).

Breytenbach acknowledges that Hieronymous Bosch is one of his artistic ancestors (Grobler 2002: 2), and Bosch is renowned for the extent to which he drew on alchemy in his work: "Reuterswärd discovers in Bosch a Christian esoterism which he elucidates with the help of, inter alia, alchemistic iconography" (Bergman 1979: 67). One can therefore safely assume that traces of alchemy can be found in Breytenbach's work, establishing a dialogue between certain of Breytenbach's and Bosch's paintings, and introducing other 'sublimations' woven into Breytenbach's work.

Mimesis, in the form of incarnation, materialises in the shape of trance in Breytenbach's oeuvre. Trance forms a central motif in "Middle World" 'geography' or space. Trance is prevalent in Breytenbach's preoccupation with Zen: "numerous studies have demonstrated that hypnosis, transcendental meditation, autogenic hypnosis, Zen, and yoga all lead to a similar if not identical state of altered consciousness, with similar reports of occasional hallucinatory, mystical, an affective experiences" (Helvenston and Bahn 2002:26).

The landscape of trance is also predominant in the world of the healer or the shaman: "shamans and initiates "practice the conscious loss of consciousness" (Stutley 2003: 7). In

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Breytenbach's work, the shaman as healer is present: "The shaman is also a mediator between the supra-normal and normal worlds and so restores a proper balance" (Stutley 2003: 7). Breytenbach sees the function of his work as healing to an extent:

> Die enigste manier om werklikwaar totaal betrokke te wees by 'n ander persoon is "by not becoming attached". Om nie daardie persoon aan te kleef nie. Soos ons dikwels sê, dis miskien ook 'n bietjie duister, maar om na jouself om te sien is soos om 'n gekwesde persoon met nege wonde te versorg: jy verpleeg die wonde, dis vir jou ontsettend belangrik dat die persoon met die wonde moet genees, maar dit beteken nie dat jy geheg raak nie. /

> The only way to truly be involved with another person is by not becoming attached. Not to cling to the person. As we often say, and it is perhaps a bit abstruse, but to take care of yourself like taking care of a person with nine wounds: you nurse the wounds, it is extremely important to you that the wounds heal, but that does not mean that you become attached.
> (Breytenbach 2013: 11 - my translation)

In *Intimate Stranger,* the poet is explicitly defined as a healer and a shaman: "In Afrikaans the shaman would be *sieketrooster, wondmeester, geneesheer* – meaning 'comforter of the sick' and 'master of wounds' and 'gentleman of healing'. The poet-shaman uses deep-sound as primeval exorcism to console and confirm the known but also to destroy certainties, perturbing particularly the comfort of moral make-believe" (Breytenbach 2009a: 18-19). The process of stripping away illusions is thus reiterated in this quote as the function of the shaman-poet.

Another function of the shaman is to move in the space that is created in a poem. Breytenbach defines space and movement in the following manner: "When you conceptualize a subject you define a *space* between the recognized and the environment, and that tension between 'full' and 'empty' gives rise to *movement*. The space may be duplicitous: it may be nothing more than the clearing where the shaman moves between shadow and substance" (Breytenbach 2009a: 165). Consciousness formation and conceptualisation are constituted by the presence of the shaman's movements, ensuring that our positioning of ourselves within our 'environment' is always fleeting and changing.

True to the integration of opposites however, Breytenbach balances the healer with the trickster, for instance Kaggen in *Dog Heart*: "The trickster is a hybrid creature, both animal and human, and amongst the many tricksters, Kaggen or the Mantis-Man, is the best known" (Saayman 2007: 62): "Kaggen is both of the "early people" and of the real people. He can be a magician, but also stupid. He is the trickster god, and yet he speaks like a child. Kaggen (often referred to as the Mantis) takes on the form of a dead hartebees" (Breytenbach 1998: 158). This hybrid creature representing both the ancestors and the current remaining Khoisan people, causes harm with his tricks but he is also a device that allows Breytenbach to explore the darker side to the human psyche in a light-hearted tone. This playful and ironic – even masochistic side - is always present in Breytenbach's work.

Breytenbach's protean approach to writing, imbued with cultural references and rituals, relinquishing social and political hierarchies, propels the critic towards an approach acknowledging the 'breath of awareness', seeking authenticity in the movement between shadow and substance in the process of consciousness formation in the "Middle World"

4.2.4. Theory about consciousness formation

Another extremely important element feeding into Breytenbach's poetry and other texts is consciousness formation. This idea is pivotal to the whole reading experience he proposed and has been developed over the years to finally constitute the ultimate "Middle World" experience.

Breytenbach is challenging the reader with new metaphors, dreams, visions and processes of concept formation, focusing on the relationship between elements and the 'thing-ness' of things, as opposed to their significance. In this regard, his work has certain similarities with Robert Frost's poetry, in which the "sense of sound" (Frost 2009: 1) is predominant over content, in illustrating the processes of consciousness formation. Breytenbach thus propagates a different way of 'being in the world', a different concept of 'existence', an integrated way of relating to one's surroundings and oneself.

The role of the imagination is crucial and often foregrounded in Breytenbach's work: "Listen, this process called poetry is an exercise in imagining memory, and then having that memory snare and cherish imagination" (Breytenbach 2009a: 14). Memory is relative and imagined. The past infuses the present to the extent that the present is an imagined past or vice versa: "... that living death which we call memory" (Breytenbach 2009a: 154). His work serves as an evolution in the philosophy of the relationship between the human and her or his surroundings on a cognitive level: "Can it be argued that imagination recognizes the real and does so by imitating it?" (Breytenbach 2009c: 154-155) The difficulty in distinguishing between 'fact and fiction' forms part of the reading process: "The difference between fact and fiction is the focus brought to bear on the matter of the text; perhaps also the latitude of space we allow the reader. But 'focus' implies *intention,* thus imagination" (Breytenbach 2009a: 154). Breytenbach puts forth the assumption that objectivity in assessing information is lost in the projection of the reader's intentions upon the text, which results in the imaginary infiltration of the text. Even in ordinary perception, both memory and imagination overlap: "The field of reception/ transformation of the impulse, I'd suggest, consists of memory and imagination, immediately prismating (prison-mating) into combinations and cross-breeding of the two, giving way to invention, intuition, knowledge, experience, analysis" (Breytenbach 2009a: 132). Perception and sensory stimuli are part and parcel of memory and imagination in combination shaping our 'mind-pictures'.

The faculties and senses and their interaction are explored: "Natuurlik is daar nóg realisme nóg logika. Die natuur bestaan buite die mens se versoeke om dit binne 'n raam van begrip te wil pas" / "Evidently, there is neither realism nor logic. Nature exists outside of the

human's requests to fit it inside a frame of comprehension" (Breytenbach 2012: 155 – my translation). The relativity of perception and the construction of meaning are regularly highlighted: "As the convention of meaning became the supreme norm, the autonomous movements of the means to expression faded in the eye; we forgot that 'meaning' can only offer us the appearances of preserving perception and keeping awareness. Reality however (and the words impregnated by it), is different: it is rot, chewing gum, the implosion of singular meaning, the multiplication of loaves and fishes" (Breytenbach 2009a: 99). Through art, the viewer or reader can be confronted with 'reality', with the 'real', which can only be found if the reader/ viewer is willing to engage his/ her imagination:

> Om nie te verstaan nie laat ons immers voel ons is deel van die groter onomskryfbare. Jy word 'gevang' deur die skyn van betekenis waartoe jy gekondisioneer is om na uit te reik deur die saamgroepering van uiteenlopendhede. *Verbeelding* is die meganisme wat jou die geloofsprong laat maak/

> To be unable to understand effectively allows us to feel that we are part of the bigger indescribable. You are 'caught' by the glimmer of meaning to which you have been conditioned, and use it to reach out by grouping together disparities. *Imagination* is the mechanism that enables you to make the leap of faith.
> (Breytenbach 2012: 156 – my translation)

The important moments in a text or faced with a painting are when the reader/ viewer is confronted with the unexpected, the incongruous, the opaque, because the reader/ viewer is transported by her/ his imagination to the "beyond", the "in-between", the "Middle World" "just beyond the moon" (Breytenbach 2009a: 28) of the text or artistic creation, to the 'real'. Therefore, Breytenbach's work often seems illogical and as if deliberately defying understanding. By stripping or peeling away the accepted conceptions and perspectives, he invites the reader/ viewer to imagine the possibilities taking shape on the canvas or in a text or a poem. One is forced to look in a 'new' way and to see the 'fire' in the 'ash', to read 'reality' in dreams and the imagination and partake of "the healing of shadows" (Breytenbach 2009a: 135). The darkness, the shadows beyond one's ordinary grasp have a healing power as one is united with the 'real': "You have to wound the self, cut it in strips, in order to *know* that you are as similar and of the same substance of shadows" (Breytenbach 2009a: 175).

Another important aspect to imagination and memory is that they are "a negation of time" (Breytenbach 2009a: 80): like a poem they exist in the perpetual 'present'. They take place in space, a space that they constitute themselves: "Die vers (of doek) as oorgang en as tussengangersruimte waar taal sig kan manifesteer as omvormingsagent"/ "The poem (canvas) as passageway and a space of a go-between where language can manifest itself as transformative agent" (Breytenbach 2012: 157). In the next section on "Middle World" as space created by dance, the importance of time and timelessness will be discussed in more detail.

Through his exploration of consciousness formation, Breytenbach contributes to the contemporary literary context by moving beyond the post-structuralist confinement within the word, and the Foucaultian deconstruction of power structures, and opening up a "beyond" to the reader/ viewer, where imagination and memory overlap, which leads to an ancient experience of healing and of the 'real', where migrants define their hybridity, and where the poem constitutes the 'perpetual' present that is already past. This interstice is the space of "Middle World".

The "Middle World" clearly moves on a variety of levels: the postcolonial and post-structural theories play a central part in Breytenbach's development of the concept but he also moves beyond the confines of these philosophies by introducing a third dimension: the 'real'. He equally integrates his "Middle World" concept into ancient ritual that does not subscribe to the intellectual Derridian 'evolution'. Through ritual Breytenbach proposes healing, which does not feature within the 'post'-debates either.

The ultimate space of "Middle World" is the interstice where metaphor shapes consciousness. Breytenbach has developed his grasp on the metaphor over the years and this evolution culminated in the alteration of consciousness through poetry or other art forms.

4.2.4. "Middle World" as space created by dance

There is no fixed vantage point from which to explore the concept of "Middle World", as the space that is created is in constant flux. The space is created through dance and, in a similar vein, only exists as long as the dance continues. Movement and change are inevitable traits of this space, in accordance with the action of dancing. Captured within the act of movement is the element of time, or an eternal present that is unfolding with the rhythm.

A very apt epigraph to *Notes from the Middle World* comes in the form of the poem entitled "Dancing", which encapsulates both the idea that engaging with the reader is a dance, and the idea of travelling, of moving through space, of creating distance.

> **Dancing**
>
> it is going to be tough
> to forsake this earth
> (but who or what goes away?)
> the terrible spaces of dispossession
> always yours alone
>
> dark hill over there
> like a bowl of shimmering light
> with trees still bearing the signs of wind
> in joint and wound and miracle of breath,
> and here a mudslide
> slopes and plains

and black vegetation

all suffering is distance –
how could you know of people in the mud?
what is lived? What seen, heard
or merely imagined,
and what matters?

when walls crumble
and the unimpeded cry
opens in you
a pealing, shimmering incantation
of dancing spaces –
a wind silence

(Breytenbach 2009c: xi)

In the opening lines of the poem, the reader is confronted with his own mortality and disintegration. The personal nature of the process of disembodiment is emphasised, and results in dispossession – in being absent from a previously occupied territory. The reader is invited into a kind of dance with death.

In the second stanza, the earth becomes the focal point and the motif of the hill – which is recurrent in Breytenbach's work – is the essential constitutive element. The hill is actually also inverted in the simile comparing it to a bowl which is radiating light. Already in his poetry written while incarcerated, the hill or the mountain becomes a prominent symbol of consciousness and existence. It has to be borne in mind, though, that Breytenbach labelled the poems written during this phase the "undanced dance" ("die ongedanste dans") because these poems were not shared with readers at the time, and as such remained largely unpublished for years.

Light "shimmering" in this "bowl" or inverted hill, equally indicates life: "And death is no ending it is the final self. The end product when light at last falls short" (Breytenbach 1996: 2). When light cannot reach the mind anymore, the individual consciousness - or what is generally distinguished and labelled as such - disappears. One could infer that this "bowl" represents consciousness formation. Bearing in mind that a hill consists of compiled dust, one could moreover assume that life and death meet in this dark hill, which also constitutes a container shedding light. Everything on the hill reeks of death: the black vegetation and the mudslides, within which people die of asphyxiation, or simply become excessive dust turned into mud.

This process of reading and juggling ideas in order to become part of the process of metamorphosis is the dance to which Breytenbach often refers. Previous ideas and concepts are altered. Walls are broken down.

In the third stanza, the rhythm changes and the reader is confronted with a motley of essential existential rhetorical questions. Breytenbach questions the essence of concept formation, consciousness and the creative process. The most prominent of all these

questions is evidently the last one, ending the build-up to a crescendo, promulgating the relativity of the attribution of meaning to our human existence and to art or poetry per se.

Finally, we are confronted with the ritual incantation liberating a "cri du Coeur", which enables us to abandon the rigidity of rational thought-processes, and to release primeval expression on an instinctual level. At this point the "spaces" that have been created in the journey of movement ("all suffering is distance") or travelling through the poem, participating in the process of dancing – following the pace and direction of the words and imagery in the poem – these spaces become "dancing spaces" and are further defined as "a wind silence". One is thus integrated into a process, which opens up spaces in the mind that are "dancing" – in constant flux and motion. Nothing is fixed or stable or fenced-in. Change is predominant.

The concept of space is also delineated as resulting from the process of dancing: "of dancing spaces". Within the space of a few lines, a multitude of aspects related to the concept of "Middle World", as it is present in Breytenbach's work, takes shape. The intensity and density of the transmission of images are no different in this poem than in any other by the same author, giving evidence of the incredible wealth embedded in these creative processes, inviting the reader into unexpected and novel approaches to awareness. The ephemeral nature of this interaction or dance, even of the whole concept of "Middle World", is underlined by the concept of the dance, which is a transitory engagement, shaping a different experience and outcome at each attempt. Even though the poem itself is finished, the reader has to complete it:

> Poem is a capsule of space and time; it is always finished – you can no less
> add to it than you can detract from it – yet never completed until such
> time as it has been consumed (consummated) by you, Reader. Sure, there
> will be as many original versions as there are readers, since each partaker
> uncovers her own reading; poem is self-enclosed in its thingness, and yet
> will always depend on the reader for final and total completion.
> (Breytenbach 2009a: 23)

The view expressed in this quotation echoes the traditional Reception Theory: "…the stress is on the text providing a certain stimulus and the reader completing the process. It is a form of give and take, a dialogue between the text and the reader." (Peck & Coyle 1986: 160).

During every attempt at reading a poem, the enigmatic nature of the poem is such that the reading alters: "Poetic knowledge is born in the deep silence of phenomena not understood, thoughts unformulated and fate unknown of scientific knowledge" (Breytenbach 2009a: 51).

The unidentifiable spaces within which these phenomena float - this beyond, these interstices - constitute the "Middle World". Even the lack of a specific geographical reference to a location and failed attempt at pinpointing the "un-citizens" of the "Middle World", form part of this shifting spectrum, existing in the "beyond", the "au-delà" (Bhabha 1994: 10), as Homi Bhabha classifies the space of intervention in the present moment: the point of exchanges and contiguities from which cultures and identities are redefined.

Dance is the key, opening up the whole process of interaction with the aesthetic creation, and leading the reader to a new and ever-changing space, a world of phenomena beyond scientific knowledge and cultural limitations. This process is the key to the "Middle World".

Dance forms part of ritual, which ties in with the ever-prominent ritualistic features in Breytenbach's oeuvre. Breytenbach provides a context for poetry as ritual within the confines of the Poetry Festival - "Dancing in other words". He was the curator and initiator behind the festival which first saw the light in 2013, a festival where words, movement (dance), and ritual came together. Music was played to certain poems and drawings were taking shape on a projector, while poems were being recited. One was welcomed by a flutter of prayer flags at the entrance. Upon arrival, the sacred nature of the festival was evident and this was maintained throughout the entire ceremony and found its pinnacle in the San ceremony of stacking stones to mark this ritualistic space that had been created.

One of the main slogans repeated by Breytenbach to express the aim of this festival was "saam mekaar andersmaak" / "together changing each other". The dance of participating in the sacred ritual of the creative process had as main aim to alter. Instead of being an individual and isolated activity, the reading of poetry had become a communal ritual at this festival. Ritual is communal and the result is often that healing takes place. The alchemy was administered and the poet-shamans entranced the crowd. The bones were thrown and the shadows read. And at the end of the festival everyone danced – literally.

Breytenbach expressed the following wish for the 2014 festival in conversation with Louis Esterhuizen on Versindaba (May, 5th 2014): "Ook dat die omgang met die nie-self meer ritualisties en selfs sjamanisties van aard is as wat die blote uitstrooi van slimmighede in die naglug aan kan voldoen." / "Also that the association with the non-self will be more ritualistic and even shamanistic in nature than that to which the mere strewing about of clap-trap in the evening air can fulfil". Again, the emphasis is on the communal and the ritualistic nature of the festival.

In the following poem, dancing as ritual is emphasised:

die ritueel van verandering

met sonsondergang
tussen die riete
soos die voël vlieg
hoe hulle wat haastig is
vir dinge van die nag
nie meer die diskresie ken
tussen afskeidsliedere se dreun
en die dood se passies nie

dans dan maar, dans
die riel van verandering
vir dinge van die nag
tussen riete

met sonsondergang /

the ritual of change

at sunset
amongst the reeds
as the birds fly
how they who are hasty
for the things of the night
know not how to distinguish
between the drone of the farewell songs
and the steps of death

better dance then, dance
the reel of change
for the things of the night
amongst the reeds
at sunset

(Breytenbach 2012: 50 - my translation)

The poem illustrates a variety of transitions: between day and night, between life and death, between the current and an altered state, between staying and leaving. These transitions are ritualistic in nature and the dance of change ("the reel of change") - bringing with it all the traditional values - is the rhythm to which these alterations will be effected. The "reel of change" also forms part of the natural cycles - the nocturnal and the diurnal, life and death. The chant of farewell songs also imply ritualistic action – that of saying goodbye. There is a significant lack of insight into the distinction between the dance of death ("steps of death") and the "farewell songs". As a result, "they" risk entanglement in both concurrently. The ritual of change is thus effected by dance.

Another poem relating death to change and memory is "die onvoltooide vers"/ "the unfinished stanza or verse":

[…]
lyke, lyke die stank van onthou

heeldag ry hulle deur landskappe met die goeie bedoeling
om die reis sinbaar te maak, en daarom versinbaar
en singmatig
en wat gesing word moet jy kan dans
met versengende hittegolwe 'n dynserigheid

todat dit aand skep naby 'n see so glinsterend
versilwer soos satyn of 'n gelakte spieël waar lig versuip

lyke, lyke die stank van onthou

om hierdie land uit die geheue te verban

in die donker kantel swaels hulle arabeske in die donker
kom daar sterre   'n flonkerende lafenis

lyke, lyke, lyke /

corpses, corpses and the stench of remembering

all day they drive through landscapes with the positive intention
to render the trip meaningful, en therefore concocted
and sing-able
and what must be sung you have to be able to dance
with the torrid heat waves a haziness

until it scoops up the evening close to the sea glittering
silver like satin or a lacquered mirror within which light drowns

corpses, corpses the stench of remembering
to ban this country from memory

in the darkness swallows swivel tracing their arabesques in the darkness
the stars come   a flickering relief

corpses, corpses, corpses.
(Breytenbach 2011:22-23 - my translation)

Dance and song are integral parts of poetry and awareness because in order to make sense of the trip, in order to make it "versinbaar" ("vers" – stanza, "in" – in, "baar" – give birth to), to be able to give birth to the poem, to concoct it, the poem has to be sung and danced. Even the movement of the swallows can be interpreted as rhythmic, as a dance. The stench of decay in the form of memory enables the poet to draw on experience as a starting point to creation. At the same time, the poem also becomes the dissolution of memory: "to ban this country from memory". The paradoxical process of forgetting in remembering is pointed out in the following poem:

die voëltjieroepers

ou mense is g'n bang
vir die dood se onwettige regering nie:
séér kan dit hulle tog nie meer maak

hulle sit in 'n kring
en klik klippies en sing
lyste van alles wat gesien en onthou is
om so 'n god se verveelflarde naam
weer saam te gom

en te ent in 'n boomgaard voëlklanke:

alle vergeet is boordensvol onthousels/

the bird-callers

old people are not at all afraid
of death's illegal government:
of course it cannot inflict **pain** on them any more

they sit in a circle
clicking small stones and they sing
listing everything that was seen and remembered
in order to glue together again
a god's tattered and multiply chafed name
and to end in a grove of trees full of bird sounds:
all forgetting is filled to the brim with remembrance
<div align="center">(Breytenbach 2011: 170 - my translation)</div>

Ritual and song again are central elements to this poem. The transitional process of moving towards the end of their lives is enhanced by the peaceful setting and the complete tranquillity and utter acceptance of their situation by these elderly people. Through ritual song and clicking rhythms, these "old people" become unified in their quest for remembering and making sense of their existence. They ultimately become unified by a grove of trees full of bird songs. The trees in the grove become the haven and harbour of poetry – the product of the patch-work the people have performed - and the songs, resonating from this haven are references to the actual poetry borne of the tree.

Another aspect influencing or resulting from dance is the rhythm of breathing. In the following definition of poetry, provided by Breytenbach, the entrance to the world of poetry is provided by breath: "I'd suggest that poetry is a world (*the* world inside and outside us) shaped by breath. It is the breath of dreaming drawn from a hunger for awareness – the awareness that tells you that to be awake is also the result of dreaming expressed in the internal vibration of rhythm" (Breytenbach 2009a: 46). The rhythm of breathing and the rhythm of dreaming both remind one of the processes of dancing, which is subject to a distinct rhythm. Within this context, the dancing becomes more complex: the steps to this dance are guided by the yearning for a different kind of awareness, one where dreaming overlaps with being awake, and the nature of this process is the result of the 'internal vibration of rhythm'. The place where this 'internal vibration' takes place is not defined. This awareness could be generated within the psyche of an individual – perhaps on a subconscious level; the vibration could be the result of multiple factors in the environment of an individual with a distinct impact on this person; the rhythm could equally be the result of the reader having participated in the dance of the reading process and as a result, is experiencing a new awareness which alters the senses and the psyche, the internal rhythm and the perception of her-/ himself. The impact is on a very intimate level. One is reminded of Lu Chi's poem - "The Inspiration" - where he states:

    thoughts must be brought outside
     like a child from the womb,
     terrified and screaming.
              (Chi 2000: 37)

The 'awareness' created through poetry often terrifies the reader. This glimpse is a process about consciousness-formation and the perception of reality.

