The Crowd, the Machine and the Whore

Some Motifs in South African Migrant Performance

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In this article I am concerned with a genre of Zulu dance and song called isicathamiya. Performed by male a cappella choirs, isicathamiya has in recent years attracted a great deal of international attention thanks to the remarkable success of the highly acclaimed Durban-based choir Ladysmith Black Mambazo. But, like other black South African performance genres that have received increased scholarly attention, such as Basotho sefela songs (Coplan 1986, 1987, 1988) and Zulu ingoma dancing (Clegg 1982, 1984; Erlmann 1989; Thomas 1988), isicathamiya is deeply interwoven with the overall process of urbanization and labor migration in South Africa. An element of the local cultures of Zulu-speaking migrant workers for more than half a century, isicathamiya is currently being performed throughout the year during weekly all-night competitions in a number of township halls, hostel recreation halls, and similar venues in Durban, Johannesburg, and other industrial centers. Although in recent years the popularity of these weekend events has somewhat given way to soccer games and other mass entertainments, the competitions still involve up to 20 or more choirs and attract audiences of 50 to several hundred spectators.

Closer examination of the migratory strategies and the heterogeneity of life experiences of isicathamiya proponents undermines the notion of a singular social position as a monocausal determinant of performance practice (Erlmann 1995). Performance, I suggest, does not emanate from a social base, it is itself a field of changing and conflicting social relations. This

position, it is true, echoes a growing theoretical concern in the social sciences and the humanities with the text, that is to say, with social practice as nothing but a web of free-floating signifiers. On this view, meaning does not reside in the music, as one of musicology's most entrenched fictions would have it, but is essentially produced in the ever-shifting interaction between actors, interpreters, and performers. How and why certain social actors, by producing and perceiving certain patterns of sound and movement, make sense of their world, is more a question of discursivity and intertextuality than of knowing some presumed, a priori truth or meaning.

All of this, of course, in turn reflects the notion inherent in almost all present-day anthropology that culture - the socially maintained and historically constituted practices, beliefs, and symbols - is a system of texts to be read and endowed with multiple meanings. The results of this textual turn in anthropological theory are well known, and so are the main lines of contention in the debates this paradigmatic shift has generated. None of this needs to be reiterated here.

One critique, however, increasingly being voiced in recent times, is worth recalling. The preoccupation with the text, the 'epistemocentrism' and indeed the sheer obsession observable in much of current anthropology and in the social sciences generally with social processes as theatre and semantics, appear to be the result in part of the profound changes in the role of knowledge and the social position of intellectuals in modernity. It is thus that a number of theorists working from a critical re-evaluation of science, scholarship and the role of intellectuals in a broadly antihegemonic politics, insist on a difference between theory and practice. The world, apart from whatever it may be to intellectuals who cast their theoretical eye (*theorein*) on it, is a totality of concrete problems that call for practical answers (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), even if these problems and the answers now overwhelmingly seem to be located in the realm of culture.

The development of an alternative notion of space and bodily practice as a central category of a politics of resistance has proved to be particularly crucial in this project. The work of Edward Soja (1989), Fredric Jameson (1991), and especially the later work of Henri Lefèbvre (1991), in my view, can be read as an attempt to recover space and spatiality as a concept countering the triumph of the sign, that profoundly mystifying logic of late capitalism which makes (real) relations of domination and subordination disappear under a giant metatext. Global capitalism, Lefèbvre

argues, has hidden from critical scrutiny an all-embracing spatiality which is built on uneven development and which is central to the maintenance of the power relations that mark this social order. To uncover these spatial orders and to make ideas leave their mark on space, in other words to produce space, is therefore the first step in demystifying this world as socially produced and thus transformable.

More than a medium, a frame or, worse, a fashionable formula for the reshaping of social theory, space then for Lefèbvre is above all a 'materialization of social being (1991:102)'. This notion of space may perhaps be illustrated by a distinction of which Michel de Certeau has reminded us. Space, de Certeau says, must be distinguished from place, a term which denotes a location in which two things cannot be at the same time. Place is ruled by the law of the 'proper.' Space, by contrast, is 'actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it' and has none of the stability of the 'proper'; it is a 'practiced place' (de Certeau 1984:117).

Lefèbvre and the other authors mentioned limit their discussion of space to the industrialized societies of the West. They might have found interesting evidence, however, in the growing body of literature addressing itself to the spatial organization of societies on the margin of the First World (e.g. Moore 1986). Although increasingly swept up by the spatial regime of global capitalism, these societies often exhibit a practice in which the disjunctures between the sign and its referent and the concomitant loss of spatial anchoring of human practice typical of modernity are still, by and large, absent. Here the body still maintains a relationship with space that is more immediate and not yet veiled by the pervasiveness of the commodity-sign. Although social practice everywhere is constituted in the dialectic of action and meaning and societies everywhere and at all times have been culturally saturated, the signifying practices of societies differ and so does, within these, the role of space in ordering and representing human practice.

