



Lifting the Veil on Lighting: Investigating how stage lighting design can become an embodied practice within South African contemporary dance making.

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## PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I affirm that this is my own work and that all references and sources not my own, have been duly acknowledged and referenced.

SIGNED:



DATE: 8 December 2023

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation began from an impulse to unpack and comprehend my own 15-year lighting design practice, particularly in the context of South African contemporary dance. Attempting to demystify some of the practice and processes of lighting design that are often obscured by misunderstanding and technical jargon, to begin to 'lift the veil' on lighting in order to undertake a personal understanding of how my practice impacts on contemporary dance making more tangibly. Moreover, it also aims to open up these practices to others operating in similar fields.

This dissertation traces some of the history of predominantly Western theatre lighting design practice and how these conventions inform my understanding of lighting design practice today. This is briefly contextualised in relation to South African contemporary dance which is advocated for being a style of dance that engages with the personal and the political in relation to the 'now' of the contemporary world. This dissertation then explores notions of embodied practice and the acquisition and application of knowledge in action. This idea of embodied knowledge is explored in relation to my own practice through a primarily autoethnographic engagement with my lighting design practice and how it impacts contemporary dance making in the contexts that I work in. This is specifically done by analysing two case studies: *days like these* (2015) and *SoliiDad* (2019). This analysis looks at how lighting influences the perception and experience of all those involved in the process of performances. This is also explored in relation to others working in a similar context through interviews with other local lighting designers.

This dissertation offers qualitative research, through an autoethnographic framework with my position as a lighting designer research-practitioner. The dissertation also incorporates a multi-methodological approach including phenomenology, as primarily advocated in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968) and the phenomenologically embodied methodologies of self-study and sensory ethnography in order to support the autoethnographic thrust in the study.

Key observations emerge from interviews with other local lighting designers including highlighting: that there is no singular approach to lighting design, however, context and one's personal life experience significantly shape an individual's practice. In the realm of contemporary dance, which often has at its core the personal (and thus political) engagement with the contemporary world, the lighting designer's conscious choices and contributions through their lighting design, can possibly contribute a distinct voice in support of the choreographers/dancers making the work. This is usually done in collaboration, through careful discussions and co-creation with the choreographers/dancers.

An overarching observation through undertaking this research, is the possible transformative capacity of lighting design, to not only alter space and time but to also infuse layers of meaning and atmosphere. Lighting design is suggested to operate in the liminal areas of Cognitive Psychologist Robert Solso's (2003) "Level 3 consciousness"; Performance Phenomenologist Susan Kozel's (2013) notion of "affect" and Lighting Designer Lucy Carter's (2023) articulation of light as a "sensation".

This transformative nature of lighting design as a sensation/feeling/emotion necessitates an understanding of my own embodied history that impacts this knowledge in practice. This heightened awareness of the role of a lighting designer, as I continue to be a practicing lighting designer, is the greater awareness of making more deliberate and conscious choices in shaping my authorial voice within the context of a production. Understanding a more holistic approach to lighting design practice, that comes from years of practice and a lifetime of experiencing – also as someone who never formally trained in lighting design – I anticipate this research could begin to provide windows to others, who may be interested in a more comprehensive engagement with lighting design practice.

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A special thank you to my supervisor Dr Lliane Loots, for being the constant support and sounding board in what can be a quite solitary writing experience. Your work on and off the stage has not only influenced my work but this dissertation. I thank you for your contributions and legacy to contemporary dance in South Africa.

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## Glossary<sup>1</sup>

**Boom:** A boom is another name for a floor lighting stand, in theatre, it is often placed in the side wings and will hang lights at a shin, middle and head position.

**CAD:** Computer Aided Design Using a computer to help with 2D plans and drawings, or increasingly for 3D visualisation of how a set will look, and how lighting will affect it.

**Colour Temperature:** A measure of the 'warmth' or 'coolness' of light sources and colours. Measured in degrees Kelvin. A higher colour temperature light source will appear whiter (colder)

**Corridor:** In terms of lighting is a focused special of light in a rectangular shape and is commonly used in dance to isolate space

**Cue:** refers to the individual scenes or looks created by programming the fixtures and dimmers via the lighting desk.

**Cyclorama:** Usually shortened to just cyc. The Cyclorama is a curved plain cloth or plastered wall filling the rear of the stage. Often used as a sky backing to a traditional set, or as the main backing for a dance piece etc. From the Greek Cyclos (circle) and Horama (view or vision).

**Dimmer:** Electrical or electronic device which controls the amount of electricity passed to a lantern, and therefore the intensity of the lamp.

**Down and upstage:** In a traditional proscenium arch space, downstage is at, or toward, the front part of a stage, near the auditorium. Upstage is toward, or at, the part of a stage furthest from the audience. The use of the names upstage and downstage for different stage areas originated from the raked stage, where stages were built with an

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<sup>1</sup> Sourced from <https://www.theatrecrafts.com/pages/home/topics/lighting/glossary/> [Accessed 1 November 2023]

angle to improve the sightlines of the spectators, and the visibility of the performers and the stage floor from the first rows of the auditorium.

**Ellipsoid Profile:** A profile lantern with an elliptical reflector and at least one lens. You can use shutters to shape the beam of the light and then focus the beam using the one or two lenses that the fixture has so it can be either a 'hard' line or a blurrier 'soft' focus

**Fixed Rig:** A fixed or general or saturation rig is a common occurrence in theatres where the lighting rig is requested to stay in place and not be changed owing to not having to refocus the entire rig every time a production moves in.

**Fixture:** another name for a light such as a profile, fresnel or wash light.

**Fresnel:** A type of lantern which produces an even, soft-edged beam of light through a fresnel lens. The lens is a series of stepped concentric circles on the front and pebbled on the back and is named after its French inventor, Augustin Jean Fresnel (1788-1827).

**Gel:** Gels are specially made polycarbonate sheets of colour that project the colour when placed in front of lighting fixtures, the most common types are made by Lee and Rosco.

**Get-In:** The "get-in" period of a production is the colloquial name for the period before a production starts and you set up all the technical elements and place the performance on the stage

**Gobo:** A thin metal plate etched to produce a design which can then be projected by a profile spotlight.

**Haze:** A Haze machine, Hazer or Diffusion Fogger, is used to produce an atmospheric haze, rather than clouds of smoke, and is used by many lighting designers to reveal airborne light beams.

House Light: Lighting in the Auditorium for the audience to take their seats – it is usually dimmed for the performance.

Intelligent Lighting: see moving light but can also include fixtures with advanced LED capabilities

Iris: Adjustable aperture which, when placed in the gate of a profile lantern, varies the size of a beam of light.

Key Light: The dominant light source/direction in a naturalistic lighting state. In theatre is generally considered to be from the front of the stage.

LED: A light-emitting diode (LED) light is the modern advancement in theatrical lighting so instead of having multiple fixtures to create different colours using gels, you can use an LED fixture that will be able to recreate multiple colours by mixing the different LED's which are generally in the primary colours of Red, Blue and Green.

Lighting Plan: A scale drawing detailing the exact location of each lantern used in a production and any other pertinent information (E.g. its dimmer number, focus position and colour number).

Moving light: Remotely controllable "intelligent" lighting instrument. Each instrument is capable of a massive variety of effects which are operated live via a moving light control desk or can be pre-programmed by a standard memory lighting desk. The instruments require a power supply and a data cable (normally carrying DMX512 signal from the control desk). A moving light is a versatile and multi-function robotized luminaire designed to replace multiple conventional, static lighting sources.

Opposite Prompt (OP) Side: In British tradition for proscenium arch theatres, Stage Right (as the Actor stands facing the Audience)

PAR-Can: Short for Parabolic Aluminised Reflector lamp. A lamp containing a filament, reflector and lens in one sealed unit, is used in PARCANs to produce a high-intensity narrow beam of light.

**Profile:** A type of lantern with at least one plano-convex lens which projects the outline of any chosen shape placed in its gate, sometimes with a variable degree of hardness/softness. Profiles include four beam-shaping metal shutters, a gate to take an iris or gobo and an adjustment to make the beam.

**Proscenium Arch:** is the name given to the physical wall that divides the audience from the stage, it is often just in front of where the main curtains fall. It is often considered the 'fourth wall' from where the audience views a theatre production, and the tradition carries across into other styles of performance.

**Prompt Side (PS):** In British tradition for proscenium arch theatres, Stage Left (as the performer stands facing the Audience)

**Spotlight:** General term for any lantern with a lens system. E.g. fresnel, PC, profile. Can also refer to a followspot, which is larger, brighter and manually controlled by an operator.

**Stage left and right:** For proscenium arch theatres in North American, British and South African, this refers to the performer's sides when facing the spectators. In other European countries, by contrast, the sides of the stage are named according to the director's perspective that is, how the audience perceives the stage. Can Also be known as Prompt Side (Stage Left) and Opposite Prompt (Stage Right).

**Technical Rehearsal:** Usually the first time the show is rehearsed in the venue, with lighting, scenery and sound. Costumes are sometimes used where they may cause technical problems (e.g. Quick changes).

## Introduction

Stanley McCandless, often referred to as the 'grandfather of modern lighting design' (Rosenthal and Wertenbaker, 1972, p.16) states: "Stage lighting is often surrounded by a thick and impenetrable veil of mystery which is due, undoubtedly, to a lack of knowledge of both the limits and potentialities of the problem" (McCandless, 1947, p.9). This study aims to begin to see through this "impenetrable veil" (1947, p.9) on lighting design practice specifically for contemporary dance in South Africa.

As a professional South African lighting designer (primarily for contemporary dance) working over the last 15 years, I have never formally studied lighting design and so I set out in this dissertation to begin to unpack and examine my own (often 'instinctual') lighting design practices, and interrogate what role lighting plays in contemporary theatrical dance; and more explicitly, how lighting design can be an embodied process/practice.

The role of the lighting designer in performance is a complex one as it is both an artistic practice, but also one that requires technical and conceptual elements. Peter Mumford broadly defines lighting design for dance as "a scenic art concerned not only with evoking of atmosphere and ideas but also with the definition of space and 'body form' in relation to space" (1985, p.46). The lighting designer forms an integral part of the creative team in making theatrical live performance, as they work to not only make the work visible but can also contribute aesthetically to the feel of the work - as well as support conceptual ideas. There is a fair amount written on lighting design since it was established as a practice in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the introduction of gas and electric lighting into theatres "enabled theatre-makers to begin pondering the artistic function of light within a practice of design" (Abulafia, 2016, p.33). Most that is written comes from European and American sources, for example, Stanley McCandless's *A Method of Stage Lighting* (1947), Rosenthal and Wertenbaker's *The Magic of Light* (1972), Philip Mumford's *Lighting Dance* (1985), Francis Reid's *The Stage Lighting Handbook* (2001), John Hopgood's *Dance Production, Design and Technology* (2016) and Kevin Dreyer's *DANCE AND LIGHT: The Partnership between Choreography and Lighting Design* (2020), as used in this dissertation to broadly discuss the history of lighting

design and lighting design practice. There is very little written from the South African context. Local lighting designer Denis Hutchinson did conduct a series of interviews in 2012/3 on the no longer existing Theatre Lighting Archive website<sup>2</sup>, however, these recordings of the interviews do still appear on their YouTube page and have also been used to give some of the histories of lighting design in South Africa, as many of these practitioners were around during the transition from lighting being in the hands of electricians to becoming a creative practice in itself (theatrearchive, 2012). Hutchinson also explores the design process of these lighting designers and these will be used to compare to the practice of myself and other local lighting designers currently working in the field. The existing writings on lighting design (examples listed above) are mostly practical guides, technological advancements or history books, there is very little research and critical theory related to the role lighting design plays in the holistic making/creating of contemporary dance work. It can be acknowledged, that this research does begin to fall into what I have discovered over the process is a growing body of writing about lighting design that prioritises creative process over simply procedure and technology, such as Katherine Graham, Scott Palmer and Kelli Zezulka's *Contemporary Performance Lighting: Experience, Creativity and Meaning* (2023) being a recent example of this.

An important starting point for this dissertation is Dr Yaron Abulafia's *The Art of Light on Stage* (2016) which begins to engage with lighting design critically and reflectively where he creates a new conceptual framework for the analysis of light that looks at two ways of looking at light: "one enables us to *experience light on a corporeal level* (its aesthetic, embodied, emotional and pre-semiotic experience), while the other level is that of *significance* (this being the realm of cognitive semiotics, including the phenomenal function) and *representation* (poetics)" (2006, p.148). Abulafia's focus is on the reception of lighting by a spectator; he states that his book "will focus, in the analysis, on the meaning and experience of light from the perspective of the addressee" (2006, p.147). While a significant study, my research will not attempt to

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<sup>2</sup> The Theatre Lighting Archive <http://www.theatrearchive.co.za/> was a website which contained "information about the people who laid the foundations for theatre lighting design in South Africa" with local lighting Designer Denis Hutchinson the driving force behind it. Unfortunately Hutchinson could not carry the cost of running the website, so it is no longer operational, but the archive's video interviews still remain on their YouTube channel: @theatrearchive (<https://www.youtube.com/@theatrearchive>). ([https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Theatre\\_Lighting\\_Archive](https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Theatre_Lighting_Archive)) [Accessed 30 January 2022].

decode the author's (lighting designer's) intentions and compare them to the spectators' interpretations. This dissertation, aims rather to take the perspective of the lighting designer, my embodied perspective and practice, in order to understand and investigate the role of lighting in creating and layering live performance. This said I will draw on Abulafia's framework to discuss the phenomenological aspects of light as linked to my theoretical and methodological approaches.

Taking this relative absence of critical research within my specific field of lighting design practice, I begin this research process from my own personal position; from my own body, which "open(s) up new possibilities for agency within discourses of theatre dance" (Burt quoted in Loots, 2018, p.123). Phenomenology and notions of embodiment (as primarily advocated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1962) intertwine both my theoretical framework and my methodological approach as a starting point for me to express/unpack and negotiate my process of lighting design, the design in performance, and ways in which this design can be perceived. By unpacking my own embodied process and practice as a lighting designer, this dissertation will interrogate what role lighting plays in contemporary theatrical dance. My hope too is that this dissertation and ensuing research findings can be used by other lighting designers who will be able to access this study to add to their own evolving practice and that of dance lighting in South Africa more generally. Choreographers/practitioners also working in contemporary dance, will be able to be drawn into possibly, having a greater understanding of the significance of lighting in the making of their live performance.

Chapter One begins with a discussion around an understanding of the nature of light, philosophically and perceptually, and frames the outset of my initial engagement with lighting design. I will then discuss the history and use of theatrical lighting, how theatrical lighting can impact on performance, and finally the impact, socially and politically, of the cultural practice of South African contemporary dance. By understanding what light is and how lighting designers use it in performance, this dissertation focuses on the specific role of the lighting designer in making performance. Author/educator Susan Kozel (2006) observes "No one is uninvolved... all those who experience a piece, performers, audience members, stage managers

[and I add lighting designer] do so from their own culturally situated positions, their own preferences, histories, bodies and connections with the art world” (2006, p.33).

Chapter Two will engage theories of embodiment, a return to centralising experience through and of the body, as importantly articulated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perceptions* (1962), and how they have been adapted into theatre studies as both critical theory and methodological approaches of autoethnography, self-study and sensory ethnography, form a framework for my engagement with how to write about and unpack lighting design and practice. This dissertation aims to unpack embodied knowledge and practice, by understanding how the body perceives, we can understand how knowledge is gained and applied in practice. Robert Solso in his book *The Psychology of Art* (2003), through an understanding of the simultaneous processes of *Nativistic Perception* (“bottom-up” processing) where “visual events [are] based on the fact that people have certain inborn ways of seeing in which visual stimuli” (2003, p.2) and *Directed Perception* (“top-down” processing) which “refers to perception based on one’s personal history and knowledge” (2003, p.2) leads to how we create *Schemata* where a “a schema is part of one’s mental framework for representing knowledge: specifically, we use the term here for how one might represent an array of interrelated concepts in a meaningful organization” (Solso, 2003, p.223). These schemata, which are developed through the lived experience of an array of perceptions over any life span, form the basis, argues Solo (2003) of our ability to engage in artistic practices and create the lens through which we experience art. Through this engagement with perception and experience, this dissertation sets out to understand my own embodied lighting design practice as well as how all those involved in theatre performance may perceive and experience the lighting design in performance.