Breytenbach acknowledges that "consciousness is ultimately a personal discovery, but it is also partly at least communal belonging" (Breytenbach 2009a: 118), and thus underlines the intimate nature of the process but equally the ritualistic aspects being part of the communal.

    tot daar waar niks
    meer saak maak nie
    want wat beteken dit om te weet
    die lyn tussen onthou en vergeet

    is beide 'n oorsteek na 'n ander so
    en die afsluiting van gedanste tyd
    wat lankal en altyd hier
    weg moes raak in kronkels van die aarde/

    up to the point where
    nothing matters anymore
    because what does it mean to know
    the line between remembering and forgetting

    is both a crossing to another suchness
    and the ending of the danced time
    that for a long time and always here
    disappeared into the twists and turns of the earth.
          (Breytenbach 2014: 65 - my translation)

Dance embodies the contiguity between the present moment and the passing moment: "the ending of the danced time/ that for a long time and always here", configuring and assimilating the "twists and turns of the earth". The beginning of the void constitutes the end of the danced time but the evidence remains in the imprint of the choreography on the dust and the air – the earth. Once one crosses over to "another suchness", one is in the realm of forgetting, like the 'old people' in "the bird-callers" - it is the realm of death where rhythm ceases to exist and the dance ends.

Death is also at times referred to as the un-danced dance by Breytenbach. A very unexpected assessment of the 'un-danced dance' is made in relation to Mr Mandela's political involvement: "There is Mandela who had politics thrust upon him when he actually wanted to be a dancer or a boxer, but perhaps he practised politics as the art of the un-danced dance with life as shadow partner so that for him there was no real difference"

(Breytenbach 2008a: 146). The irony highlighting the imprisonment of a political icon like Nelson Mandela within politics, linked to the shadow imitation of the life available to him as a result of his commitment, are put forth by the term of the "un-danced dance".

Breytenbach's poetry collection of prison poetry, equally referred to as the "un-danced dance" echoes the sense of loss and shadow lives spent in darkness: "die gedig is 'n vorm van isolasie"/ "the poem is a form of isolation" (Breytenbach 2005: 382). Breytenbach puts forth this assessment in a poem called "nekra", and he pursues the point further by explicitly stating:

> en meet my (wat vasmaak is) aan die ek
> daarom omdat ek dood is
> veral aan die dood
> en noem dit dan die ongedanste dans /
>
> and measure me (who is attached) against the I
> for the reason because I am dead
> especially of the death
> and call it then the undanced dance.
> <div align="right">(Breytenbach 2005: 383 – my translation)</div>

Another form of an "un-danced dance" is featured in *Intimate Stranger*, where the ultimate Zen moment of experiencing silence and imageless 'action' form part of a motionless motion – the un-danced dance: "There are thus two movements, a duality, a come and a go – both integrated in the coming-and-going, so that there can be movement without movement, an un-danced dance, quietness without stopping" (Breytenbach 2009a: 100).

Breytenbach persistently uses dancing in relation to death: "...it is to embark on travels into a language which is matter, an exorcism of time. The dance movements of the tongue living in the grave" (Breytenbach 1999: 108). In these lines the meta-writing is evident. He is, however, not only writing about the writing process as a journey into language but this language is something concrete - as opposed to the abstract concepts usually attached to the constitution of language. This language in its singularity enables an "exorcism of time". Erasing time seems to be contradictory to the phenomenon of dancing which unfolds through rhythm in time. The next line resolves this contradiction by stipulating that the dance will come from the grave, while death is situated outside of time. Dance is a way to cross over to death, to unite movement and immobility, to move in that in-between space of the "Middle World".

The concrete side of language is again emphasised by the following statement: "Pattern is rhythm" (Breytenbach 1989: 120). Dance is the pattern created through rhythm and thus language takes on a concrete shape.

Dancing is also a way of reaching out towards the reader: "I shall continue my dance of writing towards you" (Breytenbach 1989: 223). Dancing, as reading, is an erotic act in Breytenbach's oeuvre. He finds fulfilment in "Die gedanste dans" from *vyf-en-veertig skemeraandsange* (2014) (*fourty-five twilight evening songs*):

uit die dieper bestemming van begeerte
bly jy by my/

from within the deeper destination of desire

you stay with me

<div align="center">(Breytenbach 2014: 87)</div>

These lines echo a poem from *Die beginsel van stof* (2011)*:*

Liewe gedig, bly by my.

Moet my nie nou so na aan die einde
in die steek laat nie./

Dear poem, stay with me.

Don't abandon me now

so close to the end.

<div align="center">(Breytenbach 2011: 34)</div>

From these lines the interactive relationship (dance) between the author and the creation also becomes evident.

Dancing also implies a sensual or sexual relationship which is mirrored by Breytenbach's perception of writing as a sexual act:

11.1
jy wat dans
sê jy sal
jou motjie dringend ont
bloot vir die tonghonger
van my flad
derende mond

en ek les my dors
met eerbiedige op
sê by voorbaat se skoot
aan die vlerkiesvoering
van jou vogtige kont

11.1
you who are dancing
say you will
urgently expose your little moth

for the hunger of my tongue
of my fluttering mouth

and I quench my thirst
with the respectful
recitation of the lap in advance
of the lining of wings
of your moist cunt.

(Breytenbach 2014: 33 – my translation)

The unification of two bodies in the act of dancing is equally incarnated in the reciting of poetry, in the reading of poetry. It becomes an erotic exchange.

Rhythm as such is extremely important in the process of shaping awareness: "Mind is but a growing awareness of the existing environment. Mind is but a tiny reflex action of an unborn and immortal and all-pervasive rhythm" (Breytenbach 2009a: 185). Breytenbach continues his exploration of consciousness formation and the extent to which writing enhances the process, an ancient process of regaining instinctive rhythms from Beyond: "Writing is the ongoing imagination and invention of that which has existed since all darkness and absence. It is our way of visibly trying to breathe rhythm" (Breytenbach 2009a: 185). Writing poetry is a form of dancing and restoring harmony: "And so one can say that harmony is not possible without movement" (Breytenbach 2009a: 25), and this movement is related to the Void: "The poet dances with the void as partner" (Breytenbach 2009a: 18). The void enables the circulation of breath which leads to movement and establishes harmony. Poetry therefore becomes a very corporeal process. Similarly, on an abstract level, in order to be able to "breathe", there must be a void as stipulated by Fernando Pessoa: "... my salvation lay in interspaces of unconsciousness" (Breytenbach 2009a: 25). Ultimately, movement is form and according to Henri Focillon: "To assume consciousness is at once to assume form" (Breytenbach 2009a: 145). Movement or dancing is therefore the equivalent of consciousness-formation. As Breytenbach repeatedly stipulates: "The origin of existence is movement" (Breytenbach 2008a: 11).

Finally, what transpires from this analysis is that the ultimate overarching space of "Middle World" is consciousness-formation taking shape through the erotic dance between the author/ poet and the reader, as a process of in- and exhalation - transfiguring the divide between the present and the past, the presence and the void, the Here and the Beyond, life and death. The dance is a form of metamorphosis within which opposites dissolve, light shines from darkness, and stillness invades movement. This space is one of shamanistic healing, of ancient ritual, of stones, and of dust.

The movement of dancing is therefore the stepping stones to the "Middle World", guiding the partner into the beyond, the in-between, and the Void. Dance is the rhythm of breath and breath leads to awareness and the creation of space – a constantly changing space: "… a cardinal Middle World law – that you can only survive and move forward by continuing to invent yourself" (Breytenbach 2009a:148). The constant movement of dance enables an ongoing self-invention so crucial to living in the "Middle World".

Dance focuses on the physical quality of living in the "Middle World", which points towards Breytenbach's physical and active engagement in the political sphere. The second part of this chapter will focus on an analysis of the impact of this engagement upon his artistic expression and on the definition of "Middle World".

4.3.   The Political aspects of "Middle World"

4.3.1. The prominence of political engagement in the formation of the concept of "Middle World"

Breytenbach's "Middle World" does not move on a purely philosophical or aesthetic level but has strong political overtones, which a study like this one has to take into account in defining the evolution of the concept.

Breytenbach's overt and subversive political activism already evident in his early poetry, as an anti-Apartheid activist, provides one with a link to "Middle World", as is evident in the following poem addressing Balthazar – the then Prime Minister of South Africa: John Vorster (*Skryt* 1971) – a poem that was used against him by the Apartheid government in court at the time:

> brief uit die vreemde aan slagter
> […]
> jy wat belas is met die veiligheid van die staat
> waaraan dink jy as die nag haar skelet begin toon
> en die eerste babblende skreeu uit die prisonier gepers word
> soos van geboorte
> met die vloeistowwe van baring?
> word jou hart in die keel ook styf
> wanneer jy aan die gebluste ledemate vat
> met dieselfde hande wat oor jou vrou se geheime gaan streel? /
>
> letter from abroad to butcher
> [..]
> you who are burdened with the security of the state
> what do you think of when the night reveals her frame
> and the first babbling shriek is squeezed out of the prisoner
> as in a birth
> with the fluids of parturition?
> does your heart also stiffen in your throat
> when you touch the extinguished limbs
> with the same hands that will fondle your wife's mysteries?
>   (Breytenbach 2001: 305 – my translation)

Using his poetry as a political tool and getting involved on a physical level as well (his incarceration), the depth and the realm of Breytenbach's commitment become clear. The concept of "Middle World" is not a mere intellectual tool but transpires into his everyday life and is mirrored by his lifestyle.

One has a clear mixture of images in this poem, furthering the cause of Breytenbach's engagement in political activism. The blood of the birth in this poem is articulated with scathing sarcasm and painful irony, and cuts through the consciousness of the reader with the scalding starkness of the indifference with which these actions were executed. The nature of the dance between the reader and the text takes shape within the interstice opened up by the prisoner's cry. Thus, the relatedness of "Middle World" on an abstract level, and the political reality in Apartheid South-Africa becomes visible.

Another useful link, however of a different nature, between the abstract philosophy and the political engagement in Breytenbach's work, is provided in an essay Breytenbach wrote on exile, within which one can clearly find elements defining the "Middle World un-citizens":

> The exiled person is probably marked by a loss that he or she doesn't want to let go of, especially when occasioned by a political situation. But it goes without saying that one can replace, to all intents and purposes, the word 'exile' by refugee, misfit, outcast, outsider, expatriate, squatter, foreigner, clandestine, heretic, stranger, renegade, drifter, weak, drop-out. The irony is that if we were to add up all these individuals we'd probably find ourselves constituting a new silent majority!
> (Breytenbach 1991: 59)

Within the confines of the above-mention quotation from *Hart-Lam*, Breytenbach is delineating, for the first time in writing, the "Middle World" inhabitants, and the political overtones are evident. "Un-citizens" of the "Middle World" are in an in-between space - geographically but also politically: they do not belong to any specific nationality or subscribe to any existing political model. They are travelling without destination. They are excluded from mainstream society and move outside of legislation, often living in precarious conditions.

Subsequently, a parallel takes shape – the in-between and undefined spaces are prevalent on both a philosophical and geo-political level, and an investigation of one level will inevitably incur an exploration of the other. Even the changing South-African and African landscapes and the lack of transformative imagination on government level, situate themselves within this framework: "Nothing of the above can blur the questions we ought to ask ourselves *within* Africa in order to release a creative and transformative imagination" (Breytenbach 2009b: 65). Breytenbach recently emphasised the need for the transformative imagination in South Africa again in an article published in the *Mail &Guardian*: "In fact, as always our capacity for imagining liberation – and liberating our imagination - will at least in part be measured by the extent to which we functionally recognise and receive the dignified human in the other" (Breytenbach 2014: 33). In the light of this statement, the inextricable relationship between imagination and the political act becomes apparent. The political will to achieve change and to gain insight into the possible options that can be implemented is

borne of the transformative imagination, which in turn situates itself in the "beyond" of the "Middle World" metaphor.

In Breytenbach's work, the predominance of a political awareness is explicitly present, for example in essays such as "Nelson Mandela Is Free!"(1990), "Africa on my mind" (1993), and "Conflict and Literature in South Africa" (1974). In the last-mentioned essay, Breytenbach states that stages of alienation and exile are ineluctably inherent to the majority of writing in South-Africa: "Nearly all South African writing reflects varying stages of exile and alienation. That is what our literature is all about. One could nearly postulate that *South Africa is the homeland of exile*" (Breytenbach 1986: 77). The suffering of the people in South Africa and people in general, is salient to Breytenbach's approach. He however, slights the plight of the writer and proffers the un-citizens to centre stage: "I must however not dramatize needlessly. (As if writing were all-suffering, or all-important.) That which writers live through as the many mansions of exile translates in fact the inequality, racial discrimination and oppression prevalent in the country" (Breytenbach 1986: 77). Breytenbach thus relinquishes the central position and singular importance of writers and he seems to suggest that writing is merely incumbent upon him and that the un-citizens are the eminent entities, again underlining the central role of his political engagement.

The political awareness in Breytenbach's work investigates, reflects on, and subverts the mentioned alienation. Exile evolves beyond a geo-political condition into "Middle World" consciousness. Testimony to Breytenbach's acute political awareness is his engagement in political activities, which landed him in prison in South Africa. An awareness that is exacerbated by the deteriorating situation of disadvantaged people all over the world but specifically in Africa and most of all, South Africa, as is evident from the dark humour he uses in the following passage: "Travellers in their cars ('the rich') would periodically be stoned; stalled motorists would be robbed, shot or stabbed to death before one could say "Nelson Mandela" (Breytenbach 2008: 134). Throughout Breytenbach's writing, these vociferous protests pop up, often (as is the case in this instance) in an ironic or satirical tone, reflecting the complexities of the socio-political situation, and characteristically portraying the Poor in all the complexity of their victim-hood - the Poor who are generally perceived as major constituents of "Middle World" un-citizens.

The political awareness in Breytenbach's work refutes the inimical preoccupation with language structures found in purely post- structuralist writing. Regardless of his usage of a form of writing typical to the post-structuralist - the lack of fixity in the observing subject, and the ongoing dialectic between sign and signifier - Breytenbach rejects the radical relativism of post-structuralist thought, which results in the individual being unable to achieve political change. He relinquishes stultifying academic exclusivity, expounding the plight of the poor and the oppressed, which is evident from his continual political engagement in negotiations to improve living conditions for Africans all over Africa, as well as the Piroque initiative, which provides a platform to African artists and writers.

Breytenbach has excelled at criticising ideological power structures in all shapes and forms in society. However, Breytenbach has made giant strides towards creating a space within which the 'flow' can take place, where cultural hybridisation can take shape, the space of "Middle World". He thus persists unfailingly in his political engagement.

4.3.2. <u>Political situatedness in the postcolonial/ globalized world</u>

The concept of the "Middle World" did not simply make its appearance at a specific time but is firmly anchored in a number of preceding literary events and movements.

Prior to looking at this evolution, a brief overview of the colonial and post-colonial might be useful. The term 'postcolonial' is problematic in itself for there is an inherent contradiction: firstly, the term is a scientific philosophy aimed at the analysis of the way in which knowledge (cultural, linguistic, historical etc.) is gathered and recorded on people within a certain context; secondly the relationship between a developed theory and the political practice produces a gap; thirdly, postcolonialism remains a Eurocentric concept and in the aftermath of imperialism, a vehement protest is often voiced against this imposition from within political and intellectual circles (compare Parry, Said, and Boehmer).

Regardless of the termination of colonial oppression in Africa and Asia post Second World War, the disturbances introduced by the foreign presences are far-reaching and ever-present. The question thus arises as to the validity of the "post" in postcolonialism.

Moreover, the countries included in broad brush strokes under the postcolonial label vary greatly both in their current reality and their previous relationship with the colonisers i.e. Nigeria, Australia, South-Africa, the DRC.

Elleke Boehmer defines postcolonialism as follows:

> The term postcolonialism addresses itself to the historical, political, cultural and textual ramifications of the colonial encounter between the West and the non-West, dating from the sixteenth century to the present day. It considers how this encounter shaped all those who were party to it: the colonizers as well as the colonized. [...] {T}he postcolonial is that which questions, overturns, and/ or critically refracts colonial authority – its epistemologies and forms of violence, its claims to superiority.
> (Boehmer 2006: 340)

Postcolonialism should therefore encompass all the complexities embedded in the confrontations and exchanges between two economical and cultural powers at any given time. Literature exploring these issues should become part of the interaction and exchange amongst racial, gendered and sexual identities, to explore a "situatedness". In order to establish a "situatedness", one has to be able to pin-point a clear sense of time. Bhabha finds history as a chronological, unfolding whole problematic: "The struggle against colonial oppression not only changes the direction of Western history, but challenges its historicist idea of time a progressive ordered whole" (Bhabha 2004: 59). If one accepts his assertion that a liminal problem develops as a result of the "splitting" which is the outcome of the tension between "demand" and "desire", identification or a "situatedness" becomes problematic: "The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master's place while keeping his place in the slave's *avenging* anger" (Bhabha 2004: 63-64).

In this regard, looking at Kristeva's definition of desire can be useful, as she introduces a feminist angle:

> So then the problem is to control this resurgence of phallic presence; to abolish it at first, to pierce through the paternal wall of the superego and afterwards to re-emerge still uneasy, split apart, asymmetrical, overwhelmed with a desire to know, but a desire to know more and differently than what is encoded-spoken-written.
>
> (Kristeva 1988: 315)

Postcolonial awareness and philosophy is aware of the desire – firstly of the "Other", the new, the different, but equally of the more complex process of evolution on a psychological level – where a concerted effort has been made to change the desire to know from the phallic oppression to an openness to the "Other", looking for a way to know without the entrapment of the accepted stereotypical terminology "encoded-spoken-written". This statement by Kristeva is clearly also an attack on male domination and on stereotypical gender classifications.

Breytenbach has expressed himself quite overtly – as I have previously indicated – against the "making of the penis a phallic symbol" and "the demise of the male" (Breytenbach 2009c: 140) as popular stances within postcolonial and comparative literature studies. He therefore diverges somewhat from Kristeva's insistence upon the initial destruction of the phallic symbol. Breytenbach does not adopt a similar approach to experiencing an authentic 'reality'. Within his work, the dominant, patriarchal male has been erased already within his acknowledgement of the multiplicity of identity, the denial of the importance of a nation state, and the creation of a "Middle World" space of fluidity and exchange. He is also opposing the phallic authority of the rational, reasonable, and logical approach to our existence by suggesting an "unthinkable" beyond.

The question of the role of discourse in colonial societies is addressed by Bhabha: "The construction of the colonial subject in discourse and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference – racial and sexual" (Bhabha 2004: 96). Said illustrates the impact of discourse on the colonised clearly in his position on "Orientalism": "Above all it is as a discipline of detail, and indeed as a theory of Oriental detail by which every minute aspect of Oriental life testified to an Oriental essence which it expressed, that Orientalism had the eminence, the power, and the affirmative authority over the Orient that it had" (Said 1978: 40). The signifiers and stereotypes developed in the discourse of the colonisers – even of a suzerain state, create an image of the Oriental that does not exist. Moreover, this discourse propagates a geopolitical consciousness through with economical and military interests. Even on a philological level, perspectives and hierarchies are created: the languages and the predominant literatures within a previous colony, bear witness to the cultural power structure. As a result, society and literature should always be studied together.

A persistent problem is the complexity with which a writer is confronted in making an attempt at creating literature from within (or without – like Rushdie) a postcolonial context: how to avoid slipping back into structuralism by making certain observations about an area

or context. Moreover, the "singularity" of the text is endangered as the final product could easily be used as an example of colonial disregard for indigenous knowledge.

One possible way to a resolution of the mentioned problem is to accept the post-structural resistance to binary oppositions (to escape an inversion of the oppressor and the oppressed as Said's Orientalism is implying). A perfect example of the undermining of the binary opposition is Bhabha's concept of ambivalence – the fact that the oppressor both despises and desires the oppressed: "It is this process of *ambivalence*, central to the stereotype, that this chapter explores as it constructs a theory of colonial discourse" (Bhabha 2004: 95). Boehmer also points out the ambivalence in the following manner:

> The colonizer is thus locked into the fractious position of constantly
> disavowing and rejecting (in the form of negative stereotypes) the
> presence of the other, yet at the same time acknowledging it. The
> colonized is that which the colonial occupier is not, the negative to his
> positive, yet the latter's authority would be meaningless were he not able
> to invoke that 'is not' in order to constitute his authority within the colony,
> as well as his own colonial identity.
> (Boehmer 2006: 355)

The ambivalence of hatred and desire or hatred and longing lodged within the being of either the oppressor or the oppressed has to be erased or reconciled to enable healing.