Taking these considerations into account, I shall argue that in isicathamiya performance the vanishing symbols and crumbling orders of the past are returned to and remade in a complex set of spaces. But instead of asking what these mean as signs, I see these spaces foremost as embodiments of an imagined order, located in a heroic past, beyond the here and now, and constructed through multi-sensory communicative means such as sound texture, dress, and dance.

Space, then, as I understand it, is not another 'cultural text among many' (Moore 1986:189). Quite to the contrary, as a socially guided process, the production of space in performance is animated by the desire to fetter the random play of signifiers and the very disappearance of the signified imposed by the relentlessly disembedding logic of an extrinsic system.

In critiquing, then, these and other tenets of postmodern theory, I wish to sharpen our awareness of those aspects of South African reality that have remained hidden under the thick conceptual layers of structuralist and neo-marxist thought. For the attempts of historians and social scientists to provide 'realistic' accounts of the ongoing transformation of South African society have tended to underestimate the significance of culture and consciousness in this process. Individual experience, the emergence of multiple, fractured identities and the indeterminancies of meaning and social action have all been dealt with rather inadequately.

Perhaps it is this unfixity of meaning amidst the persistent divisions and semantic polarities of class and ethnicity in the post-colonial world that have led some scholars to re-examine the relationship between, inter alia, place and culture. Thus, Homi Bhabha, discussing recent South African literature, speaks of the 'unhomely' as a paradigmatic experience whose resonance can be heard in a wide range of historical conditions and social settings (1992). To be unhomely, he writes, does not simply mean to be homeless. Unhomeliness is a condition in which the border between home and world becomes confused, in which the private and the public become part of each other. The home no longer remains the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its counterpart. The unhomely, Bhabha concludes, 'is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world' (1992:141).

The unhomely, then, could, in a wider sense, be taken as that condition in which the making of an individual experience may well happen in one place, while its actual coordinates lie in a reality far beyond the limited space and often beyond the conceptual capacity of any one individual. The result of this strange dialectic of the private and the public, the near and the far, the local and the global is, to use Fredric Jameson's phrase, a "new play of absence and presence" (1991:411).

Isicathamiya performance, I would argue, like all forms of performance located at this particular juncture of the world-in-the-home and the home-in-the-world, not only captures this

moment, it is also inconceivable without this figurative play. To understand this, we now have to turn to the varied and multiply determined social worlds that govern isicathamiya performers' immediate experience and to the ways in which the experience of the unhomely is mediated and configured symbolically in three fundamental tropes: the crowd, the machine, and the prostitute. Together, these three tropes stand for the profound distinctions labor migrants perceived between the social worlds - the country and the city - which they inhabited simultaneously and whose symbolical significance, ironically, seemed to grow in reverse proportion to their disappearance in structural terms. In discussing these tropes here I shall draw particularly on the work of Walter Benjamin on Baudelaire and the Paris of the mid-19th century, especially the essays "Paris - the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" and "Some Motifs in Baudelaire," that are key to the aesthetics of urban society and modernity (Benjamin 1973).

To start with the first trope, the crowd, the first observation here that will strike even the most uninitated isicathamiya listener, is that there is in them, as in Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*, what Benjamin calls "the secret presence of a crowd" (1973:122f). Like in Baudelaire's poetry, in isicathamiya songs the crowd is rarely name (Later, we shall see how the corporeal experience of being in and moving with a crowd is enacted in isicathamiya choreography). And yet, it is through the crowd, that migrant workers see the city, as though through an 'agitated veil,'. The words of "Eloff Street," a song by the Dundee Wandering Singers (GE 902) that was released in 1940, about Johannesburg's elegant main shopping street, may illustrate this.

Safika eGoli.
We arrived in Johannesburg.
Safika eGoli kwandonga ziyashunqa
We arrived in Johannesburg, in the heat-chamber,
kwantaba zikhala amanzi.
where the mountains pour out water.
Ngangihamba noMqothukanwele esahamba.
I was accompanied by „Bald-headed," when he was still alive.
Awukhalime wethu awele man damn it!
Give direction, brother, cross, man, damn it!
Safika eGoli sabona intombi nensizwa zehla ngo Eloff Street.

We arrived in Johannesburg and saw ladies and
men walking down Eloff Street.
Sanibona siyanibingelela.
Greetings, we are greeting you.

The urban space that is figuratively mapped in and other songs like it, ordered as it may appear at a first glance, is in fact the epitome of disorder: a space hinging on the experience of shock. For not only does the song articulate a fascination with the strolling crowds, it also registers the rough and truncated mode of communication - ambiguously couched in English, the language of the colonial city - corresponding to the shock experienced in the urban traffic: "man, damn it".