Chapter Three negotiates and analyses five interviews with local South African lighting designers who are working in a similar environment to me. On the back of interviews of Denis Hutchinson on the Theatre Lighting Archive YouTube channel with legendary South African lighting designers Joe and Dave Freedman, Richard Parker, Mannie Manim and John T Baker, my own interviews explore lighting design practice and how contemporary lighting designers conceptually create their lighting designs as well as exploring commonalities and differences. These interviews give voice to a lighting

practice by a diverse group of Southern-based lighting designers, that is not often heard within the ambit of Performance Studies and create a framework of inquiry to set up my practice and process as will be explored in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four looks at unpacking my lighting design practice and how embodied practice is evident in the two case studies<sup>3</sup>. With the primary aim of this research being to reflectively interrogate my own practice and the role myself and my lighting design work has, and can have, in the meaningful collaborative creation of contemporary dance performance, I will be engaging in an autoethnographic study. Carolyn Ellis in *Autoethnography: An Overview* (2010), using the work of Ellis (2004) and Homan-Jones (2005), defines autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze<sup>4</sup> (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (2010, p.1). How my personal experience of my practice (auto) is written into the cultural practice of contemporary dance making (ethno) and how this is described and analysed (graphy) is the reason for choosing an autoethnographic methodology. Chapter Four explores case studies *days like these* (2015) by FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY and *SoliiDad* (2019) by Vincent Mantsoe, giving examples that engage the notion of embodied practice and ways of perceiving and experiencing a dance work through my lighting design collaboration with the choreographer/s and performer/s.

In light of the above, the critical research questions this study plans to engage are as follows:

- 1.) What is the history and process of theatrical lighting design, how does it impact specifically the cultural act of contemporary dance, and how does it speak to current social and political issues, especially in South Africa?

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<sup>3</sup> Originally this research intended to have two case studies by FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, as can be noted by the interview questions with lighting designers and choreographers. The second work which was going to be explored was *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* (2019) which would have further explored the relationship between my lighting design practice and work FLATFOOT, but owing to limitations on the scope of this research it was decided to leave it out of the final dissertation. Images from the work are still used in the interviews as the work reflects a more recent example of my lighting design work.

<sup>4</sup> This dissertation draws on several American sources who use American English. This is most notable in the use a ‘z’ where South African English uses an ‘s’. Where sources have been directly quoted the ‘z’ has been kept, as otherwise the ‘s’ has been utilised.

- 2.) How do notions of embodied practice relate to how we gain knowledge and apply that knowledge in a practice, specifically in a practice that involves stimulating the sense of vision through the use of light such as lighting design? How does this compare to other local lighting designers working in similar contexts?
  
- 3.) By unpacking and documenting my process of lighting design, as it specifically relates to contemporary dance making in my context of South Africa, how do I, by analysing my two case studies of *days like these* (2015) and *SoliiDad* (2019), affect the way in which the works can be perceived and experienced by all those involved in the process of creating a performances?

It is through a phenomenological lens, as advocated in the work of Susan Kozel (2007 and 2013), Yaron Abulafia (2016) and John McAfee (2019), of situating embodied practice at the centre of this research, in a position of both subject and object, that I set out to find a way of speaking about my lighting design practice and how this practice impacts on the way a performance is made and experienced. It is a difficult space to navigate as it connects emotions, memory and knowledge but from a phenomenological perspective, the “embodied ‘I’” (Loots, 2018, p.99), and an understanding of sensory knowledge, that I begin to unpack my practice. Solso calls it a “Level-3 comprehension” (2003, p.8) which tries to understand the artistic experiences that seems to “transcend ordinary experiences” (ibid), and it is “as much a feeling as a cognition” (2003, p.258). Hamilton, Smith and Worthington state “from a postmodern view, there is no one way to capture experience; instead, questions and perspectives can be gathered to question perceived realities” (2008, p.22). By engaging and questioning my own embodied practice and notions of the way it can be perceived and experienced in a dance work, through my lighting design collaborations in the two case studies of *days like these* (2015) and *SoliiDad* (2019), this dissertation sets out to raise the significance of lighting design as an important participant in the multi-sensorial act that is live performance.

## Chapter One: *Ways of Seeing*

This chapter begins by looking at how we see light and what it means to us. Light, as both physical and as an abstraction, performs an integral part in our lives, not only physically affecting our ability to see and engage with the world but also how we understand the world. Light is also often used metaphorically to engage ideas of gaining knowledge and understanding. It is with this importance of light in our lives, and with my own engagement and study of light in the context of lighting design for performance and theatre making that this chapter begins my dissertation by offering a brief history of the emergence and development of 20<sup>th</sup> century lighting design practice globally, then locally, and then shifts to specifically looking at lighting design for dance. I engage ideas of specifically dance lighting because this style of lighting design engagement, as I will argue, allows for a potential openness and creativity on behalf of the designer – and for me specifically in my lighting design practice.

The first chapter, as a historical background and insight into the field, thus draws heavily on the preexisting published work of Stanley McCandless's *A Method of Stage Lighting* (1947), Rosenthal and Wertenbaker's *The Magic of Light* (1972), Philip Mumford's *Lighting Dance* (1985), Francis Reid's *The Stage Lighting Handbook* (2001), Yaron Abulafia's *The Art of Light Onstage* (2016), John Hopgood's *Dance Production, Design and Technology* (2016) and Kevin Dreyer's *DANCE AND LIGHT: The Partnership between Choreography and Lighting Design* (2020). These sources come from American and European sources, as previously noted, from where most of the history of lighting design has been written, one of the aims of this dissertation is to write South African lighting designers, myself included, into the lexicon of theatrical practice discourse.

This chapter then delves briefly into looking at South African theatre history and how lighting design has developed into a crucial element of theatrical performance. The Theatre Lighting Archive (theatrearchives, 2012) interviews with South African lighting designers Joe and Dave Freedman, Richard Parker, Mannie Manim and John T Baker give insight into how lighting design has developed as a practice in South Africa in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter then engages the physical and visceral practice

of lighting design with the insights offered by the above-mentioned books and resources. This lays the foundation for my own (later) engagements with lighting design and practice thus forming a basis for understanding what it is that we (and I) do as lighting designers.

Finally, the chapter briefly explores and introduces some of the contested notions of how we define and think about South African contemporary dance, by looking at various definitions and then accessing my case studies by Vincent Sekwati Mantsoe<sup>5</sup> and FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY<sup>6</sup>, as examples of how I begin to engage and understand the form.

## 1) Light in Historical and Contemporary Thinking

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. (The Bible: Genesis. 1:3-4).

This scripture from the Christian bible forms one of many mythological and religious engagements with the idea of light as the very beginning of the creation story that is fundamental to Judeo-Christianity, as laid out in the book of Genesis. Agni, the god of fire, is one of the most important Vedic gods and is central to Hindu rites and rituals; Deepawali or Diwali symbolises the spiritual "victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance" (Little, 2017, np), and remembers the epic story of the Ramayana, to welcome the triumphant return of Lord Rama from his battle with the demon-king Ravana (Little, 2017, np). The idea of enlightenment can also refer to the spiritual awakening as achieved by the Buddha under a fig/Bodhi (awakening) tree in Buddhism. It can also refer to The Enlightenment Age: the intellectual and philosophical school of thought that dominated Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. Phrases like 'enlighten', 'seeing the light', and 'shining a light on the subject' are all metaphors or literal meanings for gaining knowledge in a particular area. Perhaps one of the most interesting references to light is Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave'

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<sup>5</sup> Vincent Sekwati Mantsoe (b. 1971) is a South African choreographer and dancer now living in France. More details are explored in section 6 of this chapter. For more information visit: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent\\_Mantsoe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent_Mantsoe)

<sup>6</sup> FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY (est. 2003) is a Durban based dance company. More details are explored in section 6 of this chapter. For more information visit: <https://flatfootdancecompany.webs.com/> or <https://www.facebook.com/flatfootdancecompany>

in his work *Republic* (514a–520a), where light reveals shadows on the wall from a fire behind a group of people chained facing a blank wall which they perceive to be their only reality. Plato suggests that it is when we move away from looking at just the shadows that are reflections of reality and we search beyond the reflections that we find a greater truth. This truth, in the ‘Allegory of the Cave’, is the real source of light from outside of the tunnel (from the sun), which then reveals the true reality and not just what we see chained up only looking at the shadows.

Scientifically speaking, the speed of light squared is the constant in Albert Einstein’s theory of Special Relativity where mass and energy are both, but different, manifestations of the same thing in relation to the speed of light (Siegal, 2018, np). Swedish researcher Simon Niedenthal, in his paper *Documents of Light: Three Case Studies and a Preliminary Model for Organizing Light Knowledge* (2007), also states about the nature of light that “Its nature as both wave and particle make light the quintessence of modern uncertainty” and continues “light is simultaneously physical and metaphysical” (2007, p.154).

Rosenthal and Wertenbaker (1972, p.39) have also boldly offered,

Scholars have surmised that man (sic) first acknowledged the existence of his soul by worshipping his sources of light, the sun and the moon. With his discovery that he could control fire man began to master his environment, and with firelight the history of artificial illumination - of controlled light - begins. When we gain in wisdom we still say we are “enlightened”.

The above-mentioned short references to mythologies and sciences offer an open and philosophical introduction and understanding of how light forms a central precept to human lives both physically and metaphorically. For my research, it is at this point I begin to think about what it means to be a theatrical lighting designer: as someone who is affected and affects others (performers and audience) with light. Understanding my role, and the impact it can have on the audience – in tandem with the collaboration with a choreographer, or other members of the creative team – is thus not only important but a necessary part of my process and the point at where this dissertation begins.

Jean Rosenthal, one of the most significant figures in modern lighting design practice begins with “The logical, basic function of light, of fixtures, of all artificial light, goes all the way back to the human demand and need for visibility in order to see in the dark.” (1972, p.3). Cathryn Vasseleu’s book *Textures of Light* (2002) begins, through Vasseleu’s phenomenological engagements<sup>7</sup> with the writing of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Luce Irigaray and Emmanuel Levinas, to rethink the role of vision in contemporary thought. Vasseleu advocates for treating light as a texture, “A ‘texture’ is a disposition or characteristic of anything which is woven into a fabric, and comprises a combination of parts or qualities which is neither simply unveiled or made up” (2002, p.11). Furthermore, Vasseleu (2002, p.12) observes highlighting light

[...] as a texture, as the naturalness of light cannot be divorced from its historical and embodied circumstances. It is neither visible nor invisible, neither metaphoric nor metaphysical. It is both the language and material of visual practices, or the invisible interweaving of differences which form the fabric of the visible.

By picking up Vasseleu’s idea of treating light as texture, this dissertation sets out to consider lighting design and implementation as a significant physical contributor to performance. This dissertation further considers that through an embodied practice light is engaged as not merely there to illuminate bodies and/or scenery, but is argued to be an active agent in performance-making, that contributes to the final production and theatrical meaning. I, as a lighting designer (like others interviewed and engaged in this research), work to take in the meaning of light physically, metaphorically and emotionally and use this in my practice. I seek to engage embodied connotations and meaning (that are personally and socially constructed) through light, and these all become valuable assets in my ability to sculpt the stage and create atmosphere and meaning during a performance. Ideas around embodied practice will be engaged in Chapter Two of this dissertation. This engagement with my lighting design practice will be further explored in Chapter Four, where I analyse my two case studies and understand the effect lighting has on these productions.

In the next section, and germane to my historical understanding of context and place, I go on to trace a brief history of European and American lighting design practice, that involves looking at how theatrical lighting started as a way of simply illuminating

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<sup>7</sup> Phenomenology, most influenced by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, will be explored more in chapter two of this dissertation.

performance, to what it is now, considered an artistic practice that can contribute to performance in a more layered and significant manner. The roots of my practice and most conventional theatrical practices have their roots in the history and development of European and American theatre, as will be traced in the next section. Debates around Global North and South, East and West, are not overlooked but fall outside the scope of this dissertation. The term 'conventional' theatre and lighting design will be used in this dissertation to speak of my and many other's experience of working in mostly proscenium arch-based venues. This does have its history in a predominantly Western style of theatre and has been appropriated into local contexts (as have many aspects of Western civilisation). This will be explored by examining my practice in Chapter Four. There are other ways of working, as I do often outside of the conventional theatres, but because this is the focus of the dissertation, it is located as the area of discussion.

## 2) A Brief History of Modern Lighting Design Practice<sup>8</sup>

Dr Yaron Abulafia, a Netherlands-based visual artist and researcher, whose book *The Art of Light Onstage* (2016) forms a more recent example to the discussion around lighting design history and practice begins,

Systems for gas and electric lighting were increasingly introduced in the theatre only at the beginning and the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century respectively, and these, for the first time in history, allowed for the effective control and modified distribution of light throughout the performance. This feature, in particular, was revolutionary since it linked light with the dimension of time and later enabled theatre-makers to begin pondering the artistic function of light within a practice of design. The ability to adjust lighting intensity at will, provided theatre artists with the new capacity to control the visual organization of the dramatic space. (Abulafia, 2016, p.33)

The role and capacity of the lighting designer is inextricably linked to advancements in technology, and the people pushing that technology that drive the industry forward (Mumford, 1985, p.47). It was only once lighting designers were able to harness the properties of light, through in particular the introduction of dimmable electric fixtures,

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<sup>8</sup> This dissertation chooses to focus on modern lighting design practice following the use of gas and electric lighting systems which allowed light as medium to be controlled. The history of theatre technology (including lighting design) can be found in books by "Allardyce Nicoll (1961), Gösta M. Bergman (1977) and, more recently, by Christopher Baugh (2005), Arnold Aronson (2008), Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth (2010), Oscar G. Brockett, Margaret Mitchell and Linda Hardberger (2010) and Scott Palmer (2013)" (Abulafia, 2016, p.10)

that it became a meaningful contributor towards performance. One of the first pioneers of conventional lighting design practice was Sir Henry Irving (1838-1905) working at the Lyceum Theatre. The Lyceum was one of the first theatres in London to dim house lights during a performance as early as 1892 (Palmer quoted in Abulafia, 2016, p.11). Irving is noted for dimming lights for transitions, embracing lighting different areas of the stage and further highlighting the importance of shadows to imitate light as perceived/experienced naturally in everyday life (Abulafia, 2016, p.11). Similarly in the United States of America, David Belasco (1853-1931), chose to work with realistic sets instead of 'flats' (painted flat wood boards) and began to pioneer modern lighting techniques such as the use of high angles in lights and not just the reliance on footlights which were popular at the time (Abulafia, 2016, p.14).