The relevance of Homi Bhabha as a theoretical framework to Breytenbach's work is, amongst other aspects, his prominence within the contemporary framework of postcolonial theorists. As a professor of the Humanities at Harvard, his fields of interest are human rights within the context of aesthetics and culture (which is relevant to Breytenbach's oeuvre in general), Walter Benjamin (a founding father of Modernism – which is equally important in Breytenbach's writing), the postcolonial writers – Coetzee, Naipaul, Morrison, Conrad, and the feminist – Adrienne Rich. He develops concepts like hybridity, mimicry, difference, and ambivalence, which describe how the colonised peoples have tried to resist colonial powers: "This emphasis illuminates our present situation, in a world marked by a paradoxical combination of violently proclaimed cultural difference and the complexity of interconnected networks of globalization" (Huddard 2007: 1). Bhabha does not content himself with looking at colonialism as a past phenomenon but "Bhabha shows how its histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations" (Huddard 2007: 1). His preoccupations are often similar to Breytenbach's: the in-between space ("unhomeliness"), hybridity, globalisation and diaspora. In Bhabha's lectures on Hegel, he reflects on a space and community very similar to Breytenbach's "Middle World" and his un-citizens – Bhabha call these migrants "paradoxical communities" (a term he borrows from Julia Kristeva): "The "paradoxical community" that ensues is caught in a historical temporality of partial and double identifications that exist side-by-side in Ethical and Political life – at once "same and other"; at once indigenous and foreign; at once citizen and alien" (Bhabha 2011: 2). In this sense, Bhabha and Breytenbach are both concerned with the interaction of peoples in diaspora with their environments. As Bhabha pointed out – Kristeva had already identified this developing social and cultural phenomenon more than two decades before:

> [W]e are, for the first time in history, confronted with the following situation... A paradoxical community is emerging, made up of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners.... In France, at the end of the twentieth century, each is fated to remain the same *and* the other – without forgetting his original culture but putting it in perspective to the extent of having it not only exist side by side but also alternate with others' culture.
> (Kristeva 1991: 194-5)

Bhabha equally finds common ground between post-structuralism and postcolonialism:

> It becomes crucial to distinguish between the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences - literature, art, music, ritual, life, death – and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as the circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value. The transnational dimension of cultural transformation – migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation – makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification.
> (Bhabha 2004: 247)

Within the context of this quotation the relationship between the post-structural fluidity of signs and signifiers, and the deconstruction of established "semblances", coincide with the postcolonial dilemma. The articulation of meaning at the conjunction and confrontation of social systems, is both a postcolonial issue and a post-structural dilemma of establishing meaning - with the delays implied by the circulation of signs.

If one accepts that play enables meaning to construe itself within the post-structural philosophy, that everything is relational (any signifier paired with any other signifier create a relation of signification), the echoes of Breytenbach's work and especially the influence of Zen Buddhism - focusing on the relational in Breytenbach's work - evidently overlap with post-structural relational signification. The interplay typical to the post-structural can be perceived in what T.T. Cloete calls the "klankverwantskap" / "relationship of sounds" (Cloete 1982: 40). Meaning keeps changing and morphing as one continues to read and draw relationships between lexical fields, expressions and sounds. The title of a poem from Breytenbach's latest anthology serves as an illustration: "windprater" (Breytenbach 2014: 27). "Windprater"/ "wind speaker" echoes the Afrikaans word "windeier"/ "wind egg" as an anticipated expression - which means that someone is presenting something of no value. Thus, a relationship is established between talking about the wind, in the wind, of the wind, to the wind, and saying nothing of any value.

Furthermore, Breytenbach's work defies dyadic polarities which are another key element of deconstruction: "Deconstruction is a way of reading that looks for places where the structure gets shaken up, where more play – more ambiguity of meaning occurs, where the binary opposites do not stay neatly on their proper side of the slash" (Klages 2006: 59). Breytenbach's work is always self-conscious, without a centre and aimed at confusing binary oppositions:

14. skryf

wanneer jy uitasem genoeg is
op pad van nêrens na nêrens
gaan staan jy stil om te luister
hoe gebeur die êrens van skrywe
in die stof/

14. writing

when you are thoroughly out of breath
on your way from nowhere to nowhere
stand still in order to listen
how the somewhere of writing happens
in the dust

(Breytenbach 2014: 42)

The direct reference to the writing process is stipulated by the poem and this self-conscious meta-writing is a typical post-structural characteristic. Where Breytenbach transcends post-structural play though, is in the references to organic elements and processes such as breath, dust and decay. There is a clear allusion to a 'beyond' taking shape in the writing process.

The point at which Breytenbach's work strays somewhat from the accepted norm in the post-structural evolution (while coinciding with Foucault's attack of power structures outside of language games) is within the autotelic discourse of poetry. Instead of staying within the post-structural parameter of the word as object referring to itself, he breaks down the hierarchy by introducing hybridity and a play of signs and signifiers creating an interstice, which opens up the text unto something other than, something beyond, an altered awareness: "Forgive me if I repeat myself. I have already said that poetry is the process of transfiguring words back into the original breath, the beat of the world […] they (words) become the moments in a metamorphosis provoked by image and metaphor, 'lucid objects of language', to open on to a "third dimension" beyond the references of word-meaning" (Breytenbach 2009 a: 47-48). Here, Breytenbach refutes the cornerstone of post-structural philosophy - the all-important, all-encompassing system of language. He provides the reader with an access to something more than the post-structural play and hyper-reality by moving back to the "original breath"/ "non-changing mutation" (the original Void)" (Breytenbach 2009c: 153), to something authentic.

Breytenbach, like many other writer-activists and journalists, is critically investigating the capitalist global market: "I believe we should practice non-power (in both directions) by refusing to shore up on the credibility and the supposed sovereignty of corrupt regimes living off theft and repression and protocol and appearance, and by equally refusing to accept the globalization of free-market systems that are killing the weak" (Breytenbach 2009c: 67). He rejects the hyper-reality which has unavoidably inserted itself within our consumerist capitalist society, however, as well as the excesses compounding tension and alienation from the self within individuals subjected to the media onslaught: "And it is true,

as well, that much of the humiliation is fed and compounded by the sight of unattainable consumer society products being dangled on TV screens worldwide (the way flashers expose their danglers), creating for the poor viewer the ambivalence of wanting to imitate as well as to vomit, and leading to the self-disgust which breeds fanaticism" (Breytenbach 2009a: 116). Breytenbach's pronounced social conscience results in an estrangement from capitalist globalisation.

Breytenbach's work is both post-structural and postcolonial. In typical post-structural style, he celebrates the fragmentation and incoherence, as opposed to the modern sense of loss and mourning, seeking for healing and unity through art. He provides healing through poetry – the shaman-poet heals the wounds in the same way that Greek tragedy, through the use of mimesis inducing catharsis, healed and cleansed the spectators participating in the experience.

A discrepancy between post-structuralist thought and Breytenbach's commitments is constituted by the strong presence of the ritual in Breytenbach's work. He clearly does not conform to post-structural trends of the rejection of "primitive beliefs" as irrational and mentally dubious (Boehmer 2005):

> The other notable absence in theorizing colonial discourse is a necessary consequence of analytical strategies which in focusing on the deconstruction of the colonialist text, either erase the voice of the native or limit native resistance to devices circumventing and interrogating colonial authority. Positions against the nostalgia for lost origins as a basis for counter-hegemonic ideological production (Spivak), or the self-righteous rhetoric of resistance (Bhabha), have been extended to a downgrading of the anti-imperialist texts written by national liberation movements; while the notion of epistemic violence and the occluding of reverse discourses have obliterated the role of the native as historical subject and combatant, possessor of other knowledges and producer of alternative traditions.
> (Parry 2004: 18-19)

Breytenbach indulges in ritual, reapplies and reinterprets ritual within a contemporary context and never for a moment detracts from the importance of ancient belief systems.

This attack by Parry on the academic postcolonial approach to ritual, does highlight the tendency to intellectualise ritual to the extent that no element of the ancient practices is visible. Derrida does however give a prominent position to ritual within his philosophy: "For Derrida, all language takes on the character of the performative and of ritual" (Hollywood 2002: 104). However, ritual for Derrida is inevitably related to some form of language utterance and the flow of signs and signifiers: "Ritual as iterability, Derrida claims, is what marks the sign as communicative and performative" (Hollywood 2002: 104). Performative within this context is related to utterance. One could ask where trance dancing would fit into this line of argument, for instance.

Like Lyotard and other post-structuralists, Breytenbach does reject the grand narratives of ultimate knowledge and the understanding of our reality in a scientific way: "What is new in all of this is that the old poles of attraction represented by nation-states, parties, professions, institutions, and historical traditions are losing their attraction. … […]…Identifying with the great names, the heroes of contemporary history, is becoming more and more difficult… […]… This breaking up of the grand Narratives leads to what some authors analyse in terms of the dissolution of the social bond and the disintegration of social aggregates into a mass of individual atoms thrown into the absurdity of Brownian motion" (Lyotard 1979: 15). Lyotard already at this stage anticipated the atomisation of societies.

Breytenbach rejects these grand narratives equally for their manipulative political nature, as well as their stasis resulting from their sedentary nature. Understanding is fixed and stale. A far more authentic approach to our existence is experiencing being in the "unthinkable". While concurring with the post-structuralist rejection of the grand narrative, Breytenbach offers something more: the 'unthinkable': "The brain, the encephalos, the mind (which is a vibration of perceptions) is a black pool circumscribed by a happening-horizon, an enternity-skyline. You travel, you travel: always you remain the same nothing and never do you return to the original" (Breytenbach 2009b: 149).

Breytenbach thus evolves his thinking on several levels, using the post-structural concepts: he opens up a space beyond the text; he introduces a healer into the play of signifiers; he exposes the dissipation hyper-reality - as inevitably part and parcel of capitalist consumerism despite protestations; he enables metamorphoses through mimetic ritual; and in the process, he traces the path to the development of the concept of the "Middle World".

4.3.3. Diaspora and its impact on the concept of the "Middle World"

Furthermore, Breytenbach integrates the phenomenon of diaspora into his own philosophy: based on displacement of people of which he is painfully aware, he developed the status of being a un-citizen and in doing so, joins the current debate on globalisation and displaced persons or 'illegals'.

The formation of identity in the 'in-between' spaces – where displaced people find themselves - is emphasised. "Identity" and "citizenship" are both spaces: "(By 'space' I mean that area or interstice in time – and of course, sometimes this space is geographical – where something is allowed to exist or come about)" (Breytenbach 2009a: 10). Breytenbach is perceived as a cosmopolitan citizen as a result of his exilic and nomadic existence: "Breytenbach has developed his own theory of life in exile, his own 'nomadology'. Drawing on his life-long interest in Buddhist philosophy, he has borrowed the ontological concept of 'the Middle Way' … […]… and transformed it into his own exile's 'Middle World' (Dimitriu 2008: 92).

Bhabha has elaborated the concept of "vernacular cosmopolitanism', which is not simply a foregrounding of the local, but an insistence on borders" (Dimitriu 2008: 90). Bhabha is exploring the "singularity of the local within global flows" (Dimitriu 2008: 90) and thus

defines a kind of cosmopolitanism where in-between spaces of exchange become prominent: "These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular of communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha 2004: 2).

Benita Parry, on the other hand, criticises the cosmopolitan citizen (the belief that all humans belong to one society based on similar belief systems) as yet another Eurocentric entity that excludes the previously disadvantaged colonised communities from the literary debate. The 'native' is again silenced and oppressed by contemporary literary approaches, focusing on textual preoccupations, instead of material reality and historical violence:

> The abandonment of historical and social explanation was soon apparent in the work of those postcolonial critics who disengaged colonialism from historical capitalism and re-presented it for study as a cultural event. Consequently an air-borne will to power was privileged over calculated compulsions, 'discursive violence' took precedence over the practices of a violent system, and the intrinsically antagonistic colonial encounter was reconfigured as one of dialogue, complicity and transculturation.
> (Parry 2004: 4)

Parry launches a vehement attack on postcolonial studies:

> … postcolonial studies is more concerned 'with the lived *condition* of unequal power sharing globally and the self-authorization of cultural, economic, and militaristic hegemony than 'with a particular historical phenomenon such as colonialism, which may be plotted as a stage of capitalist imperialism'. This refusal to engage with the prior terms which the 'postcolonial' is said to displace or supersede serves to occlude both the capitalist trajectory of the imperial project and the capitalist nature of contemporary globalization.
> (Parry 2004: 3)

This point of view is not necessarily in conflict with that of Breytenbach, who himself is quite direct in his criticism of postcolonial studies and departments, which he perceives as "sektaristies/ sectarian" and "skynbewegings/ fake movements", "leeg en vol vertoon"/ "empty and full of show" (Breytenbach 2013: 11-12).

Parry moreover attacks the 'in-between' space and the diaspora: "Integral to this revisionist endeavour is the re-presentation of colonialism as transactional, a move that displaces the received perception of conflict with the 'in-between' space of negotiation" (Parry 2004: 8). She equates the interstitial space with this in-between space. In Breytenbach's work, the diaspora appertains largely to a space of creation as opposed to one of negotiation per se. He never attempts to silence oppressed minority groups by effacing their conflicts using the transactional debate.

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Homi Bhabha, whose work serves as a main theoretical and philosophical framework for this study, is specifically attacked by Parry. She criticises him severely for getting caught up in abstractions and drifting away from reality: "The elaboration of Bhabha's project has however taken quite other directions; and because his work is situated within the theoretical mode which rather than conceiving language as signifying reality allots ontological priority to the semiotic process, the generation of meaning is located in the enunciative act, and not in the substance of the narrated event" (Parry 2004: 59).

In Bhabha's defence, he - in accordance with postcolonial rhetoric - explains the process of transformation as follows: "The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha 2004: 3). Bhabha therefore clearly aims at a situation within which these new cultural minorities become "authorized" – in other words, gain prominence and power. Even though Parry's criticism has the intention of achieving change as opposed to new definitions of identity formation, Bhabha does not refrain from stretching the philosophical process towards 'praxis'. Breytenbach, however, is always acting in the interest of the oppressed and perceived minorities (even though in the case of 'illegals', he acknowledges that all the minorities put together may constitute a majority on a global scale) and there is no temerity in his exposure of historical violence.

Given the nature of this 'in-between' existence, the interstitial perspective evolves into a liminal space opposing hierarchy: "This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 2004: 5). Hierarchy is something that Breytenbach undermines throughout his work as well, as is evident in the following criticism of academic power structures (as I have previously pointed out): "postcolonial discourse is firmly and authoritatively embedded in the syllabus of the Center's academies" (Breytenbach 2009c: 140). To emphasise equality and his opposition to the hegemonic power of the 'North' over the 'South', Breytenbach defines "Middle World" as "where the turfs of the outcast, the outsider, and the outlaw overlap" (Breytenbach 2009c: 143). Bhabha is not as specific in his application, even though he does criticise all the 'post' - movements. Despite both Bhabha and Breytenbach's concurrence with the post-structural movements in certain respects, they both try to transcend and criticise the 'post'-movements. They both oppose hierarchical structures in the 'in-between' space of negotiation and Bhabha specifically tries to find more apt interpretations and definitions of historicity and identity, in order to breach the accepted postcolonial pattern of "Otherness", "mimicry", "derision and desire", Bhabha uses the 'in-between' spaces to "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new sign of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining he idea of society itself" (Bhabha 2004: 2).

Still intimately related to the diaspora is the concept of 'unhomeliness'. In returning to this concept in Bhabha's work, which is also closely related to Breytenbach's "Middle World" and the un-citizens, one has to explore the political implications of this condition. Bhabha defines unhomelines as follows: "the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public

spheres" (Bhabha 2004: 13). These 'initiations' are yet again a reference to ritual, and Bhabha states that: "the 'unhomeliness' (is) inherent in that rite of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation" (Bhabha 2004: 13). Breytenbach defines the 'unhomeliness' as "finality beyond exile" (Breytenbach 2009c: 143). "Middle World" or "MOR" is this complex in-between space beyond exile.

As a result of diaspora, the un-citizen becomes a cultural hybrid: "Culturally such a person will be a hybrid" (Breytenbach 2009c: 149). The questions arises as to whether he uses cultural hybridity to mask social inequalities, for which Parry criticises Bhabha. The social awareness and the numerous texts dedicated to exposing, discussing, and confronting inequalities in our global society serve as proof that Breytenbach cannot be accused of hiding behind Eurocentric theories to escape from postcolonial guilt: "Through it all ran and runs the golden thread of globalization, the parlor name for crude world capitalist exploitation: we were conditioned to buy and buy and buy, and the poor became poorer" (Breytenbach 2009c: 89).

Hopefully, these cross-cultural 'initiations' will not be as negative as the ones described by Fanon, according to whom the experience of 'The Other' by Europeans, resulted in binary oppositions and labelling: "Good-Evil, Beauty-Ugliness, White-Black" (Fanon 1967: 183). Bhabha postures that: "The study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of 'otherness' (Bhabha 2004: 17). This alterity is based on "non-consensual terms of affiliation […] established on the grounds of historical trauma" (Bhabha 2004: 17). In this respect, Bhabha is clearly focusing on the reality that Parry accuses him of avoiding ("non-consensual terms" and "historical trauma").

Even though Parry's criticism of the intellectual approach to practical problems in order to maintain a certain capitalist hegemony is well-intentioned and relevant, it is not in accordance with Breytenbach's – the global "bum's" - convictions that cosmopolitanism is for the elites (Viljoen 2001). Bhabha may be accused of functioning from within an academic ivory tower, of being detached from the trauma of the oppressed. He does however try to create consciousness, debate, and he finds new definitions furthering the debate on the existing theories on the post-colonial situation. There is no way to avoid however, acknowledging the fact that Breytenbach's personal nomadism, regardless of his otherwise simple lifestyle, does position him amongst the privileged classes of the global village.

4.3.4. "Exile" and "Middle World"

The concepts of "Middle World" and "exile" are interwoven in Breytenbach's work and an exploration of the one will necessarily result in a concurrent exercise on the other. In the following section, these two concepts will be explored as they occur in Breytenbach's oeuvre.

"Exile" was evidently a painful and enriching personal reality to Breytenbach, who led a life of exile - so to speak - embarked upon at the age of twenty: "After a year and a half, Breyten dropped out of school and, without seeking his parents' approval (he knew they would never give it) or saying so much as a goodbye, he booked a fourth-class passage on a

Portuguese cattle boat." (Weschler 1998: 148). The self-inflicted exile became an imposed exile in subsequent years because of his choice of a life partner and his political activities. In a 1977 publication, Breytenbach emphasises his isolation and his inevitably related nomadism: "My death/ my prize is a diaspora of exiles sown/ across the world" (Breytenbach 1977: 105). The diaspora – fleeing from the Apartheid regime - is painful to him. Once incarcerated he sees himself as the living dead:

> Je s'use
> The ideal is to be a zombie, a dreamwanderer;
> the fire which is the spirit slaked; the territory which is pain,
> scorched.
> (Breytenbach 1977: 105)

His perception of himself at this stage is that of the ostracised, of the abandoned, and the enthusiasm within him has dwindled, resulting from his imprisonment. The allusion to the living dead ("zombie") subsequently evolves and becomes a central motif to his work, with distinctly positive connotations ("*Lewendood*").

Breytenbach further emphasises the outsider status and imprisonment in the following quotation: "Exile teaches you about individual fate with universal implications – because it is eternal and has always been with us: we are all dimly aware of our incompleteness, of the thick veils of illusion in which we are draped" (Breytenbach 1991: 64-65).

Encapsulated within this quotation, are the essential aspects of "exile" as they manifest themselves in Breytenbach's work: exile as geographical displacement, as philosophical concept, as political position, as creative space, and the psychological state of living in exile. When examining the evolution of the concept "Middle World", it is useful to examine "exile" and the elements enrolled within this concept, despite the fact that Breytenbach perceives his current situation as a Middle World un-citizen as having only residual remnants of a previous state called exile: "Exile could be a passage and you may well speak of "passage people." Yet, the Middle World is finality beyond exile" (Breytenbach 2009: 143).

One does find explicit proof in his work, bearing witness to his experience outside of South Africa as a form of exile. A clear example surfaces in his autobiographical novel *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*:

> …the dreamer ensnared by political work – neglecting his art – and
> suffering from it; the exile who had never accepted the finality of his exile,
> whose roots were still in South Africa; the man, becoming a European,
> writing in an African language, with the world evoked by it, which no one
> around him understood? How much of it was suicidal? Or repentant
> homecoming?
> (Breytenbach 1984: 99)

At this point, his rootedness in South Africa is still evident and he feels a lack of integration in Europe. He stipulates his incontrovertible exilic situation and the subsequent risks -

possibly borne of guilt spurring him on - in returning to South Africa and persisting in his political quest. He is misplaced, hovering between a South-African and a European identity; portraying the whole world in an African language, which by its very nature excluded the readership surrounding him from partaking in this experience.

Breytenbach acknowledges his outsider status as a result of being in exile in "Self-Portrait/ Deathwatch":

> I have consistently rejected the conception of exile as debilitating, petrifying, self-pitying – and yet again, many of my ruminations have circled around the condition of absence: not being where I belong naturally. I have tried to show up the negative aspects and the positive acquisitions of being expelled from the tribal framework and them permanently living *elsewhere.*
>
> (Breytenbach 1988: 129)

The isolation from his ancestral roots has an impact on his thinking and writing. He also feels the indelible impact of separation: "For better or for worse you are an outsider" (Breytenbach 1986: 212).

Living in the Middle World does still ineluctably include, as one of its multiple facets, the concept of exile, an aspect that Breytenbach willingly acknowledges: "Refuge and asylum, persecution and hospitality, indifference and difference, solidarity, home and **exile** – all these concepts figure in the Middle World" (Breytenbach 2009: 139 – my emphasis).

4.3.4.1. <u>Geographical displacement</u>

The most concrete form of "exile" is geographical displacement. Being part of the Middle World mainly differs from "exile" in the sense that the liminal state is voluntary, persistent, and self-inflicted in the Middle World, as opposed to the predicament of an exile: "Compulsive journeying, points of arrival and departure, nodes of temporary locatedness, belonging everywhere and nowhere, home and homelessness…" (Jacobs 2009: 100).

A lack of longing for the country of origin constitutes another major disparity between being in exile and residing in the "Middle World": the "Middle World" existence, constituting a choice, does not have incumbent upon it the longing for the country of origin.

At times, exile is even presented as a positive experience:

> maar hier in die duister het ek die eerste
> keer die nagtegaal 'n huiwering hoor toor
>
> en weer geleer hoe bewerig en soet
>
> die een vreugde in 'n rymelary
>
> van ruimte resoneer:

ballinggrond is nie net brak … /

but here in the darkness for the first time

did I hear the nightingale weave a hesitation in its magic

and learnt anew how tremulous and sweet

the one pleasure resonates

in a rhyming of space:

the soil of exile is not only bitter…

<div align="center">(Breytenbach 1993: 83 - my translation)</div>

Breytenbach acknowledges though, on the rare occasion, to having been the victim of ruminations on his country of origin and of a sense of loss and of longing for it: "around the condition of absence: not being where I belong naturally… permanently living elsewhere… There is some alienation involved here, a land-sickness" (Breytenbach 1988: 129).