It is worthwhile to compare Eloff Street with what appears to be one of the earliest models for such depictions of urban life in song: Reuben T. Caluza's 'ragtime' songs. Based on British 'syncopated music' and vaudeville, Caluza's songs, as we have seen in chapter 3, exerted a certain influence on early isicathamiya performers. One of these 'ragtime' songs is "Ematawini or Excuse Me Please" (In Town or Excuse Me Please), composed shortly after World War I. The title "Excuse Me Please" is a pun about the *ooscuse-me*. This is what Xhosa and isiZulu speaking migrants until well after World War II called the slick, well-adapted early town dwellers, in whose deferential demeanor and polite manner of speaking they saw only a thinly disguised submission to foreign domination. In the main body of the song, Caluza makes a mockery of the language, eating habits and dress code of the *ooscuse-me*:

Sadlula lapho kesafik'eThekwini.
We went to Durban.
Nisaka ngwa'zintombi kanye nezinsizwa
Our attention was caught by young ladies and
gentlemen
zasehlaze nyuka emgwaqweni.
walking up and down the streets.
Zihamba ziqenya zingen' impahla.
They are proud of their clothes.
Abanye bey'olwandle abanye kwaMadala.
Some of them were going to the beach, some to Madala.
Zabethi Excuse me please gidedele.
They say: Excuse me please, can I pass?
Me want some cup-a-tea, because me hungly.

Insizwa zifake izigqoko,
The young men were wearing hats,
nentombi zihambis' okwamada ngez'cathulo.
and the young ladies were walking like ducks.
Abany'ubonenj'ukutina bo besikholo.
Some of them were quite visibly students.

The song then ends on the following 'morals':

Kunjal' wematawini.
It is like that in town.
Kukhon' inhlobo izinhlobo zabantu.
There are all kinds of people.
Ababin' abahle
Ugly ones
abaziqenya yo kanye nabathobile.
and beautiful ones, proud and simple people.

Although, like "Eloff Street," seemingly painting a realistic picture of the hustle and bustle of urban life, the subtext of Caluza's song, not without a certain sarcasm and frisson, portrays the urban landscape as a more or less chaotic assemblage of people without a shared moral foundation (Erlmann 1991:127-35), a space people of every conceivable variety inhabit side by side. But the real horror at this scenery is only expressed in the last line of "Ematawini":

Kukhon' abaqhafi nabalungile.
There are vagrants and righteous ones.

And, finally, a similar expression of shock is found in Peter Abrahams' novel *Mine Boy*, written in 1946, at about the same time that the song "Eloff Street" was recorded. The text describes the experiences of the young Xuma, a newcomer 'from the north.' On his arrival in Malay Camp, then one of Johannesburg's many notorious slums, Xuma is overcome with confusion:

> He shifted the little bundle from his right hand to his left, hitched up his pants, and continued up the narrow street. A dark narrow street full of shadows, he thought. But then this whole Malay Camp is full of shadows.
> I wonder where I am, he thought. He had lost all

> sense of direction. Still, one street was a good as another...

Later, Xuma's new acquaintance Joseph introduces the newcomer from the north to another aspect of urban life:

> It is always like this on Saturdays. People have money in their pockets and it makes them move in the streets and they spend the money. Saturday is so here, Joseph said.
> It was so in all the streets. One street was as crowded as another. Groups of men and women milled up and down. It was Saturday.

Obviously, there are numerous differences among these different poetic subjects speaking through Reuben Caluza, the South African poet and composer of the turn of the century who casts his eye on Durban, the novelist Peter Abrahams visiting the slums of Johannesburg, and Charles Baudelaire, the poet of the Paris of the 19th century. For Durban, Johannesburg and Paris, in their socio-spatial matrix as well as in their class structure, are clearly characteristic of quite diverse historical moments and manifestations of global capitalism. But there are parallels here, too, most notably in the gaze on the city by those not totally lost in and to the city. For the horror that is expressed in Caluza's song - or in Xuma's confusion, for that matter - is the same as the fear of the Parisian urbanite of the middle of the 19th century to whom, as Walter Benjamin says, the 'masses appear as the asylum that shields an asocial person from his persecutors' (Benjamin 1973:40).

At the same time, the experience of difference - the 'going up and down' on Berea Road, Eloff Street and the streets of Malay Camp and the multitudinous and yet socially differentiated crowd - is here not the same as the ambulant mode of Baudelaire's urban flaneur. The flaneur, according to Benjamin, relishes the shock caused by the new urban technology that intersects with older habits of bodily perception. He 'develops forms of reaction that are in keeping with the pace of a big city. He catches things in flight' (Benjamin 1973:41). For Baudelaire's flaneur, unlike Caluza's observer of Durban town life, the crowd is 'not only the newest asylum of outlaws; it is also the latest narcotic for those abandoned. The flâneur is someone abandoned in the crowd' (Benjamin 1973:55).