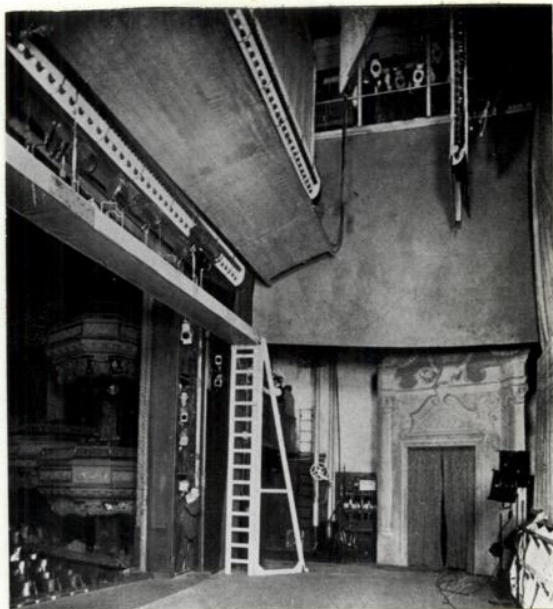


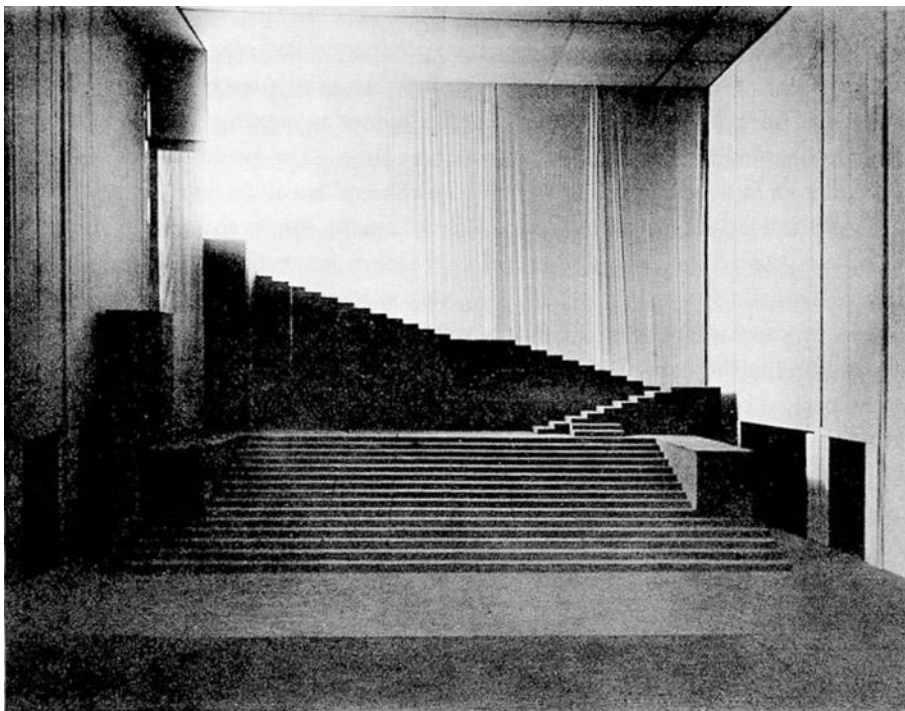
Plate 20--Belasco's lighting

*Image 1: An example of the high-angled placement of David Belasco's lighting.*  
<https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc163917/m1/112/>

Two of the most important figures in European theatrical lighting design were Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig. Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) born and raised in Geneva, Switzerland, is a key innovative figure in modern conventional theatre. He transformed old theatrical traditions from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and paved the way for modern theatre. Appia worked in both scenic and lighting design and is most known

for his work on Richard Wagner's<sup>9</sup> operas. Abulafia states Appia's first goal was "to liberate the theatre from the narrow horizon of older conventions of representation" and continues his second aim was "to overcome the gap between the 'meaningful expression' rendered by the creative artist (composer-dramatist, librettist or playwright) with the written work" (Abulafia, 2016, p.43) – the gap between what is in the text and how this is interpreted by the creatives working on the production. It is seeing Appia begin to work with light as a complimentary element, that can work beyond only ensuring visibility on a stage, to working with light as an enhancer of characters' emotions and thoughts, is what makes his work significant. In Appia's own words (Quoted in Rosenthal and Wertenbaker, 1972, p.55) he states:

Lighting itself is an element the effects of which are limitless; once it is free, it becomes for us what the palette is for the painter... the actor no longer walks in front of painted lights and shadows; he is immersed in an atmosphere that is destined for him.



*Image 2: Orpheus, Hellerau (1913), by Adolphe Appia*

<https://hicarquitectura.com/2019/12/adolphe-appia-drawings-and-productions/>

The above image of set and lighting design by Adolphe Appia illustrates this notion of atmosphere that Appia, quoted above, speaks of. The light not only illuminates the set

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883) is a German composer most not for his concept of '*Gesamtkunstwerk*', the total work of art, which unites music, poetry (dramatic text), scenery, dance and other media (Leach, 2004, p115 Quoted in Abulafia, 2016, p.31). Notable works include the *Ring* Trilogy and *Tristan and Isolde*.

but creates shadows and contrast that allow for a motivated use of light, in this instance the light from above as Orpheus descends into the underworld.

Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966) working in England and mentored by Henry Irving, also broke away from 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian theatre conventions of the time. Bergman says of Gordon Craig that one of the most

stimulating creative force[es] in his new visionary theatre was movement. Metamorphoses of space and body, with the change of coloured lights, brought about a vibrant harmony between the various theatrical components, more than had been accomplished ever before. (Quoted in Abulafia, 2016, p.48)

Gordon Craig “created a sense of musicality, rhythm and mobility with the space, by the use of light (Abulafia, 2016, p.27) which is noted to be similar to Appia’s notion of “creative light”<sup>10</sup> (ibid). Bergman (Quoted in Abulafia, 2016, p.27) offers this appraisal of the work by Gordon Craig,

Craig tirelessly experimented with lighting effects using coloured slides and patterned illumination, shadowing of plants in front of lamp lenses, lighting through semi-transparent curtains, lamps with numerous reflectors that throw light irregularly, in order to separate areas on the stage – to mention but a few of his explorations.

It is Gordon Craig’s shifting of light as “a primary poetic element, a rising and highly expressive medium” (Abulafia, 2016, p.28) that makes his contribution to conventional lighting design practice notable as can be seen in the illustration by Gordon Craig’s drawing below for set and lighting design for *Hamlet* (1913) in the scene where Claudius explains his recent marriage to Gertrude, recently widowed, in the throne room of Elsinore castle.

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<sup>10</sup> Appia’s category of “Creative Light” is directional and concentrated light beams highlighting performers and other three-dimensional objects, casting their clear shadows in the space and creating contrast between light, shade and background (Abulafia, 2016, p.20)



Image 3: *Hamlet. Act I Sc ii. Towards A New Theatre (1913). Edward Gordon Craig.*  
<http://www.edwardgordoncraig.co.uk/media/towards-a-new-theatre/>

Professional Lighting Designer and a Professor of Lighting Design at the University of Notre Dame in the USA, Kevin Dreyer, acknowledges the importance of the contribution by Appia and Gordon Craig to lighting design by acknowledging how they began to see light and lighting design as not only providing visibility to a production but more importantly to convey emotions and add to the overall scenographic/visual statement of a piece of theatre (Dreyer, 2020, p.14).

Other significant contributors to conventional lighting design working around this time as mentioned by Abulafia in *The Art of Light on Stage*, include The Theatre of Symbolists, which was developed in Paris in the late 1880's. They worked against the ideas of Realism and Naturalism in theatre (Bergman quoted in Abulafia, 2016, p.28). Abulafia (2016, p.28) notes that at the time,

scientific and artistic interest in the phenomenon of synaesthesia (the exchange of impressions between the sensory modalities) was growing. Speculations on synaesthesia and on the analogous sensorial effects of different art disciplines on the addressees, the relationship between colour and music in particular, have continued to fascinate many visual artists around the emergence of Modernism – Richard Wagner, Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) and Charles Baudelaire (1821–67).

Wagner's notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk*: the total work of art, which unites music, poetry, dramatic text, scenery, dance and other media (Leach, 2004, p.115 quoted in Abulafia, 2016, p.31), was in aim of achieving this total crossing over of senses.



Image 4: *Yellow-Red-Blue* (1925) Wassily Kandinsky <https://www.wassily-kandinsky.org/Yellow-Red-Blue.jsp#prettyPhoto>

The colours used in Kandinsky's *Yellow-Red-Blue* (1925) are said to be associated with different music compositions<sup>11</sup>. In the writing of Baudelaire for instance his 'Correspondances' extract (1957) speaks of "...Perfumes, colours, and sounds respond to one another" (Baudelaire, 1957, p.13), in illustrating the crossing over of senses interacting.

French Dramatist Antonin Artaud (1896 – 1948) is most known for his concept of the 'Theatre of Cruelty' published in the *Theatre and Its Double* (1938) advocated for a "concrete language of the stage" (Artaud quoted in Palmer, 1967, p.147) in order to predict emotional responses to specific lighting conditions (Palmer, 1967, p.147). Artaud continues, "The particular action of light upon the mind, the effects of all kinds of luminous vibrations must be investigated, along with new ways of spreading the light in waves, in sheets, in fusillades of fiery arrows" (Quoted in Palmer, 1967, p.148), it is the investigation of the qualities of light and how they affect sensations is what

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<sup>11</sup> This can be experienced by using Google's Arts and Culture page which allows you to explore the different compositions in relations to the colours used: <https://artsandculture.google.com/experiment/sgF5ivv105ukhA>

Palmer says develops into “a technique for lighting emotional states rather than objects” (Palmer, 1967, p.14). It is through understanding the emotional effect of lighting that Artaud would use it to shock the senses of audiences as often described as an outcome of a ‘Theatre of Cruelty’ (Leach, 2008, p.111) – this illustrated image below with anguished performers highlighted in stark bright beams of lights.



Image 5: *The Spurt of Blood* (1925) Antonin Artaud  
[https://www.grusomhetensteater.no/portfolio\\_page/the-spurt-of-blood/](https://www.grusomhetensteater.no/portfolio_page/the-spurt-of-blood/)

A further interesting shift in how light was used in modern conventional theatre comes in the work of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and his concept of ‘*Verfremdung*’ (‘de-familiarization’ or ‘alienation’) (Leach, 2004, p.118 quoted in Abulafia, 2016, p.31). His ideas around creating critical distancing between stage action and the audience were often achieved by harsh lighting that was set to expose the course of action on stage, and not try to conceal any artificiality or fictive representations (Abulafia, 2016, p.57-58).



*Image 6: Bertolt Brecht's musical The Threepenny Opera (1928) highlights Brecht's use of technology on stage including placards, slide or film projections, sound and lighting effects.*  
<https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/bertolt-brecht-and-epic-theatre-v-is-for-verfremdungseffekt>

Another practitioner working in America, Robert Edmond Jones (1887-1954), working with the Theatre Guild (New York, USA), believed “that a comprehensive visual treatment could support the atmosphere of the play and carry it beyond the simple physical locale or imitations of nature”<sup>12</sup> (Rosenthal and Wertenbaker, 1972, p.55). Rosenthal and Wertenbaker go on to say that the pools of light which Edmond Jones was credited for using, are “the true beginning of lighting design as a separate art and craft, for with them begins an understanding of light's separate contribution to the whole” (1972, p.56).

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<sup>12</sup> Understood to be the complete visual elements of a production, including lighting, can work beyond only representing naturalistic time and place of production.

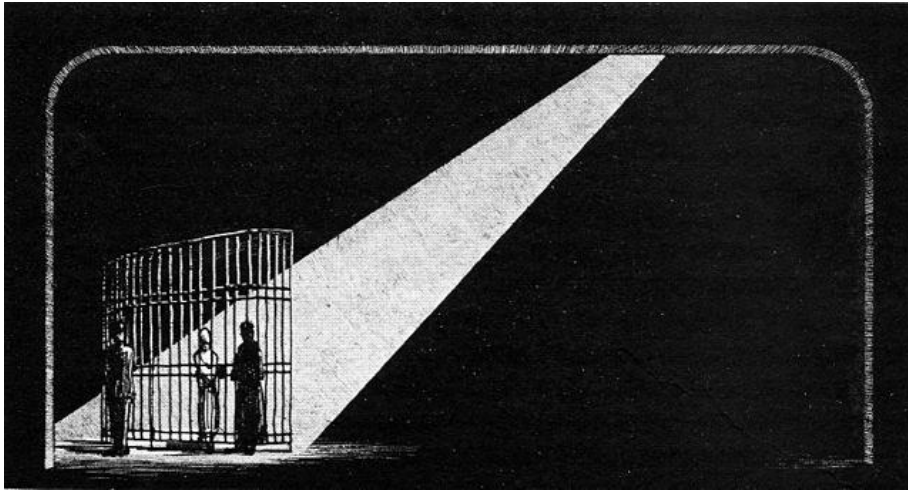


Image 7: Set design and Lighting design (indicating pool of light) illustration by Robert Edmond Jones for *Machinal* (1928). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Edmond\\_Jones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Edmond_Jones)

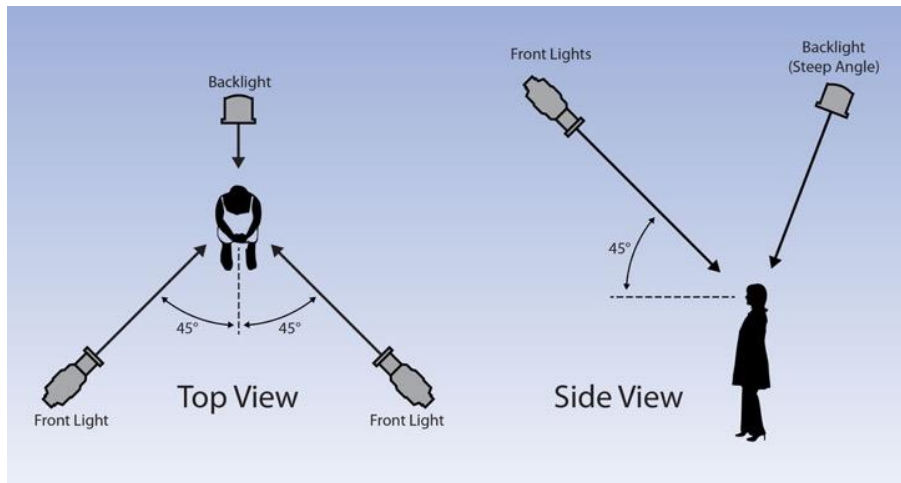
These selected European and American theatre practitioners mentioned above, amongst others, started to expand the capacity of light and theatrical lighting design into a conceptual space that moved beyond simply looking at illuminating action on dark stages. Two American practitioners, Stanley McCandless and his student Jean Rosenthal, further developed these ideas through practical guides and lived practices, that have been highly influential on conventional lighting design practice, even today.

Stanley McCandless (1897 – 1967) published his guide to lighting design practice in 1932, *A Method of Stage Lighting*, which contains practical directions for how to apply a standardised methodology to creating lighting that could serve an artistic purpose. It also discusses four manageable properties of light and design that should be considered. These four manageable properties are,

- 1.) Intensity (the brightness of a lighting fixture)
- 2.) Colour (through the use of a filter or for modern fixtures if the light is LED, which colours are used)
- 3.) Distribution (how fixtures are arranged onstage) and
- 4.) Movement (how fixtures fade, from one state to another or their actual movement if they can do, such as with an intelligent lighting fixture). (Dreyer, 2020, p.14)

*A Method of Stage Lighting* advocated for “dividing the general acting area into a number of sections [generally nine], the normal spread of light from each instrument can be expected to cover the actor in each of these sections or acting areas” (McCandless, 1947, p.17). McCandless’s three-point lighting placement with 45-

degree key light, fill light and back light remains a continuing standard of live conventional theatre performance as well as television and film (1947, p.55).



*Image 8: Stanley McCandless's 3-point lighting system*  
<http://theatretechclub.com/2015/06/04/what-is-the-mccandless-method/>

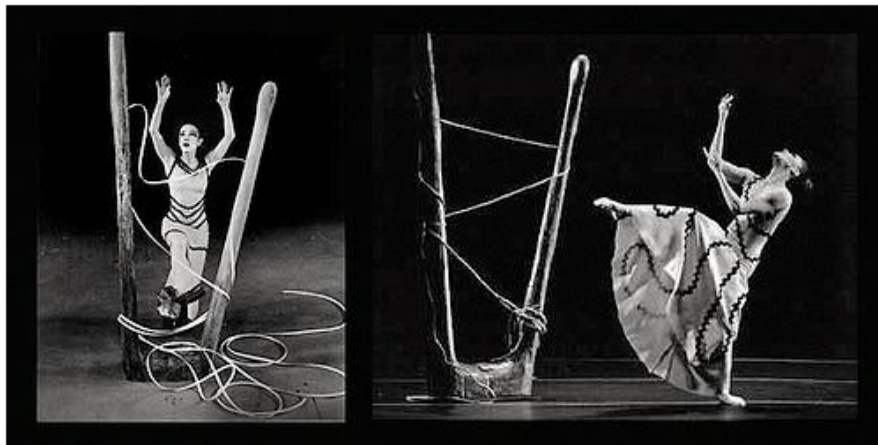
John McAfee in his 2019 published dissertation goes on to say: “McCandless's view of plasticity<sup>13</sup> remains deeply relevant to design in dance. As the performers carve through three-dimensional space, they themselves must remain three-dimensional” (2019, p.35). Rosenthal and Wertenbaker acknowledge McCandless as the “granddaddy of us all” (1972, p.16) because of how he set up “an attitude which demands that there must be a technique and a method for organizing your ideas” (ibid). These are the basic concepts I still implement in setting up a lighting rig in a conventional theatre space, as has been my experience in working in other theatres around the country as well.