This profound sense of loss and longing is symptomatic of diasporic experiences. Breytenbach's diaspora could be defined as "deterritorialized" (Cohen 2008: 8), situated within the postcolonial diasporas, because he has been multiply displaced and his homeland is lost to him after having served his prison sentence: "… the umbilical cord was cut" (Breytenbach 1988: 130). His situation does not conform to the categories "dispersion, homeland orientation, boundary maintenance" which are the social constructionist positions on diasporas (Cohen 2008: 12), because it is, first and foremost, an individual journey without the typical hankering after a homeland. Moreover, he identifies with other "Middle World un-citizens" from different countries and ethnicities, and the "boundary maintenance" therefore, only exists to the extent to which he does not become part of a new homeland. As a result, nationalist ideologies, appertaining to a new country of residence, are consistently discarded by him.

The complexities of contemporary deterritorialisation are emphasised by Appadurai when he states that:

> There is an urgent need to focus on the cultural dynamics of what is now called deterritorialization. This term applies not only to obvious examples such as transnational corporations and money markets but also to ethnic groups, sectarian movements, and political formations, which increasingly operate in ways that transcend specific territorial boundaries and identities.
> <div align="center">(Appadurai 2010: 49)</div>

Resulting from this geographical displacement, are the new formations that develop on a socio-economic, cultural and political level. Displacement is a condition that applies to a wide variety of people and large numbers of migrants: "According to the United Nations, some 100 million people in the world today qualify as migrants – that is, live as minorities, in states of unbelonging" (Boehmer 2009). This figure is constantly on the increase. These minorities are the people Breytenbach refers to as "illegals":

So, 'n mens soek miskien, sonder dat jy bewus is daarvan, na daardie wat selfs binne die groot stad bestaan, binne die plek waar jy gereeld besoek bestaan, en dus natuurlik 'n verskuiwende erkenning, 'n verskuiwende entiteit is. Miskien is dit die naglewe, miskien is dit 'n buurt wat heeltemal international is. […] die immigrante, die illegale, die clandestinos – is eintlik maar op 'n manier die dwaalvolk van die Middelwêreld /

So, one is perhaps looking, without being consciously aware of it, for that which exists even within the big city, within the place you visit on a regular basis and this constitutes, of course, a shifting recognition, a shifting entity. Maybe it is the nightlife, maybe a suburb that is completely international. […] the immigrants, the illegals, the clandestinos – they are in a sense the wandering nation of the Middle World.

(Breytenbach 2013: 1 - my translation)

Criticism is often eructed on the plight of illegals and on their predicament, and this remains one of the most prominent and unresolved political and geographical quandaries of our time. Breytenbach, on the other hand, concurrently and incontrovertibly inserts himself amongst the "wandering nation", also referred to as "grassroots globalization" or "globalization from below" (Appadurai 2001: 3) in what could be perceived as yet another subversive political act on Breytenbach's part, relinquishing nationalist and patriotic tendencies. The complexity of the different aspects of exile become increasingly evident from this exploration and one cannot separate the geographical, political, and philosophical aspects.

The relationship between "exile" and "Middle World" is complicated and it is clear that Breytenbach does not simply equate "exile" to geographical displacement. "Exile" is also explored as a philosophical concept ingrained in the human condition. Within Breytenbach's work, one is confronted with "exile" as indicative of our "incompleteness" as humans and this condition results from the "thick veils we are draped in". The innate sense of separation and loss is born of the illusion created by the veils obscuring reality. Throughout his work, there are references to the "veil of maya", that has to be pierced or removed. This recurrent theme in his work is already visible in early writings:

I'd say that it is someone who is socially weak, who has no control over his own desires and impulses, who has really no means of making a separation between the real world and the imaginary ones. This predicament the prisoner solved by taking everything as real whereas the Vedantist would see all these words as *maya*, illusion.

(Breytenbach 1984: 167)

This illusion derives from the lack of insight in and a failure to connect to the reality beyond the illusion, as well as the foreignness of the new environment within which the exile finds her-/ himself. Bhabha defines this estrangement in hegemonic and colonial terms, when he describes his realisation of the obscurity of the canonical centre to an outsider:

> …what one expects to find at the very *center* of life or literature – the summation of a Great Tradition, a touchstone of Taste – may only be the dream of the deprived, or the illusion of the powerless. The canonical 'center' may, indeed, be most interesting for its elusiveness, most compelling as an enigma of authority.
>
> (Bhabha 1994; xi)

A reference to colonialism and displacement necessarily leads to Fanon and the extent to which the black man used to be dislocated from himself or his own centre: "On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?" (Fanon 1968: 112). In this moving and impassioned plea, Fanon captivates the dilemma of an exile, a dislocated person who is perceived as different and as a result objectified and estranged from himself. Breytenbach goes beyond the point of displacement as a "Middle World un-citizen". He reaches beyond the "veil", beyond perceptions, beyond objectification, beyond hegemony. Splattered blood becomes fertile creative ground to Breytenbach. Amputation signifies the autonomy and power of the dismembered body-part. Wounds facilitate fecundity.

Breytenbach's perspective is, to an extent, shared by other contemporary writers. Despite the lack of power of the immigrant, the new position is often perceived as a positive, creative experience, which is evident in postcolonial writing. Bharati Mukherjee endorses Salman Rushdie's positive stance on the issue: "To her, the immigrant condition is protean, tirelessly inventive, creatively rooted *at once* in the society of adoption and in recollections of the land of birth" (Boehmer 2009: 234).

The deduction that one may draw from this exploration of "exile" and "Middle World" within the context of geographical displacement is firstly, that the concept of exile has evolved and has moved from the victim as an object to the exile undergoing creative changes in a positive space, despite the fact that the exile remains unfathomable to the outsider/ citizen. Secondly, "Middle World" proves to be a space, an interstice from where the un-citizen can reach beyond the "veil of Maya" to some sort of reality, which would otherwise remain unattainable. Lastly, the diaspora of the "Middle World" un-citizen is deterritorialised because the boundaries of political affiliation and nationalism are not maintained and because the un-citizen often voluntarily propels her- or himself into exile.

4.3.4.2.   Psychological impact

However wide the distension of the positive elements of exile, the overpowering estrangement persists: "… exiled memory is the slow art of forgetting the colour of fire" (Breytenbach 1991: 52).

The residual image on the mind of the reader is that of disappearance and discolouration. The process of fading is an artistic exercise, according to Breytenbach. In this section, the

focus shifts to the psychological impact of "exile" and the related indomitable estrangement:

> we the exiles -
> we who wanted to struggle
> against the shape of loneliness.
> <div align="center">(Breytenbach 1989: 115)</div>

This extract is from a poem Manu reads to Meheret as part of a discussion on freedom in *Memory of Snow and of Dust*. The isolation and exclusion embedded in the situation of the activist and exile are reiterated. Breytenbach points out the shifty nature of exile and the indistinct changes inflicted upon the individual, who is unable to mentally escape from its alienating effects:

> Using exile as a *pense-bête*, I have endeavoured to make of that condition
> a survival technique. In other words, to wipe out oneself. One
> contradiction which refuses to go away is obviously that the exile cannot
> think her/himself loose from the process of alienation: he cannot ascertain
> whether what he/she has become is the natural result of ageing, whether
> it was exile which gave his/her tongue this bitter taste, or whether he/she
> used and abused this situation to become a foreigner, a *luftmensch*, in my
> instance a hypothetical *homo sud-africanus*.
> <div align="center">(Breytenbach 1996: 42)</div>

Despite the previously designated positive aspects, the recrudescent alienation of exile cannot be brushed aside and the extent to which its unremitting presence feeds into the "Middle World" has to be established. Nomadism and the identity of the exile are contingent trails through the mirrors of the self of the un-citizen, illuminating the constant flux of signs and reflections of the "Middle World".

Exploring the psychological state of living in exile, Breytenbach, at times, focuses on the aspects that one loses in a similar situation, and makes the following comment: "One day I should write a book about exile, about what it is like to live turned in upon oneself, and give a description of the blunting caused by estrangement from the intimate and the familiar" (Breytenbach 1993:222). A characteristic of exile is thus this state of withdrawal, which results in feelings of separation, and equally in the loss of certain aspects of one's personality through estrangement. It is significant that Breytenbach uses the word "blunting", which states the incremental loss of awareness because of a lack of access to the country of origin in unequivocal terms: a very painful and traumatic process. The suffering is so excruciating that Breytenbach describes it as pretending to be 'normal' while being totally disconnected from the ingredients of such a state: "We pretend 'normalcy' where we can lay no claim to it." (Breytenbach 1993: 222). Breytenbach acknowledges the contentious nature of the concept "normal" and the question arises as to the motivation of the usage of the term. He could be stressing the illusion that human beings harbour of an 'ideal' existence and space and interaction with their environment, which is perceived as the 'norm', or he could – in an ironic manner – be highlighting the lack of any sense of an ordinary or 'normal' existence. These painful attempts at 'normalcy' are graphically

described in the following very moving image: "beat our wings to a bloody pulp against windowpanes reflecting the illusion of life outside" (Breytenbach 1993: 223). There is a strong sense of exclusion, of being an outsider, which is relevant to the definition of the un-citizens of the "Middle World". They are also outsiders and living a nomadic life away from the familiar: "Exiles are nomads of the real who need not plant or sow" (Breytenbach 1993: 223).

The nomadism that exiles experience has a distinct impact on identity and it is described as a reflection by Breytenbach: "Exile is coming face to face with the self as mirror (or mirror as self?) [...] Maybe the mirror is home" (Breytenbach 1993: 222-223). The image of the mirror is a very complex one in Breytenbach's work. The mirror enables passing instances to cross its surface without ever capturing any of these. As such, the mirror is a relatively effective means of looking at our existence, as there is a movement in time. Yet, it remains but an ephemeral reflection, an inaccurate representation. If the self is perceived as a mirror, then there is obviously the element of being capable of showing the passing events. At the same time, the self dissolves in the process and disappears completely. Only a fleeting reflection remains, which is a representation.

Breytenbach aims at capturing the fleeting moving images. The innate need to capture and the refutation incumbent upon such a process, are evident in the creative flux and tension in the mystery of the process. Kundera commented on the "melodic truth" of a sentence in the following statement, bearing witness to a similar quest: "The search for the vanished present; the search for the melodic truth of a moment; the wish to surprise and capture this fleeting truth; the wish to plumb by that means the mystery of the immediate reality constantly deserting our lives, which thereby becomes the thing we know least about" (Kundera 1996: 136). The image Breytenbach tries to capture in the "mirror" is this "fleeting truth", the interstice he creates through his writing: "Il m'aurait suffi alors d'enchaîner, de poursuivre dans la phrase, de me loger, sans qu'on y prenne bien garde, dans ses interstices, comme si elle m'avait fait signe en se tenant, un instant, en suspens"/ "It would have been sufficient for me to continue, to follow the sentence, to inhabit – without us really paying attention – its interstices, as if the sentence gave me a sign while hanging, for a moment, suspended" (Foucault 1971: 7 - my translation). The suspended moment, other than just being part of a game of moving signs, which is the definition Foucault ultimately proposes ("le discours n'est rien de plus qu'un jeu" / "speech is nothing more than a game" Foucault 1971: 51 – my translation), is an experience within which one can partake in Breytenbach's work in the mirror of the self and the self as mirror.

A further exploration of these reasons enabling the exile to be a mirror, as opposed to ordinary citizens of a designated area, is needed. One could argue that estrangement brings a heightened sense of awareness:

> It should be pointed out that Middle Worlders paradoxically have a sharpened awareness of place (topoi, locus) – as with nomads, the environment may be constantly changing and one does not possess it, but it is always a potentially dangerous framework with which you must interact – and therefore they will know cloud and well and star and fire better than sedentary citizens do.

(Breytenbach 2009c: 147)

Foreignness also questions the accepted norm. Breytenbach alludes to this possibility in the following passage: "In the meantime the condition of exile becomes a privileged status from which to morally and emotionally blackmail the world with special pleading" (Breytenbach 1991: 53). An exile is in a privileged position to have a more objective distance from his/ her country of origin and at the same time from the country of residence. The exile usually also has sympathisers with his/ her cause, which explains the ironic twist at the end of this quotation.

This process of the investigation of self-definition, identity and identity formation is essential to Breytenbach's oeuvre as I have previously pointed out.

The psychological impact of living in exile is multifarious: from the excruciating exclusion and debilitating attempts at inclusion to the creative jouissance from the vantage point allowing cultural hybridity and a constant reconstruction of one's identity. The condition of embracing the fluidity and the unbelonging with acceptance is the space of "Middle World".

4.3.4.3.   Political positioning as an outsider

Politics and culture are closely related and feed into one-another. In exploring the cultural implications for a person in exile, one is equally exploring the political position of that individual. A focus on the temporality of culture in exile enables an exploration of the political position of the individual.

In his attempts to identify the "location of culture" and the margins of the "modern nation", Bhabha prefers to situate this locality around temporality: "This locality is more *around* temporality than *about* historicity" (Bhabha 1994: 200). He feels that historicity has dominated the discussions of the nation as a cultural force: "My emphasis on the temporal dimension in the inscription of these political entities – that are also potent symbolic and affective sources of cultural identity – serves to displace the historicism that has dominated discussion of the nation as a cultural force (Bhabha 1994: 201). Historicity is lacking in defining the locality of culture because of its static nature and Bhabha is trying to find a more fluid, open-ended, ever-changing process of accommodating the locality of culture to portray the liminal nature of displacement.

The language of the metaphor is an essential cultural tool providing a means to fill the void and bridge the gap between the previous context and the current experience: "The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor. Metaphor, as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the meaning of home and belonging, across the 'middle passage', or the central European steppes, across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation-people" (Bhabha 1994: 200). In Breytenbach's work, the metaphor is equally essential in dealing with "Middle World" existence. He refers to this space as "Writer's Land" (Breytenbach 2009a: 214). In his discussion on "The Global Dimension of Cultural

Policy", Breytenbach points out the value of the metaphor, when he confronts his listeners with the question: "How to use the metaphor as transformative device – indeed, as radical undermining of our simplistic assumptions about 'reality'" (Breytenbach 2009a: 198).

Bhabha maintains that communities are imagined and temporal, and that cultural structures continually feed into social processes and vice versa: "If, in our travelling theory, we are alive to the *metaphoricity* of the peoples of imagined communities – migrant or metropolitan – then we shall find that the space of the modern nation-people is never simply horizontal. Their metaphoric movement requires a kind of 'doubleness' in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic" (Bhabha 1994: 202).

Moreover, being an exile becomes a creative space – similar to the Middle World: "Exile gave me motifs for my work: silence, death, transformation, shadows, ink, games, the void, dreams, immobility, interchangeability, essence, breaks…" (Breytenbach 1991:62). This interstice, which is opened up by the exiled space, proves to be very fertile on a creative level. This space also encourages an awareness of transformation: "Exile has stimulated my obsession with métissage, transformation, metamorphosis" (Breytenbach 1991: 63). All of these are inherent qualities to the "Middle World" as well.

Bhabha defines minority discourse in the following manner: "Minority discourse sets the act of emergence in the antagonistic *in-between* of image and sign, the accumulative and the adjunct, presence and proxy" (Bhabha 1994:225). The tension between the image and the sign, the proxy and presence therefore constitutes the space from which the minority discourse manifests itself.

Within the context of Breytenbach's oeuvre, exile has become a reminder, an ulterior motive, as a method to supersede contradictions, to move beyond them. This method requires the process of erasing the self, which bears witness to his ever-present and very prominent attempt at avoiding self-pity. His inner strength and discipline pervade all his writing and give a singular quality of disengagement to his work. His writing is at the same time self-conscious and self-effacing. The implication of this paradoxical exercise is that the reader is ceaselessly reminded of the ephemeral nature of identity and never allowed to dwell on sentimentalities but is forced to construct new meanings taking on new shapes. The mind is challenged by the continual questioning of the self and the creative rejuvenation of perspectives and ideas. The mind is forced beyond conventional categorisation and binary opposition into a new space in the same way that the exile is in a new and strange environment of which he or she has to make sense.

The space opening itself up and allowing minority discourse to take place is subversive of all hegemonic structures and free of all political affiliation and as such becomes a political stance in itself. This space is also a temporary phenomenon in constant flux and in contradiction to historicity which subsumes fixity.

Even recording these lives is complex: "These complex, partly imagined lives must now form the bedrock of ethnography, at least of the sort of ethnography that wishes to retain a special voice in a transnational, deterritorialized world" (Appadurai 2010:54). He continues

to define the problem facing the contemporary ethnographer by stipulating: "The issue, therefore, is not how ethnographic writing can draw on a wider range of literary models, models that too often elide the distinction between the life of fiction and the fictionalization of lives, but how the role of the imagination in social life can be described in a new sort of ethnography that is not so resolutely localizing" (Appadurai 2010:55). And this is where Breytenbach's work on the "Middle World" is invaluable. He creates a space within which the imagination can describe a new sort of 'ethnography' that allows for flexibility in all aspects – also in relation to locality.

4.4. <u>Conclusion</u>

The similarities and disparities between exile and "Middle World" as featured in Breytenbach's work are evident. Moreover, the "Middle World" has decided political and philosophical implications: the diaspora of un-citizens is very specific and without a homeland consciousness; the active engagement to fight for equality by giving a space – within the concepts of hybridity, unhomeliness, and interstices (the beyond), creativity, and a flexible 'ethnography' and 'historicity' – enable the displaced, the poor, and the illegals to have a situatedness on the global scene. The politics of and outsider living on the periphery of society has embedded within it the awareness of the unimportance of centre politics and power relations within a national context. National borders must be transgressed and a new political definition should be devised to encompass the complexity of the peripheral un-citizens. The "Middle World" is an attempt at such a definition.

Breytenbach's "Middle World" as philosophy implies a take on the importance of ritual (dance) in peeling away all conventions and deceptions of society, engaging the reader in the game without centre and binary oppositions with the resulting anxiety. The breath of awareness, also a Buddhist concept, allows for the always-seeking, forever-moving consciousness to form new concepts in the in-between spaces, and thus to experience moments of joy in the "Middle World".

A criticism that one could propose against postcolonial writers such as Breytenbach though, is that he is writing from a very privileged position, travelling the world and tasting all the different cultures while remaining non-committal: "In summary, postcolonial migrant literature can be described as literature written by élites, and defined an canonized by élites" (Boehmer 2009: 233). Even the "Middle World" un-citizen, with the characteristic fluidity refusing integration and disregarding roots, nationality, home language, and culture, could also be perceived as lacking social engagement and commitment. This position is in itself a political statement and remains open to criticism.

Chapter 5: The Nomad in "No Man's Land": the evolution of the term "No Man's Land" foreshadowing the "Middle World"

The concept of "Middle World" started surfacing in Breytenbach's work in the late eighties. He made reference to the term during a conference in Berlin in 1989 in conversation with Carlos Fuentes (Breytenbach 2009c: 136), and the term started evolving from this point onwards. However, years prior to this declaration, another related concept - "No Man's Land" - took shape in his work, and I put forth the argument in this section that "No Man's Land" gradually developed into "Middle World". I am going to explore the relationship between the two concepts and point out their contiguities and anomalies.

The concept "Middle World" designates a variety of elements in Breytenbach's work in the first decade of the 21st century and I am specifically referring to "the Middle World trilogy": *Notes from the Middle World* (2009)*, A veil of footsteps* (2008), and *Intimate Stranger* (2009). Peopled by the "un-citizens" and illegal immigrants, "Middle World" constitutes a geographical space that is indistinct and possibly "beyond" comprehension. Consciousness-formation and the transformative processes of hybridism are encompassed in this space. The "Middle World" is often referred to as "in-between space", as neither here nor there: "MOR will take shape and you may start inhabiting the in-between" (Breytenbach 2009c: 143). The idea of an in-between space, a beyond and also the idea of hybridism (or bastardism) have been present to Breytenbach's poetry and prose since the 1960's, although the term "Middle World" only appeared much later.

Initially, the in-between space, this beyond, starts surfacing prominently in the shape of the "No Man's Land" in Breytenbach's work in the 1970s. The first time that Breytenbach uses the word "niemandsland" ("no man's land") was in 1968, in an essay "Strafbare Onskuld", published in *Contrast* (1968). This essay was later published in *Die Miernes swel op* (Breytenbach 1980a:79). The fact that the idea of a "No Man's Land" already existed in Breytenbach's work prior to his imprisonment, is of particular significance, pointing towards a profound understanding of an outsider status and the implications of a similar existential experience. Breytenbach already lived on the periphery, which provided him with a singular vantage point, not only onto the South-African desolation and despair, but equally onto the human condition.

The two epigraphs to the essay "strafbare onskuld" by Arthur Bryant and José Ortega y Gasset, orientate the text towards a dialectic between freedom and fate, history and nature, dream and reality, and most prominently - Superman versus "human failures" (Arthur Bryant in Breytenbach 1980a: 69), all of which are explored and developed by Breytenbach. An initial preoccupation in the essay consists of the tension between dream and reality, the role of the invention of one's own experience, and the potential lack of authenticity of this creation. In his exploration of these themes, the narrator enters into a dialogue with an omnipotent, omnipresent figure called Huntingdon while passing through a dream landscape. The bitter irony in the last line foreshadows the dialogues in *The True*

Confessions of an Albino Terrorist (Breytenbach 1984b), already delineating the imprisonment of body and mind within a system of indoctrination from which escape seems unattainable.

The essay relativizes the epigraph by Bryant, who is renowned for his historical and political writings on Nazi Germany and from the quotation, the whole ideology of the Arian race is palpable in comments such as "the seeds of greatness" and "spiritual greatness":

> The only object worth achieving in this world is the ennoblement of man.
> It can never be more than a partial achievement, for man, like all
> terrestrial creatures, is imperfect and insufficient to himself. But he has in
> him the seeds of greatness… And since man lives in communities, the test
> of a community's virtue is the capacity of its institutions and traditions to
> evoke the spiritual greatness of its members.
> (Bryant in Breytenbach 1980a: 69)

These contradictory pronouncements exist despite the fact that Bryant criticised the Nazi persecution of Jewish people. His vision of man's potential for greatness is in stark contrast with the content of the subsequent essay by Breytenbach, within which Man is enmeshed in a mindless, robotic existence of spiritual deprivation in a "No Man's Land". The main characteristic of this "No Man's Land" is totalitarianism in the form of mind control.