'Going up and down,' to 'cross' is thus less an indication of urban

The role of the crowd as the most archetypal symbolic figure of the perceived opposition between town and country finds a correlate in another image: the machine. As is well known, in his work on Baudelaire and Paris, Walter Benjamin linked the experience of the city and the shock in the crowd with the experience of the worker at the machine. The pedestrians in the street, he writes, 'act as if they had adapted themselves to the machines and could express themselves only automatically' (Benjamin 1973:133f). But like the crowd, the machine and industrial technology for the most part hardly ever are present in isicathamiya songs, with two exceptions. One is in the form of the train that carries migrant workers to the city, the other consists in the enactment, indeed in the very mode of performance itself prevalent during the 1940s and 1950s called *isikambula:* gambling.

The train, on the periphery of the modern world-system, is the machine in its ur-form, the machine before the machine. Its presence rings through the arts in the whole of Southern Africa, from Zimbabwe to Namibia, from Mozambique to Zambia, from *maskanda* music and Hugh Masekela to Zambian *kalindula*. For millions of black South Africans *stimela*, the steam train, has been the key vehicle and, at the same time, the arch-symbol of physical bondage and spiritual alienation. For many the train is the most fundamental image produced by the encounter with Western technology and worldview. In isicathamiya songs, however, the image of the train is frequently an ambiguous one. On the one hand, the train is often portrayed as a predator that abducts the girlfriend, but sometimes it is also invoked to convey messages to the relatives at home, as in "Isitimela samampondo" by the Crocodiles (SABC LT 10 158,B1):

Leader: *Isitimela saseMampondweni sihamba njalo sibange enyakatho.*
Here is a train bound for Pondoland, also heading for the North.
Nas' is'timela s'qudl' uMtata.
Here is a train going past Umtata.
Chorus: *Isitimela saseMampondweni sihamba njalo sibange nyakatho.*
Here is a train bound for Pondoland, also heading for the North.
Nas' is'timela s'qudl' uMtata.

Here is a train going past Umtata.
Leader: Si...
It...
Chorus: *Sisuk'e Thekwini, kwashis'a phantsi.*
It is from Durban, you can see sparks from the rails.
Hamba njalo ukhonze kubazali.
Go, train, and send greetings to our parents.
Nas' is'timela sawa maBhunu.
Here is the train of the Boers.
Sisho sithi "khu-khu-khu".
It is going "khu-khu-khu".

What we have here differs markedly from the depictions found in other genres of migrant performance, such as in Basotho *lifela* where the train is often quite simply - albeit very eloquently - personalized and demonized as a 'madman'. The Crocodiles song, by contrast, sets in motion a rather basic metaphoric operation. In the main body of the song, it appears, the singers mainly content themselves with offering a seemingly neutral map of the space traversed by the train, before they then turn the train into an ally, asking it to symbolically bridge the very space that separates the young migrants from their kin. This strangely ambivalent situation of the train as the machine that creates space in the first place and, at the same time, as the means to transcend those spatial divisions, is then metaphorically filled with an onomatopoetic "khu-khu-khu." But this almost unadorned and yet sensuous representation of the train, in its very rhythmic structure, probably comes closer than a rich poetic imagery to the essence of the experience of the worker at the machine. The "khu-khu-khu" produced by the train represents the drill of factory work, the unceasing motion, as Marx put it, of an automaton (Benjamin 1973:132f.).

The second form of the invisible presence of the machine, as I have suggested, is inscribed into the very organization of performance itself. And it is here again that Benjamin's work on Baudelaire reminds us of an important parallel. In the section in "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" that follows on his reflections on the machine, Benjamin explores one further extension of factory and machine work: gambling (1973:134-138). Briefly, Benjamin's argument is that gambling shares with wage labor in the factory a sense of futility, emptiness. The gambler no less than the factory worker is unable to complete something. Starting all over again is

the regulative idea of the game and of work for wages. Both are devoid of substance, they are a matter only of a reflex action. Enslaved to a relentless mechanism, a drudgery that makes them start all over again, and to a time that reaches only as far as the next card or the next operation at the machine, the gambler and the wage laborer 'cannot make much use of experience' (1973:136).

During the 1940s, as I have said, a style of isicathamiya had emerged in Johannesburg called *isikambula*. Most isicathamiya veterans thought *isikambula* reflected the way in which choirs 'took chances' by shuttling between different venues. What resonates through this interpretation of the term is a deep sense of frustration, not so much about life being, as in an analogy, like a game of chance, but about the impossibility of desire as such. Like Baudelaire's gambler, isicathamiya performers are out to win: prizes and prestige. But like him, all they gain is a time that is not their own. The intention to win, for the performer of the nightsongs no less than for the gambler, does not equal a wish. It does not, like experience, reach out in time, as Benjamin says. Wanting to win in a competition is not to fill and divide time; it means to submit to 'time in hell' (Benjamin 1973:136).