The lighting of it affects everything light falls upon. How you see what you see, how you feel about it, and how you hear what you are hearing. (Rosenthal and Wertenbaker, 1972, p.3) This quotation by Jean Rosenthal (1912-1969) illustrates how lighting can affect everything in a live performance. Rosenthal was a student of Stanley McCandless, who Leal Wertenbaker calls in her introduction to *The Magic of Light* (1972), which she co-wrote with Rosenthal, a “pioneer in the art and craft of lighting design” (Rosenthal and Wertenbaker, 1972, p.ix). Owing to her work in dance, and in

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<sup>13</sup> Plasticity is commonly used term in lighting design and refers to the degree to which three dimensionality a performer on stage is brought out.

particular with the American modern dance pioneer, Martha Graham<sup>14</sup>, makes her lighting work relevant to my own practice. Rosenthal saw light as an object<sup>15</sup>, not a tool; for her, the beam of light had weight and this may explain why she used light so adeptly, creating designs that "vibrated with the emotion of whatever the particular scene was about" (McAfee, 2019, p.32). Her use of a flexible lighting plot and fixed-side-stands play a significant role in how dance is still lit today (my lighting design work included, as will be discussed in Chapter Four). Tenhula adds on the commentary of Jean Rosenthal's way of lighting "This tradition focuses on lighting movement and turns the body into an abstract, three-dimensional kinetic space for movement (Quoted in Humalisto, Karjunen and Kilpeläinen, 2019, p.127) and it is why it is still a much engaged and sought after way of lighting today. This can be noted in the below images of Martha Graham, with lighting design by Rosenthal, where high and side angles of lights are used to give the performer depth and plasticity.



*Image 9: Errand Into The Maze by Martha Graham (1948) (lighting design: Jean Rosenthal)*  
<https://womeninlighting.com/extras/entry/r.a.w-jean-rosenthal>

Lighting Designer Peter Mumford has observed that "Lighting is able to develop more creatively and freely within dance than in any other aspect of theatre" (Mumford, 1985, p.54) and with the emergence of European and American modern dance, lighting design continued to break free from its purely visual limitations. For example,

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<sup>14</sup> Martha Graham is recognised as a primal artistic force of the 20th century... Graham created 181 ballets and a dance technique that has been compared to ballet in its scope and magnitude. Her approach to dance and theatre revolutionised the art form and her innovative physical vocabulary has irrevocably influenced dance worldwide.  
(<https://marthagraham.org/history>) [Accessed 16 February 2023]

<sup>15</sup> This is a notion similar to Cathryn Vasseleu's treating of light as a texture mentioned above (2002, p.12)

American dancer and choreographer Loïe Fuller (1862-1928) used complex lighting design created by Fuller herself to match the beauty of her solo performances. In many ways, lighting and lighting effects became her dance partner. “Her costume also reflected the intensity and use of colour with light to dazzle the audience” (Abulafia, 2016, p.54). Dreyer also notes Fuller’s use of movement “augmented by the use of flowing costumes and that played with the different coloured lights she had directed at her, makes her a special person in any discussion of dance and lighting design” (Dreyer, 2020, p.22).



Image 10: Loïe Fuller, in flowing garments, performing her serpentine dance in *Garment for Dancers* (1892). [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Loie-Fuller-performing-her-serpentine-dance-in-her-Garment-for-Dancers-from-1892\\_fig1\\_268162238](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Loie-Fuller-performing-her-serpentine-dance-in-her-Garment-for-Dancers-from-1892_fig1_268162238)

Later on in America, George Balanchine (1904 – 1983) co-founded the New York City Ballet. His choreographic works (especially from the 1940s onward) began to introduce a new modernist take on ballet that was more abstract and stripped down, and this was reflected in the way in which it was lit. “Lighting design moved away from basic illumination and became equal parts alternative scenery and artistic expression” (Hopgood, 2016, p. 191). This is evident in the below image of the 2003 recreation of one of Balanchine’s earliest ballets *Serenade* (1934) where there is no set and the dancers are evocatively lit with sidelights and an overhead blue that creates a dramatic atmosphere and ‘otherworldliness’ to the piece.



*Image 11: New York City Ballet in 'Serenade,' 2003. Photo by Paul Kolnik*  
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703467004575463543929815752>

This link to dance and lighting design will be explored more in section four of this chapter. Next, this dissertation navigates some of the tumultuous history of South African theatre, and lighting design practice alongside this. As noted, most of the conventional theatre and lighting practice are inherited from European and American sources, by understanding some of this history, I can understand the practice as I have inherited it and currently use it, especially in a form like dance, which starts to challenge conventional ways of thinking about and seeing the world.

### 3) South African Theatre History and Lighting

In South Africa, the practice and history of lighting design are arguably linked to the history of theatre in the country itself with developments and changes in theatrical styles affecting how theatre is made and thus lit. Denis Hutchinson's 2012/13 interviews on The Theatre Lighting Archive's YouTube channel are one such source of speaking to lighting designers who worked during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as lighting design came into being a vocation here in South Africa (theatrearchive, 2012). This dissertation next briefly engages some of the history of theatre in South Africa, and how it relates to theatrical lighting design.

Indigenous and popular performance styles<sup>16</sup> have existed for thousands of years (and continue to evolve) in South Africa, with many of these cultural practices still in use today, however, generally, they do not situate themselves in conventional theatrical spaces. Arguably, in as much as colonisation has impacted how our current society exists, it has also deeply impacted performance traditions here in South Africa. For example, Temple Hauptfleisch in the Encyclopaedia of South African Theatre, Film, Media and Performance (ESAT) online, traces these to the “European-style theatre that the Dutch, French, German and particularly British colonials introduced between 1790 to 1880” (Hauptfleisch, 2022, np). Joe and Dave Freedman in their interviews on The Theatre Lighting Archive (theatrearchive, 2012) speak of the impact of the African Consolidated Theatres which mostly operated during the 1913-1960s in South Africa (ESAT, 2022, np). They speak of The Empire, His Majesty and Colosseum Theatres in Johannesburg as well as the Alhambra Theatre in Durban as being on the cutting edge of overseas technology as they often hosted touring productions and would need to cater to the needs of these productions (theatrearchive, 2012). These theatres catered almost exclusively for white audiences and engaged a deeply problematic construction of British colonial ‘motherland culture’<sup>17</sup>. It is more notable during the apartheid era (1948 onwards) in South Africa, that theatre began to find a unique local voice where a majority black population who “suffered under the British colonial legacy of apartheid policies that relegated blacks to separate, inferior living and working conditions, theatre artists began in the 1960s to create works criticizing these policies, works that were often politically dangerous” (Zarrili et al, 2010, p.474).

Kevin Dreyer, speaking from the American context, contends that up until about the 1930s all the formal lighting work in theatre was accomplished by people who were fulfilling other tasks (Dreyer, 2020, p.14). The director or set designer was often tasked with lighting the space as an extension of their vision for the set. Productions relied on electricians to place instruments in general directions and then adjusted the intensities (ibid). Joe and Dave Freedman, Mannie Manim and John T Baker in their interviews

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<sup>16</sup> This is a simplified understanding of the multiple histories of understanding what local African culture practices; for more understanding of the complexities of these terms look at *Popular Arts in Africa* (1987) by Karin Barber

<sup>17</sup> Temple Hauptfleisch notes “This came both in the form of amateur dramatics and through regular visits of touring companies from London and Australia, “playing the Empire”. These events impacted heavily on all aspects of formal theatre: the physical form of the theatre spaces, the Organisational system, the fundamental principles behind theatre as a representational art, and so on.” (Hauptfleisch, 2022)

on The Theatre Lighting Archive explain further saying that the director would be the person to instruct the chief electrician on the states required for the production and this is how they often came into lighting design by being electricians by day, and then working on shows at night; without any formal training, learning as they went along (theatrearchive, 2012). The early lighting control was mostly via a large Grand Master lever system, that was placed on a ledge on the side of the stage. The operator could usually not see what was happening – it was all worked out before a performance, with not that many cues owing to the coarseness of the equipment. It was only with the advent of controllable pre-set desks and eventually computerised desks that lighting design was able to become a profession (theatrearchive, 2012). Dave Freedman credits Mannie Manim (who would later go on to co-found The Market Theatre) as one of the first to plan out the lighting in advance and thus truly be able to claim the title of 'Lighting Designer' (theatrearchive, *Dave Freedman 3*, 2012).

During the 1960s in South Africa, the Nationalist government created the four regionally based Performing Arts Councils (Hauptfleisch, 2022, np). These Arts Councils built performing arts facilities in the four major centres of Pretoria (Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal, PACT – now the State Theatre), Durban (Natal Performing Arts Council, NAPAC – now the Playhouse Company), Bloemfontein (Performing Arts Council of the Orange Free State, PACOFS – now known as the Performing Arts Centre of the Free State, also with the acronym PACOFS) and Cape Town (Cape Performing Arts Board, CAPAB – now the Artscape Theatre). Still today the technical facilities provided by these centres, with the assistance of state funding, tend to form the pinnacle of cutting-edge theatrical technology that goes alongside the predominantly Western style of theatre: musicals, opera and ballet, which were (and are) performed in these spaces. Outside of these, alternative spaces, for example, The Market Theatre in Johannesburg and The Space Theatre in Cape Town, offered places for oppositional/anti-establishment theatre. Often embracing the methodologies of 'Poor Theatre'<sup>18</sup> conventions which required very simple but provocative lighting. Even in these alternate spaces, there seemed to be a holding on

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<sup>18</sup> Poor Theatre is a style of theatre that gets its name from Jerzy Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre*, where a minimal amount of set and props are used. It became especially popular in South Africa during the Apartheid era as a style used for protesting against the government. [https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Poor\\_theatre](https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Poor_theatre) [accessed 21 October 2022]. The most well-known proponent of this style from South Africa is *Woza Albert* (1981) by Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa which utilizes a mostly bare stage and the actors performing multiple roles with simple physical character and costume changes.

to the traditional proscenium arch-based venues as inherited by the European and British roots mentioned earlier. Post 1994 and a democratic country, has seen South Africa “in search of new structures, forms and styles to suit the rainbow nation of the new South Africa” (Hauptfleisch, 2022) – one such form that starts to question and challenge our contemporary world, and it will be explored in section six of this chapter, is contemporary dance and its search to rethink space and place.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4) What is Lighting Design Practice?

Having offered above an abridged history of some of the key influential modern conventional lighting design practitioners, I move on now to examine briefly what it is that a conventional theatre lighting designer does. Kevin Dreyer (2020, p.8) offers the following description,

What elevates lighting to the realm of lighting design is the process we are working to understand. It is the need to make choices, choices driven by an artistic or aesthetic set of circumstances – this is the job of a designer.

South African Scenic Designer Sarah Roberts (2001, p.82) established the following requirement of a designer working in a theatre space,

The stage is a specialized space, much the same as an operating theatre, or the cockpit of a 747, where the facilities, even in the most rudimentary house invites, if not demand (at the level of the most complex engineered spaces) informed use.

Peter Mumford, further, provides a broad definition of theatrical lighting: “Lighting is a scenic art concerned not only with evoking of atmosphere and ideas but also with the definition of space and ‘body form’ in relation to space” (Mumford, 1985, p.46).

These evocative and broad definitions offer an understanding that lighting design is not only about making people and objects visible on stage (Dreyer, 2020 and Reid, 2001), but also shifts into the emotional and poetic realms of “atmosphere and ideas” (Mumford, 1985, p.46), that, as stated earlier, contribute to how a theatre or dance work is understood and perceived. Linking back to Cathryn Vasseleu (2002, p.44) –

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<sup>19</sup> This is very simplified and contracted history of South African Theatre done primarily for context to my study which is focusing more on lighting design. For a more in-depth look at South African Theatre histories, look at *Theatre and Society in South Africa* (1997) by Temple Hauptfleisch and *The Drama of South Africa* (1999) by Loren Kruger.

quoted earlier in this chapter – and her phenomenological discussions around lighting, she observes,

in perception, light is taken for granted as a transparent ‘lighting’ or background setting of things as visual phenomena, but it can also be the object of perception, for example, as a beam, as possessing a colour, or as having a particular atmosphere.

Although not specifically speaking about theatrical lighting design, this is a notion that lighting designers understand; that light can have (and create) atmosphere - affecting the perception of all those who experience it.

Richard Palmer, American Lighting Designer and Professor Emeritus, outlines the dichotomy of a lighting designer well in *The Lighting Art* (Quoted in McAfee, 2019, p.23): “To be a designer you need more than a knowledge of equipment; you must control light itself and, ultimately, what and how the audience sees.”

Further, Francis Reid expands on McCandless’s controllable properties of light (mentioned earlier in this chapter), and lists five tools that lighting designers use to affect what the audience sees on stage:

1. Intensity (which lights are on and the brightness),
2. Colour
3. Direction (the angle the beam will hit the performer),
4. Beam (size, shape and quality)
5. Flow (movement from one scene to another). (Reid, 2001, p.10)

Reid’s above expansion to include Beam is offered because of the current technological advancements made to lighting equipment. He also adds, that one of the most fascinating and rewarding uses of light, outside of just illumination, is the possibility of influencing the mental state of the audience (2001, p.6).

## 5) Lighting for Dance

One of the many things I wish to explore in this research on the role of the lighting designer for dance is the opening up of spaces to break from expectations around lighting and how this embodied performance form of dance allows for a potential freedom that “does not have the limitations that a script might impose on actors in a theatre” (Mumford, 1985, p.54). Lighting Designer Seth Reiser illustrates this notion

further by saying: “It’s more abstract, so the lighting can be more abstract too” (Quoted in Hopgood, 2016, p.220). Jean Rosenthal offers a further interesting relationship of dance to lighting and offers, “The dance is fluid and never static, as natural light is fluid and never static. Designing for the dance has been my most constant love (1972, p.117). Rosenthal goes on to equate the dancing body on stage to that of a fish in an aquarium, she says, “Dancers live in light as fish live in water. The stage space in which they move is their aquarium, their portion of the sea” (1972, p.117). Dreyer (2020, p.10) goes on to expand this evocative metaphor,

The idea of an aquarium created by light is poetic, but it describes a practical process of defining, for the audience, the space in which the dance is to occur. It also speaks to the philosophical concept of support. We are called upon to support dancers in motion and in stasis, and as any dancer will tell you support is the key component in partner work. So we are, in effect, asked to create lighting that will partner the dancer.

This notion of a lighting designer partnering and supporting the dancer, of being an active participant in the creative process and product, is an essential aspect of the enquiry I embark on in this dissertation and one that I will actively explore in my work and the work of other (selected) South African lighting designers.

Kevin Dreyer (2020, p.153) further expands on why lighting is important in dance,

It speaks to style, it speaks to artistic vision, to partnering with the dance. It is about attention to the whole thing, to the opening up of a moment on stage in a way that brings the audience along at the pace we want. It is about revealing the dancer at the precise instant in the dance and in the rhythm of the piece. It is about making the lighting design a partner in the work. To me it is how I perform; and to the artistic director who was writing me it is what makes me a storyteller in light.

I set out, in this dissertation, to situate lighting design as one component of the complex multi-sensorial act that is theatrical contemporary dance performance involving others such as (primarily) choreographers, dancers, sound, set etc. When it comes to lighting, even if there are no dedicated people in place to take on these creative roles - as is sometimes the case, someone has to fulfil these requirements whether it be the choreographer themselves, or a technician behind the lighting desk. Understanding the importance of the lighting design to the performance work thus becomes necessary for all those creating work. However, when these roles are taken

on by experienced people, it is the notion of collaboration<sup>20</sup> that becomes important. Hopgood (2016, p.24) breaks this down further by offering

The process of creating any work of art through collaboration is a risky endeavor. There is always the possibility for misunderstandings, personality conflicts, communication breakdowns, and more. Ultimately, though, in each of these interactions lies the potential for something wondrous—a dynamic and unique creation that tells a story more powerfully and evocatively than any individual could alone. It is that potential that makes the risk worthwhile and drives us onwards.

Kevin Dreyer offers the notion that dance and lighting not only go hand in hand aesthetically, but lighting is often a practical means of enhancing a dance work (Dreyer, 2020, p.36). Productions are often trying to work with as minimal a budget as possible, with resources being shifted to paying for the hire of spaces and the paying of performers and the creative team. Most theatres will have a standard lighting rig with enough equipment to suitably light a show, so if there are no sets and basic costuming it leaves lighting “as the most economic means to make a strong artistic statement in support of the choreographer’s work” (Dreyer, 2020, p.36).

Yaron Abulafia contends that “Theatre [and dance being a notable exponent of this] has always been a multidisciplinary art form in which a variety of cultural traditions were appropriated and renewed according to contemporary worldviews” (2016, p.70). In this contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century era, light has started to become an expressive medium in its own right; “through lighting design, many light artists have indirectly had an impact on how our sense of light and the corporeal events of seeing and viewing are understood in dance art” (Tenhula in Humalisto, Karjunen and Kilpeläinen, 2019, p.146). This chapter next engages some of the notions of South African contemporary dance as a multidisciplinary art form, that engages notions of the personal, social and political.