The quotation following Bryant's is by José Ortega y Gasset and emphasises the fictional nature of any attempt at a "human dimension" (Ortega y Gasset in Breytenbach 1980a: 70) and a complete reduction to our mere zoological, natural existence. The perspectivism central to Ortega y Gasset's philosophy is evident and Breytenbach emphasises the relativity thereof in his initial paragraph with its ironic echoes of Protestant baptismal ritual: "in drome ontvang en gebore" / "conceived in and born of dreams" (Breytenbach 1980a: 70 - my translation), which is a play on "conceived in and born of sin" / "in sonde ontvang en gebore" (using a biblical reference). The approach is already post-structuralist in nature, underlining the uncertainty of individual perception and the inability to pinpoint an ultimate reality. The text equally underscores existential Angst, a central component to Modernism. Breytenbach clearly moves outside of the borders of South-Africa in delineating a "No Man's Land", incorporating modernist and post-structuralist stylistic devices and themes.

The barren "No Man's Land" is perceived as a Protestant heaven and the totalitarian voice as God the Father. The obvious parallel with the South-African white Christian society at the time and the political criticism thereof are clear. The text goes beyond mere political criticism of the regime at the time, though. The existential crisis introduces the fictional character of Chuck Huntingdon, who becomes a recurrent shadow in Breytenbach's work. The sense of imprisonment inside and outside of "heaven" and the inability to escape despite a change in location, render the final appeal to Huntingdon painfully ironic: "Daarom rig ek my aan u. Help my asseblief, meneer Huntingdon"/ "Therefore I turn towards you. Please help me, Mr Huntingdon" (Breytenbach 1980a: 81). "No Man's Land" is thus first introduced as a space where mind-control is pervasive, depriving the individual of any authentic existence.

The poem "Je s'use" published in 1977, is centred around the concept of 'no man's land' with clear political overtones:

Je s'use

Peace treaty? Truce? The stilling of thought?

The stilling of dream? Dream is the death of the real

Walking is the stilling of dream. To voice awareness

is to abandon (annihilate?) a no man's land. Dream

is no man's land. Peace is no man's land. Life is no

man's land. To dream in anonymity is no man's land. The

anonymous dream. The superfluous trench. Life is the trench

running towards death. Behind the bulwarks of dream. The fortress

of dream. Inviolable in dream. 'Impure! Impure!'

Dream is a white flag and a bell. Surrender: the prize

is no man's land. A no man's land riddled with trenches. Trenches

filled with dreams. Death is man's own land. Island and an-

other man's land. Life and another man's land.

(Breytenbach 1977: 104)

The meaning of the title of this poem is a bit obscured: "j'use" in French means 'I use'. The reflexive verbs conjugated with an "s" or other prepositional forms, could provide a possible explanation for this title: 'I use myself' would then be 'je m'use' which means 'burn out or degrade', and going one step further by adding the "s" instead of the "m", which is grammatically incorrect - may indicate 'I use him/ her/ it'. Breytenbach could be playing on both meanings: 'I've burnt myself out' or 'degraded myself' of 'I've degraded him/ it'.

The clear political orientation of the poem becomes apparent in the first line: "Peace treaty? Truce?" The contamination of the "real" has the power to "still" the dream. One may assume that the "dream" in this context refers to the freedom of all people of all racial divisions in Apartheid South Africa. "No Man's Land" becomes representative of a space where one is not allowed to think, or dream. The dream provides a temporary escape from the harsh conditions of "No Man's Land", which can only be abandoned by being vociferous in one's criticism of the regime ("To voice awareness is to abandon (annihilate?) a no man's land"). Another form of existence in "No Man's Land" is to dream anonymously because it will have no impact on the regime, and in no way support the revolution. This stance becomes a "trench" - a hole one is digging for oneself that protects one against the attacks ("the bulwarks of dreams"), but simultaneously, this hole presents a form of surrender as "Life is the trench running towards death". Breytenbach hints at "No Man's Land" as personifying a life that is death, illustrated by the ironic alteration of the original phrase - "No Man's Land" to "Death is man's own land". He reinforces his point by stipulating that if one surrenders, there will be life at a cost – the cost of dispossession: "Life and another

man's land" (with the implication that the land had been taken unfairly from the indigenous peoples).

South Africa is again referred to as the "No Man's Land" in *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (Breytenbach 1984b: 239), "being the veritable account in words and in breaks of how a foolish fellow got caught in the antechamber of No Man's Land" (Breytenbach 1984b: 12). In this prelude to the first volume of this novel, prison is ironically referenced as an 'antechamber'. The incarceration is, therefore, labelled as a state of waiting in an in-between space, adjacent to and illustrative of the macrocosm, which existed in South Africa at the time. One has to merely look at the violence, absurdity, and dehumanisation in the meticulous detail of the sketches created by Breytenbach while in prison ("Gevangenistekeninge" Breytenbach 2009d) - portraying the obsessive nature of this artistic endeavour whilst in solitary confinement - to understand that the "No Man's Land" also serves as a label signalling the atrocities of the Apartheid government and the dehumanising prison system.

The theme of a "No Man's Land" is recurrent in his early fiction and the echoes of an inhospitable landscape are equally found in the poetry Breytenbach wrote while in prison. In the poem "dit is 'n nagtegaal gelede" ("it is a nightingale ago"), which is dedicated to Lewis Nkosi, and was included in the anthology called *Buffalo Bill* (Breytenbach 2005: 173-175), the desert becomes a metaphor yet again for this barren mental landscape:

> maar ek sien om die mure
> rondom hierdie gebou waar ek
> nie kan sien nie
> 'n woestyn /
>
> but I see about the walls
> around this building where I
> cannot see
> a desert
>
> (my translation)

The lack of freedom and vision ring clear through these lines, reinforced by the lack of hope which is represented by the waterless desert.

Breytenbach also refers to "No Man's Land" as a space of treason behind the veil. The veil has a religious connotation within this poem and one may conclude that "No Man's Land" represents the deceit propagated as religious truths by religious leaders: "deur die niemandsland van verraad agter die voorhoof"/ "through the nomansland of treason behind the veil" (Breytenbach 2005: 368 - my translation). The importance of this reference and its specific meaning are evident, as this is an extract from *Yk*, another anthology of prison poetry. In another Biblical parallel from the same anthology, "No Man's Land" becomes a space, ironically included in a familiar expression: "weltevrede by die kospotte van Niemandsland"/ "well-satisfied around the pots of Nomansland" (Breytenbach 2005:418). Breytenbach has substituted Egypt with Nomansland and is implying that there are certain privileged groups benefiting from the abundance available in South Africa. Within this

context, "No Man's Land" represents the South Africa as experienced by the oppressors surrounded by opulence.

"No Man's Land" should not be confused with the Void: "wat die Hindoes as Brahman omskryf – die Al, die Totaliteit, die Oneinde, die Realiteit, die Niet, die Soenjatta van Boeddhisme"/ "that which the Hindus describe as Brahman – the All, the Totality, the Infinity, the Reality, the Nothingness, the Sunyata of Buddhism" (Breytenbach 1987: 39). These concepts represent the transcending moment of enlightenment, where the individual comes into contact with something beyond the ordinary everyday illusions:

> Dit is inneraard 'n transenderende oomblik, 'n vernietigende oomblik, ver en nietig, maar dit is binne jou waar dit gewreek word, waar jy die berge optel en in die see werp – alhoewel jy op daardie uitmekaarval-van-die-tyd geen vatbare besef van die self meer het nie, geen psigiese silhoeët/

> It is in actual fact a transcending moment, a destructive moment, far and insignificant, but it is inside of you where it is avenged, where you lift the mountains and throw them into the sea – even though you do not have any palpable sense of self in this moment where time disintegrates, no psychological silhouette.
> (Breytenbach 1987: 39)

The barren desert-living of "No Man's Land" does not entail the absorption of the self into the Void beyond time and self-consciousness. The enlightening destruction of the singular experience of the Void is made possible through – amongst other things – reading Breytenbach's texts.

At this early stage, Breytenbach is evidently not yet creating a transition from "No Man's Land" to "Middle World". "No Man's Land" is mostly portrayed as a desolate, controlled environment where people are disadvantaged by oppressors and where there is no freedom. From time to time however, hints of glimpses into an element beyond the deprived condition manifest. These fleeting moments contain references to the broader human condition and existential crises appertaining to a wider spectrum. In these glimpses one can distinguish a vague outline of the creative dreamscape that will ultimately beam into consciousness through the unexpected imagery conjured up within the "Middle World".

5.1. On the Noble art of Walking in "No Man's Land": Mirrors and echoes in the void

Before the "Middle World" becomes visible, an arduous journey is to be completed through the imprisonment of the imagination in "No Man's Land", a journey which is evidently strenuous - judging by its portrayal in *Memory of Snow and of Dust*. In Breytenbach's later work – from the late 1980s onwards, the opportunity is provided to the reader to broaden her/ his consciousness by resorting to the paradoxical unification of incongruent concepts or images in order to open up a "beyond", an interstice, an authentic moment, a true

experience. The beyond, the opening, the interstice constitute the "Middle World". In the "Middle World", there is also a sense of contentment as opposed to imprisonment and revolt.

The lack of freedom (politically and mentally) and the limited scope within which to develop one's consciousness persists however, and resurface in the experimental novel *Memory of Snow and of Dust* (1989)*,* which explores the concept of "No Man's Land" in more detail, dedicating half of the novel to a section entitled "On the Noble Art of walking in No Man's Land". Already in the first section of the novel, there are descriptions delineating the geography of this barren condition: "Nothing. Expanse of nothing. Brown nothing. Red nothing. Ochre nothing. Grey nothing. Whitish nothing. […] A timeless sunstare" (Breytenbach 1989: 158). Inextricably linked to this inhospitable, indistinct location and underlining the anonymity of both the protagonist and the space, is the name that has been selected to refer to the main character in this section, namely Mano, which is an anagram of the protagonist's name in the second section - Anom. The absurdity of the epistolary exchange in the second section is underlined by the anagram of the names of the recipient and the sender: Noma and Anom. A loss of identity and specificity of location serve as an interlude to the characteristics of "Middle World un-citizens" and their "un-belonging", which will become a fully-fledged theme in later works.

Another appellation – Mano - which is referred to by Meheret in the first section as the "nomad", further extends the scope of overlapping characters and themes to hardly identifiable shards echoing through emptiness. The motif of a nomad, which is related to "No Man's Land", is an important detail which will later constitute a major characteristic of the "un-citizens" in the "Middle World".

The art of walking in this space of echoes, reflections and emptiness is described as "understanding, not control" and a "Going towards" (Breytenbach 1989: 274). This process of understanding is already at this early stage linked to consciousness and metamorphosis – both very prominent recurrent elements in Breytenbach's work and signalling inklings of a transition from "No Man's Land" to the "Middle World" - investigating and facilitating consciousness formation via metamorphosis: "Ka'afir would have explained to you that the verse is a reality, and a method or an alley or an opening on reality" (Breytenbach 1989: 250). Once again, one is confronted with the interstice, the in-between space, a space that is opened up by the use of metaphor.

Niemand writes to Noma labelling his memoir on Death Row as "On the Noble Art of Walking in No Man's Land" (Breytenbach 1989: 222), introducing a different aspect to "No Man's Land" – that of the death sentence and an account of the last moments before being executed. He asks the question: "Isn't life the process of filming and editing a long walk to nowhere?" (Breytenbach 1989: 223). With this sentence Niemand relinquishes all hope reiterating the ambient perspectivism and nihilism of existence. The existentialism is highlighted by the choice of "Niemand" as a name, which means "Nobody" if translated, thus foregrounding our inability to outline people or experiences clearly – a notion that will become more nuanced within the context of "Middle World", where people and identities are in flux.

At this point, looking at the erosion of identity in Breytenbach's work - and the relevance of this process to both "No Man's Land" and "Middle World" - seem functional.

An aspect of perspectivism that cannot be elided is the multiplication of the identities of a perceived individual. Characteristic to Breytenbach's work is the disintegration of the 'I', for which there is a simultaneous compensatory doubling of the 'I', according to Sienaert (2001: 45).The mirror is specifically prominent and versatile, suggesting a reflection on identity. In *Dog heart* (1998)*,* Dog is looking from the mirror at the narrator and the emphasis is on the multiplicity of identities Breytenbach constructs for and of himself in his oeuvre: "Hierna word Dog een van die groot verskeidenheid identiteite wat Breytenbach vir homself in die loop van sy oeuvre sal konstrueer"/ "From this point onwards, Dog becomes one of a great variety of identities that Breytenbach will construct for himself during the course of his oeuvre" (Viljoen 2005: 11).

Identity is continually shifting in Breytenbach's work and the exploration thereof is maintained. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha investigates identity formation extensively as well, and I believe his exploration can shed light on Breytenbach's work. He points out that "In the postcolonial text the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image – missing person, invisible eye, Oriental stereotype – is confronted with its difference, its Other" (Bhabha 2004: 66). Breytenbach is moving beyond the strictures of post-colonial writing through the incredible density and transmutation of identity and space. The Other and the Self are not in opposition and the deference of signs in this splintered amorphous space quell colonial desire: "It is always in relation to the place of the Other that colonial desire is articulated: the phantasmic space of possession that no one subject can singly or fixedly occupy, and therefore permits the dream of the inversion of roles" (Bhabha 2004: 63). Breytenbach erases the fixed positions and thereby manages to attenuate the tension between the self and the Other.

This multifariousness of identity in Breytenbach's work is also discussed in Heilna du Plooy's article: "Ultimately, the representations of the self do not project an enhanced self-image, but are, rather, in Breytenbach's case, a way of opening up the self by creating spaces within and around it, by creating emptiness which can always be filled again with momentary but new processes of becoming" (Du Plooy 2009: 152). Space is essential to existence and movement and Breytenbach uses these spaces as fleeting explorations of hybrid identities.

Willem Anker also looks at the multiplication of identities, within which amputation allows for this multiplicity to assert itself: "Bostaande voorbeelde uit *Woordwerk* dui enersyds daarop hoe die hand wel die lokus van singewing is, maar andersins impliseer dit ook dat Breytenbach in sy boek *Woordwerk* talle hande versamel, wat beteken dat hy homself juis in die eerste plek losmaak uit sy self deur die skryfhande van ander in sy werk te versamel"/ "The above-mentioned examples from *Woordwerk* indicate, on the one hand, the extent to which the hand effectively is the locus of meaning being transmitted, but on the other hand, it also indicates that Breytenbach collects lots of hands in his book *Woordwerk*, which implies that he initially in effect disengages himself from the self by collecting within his work the hands of other authors/ writers" (Anker 2007: 7). The annihilation of the self is exerted to the point where the author surrenders the creative process to others.

Simultaneously, Breytenbach equally acknowledges through amputation the lack of ownership, the inability to perform a creative act in isolation due to the very nature of language and texts, and the fertility springing from this open-endedness, this woundedness, this ability to change.

Another publication focusing on the self and specifically on "Middle World" as it is developed in *Dog Heart* (Breytenbach 1998) is: "Hartland en Middelwêreld: die hantering van die spanning tussen die lokale en globale in Breyten Breytenbach se *Dog Heart"* (Viljoen 2002). In this novel, providing a far later account of identity-formation, "Middle World" is prevalent and identifiable. A shift from "No Man's Land" has been established and a breach has occurred – "No Man's Land" becomes less prominent and more specific to a certain state of mind. The unstable self in this "Middle World" is emphasised, as well as the blurring lines separating fiction from reality. Moreover, Viljoen points out the relevance of fluctuating identities within "Middle World" and their relatedness to post-structuralist thought and to globalisation. History is reproduced by Breytenbach in a consciously and deliberately subjective way in this novel, which is a typical post-structural theme, and she introduces similar themes when drawing attention to his shifting identity, the fluidity in the establishment of his roots, and the links between his present and his past cultural contexts. This continual exchange between past and present results in metamorphosis – which again underlines the creative process that is inherent to the experience.

The relationship between mirrors and identity formation in Breytenbach's work, and the way in which these contribute to metamorphosis are explored by Nancy Pedri, focusing on the post-structural and postcolonial: "In this short story, as in many other texts by Breytenbach, the mirror is postulated as both a measure of mimesis and a mode of private alienation. It is a descriptive and a destructive surface that underscores the dissolution of boundaries separating the reflection of self and the invention of self, objective identity and subjective identity, the real self and the imaged or fictional self"(Pedri 2002:299).

Erhard Reckwitz explores the mirror in general: "A mirror that is more of a filter than a truthful reflector of the past is thus a highly unreliable affair, it is, to use Derrida's graphic image, a mirror without a reflexive coating at the back that transforms or distorts everything reflected by it" (Rechwitz 1993: 143). This statement is significant to Breytenbach's work as the relationship with the past is relativized numerous times throughout his oeuvre. This relationship is essential to identity-formation and consciousness formation which positions this relativity squarely within the "Middle World".

Breytenbach describes the mirror reflection in the following manner: "Consciousness is a matter of leaps and bounds and crack-ups and painful reappraisals. And then the slow knitting of the flesh. It is the flame licking and spitting at the wick of the spine. It is the flowing stream with 'sense' the occasional surface-flash that makes you think it may be stilled into a mirror" (Breytenbach 1988: 132). The idea of a stilled mirror image is the product of the human consciousness extracting itself for an instant from the greater "flowing stream" and imagining a fleeting coherent image (making 'sense' of) by using the 'senses'. According to Breytenbach poetry has a crucial role to fulfil in mirroring: "It can be a life-long mirroring meditation on life" (Breytenbach 2009a: 48). Poetry therefore is central to "Middle World" consciousness.

5.2. <u>Migrations</u>

The prominence of a nomadic people – albeit physically or imaginary – is reiterated in relation to "Middle World" but has been previously imbedded in "No Man's Land". This theme coincides with contemporary socio-economic, philosophical, and literary preoccupations.

In her writings on postcolonialism, Elleke Boehmer refers to the contemporary preoccupations in literature in the following manner: "From national bonding to international wanderings, from rootedness to peregrination. Whereas early post-independence writers tended to identify with a nationalist narrative and to endorse the need for communal solidarity, from the late 1980s and into the twenty-first century many writers' geographic and cultural affiliations became more divided, displaced, and uncertain" (Boehmer 2005: 225). These displaced affiliations result from migrations of peoples to the extent that transnations come into existence: "For every nation-state that has exported significant numbers of its populations to the United States as refugees, tourists, or students, there is now a delocalized transnation, which retains a special ideological link to a putative place of origin but is otherwise a thoroughly diasporic collectivity" (Appadurai 2010: 172). There are displaced people in an array of countries and the transnations have become indicative of "late capitalism": "There is, on one hand, a recognition of the interstitial, disjunctive spaces and signs crucial for the emergence of the new historical subjects of the transnational phase of late capitalism" (Bhabha 2004: 311). Breytenbach incorporates these displaced people into his "Middle World" philosophy and as a result, migrations are a central theme to "Middle World" existence and the mobility of the citizens of "No Man's Land" prefigure the migrations of the "un-citizens" of "Middle World". He attempts to explore and defend the "unrepresentable" (Bhabha 2004: 310) within the interstitial space of "Middle World".

The concept of "No Man's Land" quickly evolves and takes on more dimensions representing the displaced.

In *Mouroir* (first published in Afrikaans in 1983 by Taurus) there are references to a "wasteland" (Breytenbach 2009c: 28) indicating a space outside of the "yard", beyond the controlled and personal, beyond the space where "convention" and "agreement" reign. The problem of boundaries is highlighted – an unsuccessful attempt at separating the "yard" from the "waste land" already augurs the illegal immigrants that form a prominent portion of "Middle World un-citizens".

In the essay "The God Eating", yet another uninhabitable landscape is described: "In this way one comes down into the desert. It is grey all around the eye, grey and barren and dry as if from some ancient and unlifted curse" (Breytenbach 2009c: 40). This landscape is both a physical and metaphysical one. There is an emphasis on migrations: "Other people have passed through these regions then"/ "long-gone inhabitants"/ "long-gone pilgrim" (Breytenbach 2009c: 41). The bleak landscape or mindscape, where "runagates" feed off

decaying meat as a religious ritual, emphasise a darkness and hopelessness which resurface throughout this collection. The vast empty landscape becomes an "in-between" space (Breytenbach 2009c: 45), unidentifiable.

The 'in-between' space shifts and becomes applicable to 'in-between' people later on in the collection *Mouroir*: "The rumours of the existence of the culturally unclassifiable creature were confirmed" (Breytenbach 2009c: 90). Towards the end of the essay *"The Day of the Falling of the Stars and Searching for the Original Face",* the threat that people who move in this in-between space pose to the establishment, becomes evident. However, the singular quality of this state is concurrently underlined: "Belonging to not-belonging, belonging to brokenness – can man achieve a more beautiful and more painful integration?" (Breytenbach 2009c:93). Thus "No Man's Land" is peopled progressively by "Middle World" un-citizens.

Another explicit reference to "No Man's Land" in *Mouroir* is tracing the parameters of a township that is to be built in an undefined area – probably adjacent to Cape Town (Breytenbach 2009c: 190) - which is discovered on their journey by Angelo, indicating the racial discrimination by contrasting the affluent "Uncoloured" area to the one designated for "Coloureds" - a group of people who epitomised disintegration and alienation during the Apartheid era in South Africa.

 "Nomansland", eventually spelt with a capital letter and written as one word, seems to refer to South Africa yet again in *"A Pattern of Bullets"* (*Mouroir*): "He arrived as refugee or displaced person in Nomansland" (Breytenbach 2009c: 238). At this point, 'displaced' is still perceived as a vast absorption into an excruciating landscape. There is also a reference to the title of the second volume of *Memories of Snow and of Dust,* as written by one of the many persona or identities or aliases that the label Breytenbach collectively encompass, namely D. Espejuelo. In "Middle World", 'displaced' becomes part and parcel of the un-citizen's status. Breytenbach is still a political activist at present, fighting for 'displaced' people and attempting to give prominence to their plight. The locus of "Middle World" is functional in the struggle of situating migrating people within a context.

A further development of the concept of "No Man's Land" becomes evident when the labyrinth without walls is mentioned. This image - signifying freedom along with a possible destructive force laid bare and liberated - presents itself in the shape of a bleak, inhospitable landscape filled with darkness and depression and deprivation. Journeying is introduced – a concept that is essential to "Middle World un-citizens", but the travelling is perceived as "without destination" – comparing this state to Daedalus hanging suspended from heaven "disconsolate and faint and immobile" at the loss of Icarus (Breytenbach 2009c: 198).