This linkage between machine, wage labor and industrial time, is not only highly indicative of the way in which the very social relations of capitalism are inscribed into isicathamiya. In a sense, this linkage also contradicts what I have said earlier about night-time as a protective zone, thus highlighting yet again the ambiguity of performance. The freedom which the night promises from the merciless clock-time of the factory nevertheless is not a total one. The chronological net that imperceptibly and yet powerfully holds captive the performers' consciousness is perhaps the most effective and difficult to resist form in which the hegemonic order asserts and reproduces itself.

What we have seen so far in the first two tropes of the crowd and the machine is the quintessentially ambiguous nature of the migrant perspective on and experience in the interstices of the urban and the rural world. We now have to turn to the third trope, the whore, as perhaps the new social order's most ambiguous symbol. In Southern African arts and expressive culture - from Modikwe Dikobe'.

In the performing arts, too, this particular category of women was a perennial theme of commentary by men. Typical of these early isicathamiya songs on the marabi girls, for instance, is

Ngasuk' ekhaya ngiqond' omsebenzi.
I left home to look for work.
Nga bon' intombi engomarabi.
I saw a marabi girl.

What is remarkable about this song is how the familiar stark logic of the 'here' and 'there' is translated into a dichotomy between 'home' and 'marabi girl.' At one level, this opposition between the home - the quintessential representation of a morally ordered social universe - and the whore reflects of course the traumatic displacements that had occurred in precolonial relations of productions and their gender base in particular. For as Cherryl Walker has pointed out, the role of African societies in shaping the migrant labor system was integrally dependent on the gender relations that operated in the precolonial chiefdoms (1990:168). The ability of precolonial societies to export male labor rested on a mode of production in which women were the primary producers. This, she argues, explains the violent opposition of chiefs and men in general to female migration. And, consequently, the image of the irresponsible town woman stems from this conflict (179).

At another level, however, there is also a deeper experience, a profoundly unsettling sense of ambiguity that is being registered in these verses. For it is striking to observe how the opposition between the domestic (with its concomitant role of women) and the public represented by the prostitute is put in place by 'work.' Clearly understood in this context as wage labor, work is seen here as both the symbol and the process whereby male labor power and the female body itself become commodities. It is wage labor that brings the migrant to the city, but it is also wage labor that creates the social environment in which the prostitute and her customer come into contact with each other. Labor, then, fuels ambiguous social relations. It does not, unlike in precolonial society, yield positive value, and it does not fashion an identity. Or, as the Comaroffs say in their discussion of Tswana and missionary concepts of work, unlike work, the notion of labor does not evoke 'an image of social life as a continuous, creative flow of events through which persons worked to construct themselves in relation to others' (1991:141).

To understand migrant performers' perceptions of the ambiguity of a kind of social fabric that enhances production without producing people, we again have to return briefly, in closing, to another time and another place. In Walter Benjamin's "Paris - the

Capital of the Nineteenth Century", there is a passage in which Benjamin discusses some of the root images produced by the ambiguity of social relationships in Paris during this era. It is one of the main features of the modern, Benjamin writes there, that it 'always conjures up prehistory' in ambiguous images. But this ambiguity of images is only the 'figurative appearance of the dialectic, the law of the dialectic at a standstill'. Commodities and the arcades of Paris are such ambiguous images. And, Benjamin concludes, so is the whore, 'who is seller and commodity in one' (Benjamin 1973:171).

Clearly, then, the unhomely enters into isicathamiya performers' daily practice at every moment. At the same time, as we have seen, it resonates strongly through a stark imagery, both verbal and embodied, that speaks of disorientation, uncertainty and ambiguity. But far from submitting to the shock of the world-in-the home and the-home-in the-world, isicathamiya performers also tell of a past and a future in which a truthful existence and an ordered social universe are anchored in and thus mutually enabled by the homely, a firmly framed world of local rootedness, tradition, and of sexual and collective identity. To harness, then, the instability of social action and meaning in capitalist society, to bring to a standstill the restless 'disembedding mechanisms' (Giddens 1991) of industrial society and its constant re-location and re-definition of people, things and meanings, is the alternative isicathamiya performers pose against the unhomely. In the following we shall see how the antithesis, the homely, is enacted in performance and how, in the process, it is in turn itself marked by other ambiguities.

The suppression of the body - and to a much lesser extent the domestication of the mind - has been at the heart of the colonization of Southern African societies. The process was a long one, and, ironically, it rested at first on the separation of body and mind, on the double process of a reification and de-symbolization of the black body. For in the pre-industrial societies of Southern Africa, the body was primarily an agent of the transformation of the earth. And it was a signifier whose visibility and agency in social practice had been clearly marked through a rich symbolic vocabulary. Thus, throughout Southern Africa, the female body served as the primary symbolic model for the physical structure of the house, the quintessential domestic unit. Among rural Zulu, the center of a homestead, the hut (*umsamo*), is divided into three parts that are metaphorically associated with the realm of procreation: the interior of the hut is like a woman's womb

(*inimba*) and to cross the threshold of a hut is considered to be the equivalent of sexual intercourse (Berglund 1989:102, 168).