## 6) South African Contemporary Dance

South African contemporary dance<sup>21</sup>, is a contested term for the broad category of socially conscious dance that has emerged in South Africa. Although it is not a direct

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<sup>20</sup> These notions of collaboration will be explored later in the analysis of my own process in Chapter Four

<sup>21</sup> The classification as used by dance Journalist Adrienne Sichel (2016, 2018), which informs a major understanding of this style of dance in which I work and I have adopted to use in this dissertation

focus of this dissertation to unpack the meaning of contemporary dance, it is important to look at what it is, as it is the world that I, as a lighting designer, choose to work in. Specialist Dance Journalist Adrienne Sichel (2016, np) observes: “South African contemporary dance was largely born as a form of cultural resistance and political defiance by certain choreographers and teachers, in reaction to the race laws of apartheid South Africa” and Choreographer and Scholar Lliane Loots (2018, p.1) further explores this notion of contemporary dance as

a form that defies closed definitions other than perhaps pinning down the intent which, simply put, is to create movements that open up the desire to understand dance as a medium of art making that engages the ‘contemporary’. In South Africa this is a complex interplay between the confluence and influence of traditional African dance histories and forms, European and American modern dance methodologies, and the ever-evolving search for authentic (and multiple) African contemporary dance voices that speak to culture, politics, art and (most significantly) identity and self.<sup>22</sup>

Other notable trademark qualities of contemporary dance, as mentioned by Adrienne Sichel, are “invention and reinvention of artistic and cultural forms and functions” and its ability to disrupt, displace, connect and survive” (Sichel, 2016, np).

Sichel in her book *BODY POLITICS Fingerprinting South African Contemporary Dance* (2018) traces and maps out some of the most important histories of contemporary dance in South Africa. She points out the general perception of the beginnings of contemporary dance in South Africa,

formally began in the mid-1970s, spearheaded by pioneers in major cities: These include the Jazzart Studio in Cape Town, with Sonje Mayo and Sue Parker, and in Johannesburg with Sylvia Glasser, who ran Experimental Dance Theatre’s annual seasons from 1967 to 1976. In Durban, Geoffrey Sutherland was a Speech and Drama lecturer, in the late 1960s, at the University of Natal; subsequently, he founded his multiracial Kinetica Company. Sutherland’s presence at the university, where Fred Hagemann was a lecturer at the time, constitutes one of the foundations of South African Contemporary Dance. (Sichel, 2018, p.18)

Sichel postulates that the word ‘contemporary’ was used as opposed to ‘modern’, as used in America and Europe, as a way of distancing from the modern dance being taught and performed in the suburbs and inner cities of white South Africa (2018, p.18). Out of its roots in apartheid South Africa, and into the post-1994 democratic era,

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<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that South African contemporary dance has a complex interplay between local and European and American forms as well as between the social / cultural and the personal. As traced in the previous sections, lighting design has a complex history of European and American roots and perhaps a South African voice can give a perspective on local practice as will be explored in chapter three of this dissertation through interviews with other lighting designers.

contemporary dance has continued to pioneer a voice that challenges and questions the world we live in. A forefront proponent of South African contemporary dance, locally and abroad, Gregory Vuyani Maqoma speaks of his practice as an African contemporary creator: “I am creating a domain of reality in which social and emotional conflicts can be brought out in the open and made available for public discussion” (2006, p.35). Although speaking about the broader African context, these notions do apply to the South African context as well, as all artists in the sector grapple to find their voices. One most notable idea is that there is no singular definition for contemporary dance, it draws its roots from Western and more traditional styles – it uses whatever tools it has at its disposal to try and find authentic voices for those who are involved in the form.

An important event to discuss this, was the landmark conference entitled *African Contemporary Dance? Questioning Issues of a Performance Aesthetic for a Developing and Independent Continent* hosted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s Centre for Creative Arts and its 2004 JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience. It gathered choreographers and practitioners from across the continent that wrestled with this notion of ‘contemporary African dance’ with “one popular approach is that there is no one such thing as ‘contemporary African Dance’ (Sichel, 2018, p.25) – it is rather multiple voices that in their self, defy a singular definition. It is out of this gathering that highlights how contested this term can be, “between what is African dance, what is traditional and what is modern, that are at the heart of the ‘movement’ of contemporary dance making” (Sichel, 2018, p.25).

Again, the focus of this dissertation is not on tracing the complex and layered history of South African contemporary dance, but I offer here a small situated contextual introduction to the two choreographers of the case studies I engage in this dissertation. I focus, here, on how they engage with notions of contemporary dance in South Africa.

Vincent Sekwati Koko Mantsoe

Vincent Mantsoe was born in 1971 and raised in Diepkloof Zone 2 Soweto, a township near Johannesburg. His grandmother, mother and two of his aunts are sangomas (traditional healers) who are “involved [in] consulting the ancestral spirits and going

into states of trance” (Sichel, 2018, p.203). Mantsoe, with permission from his family, later transposed these rituals to the dance stage (ibid). In 1990 he joined Moving Into Dance’s<sup>23</sup> training programme under the mentorship of Sylvia Glasser, completed his training and went on to perform and tour nationally and internationally with the company (Sichel, 2018, p.204). From 1997 to 2001, Mantsoe was the Associate Artistic Director and Resident Choreographer with Moving Into Dance. Mantsoe is currently based in France, with his family, although regularly returns and performs in South Africa (ibid). In his view, it is this rich interior life, based on traditional teachings and the pantheon of his native Zulu culture, mediated by his ability to enter altered states of consciousness, which forms the basis of his gift as a performer (Quoted in Cauthery, 2007, p.238). Bridget Cauthery goes on to say how Mantsoe describes his work as “Afro-fusion drawing on traditional African dance forms and contemporary approaches from modern, ballet and Asian forms such as Tai Chi, martial arts and traditional Balinese dance” (Cauthery, 2007, p.240). Kgomotso Moncho Maripane, in an interview with Mantsoe, says “Mantsoe’s geographical divergences, cultural and spiritual connections shape his ideas of home and belonging that resonate with audiences globally” (Maripane, 2022). Maripane goes on further to highlight the personal and social impact of a form like contemporary dance can have in South Africa by quoting Mantsoe,

Contemporary dance is neglected so much in South Africa. We are not taken seriously about how much change we bring into society. With my dance and through my cultural, spiritual and traditional modes, I try to tackle who we are as human beings globally, individually and as communities. (Maripane, 2022, np)

To further engage Mantsoe’s notions of what contemporary dance is for him, this question was posed to him in the interview conducted as part of this research (refer to Appendix J for the full transcript). Mantsoe notes a shifting landscape in South African contemporary dance, acknowledging its evolution from “European aesthetics” (2022, Appendix J, p.311) to a younger generation who “are also trying to look at what is happening especially in terms of who they are and what’s happening around this South Africa, especially today” (2022, Appendix J, p.311-12). He continues, acknowledging the multiple layers of South African dance that is also “looking much more deeper into

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<sup>23</sup> Established in 1978 by Sylvia Glasser as one of the first few mixed-race dance companies and training organisations, Moving into Dance (MID) has had a major impact as a leading Contemporary African dance company, pioneering our new Afrofusion and Edudance styles. For more information visit: <https://midance.co.za/> [Accessed 26 February 2023]

the intellectualisation of the creating of the work and questioning of course, the different elements of the society and then who they are as individuals” (2022, Appendix J, p.312). However, Mantsoe personally acknowledges that “it's been an ongoing investigation, truly about the tradition of where I grew up and then, also, the spirituality of where I come from as well” (2022, Appendix J, p.312). Mantsoe acknowledges consistency in what he is trying to achieve in his work in his more than 30-year history in dance. For him, this has been an ongoing journey of

[...] reflection of the tradition and the cultural aspect of where I come from and then in reflecting to the society, the South African traditional forms and how to manipulate them to make them universal as well at the same time. (2022, Appendix J, p.313)

## FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY

FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY is a twenty-year-old Durban-based company that was formed under the artistic direction of Lliane Loots unofficially in 1994 as a part-time dance training programme through the then University of Natal’s Drama and Performance Studies Programme. In 2003 FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY was registered as a professional performing company and has continued to produce work and tour nationally, continentally and internationally. Using what Loots calls an “African Release Technique” (Sichel, 2016, p.90), Loots (2018, p.111) goes on to highlight that

Dance and the collaborative choreographic process – for me – thus develops a vehicle for transmission; it becomes to be one of the ways in which we actively construct shared assumptions and transmit implicit value systems and modes of behaviour.

FLATFOOT also prides itself on a dance development programme that services communities across greater eThekweni (Durban) (Sichel, 2016, p.90). Their work often engages “with memory and history, FLATFOOT has developed a unique identity as a contemporary South African dance company that is known to offer politically and socially charged dance theatre work” (FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, 2021<sup>24</sup>). Again I offer up FLATFOOTs Artistic Director Lliane Loots’s (2018, p.1) definition of contemporary dance as,

a form that defies closed definitions other than perhaps pinning down the intent which, simply put, is to create movements that open up the desire to understand dance as a medium of art making that engages the ‘contemporary’. In South Africa this is a complex interplay between the confluence and influence of traditional African dance histories and

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<sup>24</sup> <https://flatfootdancecompany.webs.com/> [Accessed 19 October 2021]

forms, European and American modern dance methodologies, and the ever-evolving search for authentic (and multiple) African contemporary dance voices that speak to culture, politics, art and (most significantly) identity and self.

Loots further clarifies some of these above-explored definitions of South African contemporary dance in the interview conducted with her for this research (Appendix I). Loots acknowledges the modernist shifts in Europe and America, through practitioners such as Martha Graham, Eric Hawkins, José Limón and Doris Humphrey, as “innovators in a way beginning to create a new way of thinking about the body and about moving” (2022, Appendix I, p.298). Loots also notes the meaning of the word ‘contemporary’ which “means of the now” (2022, Appendix I, p.298) and continues that she believes “contemporary dance is almost an instruction to the audience, to the choreographer, to the dancer that you are engaging or working with the body in a way that speaks to the context in which you are living” (2022, Appendix I, p.298). Loots offers that contemporary dance can be a response to classical dance, cultural, indigenous traditional dance forms or anything located in the now. This reaction to the ‘now’ is for Loots political in that “anything that engages with the kind of zeitgeist of the moment is political because it's engaging with the context in which we find ourselves” (2022, Appendix I, p.298).

These are just two examples of practitioners working in the sphere of contemporary dance in South Africa, as will be used in this dissertation. They operate in different contexts and use different styles to engage with what it means to be an African/South African, living in our contemporary world. Mantsoe through his engagement with the ancestral spirits and “Afro-Fusion” (Cauthery, 2007, p.240) movement style, is thoroughly engaging on stage to witness as he transforms and transports the audience with his physical narratives, deeply rooted in his embodied performance. FLATFOOT and its “politically and socially charged dance theatre work” (FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, 2021) create performances that engage the personal narratives of each of the dancers, that question and probe the world we live in, but done with a performance style, that too engages the audience and asks them to react and be moved to action from the performance.

Designing lighting for dance and in particular for these two practitioners have in the words of Jean Rosenthal been “my most constant love” (1972, p.117) and it has deeply

impacted how I light productions in general and specifically dance. Interrogating how I am able to contribute to the dance works in significant ways will be explored in more depth in Chapter Four.

## 7) Closing Remarks

In closing, this first chapter – a chapter of situating and context – I have offered an overview of the importance of light in our everyday lives. Looking at how it is necessary to not only see and engage with the world but also how we use it metaphorically to colour our descriptions of the world. I have traced the emergence of the lighting designer in conventional theatres as modern technology grew to harness the capacity of light to be used in theatrical performances. The lighting designer becomes a crucial component of not just making visible what appears onstage, but they are meaningfully able to impact the mood and atmosphere of a production.

Stepping into dance lighting specifically, this chapter engaged with Peter Mumford's notion of a freedom from traditional script-based theatre in dance and specifically contemporary dance that allows for a creativity and exploration of ideas; ideas that script-based theatre does not always allow for (Mumford, 1985, p.54). The chapter traced the European and American influence of theatre and lighting design from its earliest roots to how it has impacted the landscape of South African theatre and thus on lighting design practice. The chapter has also explored what lighting design is, as it has developed into an art form that has become a crucial element in creating mood and atmosphere and contributing thematically to a production by using new technologies.

The chapter finally opened up a discussion on what South African contemporary dance may be, often defying categorisation. Arguably it is a style of dance that engages the everyday social, political and personal narratives of those who create it (Loots, 2018). It is this mix of the personal, emotional, social and political that makes South African contemporary dance a challenging and vibrant field to work in. As a lighting designer, I cannot be unaffected by how dance is created, with the impulse to move and affect an audience, the lighting alongside it cannot remain neutral. Instead, the lighting

designer begins to be on the side of the dance work and thus of understanding how the performance holistically affects the perception of the audience. As Author/Educator Susan Kozel (2006, p.33) asserts,

no one is uninvolved... all those who experience a piece, performers, audience members, stage managers [and I add lighting designers] do so from their own culturally situated positions, their own preferences, histories, bodies and connections with the art world

It is from this phenomenological perspective that I set out now in Chapter Two to grapple with how I, as a lighting designer, can understand how I, in my process and practice, impact a performance work.

## Chapter Two: *Ways of Knowing*

Having established the focus area of this dissertation in Chapter One: lighting design for contemporary dance, this dissertation now moves to look at how I can understand my practice and process and how it impacts a performance. Chapter Two thus turns to engage theories of phenomenological embodiment, a return to centralising experience through and of the body, as importantly articulated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perceptions* (1962), and how they have been adapted into theatre studies as both critical theory and methodological approaches. As noted in Chapter One, theatrical contemporary dance performance is a multisensorial act; Hamilton, Smith and Worthington further note that “from a postmodern view, there is no one way to capture experience; instead, questions and perspectives can be gathered to question perceived realities” (2008, p.22). This dissertation thus draws on multiple methodological approaches in order to understand my practice and process for lighting design for contemporary dance.

This multiple methodological approach includes the phenomenologically embodied methodologies of autoethnography, self-study and sensory ethnography, which I will argue form a framework for my engagement with how to write about and unpack my lighting design and practice. Merleau-Ponty’s work in both the *Phenomenology of Perceptions* (1962) and his posthumously published unfinished work *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) are used extensively. This chapter will also use Merleau-Ponty’s writings as they have been adapted by others, for example, Catheryn Vasseleu’s *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty* (2002), used in Chapter One; Diprose and Reynold’s *Merleau-Ponty Key Concepts* (2014); Bleeker, Sherman and Nedelkopoulou’s *Performance and Phenomenology: Traditions and Transformations* (2015). Phenomenology as used by lighting designer Yaron Abulafia in *The Art of Light Onstage* (2016) and John McAfee in his published Master’s Thesis ‘Embodied Light: Movement as a Collaborative Necessity for Lighting Dance’ (2019) are also used in this chapter.

This dissertation aims to further unpack embodied knowledge and practice, by understanding how the body perceives, so that I can build an understanding of how knowledge is gained and applied in practice. In Robert Solso’s book *The Psychology*

of Art (2003), there is an understanding of the simultaneous processes of *Nativistic Perception* (“bottom-up” processing) and *Directed Perception* (“top-down” processing) (2003, p.2). Solso argues that Nativistic and Directed Perception lead to how we create *Schemata* (Solso, 2003, p.223). Specifically, the term *schemata* is used for how one might represent an array of interrelated concepts in a meaningful organisation (Solso, 2003, p.223). These schemata, which are developed through the lived experience of an array of perceptions over any life span, form the basis, argues Solo (2003) of our ability to engage in artistic practices and create the lens through which we experience art. Through this proposed schematic engagement with perception and experience, this dissertation aims to understand my own embodied lighting design practice as well as how others involved in theatre performance may perceive and experience my lighting design in performance. It is in understanding embodied practice and how I sensorially gain knowledge and apply that knowledge in practice explored in this chapter, that offers options for me to speak about a practice that involves stimulating the sense of vision in live performance in Chapter Four. Phenomenology thus intertwines my conceptual framework and methodological approach to my research and will be explored simultaneously in this chapter to allow me to analyse lighting design practice in Chapters Three and Four.

Further informing notions of embodied practice, and how I will engage these in talking about my lighting design practice, is South African Drama Education Scholars, Tamar Meskin and Tanya van der Walt’s research *Knowing in our Bones: interrogating embodied practice in theatre making/theatre teaching through self-study* (2018) as it engages how our “practice is *always* embodied; it happens in *action* and happens *through* and *of* the body” (2018, p.41 italics in original text). In order to assist with understanding my practice which is affected and affects others by the senses, Design Anthropologist Sarah Pink’s *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2015) develops a way of “thinking about and doing ethnography that takes as its starting point the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice” (2015, p.xi) and assists me in analysing the sensorial nature of my work.