Travelling is a quest for meaning: "Die uitstappies en die uittog, die soeke na betekenis – dit is die reisverklaring"/ "The outings and the exodus, the search for meaning – this is the explanation of the travels" (Breytenbach 1991: 10). Travelling is also indicative of the make-shift existence of the un-citizens: not belonging anywhere but feeling at home everywhere. The lack of national, cultural and political affiliations are equally embodied in the concept of nomadism , which is inherent to travelling as it manifests itself in Breytenbach's work.

An antidote to the earth receding into barrenness, and taking on the shape and characteristics of a "No Man's Land", resulting from the abuse of power, is travelling: "Listen: you must continue travelling because the earth needs to be discovered and remembered again and again, cyclically, creatively, with her seasons and her sounds, with the warm breath of hospitality, with the healing touch of strangeness … lest it becomes cold and impenetrable – a barren place of power and politics. The earth needs to be reminded of the eternity of one life" (Breytenbach 2008a: 11). Travelling is integral to survival as "The origin of existence is movement" (Breytenbach 2008a: 11) and as a result, in order to reaffirm existence and positive existence on this planet, one must continue to discover and remember the earth.

Metaphorical travelling (the Tao/ the Way) is an essential part of writing, as it enables the writer to move into the unknown: "Nor does it matter in the land of writing whether in the process (along this road) the void is out *there* or in *here.* Walking the road of itself depicts and becomes the fear and the fall and the oblivion and life resurgent: it becomes the human condition, the state of man" (Breytenbach 2009a: 146). Whether one travels physically or mentally is of no importance. The essential point is to 'walk the road' and, to discover "the state of man".

Within the metaphor of nomadism is therefore encapsulated the survival mechanism as prerequisite to "Middle World" un-citizenship: this nomadism can be of the mind and does not need any physical manifestations.

There is thus a very definite evolution in Breytenbach's work from the "No Man's Land" of his early texts, signalling the deprivation of oppressive regimes and the desolation resulting from these regimes – exile amongst others - to "Middle World" consciousness, within which he has regained his political consciousness (a global consciousness), where he investigates his earlier explorations of human nature, looking at a wider range of reactions – even the exploration of the Minotaur is reconsidered, where fragmentation and labyrinthine experiences become indicative of an elsewhere, a beyond, a Middle World, which one has to reaffirm through a constant nomadism allowing exploration, metamorphosis, movement, and ultimately fluidity in identification.

5.3. **The Labyrinth**

The labyrinth is a prominent concept in the post-structural theory, as I have already indicated, and who better to illustrate the labyrinthine experience than Jorge Luis Borges' "the book of sand":

> The line consists of an infinite number of points; of an infinite number of lines; the volume, of an infinite number of planes; the hypervolume, of an infinite number of volumes… No – this, *more geometrico,* is decidedly not the best way to begin my tale. To say that the story is true is by now a convention of every fantastic tale; mine, nevertheless, *is* true.

This landscape of infinity, illustrating the inability to capture or fix a sign or its signification, compounded by the impact on the protagonist and narrator being lost in this labyrinth, echo the post-structuralist language games and the infinite possibilities as signs slip along the chain of signifiers.

The labyrinth is also another spill-over from the surrealist influence on Breytenbach's work (I have previously mentioned the imaginary freedom, the revolutionary and subversive overtones, as well as the metamorphoses present in imagery and dreams, exploring the macabre side of human nature – all elements of surrealism which are present in Breytenbach's work), which is equally prominent in defining "No Man's Land" and is a recurrent theme in Breytenbach's work. He initially illustrates the symbol of the labyrinth by emphasising the contiguity of the labyrinth and "No Man's Land" during the Apartheid era: "Contrast it with that other place in No Man's Land having the attributes and the gestures of life but in fact being a labyrinth of death" (Breytenbach 1984: 174). Breytenbach feels his existence to be labyrinthine when imprisoned and he identifies with the Minotaur. Later on, in *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist,* Breytenbach sees himself as having a dark twin brother, who is part of his personal identity: "I have seen you as the Minotaur, which is the I, which does not exist since it is a myth... I see you now as my dark mirror-brother" (Breytenbach 1984: 260). The recursive characterization forms an integral part of Breytenbach's modernist style which is instrumental in conveying the content formalised in this manner.

The space within which the Minotaur resides resurfaces as a "maze" in *Memory of Snow and of Dust,* when Anom is trying to pass off Nomza's letter as a film script: "…finally about how important it is to find a way out of the impasse the maze we find ourselves in, the spiral of bloodletting…" (Breytenbach 1989: 263). One is confronted with despair and powerlessness to escape the cycle of sacrificial violence, where the blood of one oppressed majority has to appease the appetite of the dictatorship and its psychotic desires. Concurrent with this assessment however, one is confronted with a sense of partisanship to this statement, regardless of the ironic overtones: "the maze we find ourselves in". This phrase echoes the "blind violence" that I referred to earlier, in the sense that the abuses are so excessive and far-reaching that no one can be precluded from their impact or their implications.

Earlier in this novel, the labyrinth is presented in a more positive light, despite the ironic undertone: "Where there is structure, there is appearance or semblance or simulacrum or glow, and thus the riddle, and in this way labyrinths, and so the wiping out of borders, and therefore heaven" (Breytenbach 1989: 247). Despite the conjunctions used, the accumulation of phrases create a paratactic effect with which Breytenbach shapes the elusive nature of this exploration of borders.

Another totally different example of the labyrinth as "No Man's Land" in Breytenbach's work is featured in *Mouroir* (2009b – first published in 1984). "Boy" lives in a "No Man's Land":

It was the birthplace and the lair of the sirocco, and other fever-laden winds shooting forth their rustling tongues to insatiably lick up any moisture or coolness. Distances were hazy from a lack of obstacles. Around the rim the sky was cemented to the earth by a thinnish grout of greyness. Water was a pittance always to be searched for all over again. Flora was scarce, nondescript…

(Breytenbach 2009b: 89-90).

This inhospitable landscape is the home of "Boy" and is described as "rufous labyrinth without walls" (Breytenbach 2009b: 91). In this instance, however, one could interpret the labyrinth and this "No Man's Land" in a more positive way, as some original landscape bearing witness of man's existence as free from self-consciousness and time-consciousness and thus, free from the fear of death. "Boy" is the character infused with these original paradisiacal qualities of man. The paradise in this instance is very different from the Adam and Eve Biblical version. This paradise is an approximation to the San culture and landscape and their nomadic freedom. The origins of man and the original state of consciousness are imagined. At the same time, the persecution of this freedom and half-human half-animal person ("Boy") by the "Academy", indicates the lack of creative freedom and the innate intellectual need for classification and a firm rejection of all that evades clear labelling. As opposed to the Minotaur, "Boy" is beautiful, agile, and free. He finds survival naturally and with facility in a harsh landscape which outsiders experience as a labyrinth.

In *Boek* (1987), Breytenbach extends the creative metaphor in relation to the labyrinth stating: "Ek het aangekondig dat ek wil uitlê hoe 'n gedig ontstaan en ek weet reeds dat ek verdwaal gaan raak in die labirint van wat die gedig is" / "I have announced that I want to elucidate how a poem originates and I already know that I am going to get lost in the labyrinth which constitutes a poem" (Breytenbach 1987: 10 – my translation). The "No Man's Land" of original freedom and hybridity of man and animal, which is also the creative space of the uncontrolled and non-institutionalised imagination, here become the space of the poem.

The labyrinth has even wider connotations within Breytenbach's work, though. In his later work, Breytenbach clearly defines the labyrinth as a place where the self resides in the form of the Minotaur: "Now, you and I know that the *self* is a Minotaur – an anguished bellowing, monstrous beast, the offspring of coupling between human and animal and therefore forever in the raging pain of questions that cannot find answers – whose head must be chopped off and brought out into the light for the city to live in peace" (Breytenbach 2009c:163). This potent statement can be interpreted in multiple ways. Ritual and sacrifice being the first option – relinquishing the self to appease community life via conformity. Or taming the inner animal, in order to achieve individual freedom. If read in an ironic way: abandoning the exploration of difficult questions to avoid derailing the institutions. The monstrous nature of man. Ostracising the instinctive living with raw emotion. The beauty of the beast. In this instance, the Minotaur is clearly situated outside of the community and thus still in an in-between space, a "No Man's Land".

Breytenbach continues by stipulating that the line out of the labyrinth is provided by a lady (Ariadne) and that this could be a cord (from which to hang oneself). Liberation from the

labyrinth does not necessarily entail enlightenment or freedom. He rejects Willem Boshoff's ideal of finding a centre or core or absolute reality after the initiation into the labyrinth.

Breytenbach refers to the labyrinth as this "no-where space" (Breytenbach 2009 c: 162) and thus clearly draws the line to the "No Man's Land". He contrasts it with the "Middle World", though: "But the Middle World, as I see it, is not a maze and neither is it Paradise. You are not strung along. It is not lost and you are no longer in exile there; it is a place coming into founding, heaving into sight" (Breytenbach 2009c: 163). Therefore, the "Middle World" is clearly not the labyrinth in the sense that a parallel could be drawn between the last-mentioned and the "No Man's Land". "Middle World" envelops the un-citizens in its warmth of finding as opposed to losing; of appearing instead of erasing; of the unhomeliness of the new home as opposed to the isolation of exile.

5.4. <u>South Africa: inferno and paradise</u>

At the core of "No Man's Land" lies Breytenbach complex relationship with his country of origin: he left the country of his birth in 1960 to live in a self-inflicted exile. After his marriage to a Vietnamese citizen, classified by the Apartheid government as non-white, he could not return to SA. The couple were allowed a short visit in 1973, which he sums up in its confusing complexity as follows: "when we visited No Man's Land in 1973 and spent one season in that paradise" (Breytenbach 1984: 24). Both the positive and the negative elements about the country are united in this phrase and bear witness to his inner turmoil.

Breytenbach had an acute political awareness, became part of the resistance movement Okhela - whose aim was to undermine the Apartheid government with its oppressive regime, and later he was arrested as a result of these political activities, and sentenced to jail in South Africa. Prior to his arrest, he showed a singular insight into the South-African cultural context: "For the White man, Apartheid is a distance of mind, a state of being, the state of apartness. […] Apartheid is White culture" (Breytenbach 1986: 54). This essay - "Vulture Culture" - was already published in 1971, and Breytenbach expressed the ignominious cultural stance by Whites as an impediment to communication amongst South-Africans: "Culture is a process of communication between men; it is the essence of being human" (Breytenbach 1986: 54). Breytenbach takes this definition from a UNESCO publication called *Cultural Rights as Human Rights*. The scathing criticism of the White political perspective, which he identifies as a cultural position, points towards the Afrikaner culture, which has been grafted on the European model: "culture is a parody of Europe's cultures; aesthetics are unrelated to any conceivable facet of reality. Culturally Saint-Albino Whites live from overseas offal" (Breytenbach 1986: 55). Breytenbach feels estranged as intellectual and as writer against the complex backdrop of cultural alienation: "The perceptive intellectual feels that he is the product of a cultural bastardization. He is full of the pain of alienation, frustration, humiliation. He is a man without buttocks to sit on. And he rises and shakes his pen like a spear: a measure of his impotence" (Breytenbach 1986: 64). The reference to a spear in this quotation is particularly indicative of disempowerment, as Umkhonto weSizwe ("the spear of the nation) was the ANC's armed wing. Moreover, the

pen was perceived as mightier than the sword by anti-Apartheid activists, which adds to the irony and the sense of debilitation in this acknowledgement.

The impact of cultural bastardization can be seen as translated in a positive and contemporary frame within the "Middle World": "Culturally such a person will be a hybrid… […]… This is both a precondition and a consequence. Is the bastard more tolerant?" (Breytenbach 2009c: 149). Breytenbach has engrained in his own constitution the sense of being a bastard but he contextualises this predicament within the transnational diaspora and celebrates the hybrid cultural product rising from within these parameters.

South Africa has failed to become Breytenbach's place of permanent residence, since his release from prison, after having served a seven-year sentence in the desolate "No Man's Land". He often visits the country, however. He has expressed his revulsion in the government and the Afrikaners on various occasions: "I do not consider myself an Afrikaner: the definition, whichever way you turn it, has a political content with which I cannot identify" (Breytenbach 1986: 102), yet he keeps on returning to the country and keeps on writing in Afrikaans. An illustration of this paradoxical situation appears in "Mother City" (Breytenbach 2008a: 142), where he claims to be "an invisible visitor reading the news of a foreign culture and blue skies". The "Middle World" un-citizen is clearly evolving from the ashes of broken ties with both the Apartheid and post-Apartheid South-Africa. Breytenbach remains attached to his country of birth without identifying with it. Consequently, he continually has to invent his identity and his context: "South Africa went through birth pains, it was close to understanding a cardinal Middle World law – that you can only survive and move forward by continuing to invent yourself – but then it became a majority-led and –smothered democracy instead" (Breytebach 2009c: 148).

In his novel *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist,* one finds a perception on prison life from the outside. The feelings and perceptions on South Africa also become apparent.

South Africa is simultaneously described as "paradise" (Breytenbach 1984: 24) and a space bringing forth people who cannot be trusted:

> Never trust a South African. It cannot be helped: in whichever direction
> you argue, you will always be conditioned, and the people come like
> words from the belly of the System. It cannot change itself. It is
> structurally impossible for those who are bred from it to modify the
> System significantly from within. The *structure* must be shattered by
> violence. And violence will be blind from having seen too much…. Of never
> having truly seen anything at all…. The land shall belong to no one. Not
> even to the dead.
>
> (Breytenbach 1984: 239)

In this ominous apocalyptic premonition of the country's future, there is justification for the label indicative of a sedentary system, within which people have lost their sense of humanity and are referred to as "bred" – as if they were animals. The only possible liberation from this oppressive structure lies in violence – a violence that has no conscience,

vision or hope, and will be such an annihilating force, that the territory will ultimately belong to no one.

Ka'afir calls South Africa "a paradise of dark painful ecstasy" in *Memory of Snow and of Dust* (Breytenbach 1989: 52), as a summation of the horrors manifesting themselves regularly either in reality in the country or in the deepest and darkest fantasies of the inhabitants. He is exploring the "orgiastic exercise of power" (Breytenbach 1989: 50) packaged in hypocritical taboos and religious beliefs. Exploring the intricacies of the South African situation at the time, Breytenbach exposes the guilt on both the side of the oppressor and the oppressed: "How wonderful it is to be able to kill in the name of Freedom!" (Breytenbach 1989: 51) He undermines the simplistic view of the struggle enmeshed in heroism and idealism.

The complex experience of South Africa in *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* illustrates the multiple dichotomies at the core of "No Man's Land". The surface structure of appearances and the paradoxically interrelated sordid underbelly co-existing at the time in South Africa, come to the fore in the following passage: "No Man's Land". Another world. A world of genteel manners and old-fashioned picnics. And a vicious world. A land of harsh, dream-like beauty. Where you can feel your skin crawling. Ever on that last lip of annihilation." (Breytenbach 1984b: 93). Encompassed within this oxymoron of a paradise-like inferno, is the barrenness of a world devoid of humanity and compassion, governed by an oppressive regime.

The "Middle World" un-citizen moves outside of the generally accepted norms and values and in this manner one notices an evolution from the negative portrayal of incongruent qualities resulting in monstrous "men" shaped by an inhumane regime, to a peaceful acceptance of dichotomies, despite an overt recognition of the horrors and damage inflicted - provided that a passive resistance to injustices pervade:

> There could be areas of Middle Worldness that are socially defined, separate and specific, perhaps temporary, drifting through the surrounding waters of belonging like ice floes ultimately melting: I'm thinking of that long middle period when mentally disturbed people are 'cured' and have to learn the vocabulary of and the codes of a "normal" world, where one audited fiction must now take precedence over the other "deviant" one; and feminists who broke away from rules and values imposed by the patriarchy to reinvent their lives freed from the shackles of family and decorum, and who may do so until the better end of purdah and pariah loneliness; and "rehabilitated" prisoners becoming invisible while carrying with them an inner universe of extreme humiliation where isolation bounces off steel and concrete; and societies gutted by war and self-war that have to rebuild around the ruins of brutally destroyed "normalcy".
>
> (Breytenbach 2009c: 148-149)

Rough outlines or the erasing of outlines is thus sketched by Breytenbach in his attempt at encompassing "Middle World" un-citizens. He is clearly resisting accepted norms and

exposing their impact on un-citizens. The inversion of generally accepted norms and values and prejudices enable a space within which un-citizens are allowed. Breytenbach has always been very controversial in his activism and clearly still is by criticising definitions of "normalcy" and "deviation" and code systems and their imposition on individuals where these systems overwrite personal experience. On an ethical level, Breytenbach delineates "Middle World" as follows: "Maybe I should push my luck and suggest we call this emerging archipelago of self-enforced freedom and unintentional estrangement partaking in equal parts of love and death, MOR. I like the sound: the land of MOR" (Breytenbach 2009c: 136).

To return to *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist:* a very bleak outlook on the country and its people is all-pervasive in this novel, tinged by prominent Surreal elements such as the Minotaur and the labyrinth: "Freedom is the minotaur outside the walls" (Breytenbach 1984b: 27). This statement becomes a motif in Breytenbach's writing. He perceives himself as the Minotaur at some point and the breaking down of walls as liberation. One is always confronted with the complexity of this image and the implications of liberating the destructive Minotaur, with which Breytenbach again establishes the contiguity between freedom and destruction, man and monster. These Surreal elements generally reinforce feelings of despair and destitution, while concurrently maintaining the tendency in Breytenbach's writing to expose all taboos – both destructive and protective. This tendency is ever-present in his writing and form an essential part of "Middle World" existence where the "outlaws" reside (Breytenbach 2009c: 142).

5.4.1. <u>Political undertones of "No Man's Land"</u>

Breytenbach had an unexpected political acuity when he first left South-Africa, which he has been constantly refining, assessing the global political dynamics.

In the notes on the novel *Memory of Snow and of Dust*, Breytenbach pairs the "No Man's Land" label with Azania. This equation has obvious political resonances, as Breytenbach conjectures about the future regime that could arise from this totalitarian state. He is clearly unconvinced that an obviation of a severely hegemonic state is possible. This assumption is partially based on the inherent qualities of a preoccupation with victim-hood within Western society. Another constitutive element to this assumption is an investigation into the rejection of all that is perceived as different, such as racial differences:

> Rassisme, die afsku vir die ander en die anderse of die sotlike
> bemoeisiekheid met die slagoffer, lê diep gewortel in die Westerse
> samestelling/ Racism, the abhorrence of the other and that which is
> different, or the idiotic meddlesomeness with the victim, lie deeply rooted
> in the Western make-up.
>   (Breytenbach 1999: 103)

In a tendency to absolve themselves of any involvement in racism or oppression, Europeans tended to shift the blame to the Afrikaners as guilty of all atrocities. Breytenbach finds this

ironic given the new kind of global oppression based on optimal profit margins and minimal wages: "How easy it is to cancel the debts by having a go at the *Boere*, those colonial products, foremen for the fat pigs in the good European banks swollen as tight as ticks with the blood of exploitation. Anti-racism washes whiter" (Breytenbach 1989: 87).

The oppressed, the illegals, the Poor, these are amongst others the un-citizens of the "Middle World" and Breytenbach pleads their case, criticising globalised capitalist exploitation and calling for pride and imagination to overcome the dogmatic imposition of the West:

> Only the poor can break the cycle of exploitation and dependence. Power makes stupid. Neither religion nor ideology nor even art will permit the dominators to understand the underdogs. Utopian collectivism, just like free trade capitalism, is a European export notion nurtured on Northern greed and uncertainty and dogmatic dreams. The Rest must hold their own, not because the West will be so kind as to allow justice in international economic dealings, and dignity to those living on the periphery of their concerns, but because they will have no choice. It is only by generating and mobilizing Africa's capacity to think from its own reality, to transform its conditions so as to live within its means, that the grip of European charity and paternalism and cultural cannibalism (and the *pleasure* Westerners get from feeling guilty), so corrosive to Africa's self-image, can be loosened.
> (Breytenbach 1996: 6)

His preoccupation has moved from the South-African "No Man's Land" to a consciousness of all oppression and misery inflicted by ideologies and monetary power and already in 1996 he compiled the following declaration of human rights, still as relevant as before:

> My personal declaration of human rights could be resumed in four brief points: 1: Every human being has the birthright to struggle for justice and equality. 2: Every human being has the right to a home. 3: Every human being has the survivor's right to the preservation of our planet with all its life. 4: Every human being has the right to die with his or her dignity intact.
> (Breytenbach 1996: 44-45)

There is a clear transition from Azania, where the struggle was against a white oppressive regime and in favour of Black Pride, to an activism against dependence on Western powers and their guilt and post-colonial oppression – the Western guilt on which Arundhati Roy makes the following comment: "There's a lot of money in poverty, and a few Nobel Prizes too" (Roy 2014: 338), and implied in this statement is another manifestation of capitalism currently which is "perception management": "War against the poor is one thing. But for the rest of us – the middle class, white-collar workers, intellectuals, "opinion-makers" – it has to be "perception management." And for this we must turn our attention to the exquisite art of Corporate Philanthropy" (Roy 2014: 212). Both Breytenbach and Roy are looking at global trends with a critical eye, though Breytenbach does accept and incorporate

globalization into his "Middle World", as opposed to Roy's total resistance to and rejection of this new kind of "oppression": "the Middle World, which is, and is not, the same as the Global Village" (Breytenbach 2009c: 135). The evolution within Breytenbach's political activism hereby shows a clear shift from the delineation of "No Man's Land" as a form of criticism first and foremost, to the fertile ground of "Middle World" where fluidity and hybridism reign.

5.5. <u>Fractured and mangled pictures</u>

Destruction and disintegration are evident aspects of "Middle World" as well as of "No Man's Land", and the fractured nature of images is already evident in *Boek* which was largely consolidated from prison manuscripts resulting in the singular fragmented nature of this text. The text takes on its own dimensions and again defies classification as a specific genre. These reflections from a "No Man's Land" are invaluable in tracing the development of this concept. The labyrinth is constituted by ash. The nature of a poem (the labyrinth) is defined as ash deposited on paper sifted through the ego, the self. Breytenbach moreover refers to the stanza from a poem as the borderline between the conscious and unconscious (Breytenbach 1987: 53), which foreshadows one of the typical qualities of the "Middle World" consciousness. The poem is also described as a "meditasiepunt"/ "a point of meditation" (Breytenbach 1987: 56) situating the labyrinth and "No Man's Land" within the context of Zen Buddhism.