Given these taken for granted, embodied conceptions of the social universe, it is not surprising, then, that the missionaries - the benign pioneers of colonial subjugation - first concentrated on the body in order to undermine the autonomy of this universe and to undo the unity of the bodies natural and social. Blind to the profound significance of African bodies social, scientific racism reduced Africans to a natural essence, to mere bodies shackled to their primordial nature, disrobed of any symbolic meaning fostered by socially ordered human intercourse. Black bodies, like women in general, were thought to be held in bondage by the sensory stimuli of the environment and the dark and unreasoned forces of their own needs and functions.

It is in this reduced state as a moldable, natural essence whose possibility for symbolic representation is undercut, that black bodies in South Africa were becoming available as free wage labor - free from the nexus that tied the body to the socio-moral universe of domestic production with its ancestors and symbols, but also free to seek fulfilment in a world beyond nature. As the work of John and Jean Comaroff on concepts of work and labor among the Tshidi has shown, the colonized subjects increasingly came to experience wage labor as a gradual weakening of the idea of work as the primary measure of personal value. Industrial labor required the physical operation and interaction of bodies increasingly cut loose from any referentiality in nature.

Coinciding with this, in the world of industrial production, the domestic sphere ceased to be a place where the body might reside for itself. The 'house' has become no more than a site of consumption, severed from the direct appropriation of the earth and at the same time physically segregated from the sphere of production, the mines and the factories. In South Africa's industrial capitalism, the gun and the sjambok of colonial conquest increasingly yield to the train, the Putco bus and the mini-taxi ('Zola Budd') as the chief instruments of the oppression of the body. And it is this contradiction between production and consumption that mutilates the body. The distance of the body from the workplace only generates more need and the necessity to return to work in order to satisfy it. Thus, unable to find a home, the body 'roams' in an never-ending pursuit of satiation. The unleashed body, abandoned to its own devices, eventually comes to be perceived as an afflicted, homeless thing whose pathology in turn indicates the disturbed social order.

Given, then, the long and troubled history of the suppressed and diseased body in Southern Africa, it is hardly surprising that, as Jean Comaroff's study on Zionist ritual illustrates, the efforts to reclaim the agency of the body in human history, in the broadest sense, involve practices focusing on 'healing' as a mode of repairing the tormented body, and through it, the oppressive social order itself. Ritual, Comaroff goes on to state, works on the body so as to re-fashion the continuity between social, natural and personal being. The Zionist cult seeks to re-formulate the constitution of the everyday world by dealing with contradictions inadequately addressed in dominant ideology (1985:8f).

In a similar sense, I argue, through dance isicathamiya performers seek to reform the offending system by rehabilitating the body. Isicathamiya choreography reinserts the body's potential for symbolic representation. The bodies of isicathamiya dancers cease to be the mere individual parcels without social or historical referent to which they have been reduced in the factories, and become potent metaphors evoking the lost continuity between the bodies social and natural. The majority of these embodied images, as we shall see, corporeally merge the dancers with a collectivity bound by regional identity and common values about a certain gendered order of the world, and thus become metaphors for the ideal community itself.

But the dancing body not only resists its submission; it also attempts to encompass and to recapitulate the history of that submission. The therapy which the dancer administers to his own body is not only meant to compensate for the debilitating modern social environment. The images of slick and smoothly gliding bodies, as we shall see, equally suggest that relief for the tormented body is to come from the consumption of the commodified images of the body molded in and by the city. In the topography of the dancing body, the abdication of the body as a signifier and the utopia of the body as the socialized means of appropriation of the earth, are tangibly bound together.

At the beginning of my account of the transformations of the body under colonial dominance and industrialization, I argued that the formation of a centered individual involves the recourse to the body as a signifier and practical agent of a spiritually animated social and natural world. I would now like to pursue this thought by examining the dancing bodies of isicathamiya performers as a principal means of this self-constitution and of the symbolic redefinition of notions of human relations in space and time. As I have said, isicathamiya dancing grew out of a

complex and heterogeneous body of indigenous and Western dances which I cannot review here. Rather I shall concentrate on a central set of ritual practices that has particular relevance for the symbolic reconstruction of a centered social universe: weddings. Together with these practices, I shall examine a number of tropes that are connected with interdependent foci of social life: the homestead and warfare.

It is hardly surprising, of course, that wedding ceremonials should assume such a central place in the metaphoric structure of isicathamiya performance. As I pointed out, the return to the home, *ekhaya*, centered fundamentally on the house as the nucleus of an ordered web of socio-moral relations uniting production and consumption, the private and the public. Thus, in pre-colonial society, marriage was primarily a multi-layered, partly ambiguous alliance between domestic groups rather than a contract between freely acting individuals. Any wedding, with its delicate preparations and complex rituals of exchange, illustrates this vividly. But it is the dance, generally considered by Zulus as the highest form of worship and spiritual communication with the ancestors, that constitutes the most sacred ritual activity in a wedding. A wedding is considered incomplete, indeed spiritually empty and profane, unless the bride has danced. Hence, the most common question asked in determining the stage of the ceremonial proceedings is: *Umakoti usesinile*? Has the bride danced?