This then leads to the main methodology used in this dissertation which will be informed by a reflective autoethnographic approach. Nicholas Holt defines autoethnography as “highly personalised accounts where authors draw on their own

experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture” (2003, p.18). In Chapter Four I unpack and negotiate the role of lighting design (and the designer) in contemporary dance making and how it (they) contributes to how a dance work can be perceived and experienced informed by this methodology. Lauren Dyll in *Autoethnography and reflexivity: where does the researcher fit in?* (2018) observes “Reflexivity refers to an act of self-reference where examination or research bends back on, refers to, and affects the object/unit/person initiating the study” (2018, p.144).

As this dissertation also engages with practice in terms of my lighting design work, I will also draw on self-study methodologies to support the main methodology of autoethnography. Anastasia Samaras and Anne Freese (2006) state self-study methodologies are defined by “the role of ‘the self,’ by the ‘situated practice’ being examined, and/or by the ‘purpose’ for the study, which can reflect multiple reasons that are often integrated” (Quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.3). It is the focus on the self and practice that differentiates self-study and autoethnography which has as its focus the self in relation to culture. Author/Educator Susan Kozel, and in particular her book *Closer: performance, technologies, phenomenology* (2007), provide further resources to unlocking my phenomenological embodied engagement with my lighting design practice. Susan Kozel implores “We dare to do our phenomenologies because the subjective voice may yield new knowledge... where the objective voice may repeat old beliefs that are remote from lived experience or simply uninteresting” (2006, p.39).

## 1) What is Phenomenology?

“To be a body, is to be tied to a certain world, as we have seen; our body is not primarily in space: it is of it” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.171). Phenomenology has its roots in the work of German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who placed the body as the locus of conscious experience (Abulafia, 2016, p.80). Phenomenological studies examine our conscious, subjective, lived experience through using our “senses, perception, imagination, memory, thoughts and desires and emotions (ibid). Abulafia continues it is “also the study of the *appearance of things* (‘phenomena’) or how things appear to be in our experience, in contrast with *the way they are* in reality – subjective and individual perspective” (ibid, italics in original text). The “appearance of things”

(ibid) forms a central understanding to this dissertation as lighting design is a process that impacts on visual perception, as will be discussed more in the next section. Understanding lighting as a 'phenomenon' or as it appears to be in performance, which is a result of my own unique perception of the world, is an important engagement in this dissertation.

However, it is in the work of French Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), influenced by the work of Husserl, that the "living body" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.63) comes to the fore as our primary way of being in the world (1962, p.162). He offers up the notion,

I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am it. Neither its variations nor their constant can, therefore, be expressly posited. We do not merely behold as spectators the relations between the parts of our body, and the correlations between the visual and tactile body: we are ourselves the unifier of these arms and legs, the person who both sees and touches them. (1962, p.173)

Highlighting that the body is not separate from its surroundings – it is a part of it. Further expanding on the dynamic relationship of the body to its surroundings, Marco Cavallaro quotes Merleau-Ponty, "It is a form of lived experience which is fluid and ever-shifting. And it is also a way of interacting with one's environment, of shaping it and being shaped by it" (Quoted in Loots, 2018, p.99).

Shaun Gallagher notes that in phenomenology "the body is no longer merely an object in the world [...] It is on the side of the subject; it is our point of view on the world, the place where the spirit takes on a certain physical and historical situation" (Gallagher in Diprose and Reynolds, 2014, p.209). Catheryn Vasseleu also highlights Merleau-Ponty's notion that "the body expresses total existence, not because it is an external accompaniment to that existence, but because existence comes into its own in the body" (Vasseleu, 2002, p.36).

This understanding of the body "as *of* and *in* the world, as subject and object allows us to understand 'our sense of 'reality' must come from our lived experience of reality, that is, from the body's involvement in and transactional dealings with reality" (Busch in Diprose and Reynolds, 2014, p.34). Phenomenology dissolves the Cartesian mind/body split, and supports that the body is bound up with that of the world

[...] because my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world. The ontological world and body which we find at the core of the subject are not the world or body as an idea, but on the one hand, the world itself contracted into a comprehensive grasp, and on the other the body itself as a knowing-body. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.475)

Merleau-Ponty's "ontology of flesh" (Aarø, 2010), which is the central theme of *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), places us as both subject and object in perception, suggesting an inseparable way of understanding that our perception and what we perceive (and hence know) are connected. Merleau-Ponty describes flesh as "a position which is both subject (a subjective reality) and object (objectifiable for others), and also simultaneously a subjectivity which is internally divergent with itself" (Quoted in Vasseleu, 2002, p.26). Merleau-Ponty further explains "It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.135). This important understanding of the interconnectedness of the seer and the thing being seen is vital to how I engage my practice and this research.

Suzan Kozel, engaging Merleau-Ponty, further notes,

above all, for Merleau-Ponty, bodies are flesh, and flesh is more than just bodies. Our bodies extend beyond ourselves through the operation of our senses and as such the boundary of the body, skin, is not a boundary at all. We are porous beings, and we are a part of flesh as well as being flesh. (2007, p.33)

This thickness of "flesh that constitutes a prototypical structure of all subject-object relations" (Vasseleu, 2002, p.26) allows for an understanding of a connectedness to all things and their relationships – it is their "means of communication" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.135) and "there is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.138). An analogy for understanding this concept is that one's hand that touches or is in contact with one's other hand is simultaneously an object touched and a subject touching another hand; "The two hands represent the body's capacity to occupy the position of both perceiving subject and object of perception" (Vasseleu, 2002, p.26). This proposed understanding of the porous nature of flesh, which dissipates the subject-object relationship, and as suggested, becomes their "means of communication" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.135) is an essential engagement

with my lighting design practice in this research. In understanding my process and practice, it is not separate from me, it is part of me, and thus provides the phenomenological lens through which this research takes place. It is thus the choice of this dissertation to broadly use phenomenology to engage with my (embodied) lighting design practice because of how it integrates myself and my research.

From its introduction in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the work of Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger<sup>25</sup>, and as explored more in-depth in this dissertation, by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology has continued to grow in popularity as a means of engaging with live performance. Yaron Abulafia notes,

that the increasing interest in phenomenology and the decline of structuralist semiotics<sup>26</sup> occurred simultaneously around the early 1960s, with the emergence of new experimental performative forms, such as the Happenings, the Theatre of the Absurd, new forms of music drama, and the later 'post-dramatic' theatre – for the analysis of which semiotics proved to be unsuitable. (Abulafia, 2016, p.85)

Susan Kozel adds that “the revitalization of phenomenology is the result of a convergence of theoretical, cultural, and artistic forces and produces a new embodiment of older ideas” (2007, p.5). The increased application of phenomenology to live theatre and dance studies with its aim of placing the body at the centre of experience has found an increasing momentum not only through research of performers and choreographers but also audience members' reception. Matthew Reason (2006) highlights that “audience members, all of whom have bodies and experience the world through their bodies, are able to empathise with the bodily presence of the performer” (Reason, 2006, p.217). Kozel advocates for how phenomenology has impacted her practice, “As a method, phenomenology involves a return to lived experience, a listening to the senses and insights that arrive obliquely, unbidden, in the midst of movement experiments or quite simply in the midst of life” (2006, p.xvi). Shifting the perspective to dance, which mostly has at its centre the moving body, McAfee highlights that “phenomenology embraces the idea that dance,

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is most known for his work in Hermeneutic phenomenology is epistemologically driven, as it seeks to broaden the scope of its analysis and asks: what is the object we would like to understand and what is the process of understanding? (Abulafia, 2016, p.80). His research falls outside of the scope of this dissertation which chooses to focus on Merleau-Ponty's focus on the living body.

<sup>26</sup> The study of semiotics explores the processes involved in signification and communication – the generation and exchange of signs in human culture. Semiotic studies examine the relation between the signifying object ('sign') and the signified ('meaning') in sign systems used by society, at first closely related to the study of linguistics and its methodologies. (Abulafia, 2016, p.70-1)

or really any movement-based communication, is among the most effective ways to bridge the divide between reality-as-experienced-by-self and reality-as-experienced-by-other” (2019, p.27). Finally, the place I begin this unpacking of my practice comes from Choreographer/Scholar, Liane Loots’s call to action to

[...] take up Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body, my body, as the prime means of communicating with the world (1962) and this is the phenomenology of speaking from the embodied ‘I’. This embodied ‘I’, the self as the knower and the writer of language, becomes the self-referential transmission of theory and process. (Loots, 2018, p.99)

It is through this “embodied I” (Loots, 2018, p.99) with an understanding of a “connectedness to all things” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.135) – that I will in Chapter Four find the starting point to speak about my embodied practice. This will be assisted with the methodologies of, primarily autoethnography supported by self-study and sensory ethnography which are explored in sections three and four of this chapter. In the next section, I move on to offer insights as to how the body comes to know what it knows through a brief engagement with ideas of perception, especially visual perception, as the practice of lighting design primarily engages the sense of sight.

## 2) The Perceiving Body

In *Analyzing Performance: Theatre, Dance and Film* (2003), Patrice Pavis stresses that

since theatre performance is a complex, multi-sensorial event, consisting in more than just a system of linguistic signs, we cannot reduce our experience in the theatre and refer to it as a stable system of signs with only arbitrary meanings. Performance consists partly in signs perceived by the senses and partly in ephemeral ‘vectors of energy’ that affect our overall experience. (Quoted in Abulafia, 2016, p.78)

It is in this multi-sensorial act of live performance that this dissertation attempts to engage as a vehicle to understand how we are/might be using our senses to engage these “signs” and “vectors of energy” (2016, p.78). As advocated above, it is through the notion of Merleau-Ponty’s “living body” (1962, p.163)/Loots’s “embodied ‘I’” (Loots, 2018, p.99) that this dissertation proposes that we engage in the world and thus live performance. Bleeker, Sherman and Nedelkopoulou (2015, p.1) additionally note that “both performance and phenomenology engage with experience, perception, and with making sense as processes that are embodied, situated, and relational”.

Sally Barnes and André Lepecki in their introduction to the book *The Senses in Performance* (2007) explain how there would be no such thing as a purely perceptive, or purely sensorial realm in phenomenology: “Rather, language, memory, affect, sensation, perception, and historical and cultural forces find themselves in a deep chiasmatic intersubjective relationality, where each element in the relation is continuously crossing and being crossed by all the others.” (Barnes and Lepecki, 2007, p.6-7).

It is in these interconnected/chiasmatic relationships, that makes working with light in performance an interesting and complicated sense to unpack, as is being explored in this dissertation. Robert Solso in *The Psychology of Art* (2003), which I use to help unpack the notion of sensory perception suggests, “Of the five senses with which we behold the physical world—vision, audition, taste, touch, smell— vision is the faculty that is most directly related to the perception of art: it truly is ‘the big window’.” (Solso, 2003, p.73).

Solso is particularly engaging with visual art, such as paintings, however, these understandings of perception and artistic practice are paramount to how I engage with performance too. I have adapted Solso’s visual art understandings to lighting design which is primarily seen as a visual art form, by how it physically engages light to ‘paint the stage’<sup>27</sup>. However, as suggested above, live performance is more than visual, it is a “multi-sensorial event” (Parvis quoted in Abulafia, 2016, p.78), of which vision plays a major part in being the “big window” (Solso, 2004, p.73). Susan Kozel adds “Vision is fundamentally embodied. I do not just see things or act on them, I am caught up in the world, and my vision and actions are affected by the people and things in my world” (2007, p.37). “The qualities, intensities, colour and depth of light are always there before us”, says Joslin McKinney, quoting Merleau-Ponty (Aronson, 2018, p.113). McKinney continues that they awaken “echoes in our bodies” because “the body welcomes them” (McKinney quoted in Aronson, 2018, p.113). Gallagher, in his chapter ‘Cognitive Science’ in *Merleau-Ponty Key Concepts* (2014), concurs “The body is no

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<sup>27</sup> Speaking of lighting as painting the stage is common phrase in lighting design, for example, Adolphe Appia speaks of light for the designer as the “palette for the painter” (Rosenthal and Wertebaker, 1972, p.55). It can be argued that because lighting works in 3 dimensions it is more akin to sculpting space, Michael Broderick (interviewed in this dissertation) often offers this understanding and this will be discussed more in Chapter Three with the interviews.

longer merely *an object in the world* [...] It is on the side of the subject; it is *our point of view on the world* (Diprose and Reynolds, 2014, p.209 italics in original). This notion of subject/object dissolution further expands on Merleau-Ponty's view that we are experiencing subjects "We live our biology; we live our neurophysiology – and that is precisely what accounts for our lived bodily experience" (Gallagher in Diprose and Reynolds, 2014, p.213).

This link to cognitive perception through the senses is taken up by using Robert Solso's book *The Psychology of Art* (2003), especially in relation to how it relates to experiencing art. By understanding how the body perceives, it is suggested that we can know how knowledge is gained and applied in practice. Solso offers the two simultaneous processes of *Nativistic Perception* and *Directed Perception* which "refers to perception based on one's personal history and knowledge" (2003, p.2). Both these forms of perception also depend on a conscious brain in order for art to be "seen," in the nativistic sense, and "understood," in the directed sense (Solso, 2003, p.3). Neurologists call these circuits "streams" and the two which are of interest to the visual study of art are the "ventral" and "dorsal" streams (Solso, 2003, p.124-5). First, the visual signal is sensed by the eye and passed along to the visual cortex, which divides into the 'what' and 'where' routes (2003, p.125). The descending ventral stream tells 'what' an object is and the ascending dorsal stream locates the 'where' (Solso, 2003, p.133). Solso then goes on to observe "No matter how similar [...] the neurological streams among all people, our interpretation of art is significantly influenced by who we are and what experiences we have felt" (2003, p.226). This directed perception in terms of understanding visual stimuli leads to how we create *schemata* where "A *schema* is part of one's mental framework for representing knowledge: specifically, we use the term here for how one might represent an array of interrelated concepts in a meaningful organization" (Solso, 2003, p.223). For me, being able to translate visual cues from the everyday world: how light filters our everyday lives, from the beauty in a sunrise, to the harsh fluorescent lighting in an office, and then using the technical equipment and conventions of theatre to recreate, in my own perceived way, that effect on stage, is at its heart the role of myself as a lighting designer.

Solso (2003) notes there are collective images or prototypes of people, objects, things, and ideas stored in the brain; the multitude of schema that allows us to see the world

through a myriad of possible ways. When I create a lighting design, I draw on these connotations, for example, one of the most common overarching principles in lighting, for me and many others, is that warm colours are happier and cold colours, sad. If a performance piece requires a happier tone, then I would use warm colours such as amber or colour-corrected warm. Whereas if the overall piece was more sombre then colours on the cooler spectrum would be used<sup>28</sup>. Solso continues highlighting how the brain interprets visual cues based on perception as opposed to how they are, “We see things that fit well within our preconceived notion of how things should appear, not necessarily as they actually do appear” (2003, p.222). These schemata represent the structure or classification of objects and ideas as well as the relationships between schemata and within a schema (2003, p.225). Solso suggests that it is the activation of schemata that then allows us to “make inferences about art and to construct a larger interpretation and understanding of it” (2003, p.224) and thus becomes part of our “collective knowledge” of the world (2003, p.225). My multitude of life experiences: where I was born, how I grew up, and how I engage with the world, colour how I experience and create art and that will always be different to anyone else. This not only provides a uniqueness to my lighting design practice, but it also provides a valid reason for conducting this research; as Suzan Kozel notes “the subjective voice may yield new knowledge [...] where the objective voice may repeat old beliefs that are remote from lived experience or simply uninteresting” (Kozel, 2006, p.39). There are certain commonalities to lighting design such as types of equipment, placement of equipment, choices of colour and timing conventions, however, how I do this, compared to other lighting designers will always be different because of my schemata and how I interpret the piece and the choices I make – these commonalities and differences will be explored more in Chapter Three where I interview other local lighting designers and interrogate their practice alongside my own.

Solso concludes,

when all of the above physical and psychological features converge, we comprehend art at a level that is difficult to describe in words. At this level, our appreciation of art becomes more of a sentience than an intellectual explanation; more of an engrossment than an analysis of a piece; more of a feeling than an appraisal. (2003, p.8)

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<sup>28</sup> This notion is explored more in the analysis of my case study of *days like these* (2015) in Chapter Four.