Breytenbach also refers to the Middle Way in this text, which could be a development in his thought-processes towards the "Middle World": "Die Middeweg, glo ek, is absolute identifikasie en aanklewing: slegs so word objektiwiteit en stilte bewerkstellig. Gewoonweg, by die uitdop van 'n droom, die peul wat in die nag toegegroei het, die peul vol albasters en miertjies, skep jy onopsetlik 'n bestaanspasie - want jy vertaal/ verhaal mos" / "The Middle Way, I believe, is absolute identification and adherence: that's the only way in which to establish objectivity and silence. Simply put, at the peeling of a dream, the pod that re sealed itself during the night, the pod filled with marbles and little ants, you inevitably create a space of existence – because you are indeed translating/ relating" (Breytenbach 1987: 165/ my translation).

A final reference to "No Man's Land" in the text is featured in an essay "stadig maar onseker"/ "slowly but unsteadily" – an obviously ironic title. A confused prisoner ends up outside of prison by accident and is overwhelmed by the experience in the labyrinth of "No Man's Land" (Breytenbach 1987: 196).The experience results in an unexpected orgasm accompanied by rain and tears while hiding in the grey grass outside, while white prison wardens use black prisoners for entertainment. The pristine nature of the "No Man's Land" outside the prison is emphasised, leaving the narrator perturbed by the unhampered persecution on virgin soil. This mangled picture illustrates the prisoner's freedom.

This aspect of inevitable laceration and contortion of images is prevalent in both "No Man's Land" and "Middle World", showing the continuum of the evolution between the two concepts.

5.6.   <u>Transition from "No Man's Land" to "Middle World"</u>

There is a clear transition from "No Man's Land" to "Middle World" in Breytenbach's work, and even though both resurface at a later stage in parallel, "No Man's Land" is ultimately much diminished in its scope of references: "The Arabs either drowned when the police threw them into high-rising no man's land 'zones' in suburban *cités"* (Breytenbach 2008a: 43). Desolation and powerlessness of, for instance, the Arab people in a French city like Paris, become indicative of one interpretation of "No Man's Land" in Breytenach's later works.

In *Return to Paradise,* Breytenbach expresses a certain level of ironic affection for this space and the label of "No Man's Land" is questioned: "Is this a No Man's Land? Everybody's Land. Reason understands and accepts, the heart is clearly much more narrow-minded. My country, 'tis of Thee…" (Breytenbach 1993: 9). There is a clear evolution in the term deriving from the political change that was being engineered at the time in the country. White Supremacy was giving way to majority rule and the positive anticipation can be sensed when the label is adjusted to "Everybody's Land". The enthusiasm dissipates later on in Breytenbach's work and the term "No Man's Land" becomes "Fuck-Land" (Breytenbach 2008a: 138), and it is a more restrictive label signifying the situation in the new South Africa, portraying Breytenbach's profound disgust for the developments in the country, as well as his renewed dissociation from the country. Breytenbach assessed the post-Apartheid situation already in an essay called "Cold Turkey" in 1996: "By the time the liberation movements were allowed again to operate legally inside the country and the exiles permitted to return, two essential dimensions of our dreamspace had caved in – 'virtual socialism' had collapsed, 'national liberation' on the African model, so it turned out, had led to disastrous misery nearly everywhere" (Breytenbach 1996: 101). Voicing and anticipating the demise of the ANC, incontrovertibly estranged Breytenbach from the movement and the support with which they could have provided him.

He also found it impossible to fit into the "New South Africa":

> It is true that I have been back to that no man's land, but I soon found that
> I couldn't fit in, that I could neither condone the conversions of those who
> switched overnight from being privileged members of the master class to
> the pen-carriers for the liberators (without missing a goosestep, as it
> were), nor continue unquestioningly to support in the name of 'unity' the
> cause I helped struggle for. 'Unity in the in the face of the enemy', I found,
> was the strategy exerted to establish a new hegemony of mediocrity
> where the notion of quality, for example, was decried as 'bourgeois

irrelevant'. The fragrance of revolution had been blown away by the stench of politics.

(Breytenbach 1996: 100)

Breytenbach's disdain with the hypocrisy of representatives of the previous regime estranged him, and their successful integration into the power structure of the new government disgusted him. The lack of integrity on the part of the political leadership to uphold socialist ideals and to implement structures to alleviate the misery of the Poor, pushed him to the periphery of South-African politics and a dissociation from the ANC. He becomes ambivalent in his attitude towards this "No Man's Land" that is still hostile to the Poor and oppressive towards the Powerless.

"No Man's Land" also refers to other countries ravaged by war and corrupt regimes. In the poem "visiting the forefather's grave at "Bac Giang, 4 December 1995", referring to the Vietnamese province in the Red River Delta, this war-torn area is described as a "No Man's Land": "Everything must grow and live from the dying./ This is no-man's-land, always threatened by invaders" (Breytenbach 2002: 54).

In the same anthology - *Lady One* – Breytenbach refers to a "nowhere land" in relation to the situation of exiles:

> mene mene tekel
> […]
> wallwriting
> is always in a foreign tongue
> in nowhere land
>
> in nowhere land
> I forfeited the pleasure of rhyme
> and no longer trim the feeling to my hand-writing
> the moon's clockwork is a dead-eye watch
> [...]

(Breytenbach 2002: 27)

The brokenness of exiles is represented in this poem - the lost dreams and inner struggles - and 'nowhere land' become representative, not only of alienation and foreignness, but also of a sense of loss, disillusion and impending disaster – a space where the visions of dreamers and revolutionaries dissolve into a "white silence" and a "cremation" by "soulfire". There is also an echo of "Netherland" from the *Peter Pan* fairy tale in the ring of this appellation, emphasising the hopelessness of their plight and their struggle, and the naïve idealism with which they had undertaken this mission. In this anthology, there is a clear evolution of "No Man's Land" and a transition to "Middle World" is appearing in the references to a "Middle Kingdom" (page 54) and "Middle Empire" (page 30).

Definitions without specific labels identifying certain aspects of "Middle World" start appearing. An example of one such aspect is found in *Dog Heart*:

Yet: within the confines of these blue walls one can see the still smouldering campfires of the trekvolk, the eternal migrants. On, towards the great transformation, the *groot andersmaak*. It is in the congealment during the shift of the prism, in the last illusion of meaning during the fragmentation, in the half-closing of the eye against the smoke, in the transition of one essence to etiolation (and later another essence) that the ache is naked.

(Breytenbach 1998: 69)

The transition and continual transformation taking place within the South-African communities are exemplified by looking at a specific nomadic cross-section and the disappearance of this specific community into a liminal state. "Middle World" un-citizens also enter into perpetuated liminality and metamorphosis ("die groot andersmaak" / "the big alteration" – my translation).

In *A Veil of Footsteps*, which form part of the "Middle World" Trilogy, both concepts of "No Man's Land" and "Middle World" are present. The former is referred to as a "bone orchard", signalling the insubstantial character of urban anonymity: "To die nameless and be put away in some no man's land where the relics are as shadows. Bone orchard just beyond the outer limits of the city where sense peters away in vacancy and evening will have the feathers of ravens." (Breytenbach 2008a: 12). The latter takes on a range of meanings from consciousness: "this middle world of consciousness" (Breytenbach 2008a: 69), to signalling the "country" labelled "Middle World": "A man from nowhere, a citizen of the Middle World" (Breytenbach 2008a: 81); to a space: "So, for me it is a site – an outcrop of the Middle World – where the dialectic between *space* and *movement* can be enacted." (Breytenbach 2008a: 221), to identity, memory and writing: "Mangled and fractured Middle World pictures. Words" (Breytenbach 2008a: 301).

"Middle World" has become an overarching and ever-present concept in Breytenbach's later work, erasing "No Man's Land" to a large extent, leaving only splinters of this previously prominent concept.

Chapter 6: "Middle World" as a reading strategy to Breytenbach's poetry:

The relevance of the literary theory identified in Breytenbach's work related to the "Middle World", needs to be established and will be explored in this section. The aim is to establish the value and practicability of the "Middle World" as a theory or as metaphor. The selection of poems was made from his most recent anthologies, posterior to the acknowledgement and development of "Middle World" as a metaphor, a concept, and a philosophy. The texts I have selected illustrate various aspects of "Middle World": the Beyond (/the interstice), nomadism, a process of "peeling the eyes" (as previously delineated), consciousness-formation, self-conscious expression, fluidity in identity, and the relationship between fact and fiction. In addition, post-structural elements and meta-writing are explored, as being intricately linked to "Middle World" philosophy, and the multiplicity of meaning is highlighted in the fourth poem illustrates the fluidity of meaning in relation to language. The exchange between metaphors and experience is the main reason for selecting the fifth poem, and the last poem the nada of the Zen experience – which is equally part of the "Middle World" experience – is illustrated, as well as death and departure. The essay mainly focuses the dissolution of the "I" in the multiple identities of the "Middle World".

In the first poem the focus will be on clarity, the peeling away of the illusions obscuring reality, and on how the writing process advances the identification of these moments.

> die hart-stér
> (vir Caro)
>
> *"uiterste helderheid is 'n misterie"* - Magmoud Darwiesj
>
> die wolke sal bly
>
> tussen water en wind
>
> om die lig te bou
>
> in tuimelende binding
>
> en ontbinding van herinnerde drome
>
>
> agter die berg
>
> onthou 'n maan
>
> die klank van donkerte
>
> die klip se gesig
>
> ingeskerp in kwartiere van sien
>
>
> is ons die vel van die aarde

wat met die jare sal plooi

tot verborge patrone van liefde?

Is ons die vlam om die fees

van verloorders te vier?

wie sal met ons praat

van die huweliksoptog

ingeskeep in die gedig?

wie sal ons vertel

van die vlees se vokale?

kyk, in jou hand

bewe verbeelding se lettergrepe nog

soos die lewe van vlindervlerke

en wie ken die vreemdeling se land?

kyk weer die blou planeet

se nagmusiek uitgemeet

in die uitspansel van jou hand:

daar is geen liefde

wat nie weerklank is nie

en verder as geheue

in die weggange van ewige

beweging gevou

rook die hart

so stil soos 'n oog

die wolke sal bly

en verder as geheue

in die ewigheid van drome

brand die hart soet en seer

want heerlik, heerlik, heerlik

is die lewe! /

the heart-star

(for Caro)

"extreme clarity is a mystery" - Magmoud Darwisj

the clouds will stay

between the water and the wind

to build the light

through tumbling unison

and the decaying of recalled dreams

behind the mountain

a moon remembers

the sound of darkness

and the face of stone

inculcated in the quarters of sight

are we the earth's skin

that will fold over the years

into hidden patterns of love?

are we the flame of the festival

to celebrate losers?

who will talk to us

about the wedding procession

shipped into the poem?

who will tell us

about the flesh of vowels?

look, in your hand

the syllables of imagination are still shivering

like the life of butterfly wings -

who ever sings the song of flying departure

and who knows the stranger's country?

look the music of the night

of the blue planet

has been measured again

in the expanse of your hand:

there is no love

that isn't an echo

and further than memory

folded in the lost corridors

of eternal movement

the heart is smoking

as silent as an eye

the clouds will remain

and further than memory

in the eternity of dreams

the heart is burning sweet and sore

because wonderful, wonderful, wonderful

is life!

(Breytenbach 2011: 65-66 – my translation)

The title of this poem consists of a conjunction of organic, biological matter with a celestial body. The reference to a heart (a symbol of the emotional centre of humans) sets the tone of the poem as sentimental, subjective, irrational and unscientific. The heart being an essential life-sustaining organ, has the added field of meaning of life and death. The combination of these two elements forces the reader to enter into the process of constructing meaning right from the start – as the references and comparisons are hidden. The dance has thus begun.

The image of a heart-star could also imply that the heart is part of the celestial cycles and has been formed from the same material than the one constituting stars. A star can also act as a guide and the implication could be that the heart should be followed.

The epigraph immediately changes the tone from romantic anticipation to a philosophical one. Moreover, the illogical statement introduces a typical Zen Buddhist approach, again emphasising the strong refutation of reason.

An in-between space is delineated in the first stanza: the clouds are in-between the water and the wind (literally and figuratively), and the metaphor of their tumbling construction of light which binds everything together, shows the inherent power they possess to perpetuate their existence, a power which is lacking in humans. The formation of dreams is compared to the fleeting shapes of the clouds – binding and dissolving constantly. The passing quality of dreams is underlined by the dissolution of recollections, which is emphasised by the enjambment.

The personification in the second stanza, as well as the synaesthesia, transcend the separation between human and non-human elements once more. One is reminded of prehistoric processes and presences like stones and mountains and moons.

The perspective of the lyrical subject is hard to determine and seems to be shifting. There is no clear identity. Who is seeing, who is looking? The whole of mankind? Every element in the universe? Consciousness-formation thus becomes a very broad and open-ended process.

The mystery of love recaptures the epigraph in the third stanza. The repeated rhetorical questions indicate a continual movement in the thought-processes. There is a constant motion and no final answers are offered. This motion forms an integral part of "Middle World" consciousness: nothing is final, permanent or fixed.

The meta-writing in the fourth stanza situates the corporeality of the human within a different context: from being reduced to dust in the third stanza – reshaping the surface of the earth - the poem becomes flesh, the vowels and consonants constitute a body. This body is the flame at the festival of losers. And a flame will burn out and become ashes. Thus, the poem becomes a corpse. An irredeemable, ephemeral moment. The reference of losers is not clearly defined but it could be pointing towards the fugacious nature of the human existence burning out in a flitting instant.

Nomadism, another inherent quality to "Middle World" existence, is prevalent in the fifth stanza and there is a shift between reader and writer: the reader seems to be writing as she/ he is reading or observing. The delicate nature of life and its fragility are expressed in the simile "like the life in butterfly wings". The beauty and ephemeral aspect of life are encompassed by the image of the butterfly. The reference is not only to life, however, but to the creative process, to writing: "the syllables of the imagination are still shivering". It is significant that the syllables are in the hand of the reader/ writer, just as the music of the whole planet is held in one hand. The importance of the creative act is thus highlighted as opening up the interstice to the beyond, the 'real', the music of the 'blue planet'.

The music of the night again reminds one of the motif of dance and the presence of ritual. Love is an echo, it is not an original emotion. There is a reference to the primal human in this allusion – love is ageless and at the same time reverberating whenever experienced through creation. Poetry is a form of love-making, a form of wedding between reader and writer, reader and text, words and concepts/ images, words and the white page. The eroticism of the whole process is a form of love, a kind of wedding procession.

There is an evolution towards the end of the poem when the dreams become part of eternity and the heart's fire seems to be unceasing as well. The experience of this moment of the 'real', piercing the veil and slipping through the cracks, inserts itself into the fabric of the whole, and therefore takes on an immutable quality. Breytenbach also transcends binary oppositions in the last stanza, uniting pain and delight as a delicious experience - which is life.

The "Middle World" theory is clearly present and useful in looking into this poem: the process of peeling takes place to open up a moment of enlightened clarity; the nomadism and constant movement are present as inherent qualities of the creative process and the unfolding of life as love; the erotic dance as interaction between reader and text as ritual is present reaffirming the intensity of the 'real' found in the transcended interstice, the in-between moment.

Another poem used to illustrate the "Middle World" theory in Breytenbach's work is "12.6" from his latest anthology:

12.6

sien: oorhoofs 'n stroom sterre

in vloed na die nêrens

en tussen die lettergrepe

soos geheue gesigte, kyk:

die suiderkruis om die hals

van die lyk van die digter

wat klokklok vooroorbukkend

              die misterie

van woordverval met handskryf

wou besweer   en verdrink het

in die alfabet van weerspieëlniet /

12.6

see: overhead a stream of stars

in flood towards nowhere

and in-between the syllables

like memory faces, look:

the southern cross around the neck

of the corpse of the poet

that bending forward dong-dong

wanted to allay with hand-writing

        the mystery

of word-decay   and drowned

in the alphabet of mirror reflection voids.

        (Breytenbach 2014: 40- my translation)

This whole poem centres on the Beyond and the in-between spaces when sentences leave the reader suspended with their chopped, interrupted, staccato quality.

A potent metaphor engulfs memory in faces of flowing stars on their way to the big 'Nowhere' and these faces are like syllables. There is a contagion of a number of different fields and elements in this metaphor: the inversion of heaven and earth and sky and water; the contamination of memory with language and both forming part of the "stream of stars". The colon after the opening word of the poem further enhances the metaphor as an explanation of the faculty of seeing, of perception. The repetition of the visual sense as a more active engagement recaptures the initial metaphor and unifies the poem, inviting the reader to repeat the process of consciousness-formation in a slightly altered way, providing the reader with a further explanation of the unfolding situation.

The previous explicit reference to the writing process in the shape of syllables becomes more developed in the second part of the poem. The dead poet is trying to allay the mystery of the decaying of words and is drowned in the stream of stars – resulting in the corpse having the Southern Cross as a garland around its neck. The onomatopoeia "klokklok" imitates the sound of a water colliding with an object: the body of the poet beats against the stream of stars, which reflects the mystery of decay while the body entangles itself in the refractions of the alphabet of the Void. The interrelatedness of the creative process with decay and death, with the complexities of concept-formation (the "stream of stars" can also be read as a stream of consciousness), and the inability to escape from using language to portray consciousness and the Void, are all elements emphasised in this poem and the latter is yet again very post-structuralist in nature. The creative process is always in the past tense: it is based on memories which form part of the imaginary process and the poem is always a reference to a moment of insight create through writing the poem, which becomes past as soon as it is pinned down. There is a sense of hopelessness in the attempt to fight the decomposition of the creation in this poem but at the same time the total immersion of the poet in the end in the creative process, as well as in the Void, is indicative of unification and a moment of Nirvana.

Once again in this poem the emphasis is on the Beyond, the interstice, on movement and change, and thus on the less concrete aspects of the "Middle World" concept but looking to a greater extend at the philosophical implications of consciousness, of the interrelatedness of life and death/ decay, the inability to escape language, the relationship between imagination and memory, the ultimate Nothingness.

A more overtly academic approach is adopted in the following poem:

> "frottage"
> *"Bien avant de servir à communiquer,*
> *la langue sert à vivre"* - Emile Benveniste
>
> wat deurgaan vir 'betekenis'
> is *klankruimte* – m.a.w.
> (met ander woorde)
> die proses waarop woord en kleurtekstuur
> in die stil spuitspieël van die blad
> 'n gesprek oopknoop wat lei tot verhouding
> en kontteks waarbinne indrukke
> oogbetuiging en uitdrukking word
> (want sien):
> met ruimte kom beweging
> met verbastering kom denke
> en die donkie verklank tot woordwoordens
> toe en nou weer hoenou/
>
> "frottage"
> *"Well before being used for communication,*
> *language served to live"* - Emile Benveniste
>
> that which passes for 'meaning'
> is *soundspace* – i.o.w.
> (in other words)
> the process on which word and the texture of colour
> in the quiet spraymirror of the canvas
> unbutton a conversation that leads to relationship
> and cunttext within which impressions
> the testimony and the expression of the eye become
> (because you see):
> with space comes movement
> with bastardisation comes thoughts
> and the donkey sounds till words become
> then and again now what now
> <div align="right">(Breytenbach 2012: 60 – my translation)</div>

The title of this poem immediately evokes the process of uncovering images by applying pressure to a paper covering an object beneath it. Max Ernst, a prominent surrealist painter was particularly known for using frottage to convey his fascination with existing patterns forming unexpected images in his mind by looking at them. He was, for instance, fascinated by the grains of an old wooden floor and captured the images formed by these grains by laying paper over them and rubbing a soft pencil over these to make them become visible.

This process can be repeated several times with the same piece of paper and different objects placed beneath it, creating a multitude of layered shapes and forms. Apart from this obvious reference to the visual arts of the layering of images and meanings, there are other possible interpretations: brushing against a stranger in passing on the street or the inducing of sexual pleasure of applying one's body to another person's.

The quotation from Emile Benveniste brings to the attention of the reader a much-neglected philosopher and linguist from the twentieth century. As a successor of Saussure in the evolution of Saussure's thinking, one tends to immediately classify Benveniste as a structuralist without further consideration. Kristeva however, wrote an enlightening introduction to a publication of his last lessons (delivered in 1968) and published in 1969:

> Dans le sillage de la philosophie analytique (les énoncés performatifs) mais aussi de la psychanalyse freudienne, Benveniste conçoit la *subjectivité dans l'énonciation* comme un émetteur bien plus complexe que le sujet cartésien, car il l'élargit à l'«intentionnel» (emprunté à la phénoménologie existentielle). De surcroît, et sans y paraître, il esquisse une ouverture vers le sujet de l'«inconscient». Pas vraiment «structuré comme un langage», mais travaillé par une «force anarchique» (pulsionnelle?) que le langage «refrène et sublime», bien que par «déchirures» elle puisse introduire en lui un «nouveau contenu, celui de la motivation inconsciente et un symbolisme spécifique», «quand le pouvoir de la censure est suspendu». /

> On the trail of analytical philosophy (the performed utterances) but also of the Freudian psychoanalysis, Benveniste conceived *subjectivity in the utterance* acknowledging an utterer much more complex than the Cartesian subject, because he focused on the "intentional" (borrowed from the existential phenomenology). Moreover, inadvertently, he initiated an opening towards the subject of the "unconscious". Not really "structured like a language", but influenced by an "anarchic force" (pulsating?) that language "curbs and sublimates", although through "ruptures" the force can introduce within language a "new content, one of the motivation of the unconscious and a specific symbolism", "when the power of censorship is suspended".
>
> (Kristeva 1969: 13 – my translation)

Despite being labelled as a French structuralist, Benveniste's vision was far wider, encompassing surrealism, psycho-analytical elements, and the relativity of utterances as a result of the nature of language and the subjectivity of the utterer. He thus opened up the possibility for language to function in an unstructured, unpredictable way, allowing space for the irrational and symbolic. The quotation that Breytenbach selected from his work focuses on the life-giving or rather "life-enabling" function of language as opposed to a purely communicative function.

Benveniste's philosophy on language is reflected in the first three lines of the poem, as Breytenbach is clearly showing the relativity of "meaning" by equating it with a "soundspace" - a sensory and abstract fluiditiy as opposed to a structural construct. The

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abbreviation, which is subsequently fully written out, illustrates in a playful manner the arbitrary nature of signs in relation to signification. The focus shifts to the process of experiencing language: the metaphor used by Breytenbach is extremely complex and layered like a frottage. First of all, one has to bear in mind that all the images conjured up and mixed together within this metaphor behave like people brushing against each other – like intimate strangers. Taking apart the metaphor transcribed in the first four lines of the poem, a few prominent and recurrent symbols from Breytenbach's work resurface: the mirror, silence, space, the relational quality of everything.