Probably the most telling symbols isicathamiya dancers appropriated from the realm of weddings, are select key elements of dances such as *ikhetho*, *ukureka* and *isigekle*. To begin with *ikhetho*, as its name suggests, is the dance associated with the *ikhetho*, the bridegroom's party at a wedding. It is danced in a single line, in a mock confrontation with the *umthimba*, the bride's party, equally positioned in a straight line. As for the *isigekle*, it is generally considered to be one of the most profound expressions of lineage identity. It is a slow dance performed in a straight line in which the main thrust of movements consists in the pointing of a spear toward the ground and in the stately raising of the feet and subsequent fast stamping down in relatively slow-paced intervals.

In addition to these dance forms from the past, *ukureka* (ragtime) constitutes an essential, if relatively more recent component of isicathamiya choreography indexing the socio-moral web of the house. *Ukureka* is danced in a single or double file, the dancers executing simple walking steps in time to the

song. Although there are numerous variations to this pattern, such as stopping the forward-walking thrust at a certain recurring moment in the vocal cycle, the file is the principal formation.

Among the reasons performers give for the prevalence of this formation in these dances is the spatial order imposed by the traditional homestead. Thus, when the bride's party, the *umthimba*, bring the bride to the bridegroom's homestead, they cannot pass the narrow gate all at once. They have to form an *uklele*, a straight line, that allows them to enter one by one, while singing *ukureka* songs. It is thus that, through their association with wedding songs, *ukureka, ikhetho* and *isigekle*, play a key role in the real and symbolic travels between and into the houses that are in the process of affiliating through the marriage: they *are* lineage reciprocity embodied.

It is obvious that of the features that *ikhetho*, *isigekle* and *ukureka* have in common and of the ones that are adapted to isicathamiya performance the formation of the dancers in straight lines carries the greatest symbolic weight. Because of the march-like character of all these dances and probably as a result of the fact that the linear arrangement was acceptable to the Christian missionaries as dignified and "orderly", *ikhetho* and *ukureka* are frequently called *imashi*, "march".

But the march-like formation of these dances also connotes another crucial aspect of pre-colonial social practice: warfare. The most telling symbolic cross-reference performers make in this respect is to the formation of regiments in single lines (*ukuklela kwamabutho*) or to the breaking-up of a unit into strands led by a 'war-leader' (*ukudabuka amafolosi*). This image of a marching regiment going to war, as Jama Lucky Stars leader Wellington Dlamini told Caesar Ndlovu, is in the minds of performers proceeding to the stage. 'When we go to the stage', Dlamini said, 'we go there *ngomdlandla wamabutho*, with the enthusiasm of the regiments'.

One final prominent feature of isicathamiya choreography remains to be mentioned: the use of circular floor patterns. Before a choir moves onto the stage, the members form a ring, and with the leader in their midst, start the opening song in hushed voices. This circular pattern is also common during rehearsals and is associated by most performers with *isibaya*, the cattle enclosure in a traditional homestead. The cattle enclosure is the most sacred, the most symbolically charged place in a homestead. It is a practiced place, a place of power and, hence, a male domain. It is here that men convene before they go to war, to invoke the

ancestor spirits and to gather spiritual strength. By positioning themselves in the shape of an *igoda*, a coiled rope, until the song is *vuthiwe*, cooked, and they meander (*guduza*) toward the stage, isicathamiya performers behave like men gathering in the cattle enclosure.

In the most general sense, then, this type of kinetic 'architectonics' reshapes the rectangular architectural frameworks of the alien order by evoking the 'feeling tones' of the pre-colonial concentrated circularity (Fernandez 1984:38). In freely selecting from a number of bodily patterned and therefore gendered roles, the dancers construct, as men, spheres of corporeal interaction that metaphorically speak to the contrary location of the 'house' in the white city and its alienating set of social relations.

But the choreography of isicathamiya is no less polymorphous than the images evoked in the lyrics of the nightsongs. In industrial capitalism, as I have said, the body ceases to be the integrated and centered agent of the construction of worldview. It becomes the site for a never-ending conflict between production and consumption, need and fulfilment. Increasingly, the body experiences the feeling of being 'homed' only in consuming industrially manufactured goods and images of itself. As the unity of the producing and consuming household dissolves, the TV-commercial for that cereal and that special garment is framed in scenes of domestic happiness.

In its most basic form, the corporeal regime of the city and the world of commodity relations is concentrated in the step, *istep*, the earliest from of isicathamiya choreography. Like *ukureka* it consists of a simple walking gait, executed in such a manner that two steps forward are followed by two steps backwards and so on. This is done with a lot of vigor but without the rigidity of a fast pacing person. A variation of this basic step is a rapidly sliding, forward-movement of one foot which is then kept suspended in the air, slightly crossed in front of the other leg. From here, many choirs launch into the intricate tapping which, historically, is derived from African-American tap-dancing.