He calls this “Level 3” (2003, p.258) awareness; Level 3 appreciation goes beyond the basic perception of features and what they mean. Level 3 interpretation goes beyond what the art may infer (2003, p.258).

Level 3 comprehension is as much a feeling as a cognition; it is the Tao of the painting and yet, like the Tao (as Lao-tzu wrote), “the Tao that is the true Tao is the Tao that cannot be told.”<sup>29</sup> It is, at the same time, a painting’s most direct meaning and its most obscure. It is being “at one” with the art; it is commingling a painting with universal properties of the mind; it is seeing one’s primal mind in a painting. (Solso, 2003, p.258)

It is precisely because of the complex nature of art and its difficult nature to be spoken about that this inquiry draws on a multivocal approach to its design. First, it draws on existing writing as referenced in Chapter One, for example, Jean Rosenthal’s metaphor that “Dancers live in light as fish live in water. The stage space in which they move is their aquarium, their portion of the sea” (1972, p.117) that eloquently describes lighting as the substance in which dancing takes place or the practical guidelines of Steven McCandless’s method of three-point lighting design (1947) that aid in how lighting is worked out. Secondly this dissertation interviews and reflects upon the practice of other South African lighting designers in Chapter Three. Lighting designers do not often have space to speak about their work – often working on technological know-how and ‘instinct’<sup>30</sup>, and so initially there was difficulty in the interviews around accessing language and words to speak about process and practice. I encouraged interviewees by acknowledging (with them) that there are no right or wrong ways to speak about our process and practice and I found that as we talked more, we were able to open up about our practices and how we talk about lighting design. Thirdly, in order to start exploring this “sentience” or “feelings” (Solso, 2003, p.8) of experiencing art, is by exploring my own work in Chapter Four, by engaging in an embodied autoethnographic approach, I contribute my voice and understanding of my lighting design process by analysing two case studies to the already established framework of others. It is understanding that myself and my research are inseparable and interconnected and that this research begins to open up an understanding of how lighting design can impact contemporary dance making.

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<sup>29</sup> The *Tao Te Ching* “is not only one of the most influential classic texts of Chinese philosophy; it is also one of the most widely read examples of what can perhaps best be described as ‘wisdom literature’. According to tradition the *Tao Te Ching* was written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC by the Taoist Sage Lao Tzu” (John Baldock in his introduction to *Tao Te Ching* (2018) Arcturus Holdings Limited)

<sup>30</sup> Lliane Loots reminds us that “Instinct is not, of course neutral... ‘Instinct’ becomes an embodied sense of knowing that Merleau-Ponty (1962) reminds us is always related to the physical experience of living in and with a body” (2018, p.142)

This reciprocal relationship hinted at above, links back to Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh, in *The Visible and Invisible* (1968), discussed earlier in this chapter, where there is a suggested chiasmatic relation of the perceiving body with the world. This suggests a relationship to our understanding of art, where through our bodies and by our viewing of it, we are connected to art and thus a part of it – we are “at one with the art” (Solso, 2003, p.258). Susan Kozel in *Somatic Materialism* (2013) speaks of performance working in this area of *Affect* which she says is more like “particle systems or fields, affect is an ever-fluctuating exchange of forces [it] inhabits bodies and the spaces beyond them” (2013, p.69). Kozel goes on to explain that it too may be “beyond comprehension, but which is still experienced” (2013, p.69). Affect is also routed in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty who conceives affectivity “as a mosaic of affective states, of pleasures and pains each sealed within itself, mutually incomprehensible, and explicable only in terms of the bodily system” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.178). Dutch philosopher, Baruch Spinoza, in his *Ethics* (1677), as an early proponent of talking about Affect, extrapolates this idea further where “drives, motivations, emotions and feelings are all ‘affects’, and they are viewed as central to what defines us as being human” (Quoted in Cilliers, 2016, p.8). Gille Deleuze and Félix Guattari define affect as “an ability to affect and be affected [...] a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act” (Quoted in Cilliers, 2016, p.ii). Finally, of importance to understanding this notion, is Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth's description of Affect that they liken to “amongst other things, as a vibrational intensity, a ‘shimmering’ potential with the capacity to “move” us, either abruptly or incrementally (Quoted in Cilliers, 2016, p.3). Ilana Cilliers sums up this illusive understanding of Affect,

A final, concrete definition of affect eludes us. Perhaps because affect is not something concrete. It is a shimmering potential which cannot be destroyed or created, but manifests in various transformations. These transformations, or transitions from one state to another, may take many forms. They may be intellectual, spiritual, psychological, physical, all of the above and everything in between; a thought, an emotion, a feeling, goosebumps, disgust, revulsion, pain, pleasure, a felt vibration, a connection, a motivation, an insight, a shock, an epiphany, ecstatic transcendence, or a simple movement. Are these transformations not precisely what artists and theatre-makers attempt to bring about through their work? (2016, p.77)

It is in this transforming, embodied sensory realm in which artistic practice is suggested to happen and be experienced, that is suggested by Robert Solso to be at

Level 3 awareness that will be explored further in Chapter Four of this dissertation, as I begin to analyse/engage my practice. It is perhaps because it is not concrete and easily defined that makes understanding this area of affect/Level 3 awareness, an interesting area to explore lighting design practice that impacts and is impacted by perception, the senses, and embodied knowledge. By using phenomenology which places at its centre the “living body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), with sensory perception paramount to how I engage “in and of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), that is of importance as to how I am able to write and speak about my process and practice in analysing my two case studies and how the lighting design impacts on the performance. It is why this dissertation uses the multi-methodological approach, explored more in the next sections, to understand the complex notions of how lighting design affects contemporary dance.

Although Solso (2003) is mostly referring to the reception of art in *The Psychology of Art*, the same could be offered in terms of understanding the artists themselves who are perceiving bodies in the world. If art is perceived in Level 3 then it can be suggested to correlate to being made at the same or similar Level 3 of awareness with the artist’s schemata influencing how we think about the world. It can be suggested that the artist perceives stimuli in the world (*Nativistic Perception*) and engages with interpreting and using the stimuli through their collection of schemata (*Directed Perception*) in order to create art. Solso notes that artists “don’t see the world differently, they ‘think’ the world differently” (2003, p.153). “Whether they are born with such intellectual perspicuity or develop it through years of training is, of course, the question psychology has grappled with for centuries” (ibid).

This question came up in the interviews in Chapter Three and perhaps again, without a definitive answer. It is offered that there must be some natural aptitude for working in the area; Michael Broderick<sup>31</sup> speaks of being a “visual person” (2022, Appendix B, p.158), Tina Le Roux<sup>32</sup> speaks about “borrowing and absorbing knowledge from all these different practitioners that informed that world, that backstage world for me and

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Broderick, one of the interviewees for this dissertation, is well well-known Durban-based lighting designer and has worked nationally and internationally on a variety of styles of performance.

<sup>32</sup> Christine ‘Tina’ Le Roux, also an interviewee in this dissertation, is a Durban based lighting designer also currently employed as a production manager at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre.

allowed me that place to explore and develop my own voice” (2022, Appendix C, p.185). However, for me, and from my own experience, I understand it is a skill that is developed over years of practice and that then also starts to change how you are aware of the world. I make decisions of how I will light a performance based on my experience of knowing ‘what will work and will not work’; which is instinct born of years of practice “that are inscribed in the body, in doing and being” (Meskin and van der Walt, 2018, p.40). These instincts derive from how I have learnt to interpret visual cues from the world and then apply them to lighting the dance piece appropriately. The more I practice my lighting design craft, the more things can work, in an endless process of refinement. Each designer – like each choreographer – will always find unique ways to engage the process, as their unique lived experience impacts the performance – and this interrogation is at the heart of this research.

It may not be known definitively whether an artist is born with the skill or can learn it, however, Solso (2003) advocates – as one way of engaging this debate - that the dual influence of their nativistic and directed perception over the years in creating schemata that is important to how a person understands and creates art. This is possibly true of an audience member too. Their senses will be stimulated (especially visually) by the art (painting or live performance) in a nativistic sense but it is their schemata, through directed perception, that will be different to everyone else, that possibly may influence how they interpret the art (Reason, 2006, p.217). It is through an understanding of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological flesh mentioned above, that I thus suggest that the artist, the art and the addressee are all connected in a reciprocal and intertwined relationship with each other. Morris further supports this idea by suggesting that it is through bodies which “mediates meaning and is mediated by meaning” (Morris in Diprose and Reynolds, 2014, p.114) that the body schemata is what enables a “synthesis in the flesh” (ibid).

This suggestion that all those involved in performance are connected in a “synthesis of flesh” (Morris in Diprose and Reynolds, 2014, p.114), is thus significant to understanding my own embodied practice. By understanding myself and my practice better, I can then postulate how it relates to others in performance and how they perceive it.

In the next section, I move to examine the meaning of embodied practice, and how I can become more aware of it, in order to find new ways of opening up and exploring perceptual knowledge about my practice.

### 3) Embodied Practice

As offered in Chapter One, this dissertation posits that the lighting designer is an artist, someone who is contributing more to a performance than just visibility on the stage, and who is contributing to the aesthetic nature of the composite performance. Unpacking my practice, as a lighting designer, is a necessary step to understanding how it impacts a performance and those who perceive it. It is through a phenomenological lens of the “living body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) – as unpacked above – that this dissertation advocates for understanding my lighting design practice. Through understanding practice, South African Drama Education Scholars Tamar Meskin and Tanya van der Walt’s research *Knowing in our Bones: interrogating embodied practice in theatre making/theatre teaching through self-study* (2018) becomes important; as their work engages how our “practice is *always* embodied; it happens in *action* and happens *through* and *of* the body” (2018, p.41 italics in original text).

Meskin and van der Walt call it ‘embodied knowledge’ or colloquially ‘knowing in our bones’, they quote Philip Auslander: “The complex notion of ‘embodied knowledge’ originates in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968), who posited the idea that knowledge is constructed through the action of the senses, and resides as much in the body as it does in the mind” (2018, p.39).

Meskin and van der Walt further offer that we learn to be practitioners in the performing arts whether it be performers, directors, choreographers, stage managers, lighting designers etc. “by engaging in the practice of these disciplines; it is a process of embodied teaching and learning that is experiential, holistic, and involves being and doing” (2018, p.38). As someone who never studied lighting design formally, I know from learning from someone else with more experience, that through learning from their actions, I came to learn my practice. It is through years of doing and trying that I feel comfortable in approaching how I design lights, that my instincts are honed and

my practice refined<sup>33</sup>. It also shifts and changes as I continually, through 'doing', learn new ways to do things differently and more efficiently, learning what will work and what will not, is implicit to my practice. My practice is not "singular" (Meskin and van der Walt, 2018, p.37), it is constantly shifting and growing especially in relation to other people and technology. As noted in Chapter One, the capacity of the lighting designer is linked with technological advancements (Mumford, 1985, p.47), rapidly shifting technologies, especially that of computers and LED technology, have shifted how lighting design is practiced into often more efficient and advanced ways. For example, a simple LED light that has red, green and blue diodes can mix and produce colours in one fixture that would require several older generic fixtures to do the same.

Meskin and van der Walt particularly draw on the methodology of self-study which is commonly borrowed from "education, and teacher-education in particular" – and has offered "performing arts practitioners, educators, and researchers a way of examining and elucidating their embodied practice/s and knowledge/s" (2018, p.38). They suggest that this notion of embodied practice draws on what self-study theorists Stefinee Pinnegar and Mary-Lynn Hamilton call 'tacit knowledge', which they define as "the kinds of things revealed not so much in our ability to articulate them as in the action or actions we take" (2018, p.39) highlighting that is "knowledge in action" (2018, p.37) and knowledge "*through and of the body*" (2018, p.41 italics in original text) that we know because we do, it becomes practice in action and always through the body which, phenomenologically speaking, is our way of engaging with the world. Meskin and van der Walt advocate for a self-study inquiry as a means to "make public the most indefinable aspects of our embodied creative practices, pedagogic beliefs, and research principle" (2018, p.53) and conclude using Sullivan (2006, p.32), that through self-study, "it is the creation of new opportunities to see beyond what is known that has the potential to lead to the creation of new knowledge" (2018, p.53). My engagement with self-study inquiry will be explored further below in section four of this chapter and will be used in Chapter Four as I explore my practice.

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<sup>33</sup> These ideas especially around instinct and honing of practice will be explored more in Chapters Three and Four where I aim to understand my practice in relation to others

Because of this interest in the research of embodied knowledge and how that is achieved through perception and our senses, another methodology that helps me to look at embodied practice is the research of design anthropologist, Sarah Pink in *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2015), where she develops a way of “thinking about and doing ethnography that takes as its starting point the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice” (2015, p. xi). Pink raises the validity of not thinking about only one sense, as may be perceived in the “ocularcentrism” (2015, p.10) of looking at the visual sensation of lighting design but looking at the multisensorial act of live performance. Pink offers that in terms of phenomenology, all senses are linked and referring to Tim Ingold, Pink asserts that “based on theories that understand perception as multisensory, in that the senses are not separated out at the point of perception, but culturally defined, [he] thus suggests understanding vision in terms of its interrelationship with other senses” (Pink, 2015, p.10). This links back to Solso’s notion of directed perception and our experientially learnt schemata (Solso, 2003). Sarah Pink also highlights Edward Casey’s work stressing that “place is central to what Merleau-Ponty has called our way of ‘being in the world’ in that we are always ‘emplaced’ (Casey quoted in Pink, 2015, p.34) and continues that *‘lived bodies belong to places and help to constitute them’* and *‘places belong to lived bodies and depend on them’*, thus seeing the two as interdependent (Casey quoted in Pink, 2015, p.34, original italics). This understanding of perception as ‘culturally linked’ (Ingold, 2000) and ‘emplaced’ (Casey, 1996) frames the autoethnographic nature of this dissertation’s engagement with this notion of perceptually based embodied knowledge. Pink proposes that an engagement with sensory ethnography opens “to multiple ways of knowing and to the exploration of and reflection on new routes to knowledge” (Pink, 2015, p.5). By opening up “multiple ways of knowing” (ibid), this research starts to unpack the suggested complicated role that lighting has on contemporary dance how those who make it are affected by light and how this translates into the audience receiving it being affected too. It is suggested that through sensory perception I build schemata and this colours how I view the world, this directly affects how I create and experience art. It can be suggested that this holds true for others in the creative team working together and true for an audience member watching. Because I am dealing with an art form that directly impacts the senses, Pink’s sensory ethnography becomes an important aid to understanding how this is done, so that I am aware of how I am affecting the senses in my lighting design. This

is particularly highlighted in her notion that sensory memory, forms an engagement of how phenomenologically embodied knowledge is put into practice. Pink notes “Sensory memory is an inextricable element of how we know in practice, and indeed part of the processes through which ways of knowing are constituted” (Pink, 2015, p.44).

Sensory ethnography is also routed in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty which Pink claims is relevant “because he placed sensation at the centre of human perception” (Pink, 2015, p.29), Pink quotes Newell and Shams,

phenomenological experience is not of disjointed sensory sensations but is instead of a coherent multisensory world, where sounds, smells, tastes, lights, and touches amalgamate. What we perceive or where we perceive it to be located in space is a product of inputs from different sensory modalities that combine, substitute, or integrate. (Quoted in Pink, 2015, p.31)<sup>34</sup>

Highlighting once again an integrated multisensorial perception through and of the body, with its reciprocal and intertwined relationship in and of the world, that is Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh (1968). Pink suggests our “knowing in practice” is always “embodied and [a] multisensorial way of knowing that is inextricable from our sensorial and material engagements with the environment and is as such an emplaced knowing” (Pink, 2015, p.40). We don’t simply mimic others, we create our practice through “emplaced skill and knowing” (2015, p.41) that then “becomes acceptable to others” (ibid). As will be explored more in Chapter Three, although some lighting designers study lighting formally, a large part of what they learn, and for those of us who did not study lighting formally – all of what we learn, comes from physically doing and working. This is most notable in the idea of being mentored by someone already working in the industry which the majority of the lighting designers interviewed, myself included, acknowledge as our primary means of learning how to do it. Chapter Three will also explore notions of a South African/African/Global South lighting aesthetics, by the nature of lived experience being different, there are certain commonalities (and perhaps differences, that local lighting designers may employ in their lighting design practice that as previously suggested is ‘culturally linked’ (Ingold, 2000) and ‘emplaced’ (Casey, 1996). Perhaps, as suggested in Chapter One, because South

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<sup>34</sup> This is a notion again similar to that of synesthesia mentioned in Chapter One, and will be explored further in my own analysis of works.