Breytenbach illustrates that "meaning" is wrongly assumed to exist with a sense of finality to it. This could be read as a criticism of the structuralist approach to text, reading them in isolation and adding up all the clues to find the ultimate structure of the text within which the meaning is encoded.

Using synaesthesia, Breytenbach illustrates that "meaning" is actually a space created by sound, in accordance with Benveniste's statement that language does not first and foremost serve the purpose of communicating "meaning". Words also have texture created by colour and they appear in the silence of a "spraymirror". One could interpret the spray as graffiti being sprayed onto a mirror. A mirror is also illustrative of multiple identities and the ephemeral quality of a present moment. The paradoxical silence of the mirror, despite the "soundspace" of the words, is a pointer towards Buddhist enlightenment: sounds are not the opposite of silence. Words can be silent.

The word "blad" is hard to translate as it has so many references in Afrikaans that cannot be presented by any single English word within this context: it can refer to the surface of the mirror, the leaf of a book or an actual leaf, a canvas of a painting, or the shoulder-blade of a person. All of these references bound into one knot that can only be untied by establishing a conversation amongst all these elements. A conversation results in creating a relationship – another reference to Zen Buddhism where the relational supersedes content, meaning, or symbolism. The erotic nature of the relationship is conveyed by the wordplay "kontteks" or "cunttext". Context is established through the relationship of words, sounds, colours, and visual images to each other – of these elements being intimate with each other, resulting in the development of a cunt text.

The tone of the poem is persistently playful with a degree of sarcasm, irony and self-criticism. A theory of the function of language within expression is developed but constantly undermined by the tone, wordplay, light-hearted interjections, and incongruent images (the donkey). The playful tone defies meaning and to an extent the poem seems to become mere post-structural language game of signs and signifiers slipping and avoiding interpretation.

Impressions made through observation and the expression of these seem to be of importance however. These impressions on the mind need space within which to exist: when they are expressed and when they arise. Space entails movement which is essential to life – and thus language is life-enabling, even if communication is not or cannot be clearly established. Impressions of all sorts via all our senses create a bastardisation of thoughts, and this bastardisation opens up an entry into the "Middle World".

The ultimate humoristic element in the poem is the mention of the donkey. Donkeys can have so many possible symbolic interpretations – from intelligent, peaceful, and divine to idiotic. This unexpected twist is typical of Breytenbach's style and his confrontation of the reader with the incongruous, the unexpected and the unusual. The image of the donkey becomes like a frottage layered with all the mentioned possible references but he equally is responsible for creating sound – he seems to be learning to speak ("verklank" is usually associated with young speakers trying to read or speak properly). His learning process continues until words develop – whether expressed by the donkey or humans is unclear. The final line of the poem illustrates though that whichever words came forth, understanding or the transmission of meaning is not taking place.

Does Breytenbach attempt to subscribe to post-structural philosophical convictions through this poem or is he illustrating that "meaning" is not the ultimate function of expression? Perhaps both these points are valid and applicable to this poem. He is definitely looking at language and its function within society and its importance to our existence, though. He is also emphasising the inevitability of space created through expression and the continual movement in thought-processes that we need if we are to continue living, and specifically living in the "Middle World" where stagnation is impossible.

In the following poem, travelling – another "Middle World" characteristic -is central.
"klein reis"
my vriend sê:
die maan is die skerp rand
van 'n blik se deksel -
en ek sien hoe duisternis kerf

my vriend sê: kom kyk hoe bloeisel
die sterre soos smeulende vuurtjies
in 'n donker boom -
en ek droom van vaarte soos 'n ou verhaal

my vriend sê: jy praat kak -
en ek proe die brak smaak
van te veel woorde in die mond

my vriend verduidelik dat die see nat is:
en ek maan my -
dat ek nêrens by die huis sal wees nie/

"small travel"

my friend says:
the moon is the sharp edge
of a can's lid -
and I see how the darkness shreds

my friend says: come and have a look at the blossoming
            stars like smouldering fires
in a dark tree -
and I dream of cruises like an old story

my friend says: you are talking shit -
and I taste the bitter flavour
of too many words in the mouth

my friend explains that the sea is wet:
and I remind myself -
that I will not be at home anywhere
                    (Breytenbach 2012: 132 – my translation)

The travel or trip that is referred to in the title of the poem, is drawn to its logical conclusion in the last line of the poem: the realisation that subsequent to entering the "Middle World" space, interminable travel is inevitable, and that the speaker position as an un-citizen precludes consequent integration and belonging.

The question arises as to the nature of this small travel for the lack of direct references to travelling. The night-time musings, which could refer to actual dreams or reflections triggered by the view of the night-sky, could represent travelling through dreams.

The entire poem takes on the form of a sort of dialogue or story-telling: the friend conjures up images and proffers opinions and the speaker reacts to these comments on some level. The importance of this process resides in the consciousness-formation – the space that is opened up in the speaker's mind – that takes place, which is put forth as a sort of travel: dreaming, seeing, tasting, and a final resolution.

The dichotomy in the imagery used illustrates the lack of binary oppositions, as well as the Zen Buddhist belief that the relational is of utmost importance, and equally emphasising the overall nature of being and the range of our experiences, without introducing any judgement or distinction between the conventional western positive and negative elements – yet again reinforcing the Buddhist philosophy. The moon is brought in relation to the serrated edge of the lid of an open, used, and probably disposed can. Not only is this metaphor unusual, but it also extends itself to the emotional plane, when the speaker observes that the darkness "cuts". This paradoxical image can be interpreted in two different and related ways, namely that the moon or lid is cutting into the darkness, extending the presence of light in the night-sky; or that the darkness is omnipotent and malicious, inflicting wounds on its surroundings by cutting into everything. Pain and wounds are spaces from which creativity spring forth. The darkness therefore becomes a form-altering force, as opposed to the expected negative influence.

In the second stanza, the image of a magical sight is conjured up, set yet again against the backdrop of darkness: the stars are small blossoms that resemble fires, hanging from the tree. The presence of fire introduces both a destructive element and the creative "playing

with fire" performed by the poet. The result of the process is the trigger of the dream (memory/ imagination) of old cruises or pilgrimages which are compared to stories. At this point, the writing process overtly enters the poem.

When his friend swears at him in the third stanza, accusing him of expressing worthless ideas, the speaker can actually taste the bitterness of having pronounced too many words. One could imagine that the speaker/ poet feels that he is being crushed under all the words that he has uttered in his life. The tension between the superfluity and the futility of the writing process on the one hand, and the life-altering properties of this process on the other, is often pronounced in Breytenbach's poetry.

In the final stanza, all the elements are brought together when the water (used for cruises), coincides with the moon ("ek **maan** my" – maan being a pun with the added meaning of the moon). The speaker realises that as a traveller or writer or un-citizen, he will always be moving – either in his mind or physically. The "unhomeliness" indicates the state of mind of the un-citizen and the fluidity of and ongoing recreation of his/ her identity.
Waiting and leaving seem to be central elements explored in the following poem:

> "die afwag van die laaste woorde"
>
> toe ek 'n kind was
> te arm om 'n branderplank te bekostig
> was dit die begin van 'n lewe
> van lewenskratige avontuur
> om golwe met die lyf te ry,
> te wag vir die grote,
> en met vinnige hale die brekende kim
> te vang om kop tussen die uitgestrete arms
> tot op die sand te spoel
> weer en weer,
> te wag vir die grote,
> totdat jy vermoeid met geskeurde lyf versuip
>
> nou is dit nog so
> om die kruin en kindsheid uit die donker nag
> te vang
> gedagteloos onder 'n wentelende tonteldoos sterre
> solank die gety nog hou,
> te wag vir die grote,
> te ry totdat die water van 'n verdonkerende son
> die afwag van die laaste woorde wegspoel
> en die longe verstik aan asem soos aan water/
>
> "in suspense of the last words"
>
> when I was a child
> too poor to be able to afford a surf board

this was the start of a life
of vigorous adventure
to ride the waves with the body,
to wait for the big one,
and to catch the spuming crest
with brisk strokes
and to be washed up on the sand
head between outstretched arms
again and again,
to wait for the big one,
until you drown exhausted with a lacerated body

it is still the same now
to catch the summit and the childhood from the dark night
thoughtless under an orbiting tinderbox of stars
as long as the tide lasts,
to wait for the big one,
to ride until the water of a darkened sun
wash away the anticipation of the last words
and the lungs choke on breath as on water

<div align="center">(Breytenbach 2012: 82 – my translation)</div>

The end and the finality of death is often represented by Breytenbach as the termination of the creative process. When a "Middle World" un-citizen refrains from pursuing the creative process of constant change, of dancing: "You will also be your own ancestor and your own landscape. You will be patterned movement towards the absurdity of death, which is the extinction of consciousness, with decay the dissolution of patterns" (Breytenbach 2009c: 165).

The speaker contrasts the power and energy of youth to the fading of the exuberance in this poem. The speaker in his youth, struggled with the sea on an ongoing basis, with delight. He paid little attention to the bruising that the sea inflicted upon him, or to the lacerations that ultimate resulted in his disappearance or "drowning". The simplicity of this boy - pitting himself against the power of the sea, while waiting for a big wave - creates a light-hearted tone and a familiar vision in the mind of the reader. The final result of the boy "drowning" is unexpected however and foreshadows the following stanza.

There is a shift from the past recollection to the present moment when the speaker opens the second stanza reaffirming his ongoing pursuit of the big wave, acknowledging that this activity is childlike, however exciting the quest for the summit. There is a distinct evolution in this stanza, though. There is a sense of a progression towards an ending "as long as the tide still lasts". Another important image is the fact that the speaker is currently trying to capture the night, floating in a thoughtless state, looking at the stars – which are again referred to as sparks or fire. The sun is eclipsed and the last words are washed away as the speaker chokes on his own breath, in a similar manner to the young boy who choked on the water. In the final lines, the correspondence between the above-quotation and the loss of words become clear: once breath is lost, and consciousness falls short, patterns disappear.

As a result, we have to travel and dance, making the footprints of our ancestors visible again and again for as long as the "tide" lasts. Thus we dance the world to life, thus we experience the nada – the Void.

In the following essay, the philosophical realms become even more prominent, and the fact that the essay was published shortly after Breytenbach's first open mention of "Middle World" makes it all the more relevant to this study.

"this unmemorable memory exists!"

I know D.E. You could say as well as I'd know my own brother. Years ago when I was in prison, he passed on to me a sheaf of notes which I tried to make into a story. If you read *Mouroir* you may come across it. It was a generous gesture. I owe him a favour. Today, 22 July 1986, here in Rotterdam, I have the chance to repay the debt. It is sunny but not hot. D.E. has given me a speech to read. Thirty-four people are standing in the shade along the banks of a canal. Maga is here and so are Taraxippos, Bert, Kure, Hartpagos, Phlogée, Djaran... We are taking part in the ceremony of *saluting the tree of poetry*. I shall now read the notes, the inaugural remarks. Nobody knows D.E. Sometimes the noise of passing vehicles drowns out my voice. A small girl watches me intently, a finger in her mouth. The branches are decorated with ribbons of many colours. And these flutter in the wind.

It is with an immense sense of satisfaction that I stand here today. The word dreamt in the anonymity of prison has become sap and fibre. It will be tangible like a tree. The present word may be a noise, like a passing tram, but the absent one is space. It is resonance. We are here to consecrate absence.

It is with an equally enormous feeling of awe and humility that I stand under this tree. The tree is a creator of space and this one here particularly so, because it is ancient and indifferent to human foibles, but still intent upon drawing poets to it, as if poets were birds – to the awareness of absence, of earth-forces, and thus to infinity.

We are here to inaugurate the as yet non-existent memorial to the unknown or the anonymous poet. Were I to do it in the correct way I would have had to stand silent. But just as the tree must produce space to *be* tree, the poet must create words to encapsulate the silence.

Elsewhere, I have communicated the mysterious notes that came into my possession while I was living underground, probably during 1976. At that point I was just passing along an old need; perhaps I was merely the unwitting instrument in the bringing about of a place where oblivion could be predicated and practised endlessly. And now we stand here and I have, too, a real feeling of *recognition*. This is the right place; here are the right people; these are the requisite elements: tree, water, the stones to come.

In parts of Africa – in Senegal, Mali and Niger, for instance, when a *griot* dies, his fellows will take the mortal remains to be hidden in the hollow trunk of a baobab because he constitutes the word-weaving memory of his people. It is a way of positioning him for ever where heaven and earth meet and merge. Perhaps this tree here, the subject of our

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meeting – hanging tree, burial platform, labyrinth of budding life – could also be a place where poets will come ultimately to be consumed by the flames of forgetting.

And in Delphi, I am told, there is a tree just like this one, a plane tree also (maybe it is the very same one; what do we really know about the deep run of roots?), shading the Castalian waters. There, people went to be purified before going up to consult the oracle. There the Pythianmaids, or the prophetesses, drank the water and munched the laurel leaves that would lead them into the dark-seeing trance. That, after all, was why poets were crowned with the poisonous wreaths. Delphi, the navel of the world where the young Apollo, son of heaven, was to slay the python guarding the entrance to the earth – thus inheriting the chthonian strength, the subterranean force, the hidden word. Thus is heaven and earth united. And we know that there by the water of *Ga* spouting from Parnassus, Apollo always spoke obliquely, in the form of verse, the way we too are condemned or chosen to do...

By all means, let us not be distracted from the horrors of our everyday realities; let us continue denouncing and combatting the killing and the maiming of the slow indifference and death of memory. But to be a poet – that is, to aspire to the grace of pain – however obscurely, means not to lie. Let us, therefore, then also validate that other reality, the blacker one of primordial poetry. Let us be where water flows and a tree grows, where there's no conflict, where snakes make us dream and touch the deeper layers of integration. We must be intimate with ourselves, we must uncover the earth in us, the icy wall of eternal ecstasy, where stones live out their colours like washed-up petrified breaths of whales. We want to express the secret vote of unquestioned belonging, to mesh consciousness and matter – and matter is awareness. We have to concretize the need *not* to make public. Here is our place of no name. The roof of the flame. No selfishness – just the purity of creation. It will be the bottomless hole which, for once, will have no *function* – except that, the most important one, of distilling a shared crucible.

I hereby declare that this tree, this unknownness, this unmemorable memory exists!
(Breytenbach 1990: 29-31)

The narrator starts out by referring to mirrors in the mention of D.E. (Don Espejuelo – little mirror), which immediately creates manifold identities and reflections and these identities enter into a dialectic with representation as creation. The creative process is foregrounded in the mention of the decision-making process involved in choosing material for a text. D.E. is put forth as a real person, as well as a deliverer of inspirational material – a kind of muse. If one considers identity-formation and the related complexities in the "Middle World" context, it follows naturally that this process can propel a person to explore these complexities on a more philosophical level. The narrator is deliberately blurring the lines between perceived reality and fiction by introducing a fictional character as an inspiration for fiction. Adjacent to this essay, there is a painting where the distinction between perceived reality and the artistic creation is equally indistinct. This interplay results in a sense of absence in the presence configured on the page and this feeling is underlined by the narrator: "The present word may be a noise, like a passing tram, but the absent one is space. It is resonance. We are here to consecrate absence" (Breytenbach 1990: 29). Absence is related to the Void, the Beyond, Nothingness, eternity, the 'earth-forces', the interstices opening up the 'real'. The narrator is insisting that "the unmemorable memory" exists, in

other words, there are elements beyond our conscious awareness and they do exist despite our ignorance. This space is the "Middle World" in consciousness-formation.

The importance of ritual is again encapsulated in the mention of the griot and his role as poet within the oral African tradition: "the *griot* constitutes the word-weaving memory of his people" (Breytenbach 1990: 30). The burial ritual of a griot in the hollow trunk of a baobab is significant to the salutation of the tree of poetry – the ritual with which the narrative is concerned. The tree represents meeting place, burial site, and a labyrinth of new life. The tree is also a cremation site: "... could also be a place where poets will come ultimately to be consumed by the flames of forgetting" (Breytenbach 1990: 30). The narrator takes the reader back to Greek mythology, claiming that this tree could be related to a specific tree in Delphi, where Pythian maids and prophetesses entrance themselves. Trance is an altered state of awareness that can again refer to "Middle World" consciousness. The importance of the "Middle World" is even more prominent in the following section where Delphi is referred to as the "navel of the world" (the middle, the centre) and where Apollo found "the hidden word" - the zone of "primordial poetry". The narrator concludes that this "unknownness" exists. This is the zone of the shaman – of the healer.

The fluidity of place and space in this text underscores the relevance of "Middle World" existence as a mode opening up awareness, which enables unification and integration of an individual within the whole via ritual, and in doing so, enables healing to take place.

Having selected only certain elements to highlight from each text, I have tried to illustrate that "Middle World" and its characteristic features can serve as a reading strategy to Breytenbach's work. "Middle World" experiences are varied, sensual, unconventional, and metamorphic. The reader arrives at a third dimension through a "peeling of the eyes" because a "Middle World" un-citizen is always "seeking", entering the Void through ritual.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

> What one is left with will be Middle World *pictures* of people and places.
> Mostly processes of killing, for man is born to the art of killing and the
> unquenchable lust for making war. Why? Because we cannot keep the
> past alive however much we twist it, and we cannot *see* the future. We kill
> because we cannot hang on to the present. That is why we have to make
> pictures to gouge out the eyes of awareness. Man's awareness consists of
> the sequences and the consequences of killing or being killed. We prefer
> the pictures to the eyes.
>
> (Breytenbach 2008a: 301)

The killing fields of the "Middle World" enable the resident un-citizens to savour the Mobius strip of pictures which shows the sequential slaughters and mutilations. The ritual participation in these repetitive dances retells the human existence in fragments of stirred dust, resulting in the hybridisation of all involved.

Wrung from our awareness of our inability to face the anguish of our existential dilemma, a "Middle World" takes shape: this space of consciousness formation is constituted by a fleeting series of "pictures", giving evidence of the way in which we treat awareness; it is an in-between space of unbelonging, triggering creative reactions from the un-citizens to adapt to the global context. In the above quotation, Breytenbach stipulates the reaction of humans to their anguish as astonishingly violent. At the same time, these shocking lines could be interpreted as a later form of Ars Poetica - a comprehensive pointer towards the content of the concept of the "Middle World". "Middle World" here defines the creative process with the play on the word "pictures": these could refer to paintings, photographs, memories, and/ or images conjured up in the mind as a result of exposure to some sort of stimuli – artistic or other. The irony of the above statement resides in the reader's inability to separate the "pictures" from "awareness", underlining the futility of the process – "gouging" out the "eyes" of awareness, while simultaneously bearing witness to the process by representing the mutilation artistically, or having as only proof of this awareness the resort to the artistic creation. The pictures have to be mutilated to escape from our awareness – even though these pictures equally constitute both our creative escape and our awareness itself. As if confronted by a typical Zen riddle, the thought-process ends at its starting point, reflecting our incomprehension back at us when arriving at this point which in itself is an empty space. At this moment, we enter the "Middle World".

In an attempt at defining a new position for the global un-citizens of the world, Breytenbach's work has inevitably evolved towards the concept of the "Middle World" within which all "non-classifiable" persons can be captured and are able to find an interactive, liminal space within which to exist and express themselves. This space is in continual formation and as such, the un-citizens cannot become sedentary and have to continue their migrations – whether on a physical or intellectual level or both. The mind-space opened up by the confrontation of the un-citizens with the unexpected and unfamiliar, creates a psychological discomfort which results in adaptation, redefinition and

hybridisation. The confrontation can be created within the context of a written text or a visual element. The process does not only appertain to the reader but also to the writer/ artist, who is opening up the interstices of the 'real'.

The "Middle World" is also illustrative of a similar process taking place on the level of consciousness formation of the individual. Time cannot be captured and the ephemeral nature of humans creates profound distress on an emotional level: a distress that results in such extremes as killing (according to Breytenbach). Breytenbach proposes a healing process in the form of poetry (or art in general). The consciousness of the person is recreated when confronted by the incongruous elements brought together in metaphors or on canvasses. This alteration may bring about wounding and scorching but opens up a beyond to the reader/ viewer that enables a moment of interaction/ dance with the unknown, the immutable, the nada. In this exchange, humans are able to leave new prints in the dust, to dance into being ancient rhythms, to commune with stones and bones.

Consciousness formation intricately engages the senses to the extent that the exchange takes on a form of eroticism. This communion creates a passing union and relational involvement within which ritualistic elements of healing transpire. The reader/ viewer starts to breathe awareness through a peeling away of all conventional perceptions, and thus Breytenbach's work can be read against itself as its own critical framework.

Deconstruction is a way of "peeling away" conventional perceptions, but as Breytenbach has pointed out – the game of discourse, however enlightening and revolutionary, remains largely meaningless. Willie Burger in his inaugural address gave the following pointers in order to find a new direction to further this debate:

> The deconstruction of presuppositions and certainties eventually leads to a cynical relativism, an ironic way of living where nothing is real and where "anything goes". The author and critic underwriting these ideas indeed rid us from an obsolete cultural ideal but in the process render itself irrelevant.
>
> In these circumstances, it is argued that there is a need for "engaged criticism": a kind of criticism (deduced from the idea of "littérature engagée") that appeals to the reader to take full responsibility for his/her own being in the world, an evaluative criticism that does not return to superseded humanistic beliefs but that values literature that enable us to share our most important questions and our deepest emotions.
>
> (Burger 2012: 1)

The process of sharing and of engaging is directly related to the "Middle World" experience of healing, of discovery, and of enlightenment.

Breytenbach has in the process of defining "Middle World" also developed a transition between time and space, historicity and history, fact and fiction, the rational and the irrational. He has provided the reader with an approach to life and death, a tool to survival through the continual renewal of her-/ himself to the rhythm of the metaphors with which

she/ he is presented. In this manner, Breytenbach has developed an approach to all art forms, to the environment, to the global world, to political dilemmas and to the onslaught of the media. The reader is urged to look for creative solutions using her/ his imagination to escape the vicious cycle of oppression and killing; one is urged to write against annihilation, to continue moving and to partake in ritual experiences in order to heal – the healing provided by residing in the "Middle World".

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