The meaning of all these micro-patterns can only be understood when seen in relation to the reconfiguration of space and movement engineered by the industrial city. In his brilliant reflections "Walking in the City" Michel de Certeau (1984:91-110) has argued, perhaps somewhat optimistically, that the city not only produces its own 'urbanizing' language of power. The city, he wrote, is 'left prey to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of

panoptic power' (1984:95). Walking, de Certeau argues, contains within itself the possibility of a 'proliferating illegitimacy,' (96) of a rhetoric that, like the drifting manipulations of figurative speech, diverts and subverts the 'proper' and normative meanings constructed by the grammarians.

In the South African city, that most disciplinary and disciplined space of spaces, the normativity and rigidity of the spatial order imposes severe restrictions on its black inhabitants' everyday choices - not to mention the brutal 'mass removals' of the 1960s and 1970s - of organized space. A black person encountering a white pedestrian on a sidewalk has to step aside and use the street. Curfew regulations that were in effect in many South African cities prevented black people from walking certain sections of the city at night. To socialize with their fellow domestic workers next door, the 'maids' of the white suburbs can only use the sidewalks. Clearly, a black person has virtually none of the means at his disposal to actualize and create spaces. He or she lives in no space at all, and does not, in practice, constitute a near and a far, a 'here' and a 'there.' Thus, the black 'user' of the white city is derobed of what de Certeau calls the phatic function of walking, of the ability to ensure communication by creating sequences of phatic *topoi* (1984:99).

Inevitably, this lack of choice, this absence of a place - the primordial black experience of the white man's city - sheds an ambiguous light on a type of dancing such as the step. Although dancing might be fruitfully conceptualized as a bodily rhetorics, whose 'turns' and 'figures' operate on culturally codified systems of bodily communication, it does not always manipulate hegemonic spatial organizations in the same way that the 'turns of phrase' of a speaker create metamorphoses of grammar and order. *Istep*, I argue, in its basic form celebrates the body finding its proper place in the normative space of the engineers of the apartheid city. The walking of *istep*, as the most condensed rhetorical figure in isicathamiya dancing, does not constitute a displaced, wandering semantic. The to and fro of the step does not, like the evocations of the rural 'home' in *ukureka* and *ikhetho*, counterpose its own spatial enunciation against the rigid grid of the segregated city. *Istep* is the omnipresent sign itself of the city. It has no direction and it does not articulate places in relation to an 'I.' It is walking in the neuter and thus ratifies the absence of a place and the continuous search for a proper locus that propels the mobile individual in capitalism. As de Certeau aptly writes:

> The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place - an experience that is, to be sure, broken up into countless tiny deportations (displacements and walks), compensated for by the relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric, and placed under the sign of what ought to be, ultimately, the place but is only a name, the City. The identity furnished by this place is all the more symbolic (named) because, in spite of the inequality of its citizens' positions and profits, there is only....a shuffling among pretenses of the proper, a universe of rented spaces haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed-of places.(1984:103)

But the walking step, as I have indicated, also often leads into spirited tapping, as though the dancers were executing a movement from the naked sign into style, from the abstract symbolic into figure. This transition, marked by intensified emotional immersion and almost whispered repetitions of the key bass-line, is a digression from the ordered up-and-down of the walking step. As such, the tap in isicathamiya performance recalls a statement by African-American tap-veteran Chuck Green. Maps, Green said, are full of limitations. But when I tap, I can get lost in dancing. I don't have no maps on my taps (Hanna 1983:52). The "unmapped" situation of tapping, the feeling of being lost in dance, is contrasted here with the limitations imposed on space by the sign which obliterates the traces of those who produced the knowledge on which the map rests. Tapping would thus appear to be challenging the rule of the sign and of the space that engenders it. The identity that is constructed from this rhetorical freedom finds its expression in the phrase 'writing the name by steps' which isicathamiya dancers use to refer to their choir's particular form of choreography.

The dilemma, which has become apparent in my account of migrant performance, of symbolically transcending a given order of things, not only marks, ontologically speaking, all performance *qua* mode of symbolic action, therefore frequently giving rise to Western views of performance as the sole, seemingly apolitical form of voicing dissent available under constrained circumstances. Rather, this paradox emerges in and is symp-

tomatic of a specific historical moment in which the capitalist instrumentalist logic and the attendant mass production of images of reality increasingly undercut the agency of the body and the formation of a personal identity by other means than the consumption of these same images of the body. Thus, the contradictory relationship in isicathamiya between the acting body represented by the dancer of *ukureka* and the consuming body symbolized by *istep*, betrays the real obstacles to undoing the dichotomies of the modern world between production and consumption, to reconnecting the individual with the holistic web of economic, religious and social ties of the pre-colonial world.

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