African contemporary dance is a contested term that defies a singular definition, South African lighting design for contemporary dance may defy and contest itself against a singular definition. However, this understanding of how it impacts on contemporary dance may lead to a greater understanding of how it can be used in personal, social and cultural engagements.

Pink also goes on to explore the relationship between sensory perception and culture,

[...] our sensory perception is inextricable from the cultural categories that we use to give meaning to sensory experiences in social and material interactions. Indeed, perception is integral to the very production of these categories: culture itself is not fixed. (2015, p.32)

Phenomenology aims to understand the “experience as a phenomenon [that is] not born whole [but] messy and uncooked at first” (Kozel quoted in Bleeker, Sherman and Nedelkopoulou, 2015, p.10). “Through tracing the contours of experience as it comes into being phenomenology may help to counter and overcome ‘philosophical anaesthesia’” (Bleeker, Sherman and Nedelkopoulou, 2015, p.10). This research is by its nature not singularly defined and involves complex and integrated levels of understanding related to the impact of lighting (and how it is used) on theatrical performance (specifically contemporary dance) and as such multiple methodologies are offered to engage with my practice and its impact.

As a primary concern established in Chapter One of this dissertation is how my personal experience of my practice (auto) is written into the cultural practice of contemporary dance making (ethno) and how this is described and analysed (graphy), reflective autoethnography is the primary means of methodologically engaging my practice. Autoethnography will be explored in the next section followed by looking more in-depth at self-study inquiries – with embodied practice central to attempting to understand my practice. As will be explored below, it must be noted that autoethnography and self-study are often on opposite sides of the qualitative research spectrum. The primary aim of autoethnography is to “bring forward the shifting aspects of self and creates ways to write about experience in a broader social context (Hamilton, Smith and Worthington, 2008, p.22). The primary aim of self-study methodology is defined by “the role of “the self,” by the “situated practice” being examined, and/or by the “purpose” for the study, which can reflect multiple reasons

that are often integrated” (Samaras and Freese Quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.3). The umbrella aim of this research is to locate my practice within that of contemporary dance making and thus the reason for primarily choosing autoethnography. However, because the research does draw on understanding my practice, self-study methodologies will be used to support this in the same way that it draws on sensory knowledge; sensory ethnography will be used to support the autoethnographic nature of this research. This will be evidenced in Chapter Four, where I analyse my case studies and reflect on not only my practice of creating the lighting design but also the sensory impact the lighting design can have on contemporary dance work.

#### 4) Methodologies

As noted at the start of this chapter, Hamilton, Smith and Worthington state “From a postmodern view, there is no one way to capture experience; instead, questions and perspectives can be gathered to question perceived realities” (2008, p.22). As previously mentioned, this dissertation draws from several methodologies in order to achieve its aim of reflectively interrogating my process and practice and the role my lighting design work has, and can have, in the meaningful collaborative creation of contemporary dance performance. Autoethnography becomes the main umbrella methodology into which this research will fall, with phenomenology always central to how this research understands embodied practice.

Carolyn Ellis in *Autoethnography: An Overview* (2011) defines autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (2011, p.1). How my personal experience of my practice (auto) is written into the cultural practice<sup>35</sup> of contemporary dance making (ethno) and how this is described and analysed (graphy) is the reason for choosing an autoethnographic methodology. Holt defines auto-ethnography as “highly personalised accounts where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture” (Quoted in Loots, 2018, p.129). Hamilton, Smith and Worthington

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<sup>35</sup> As proposed in Chapter One that contemporary dance is “the ever-evolving search for authentic (and multiple) African contemporary dance voices that speak to culture, politics, art and (most significantly) identity and self” (Loots, 2018, p.1)

further define the purpose of autoethnography as a study which “bring[s] forward the shifting aspects of self and creates ways to write about experience in a broader social context (Hamilton, Smith and Worthington, 2008, p.22). Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008, p.22) go on to suggest that “A broad description of ‘culture’ would include evidence of shared patterns of thought, symbol, and action typical of a particular group”. It can thus be argued that lighting designers and other creative contributors in contemporary dance making, who share “patterns of thought, symbol and action” (2008, p.22) through our practice of lighting design<sup>36</sup> and contemporary dance making can be considered ‘cultural groups’. My practice in relation to others in these ‘cultural groups’ is another reason for the choice of autoethnography for this research.

Hamilton, Smith and Worthington advocate for looking from a “wide-angle lens with a focus on the social and cultural aspects of the personal” (2008, p.24); which echoes in the words of Ellis and Bochner (Quoted in Dyll, 2018, p.143-4),

Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations.

It is this backwards and forward through personal and social/cultural lens that I will engage in the investigation of my two case studies. Having looked at the broader understanding of lighting design practice in Chapter One, Chapter Three will look at other local lighting designers' practices, followed by the investigation of my practice in Chapter Four. Chapter Four will also explore specific autoethnographic research strategies, as advocated by Hamilton, Smith and Worthington, such as “note-taking, memory work, narrative writing, observation, and interview” (2008, p.22).

Stacy Holman-Jones offers that the aim of autoethnography “is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better” (2005, p.764). By understanding how the locally under-written about area of lighting design, as one part of the complex “multisensorial event” (Pavis quoted in Abulafia, 2016, p.78), impacts on performance, I can begin to be more aware of how my design impacts

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<sup>36</sup> This is most notable by our use of technical terms/jargon for our practice that are commonly understood and shared by people working in different environments but with similar conditions.

future contemporary dance projects. Others working in the field will also have a better understanding of how they can use lighting more effectively in their performances.

With my research also importantly engaging reflexivity in its autoethnographic approach, and by reflecting on my two case studies, Lauren Dyll encourages the sustained use of “I” and notes that this “aids in creating a researcher’s (i) identity; (ii) commitment to his or her position/argument; and above all (iii) a strong personal voice” (Dyll, 2018, p.147).

It is the researching back on itself, similar to Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm of flesh (1968) that simultaneously analyses and engages with my practice, I am a part of the research and thus must be “visible in the writing” (Dyll, 2018, p.147). This is always done in relation to the “multivocality” (Dyll, 2018, p.149) of others “in the same group or same project” (ibid). It is the multivocality of others<sup>37</sup> in relation to my own experience that will be embraced, where “the usual research conventions that analytically separate Subject and Object could not be assumed” (Dyll-Myklebust, Tomaselli and van Groorheest, 2013, p.577). This breaking down of the subject/object once again links to the phenomenological approach as advocated in the writing of Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968).

Dyll-Myklebust, Tomaselli and van Groorheest highlight Carol Hanisch's (1970) phrase, "the personal is political, as an often neglected conjuncture" (2013, p.579) and suggest that to make the personal political we should “draw on the lessons that the turn toward personal narrative and performance has taught us – writing our stories as they are constructed in and through the stories of others (2013, p.582). Loots, quoting Sarah Wall (2008) further implores that,

no one individual voice speaks apart from a societal framework of constructed meaning. There is a direct and inextricable link between the personal and the cultural. Thus, rich meaning, culturally relevant personal experience, and an intense motivation to know, are what typify and strengthen autoethnography. (Loots, 2018, p.129)

This quote from Wall highlights the strategy of the “back and forth autoethnographers’ gaze” (Ellis and Bochner quoted in Dyll, 2018, p.143-4); between the personal and

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<sup>37</sup> In this dissertation it is through interviews with other lighting designers and the choreographers of the two case studies.

social/political; that advocated for earlier in this section, will be employed by this dissertation's autoethnographic approach.

As this dissertation also engages with practice in terms of my lighting design work, it is also necessary to draw on, and not ignore, self-study methodologies to achieve a greater understanding of my practice that will, in turn, support the autoethnographic social and cultural aims of understanding my lighting design in relation to contemporary dance making. Samaras and Freese (2006) observe self-study methodology is defined by "the role of 'the self,' by the 'situated practice' being examined, and/or by the 'purpose' for the study, which can reflect multiple reasons that are often integrated" (Quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.3). Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998, p.236) further define self-study methodology as

The study of one's self, one's actions, one's ideas, as well as the 'not self'. It is autobiographical, historical, cultural, and political... it draws on one's life, but it is more than that. Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known and ideas considered.

As mentioned above, Tamar Meskin and Tanya van der Walt in their research *Knowing in My Bones* (2018, p.44) advocate for self-study methodology as it

offers a pathway to the knowing in the bones that sits at the core of the artist or researcher or teacher's practice. Our embodied practice engages our content knowledge, our personal practical knowledge, our teaching knowledge, and our reflexive discoveries, to shape a network of ideas with which to facilitate making, teaching and researching theatre.

It is through embracing such inquiry that we can in the "creation of new opportunities to see beyond what is known that has the potential to lead to the creation of new knowledge" (Sullivan quoted in Meskin and van der Walt, 2018, p.53).

Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan et al. offer that "There is no set self-study research method. The appropriate methods are those that facilitate the inquiry" (Quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.3). Loughran concurs in offering, "There is no one way, or correct way, of doing self-study, rather, how a self-study might be 'done' depends on what is sought to be better understood" (Loughran, 2004, p.15 quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.3). Samaras recommends five focus areas to be addressed when developing an effective self-study of practice, which will be used in Chapter Four of this dissertation,

a personal situated inquiry, should involve critical collaborative inquiry, should be designed for improved learning, should involve a systematic and transparent research process, and should result in knowledge generation and presentation. (Samaras, 2011, pp.10–11 quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.4)

A key element of self-study is often the use of a “critical friend” (Costa and Kallick 1993) or “critical colleague” (Henderson and Hyun, 2017 quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.5). In this research this is done through interviewing the choreographers in which I collaborated in the two case studies with and comparing my views to theirs as a necessary step of this research process.

Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) highlight the importance of self-study research which not only allows us “to learn some things about ourselves, it often reveals important understanding about the others engaged in the practice, which provides understanding and assertions about how we might act differently in our future practice” (2009, pp.14-15). It is in understanding ourselves and others in research, that we can “shape knowledge in the very act of knowing it” (2009, p.20).

It is by drawing on the investigative elements of self-study methodology that are concerned with practice, for example, as mentioned above: Samaras’s (2011) five focus areas and Costa and Kallick’s (1993) notion of a critical friend that I will support the autoethnographical framework of this research which is concerned with how I impact on the cultural arena of contemporary dance (in South Africa). By understanding and improving my practice I will better describe and analyse my practice and thus how it is autoethnographically written into contemporary dance making.

Finally, I return to Liane Loots’s call to action, as a central point from which to emanate this research, to

take up Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body, my body, as the prime means of communicating with the world (1962) and this is the phenomenology of speaking from the embodied ‘I’. This embodied ‘I’, the self as the knower and the writer of language, becomes the self-referential transmission of theory and process. (Loots, 2018, p.99)

In the end, phenomenology provides not only a conceptual framework but a methodological underpinning for speaking about my practice in relation to others.

In *Closer* (2007) Susan Kozel provides a step-by-step process to perform a phenomenological study that has “emphasized attention, or even the sort mindfulness familiar to anyone who does meditation” (2007, p.56) and these steps will be engaged as part of reflectively unpacking of my process of in the two case studies in Chapter Four. These are the steps she provides, and which have been employed by this dissertation, for performing a phenomenology of lived experience,

- Take your attention into this very moment.
- Suspend the main flow of thought.
- Call your attention to your body and what it is experiencing.
- Witness what you see, hear, and touch, how space feels, and temperature, and how the inside of your body feels in relation to the outside.
- Take a break (a moment, a day, a week, a year).
- Describe what you experienced. Take notes, record sounds or images.

Initial notes can be a sort of “brain dump.” Do not worry about style, grammar, or relevance at this stage. This stage may occur immediately following your immersion in a specific sensory experience, or it may happen after an interval. Memory and imaginative reconstruction are involved regardless of the lapse of time between experience and documentation of the experience, but obviously too much time passing can dull the recollection. (Kozel, 2007, p.52–55)

## 5) Closing Remarks

In closing, this chapter has examined ways of knowing in our world through an understanding of the perceiving body as central to phenomenology as well as how it is implemented through the methodologies of research inquiries of autoethnography, sensory ethnography and self-study. Phenomenology, as advocated primarily in the research of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968), observes the “body is primarily a way of being in the world (Cavallaro quoted in Loots, 2018, p.99), it is “on the side of the subject; it is our point of view of the world” (Gallagher In Diprose and Reynolds, 2014, p.209) being “*of and in the world*” (Busch in Diprose and Reynolds, 2014, p.34). Merleau-Ponty’s concept of flesh (1968), which is “the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.135). This is “intertwined in a reciprocal connection” (Aarø, 2010, p.334) where we are “part of flesh as well as being flesh” (Kozel, 2007, p.33). “The body is no longer merely *an object in the world* [...] It is on the side of the subject; it is *our point of view on the world*” (Gallagher in Diprose and Reynolds, 2014, p.209).

Robert Solso's book *The Psychology of Art* (2003), has offered an understanding of the simultaneous processes of Nativistic Perception ("bottom-up" processing) (2003, p.2) and Directed Perception ("top-down" processing) (2003, p.2) leading to how we create schemata (2003, p.223). These schemata, which are developed through the lived experience of an array of perceptions over any life span, form the basis, argues Solo (2003) of our ability to engage in artistic practices and create the lens through which we experience art. Solso says that artists "don't see the world differently, they 'think' the world differently" (2003, p.153). Through an understanding of "Level 3" awareness, Solso offers that the artist, the art and the addressee are all "at one with the art" (Solso, 2003, p.258) in this reciprocal and intertwined relationship with each other. It is through bodies which "mediates meaning, and [are] mediated by meaning" (Diprose and Reynolds, 2014, p.114) that Morris offers enables a "synthesis in the flesh" (ibid). "Practice is *always* embodied; it happens in *action* and happens *through* and *of* the body" (Meskin and van der Walt, 2018, p.4).

Sarah Pink's *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2015) is an essential engagement with understanding "the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice" (2015, p.xi) that is central to this research in terms of my lighting design practice. Pink suggests our "knowing in practice" is always "embodied and [a] multisensorial way of knowing that is inextricable from our sensorial and material engagements with the environment and is as such an emplaced knowing" (Pink, 2015, p.40). Hamilton, Smith and Worthington's notion that "from a postmodern view, there is no one way to capture experience; instead, questions and perspectives can be gathered to question perceived realities" (2008, p.22) opens this research to multiple methodologies to achieve its aims. Autoethnography, as defined by Carolyn Ellis, is "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (2011, p.1) and how my personal experience of my practice (auto) is written into the cultural practice of contemporary dance making (ethno) and how this is described and analysed (graphy) is the reason for choosing an autoethnography as the umbrella methodology for this research. Hamilton, Smith and Worthington advocate for looking from a "wide-angle lens with a focus on the social and cultural aspects of the personal" (2008, p.24) – this will be the focus of the next chapter by examining the interviews with other lighting designers to situate myself within a broader culture of other lighting

design practitioners in my context. Establishing the effect of lighting design practice on the cultural practice of contemporary dance will further be explored in Chapter Four.

As this research involves my practice as a lighting designer, it is the choice of this dissertation to also include self-study practices in my inquiry in order to better understand my practice, and thus how it autoethnographically impacts on contemporary dance making as a form that “speak[s] to culture, politics, art and (most significantly) identity and self” (Loots, 2018, p.1). As discussed above, Samaras and Freese's (2006) definition of self-study methodology by “the role of “the self,” by the “situated practice” being examined, and/or by the “purpose” for the study, which can reflect multiple reasons that are often integrated (Quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.3). There is no singular way of executing lighting design (as there is no singular way to understand it) but by bringing my voice in relation to other voices in the same field, as will be explored in the next chapters, where I will explore my lighting practice in relations to others in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, I will then further explore the impact my practice has on my two contemporary dance case studies and through this multivocal approach as we explore the difficult-to-describe “sentience” or “feelings” (Solso, 2003, p.8) of experiencing art.

## Chapter Three: *Light Work*

This dissertation began with an exploration of the historical evolution of lighting practice in modern conventional<sup>38</sup> Western theatre in Chapter One, through notable figures such as Sir Henry Irving (1838 – 1905), David Belasco (1853 – 1931), Adolphe Appia (1862 – 1928), Edward Gordon Craig (1872 – 1966), Antonin Artaud (1896 – 1948), Bertolt Brecht (1898 – 1956), Robert Edmond Jones (1887 – 1954), Stanley McCandless (1897 – 1967) and Jean Rosenthal (1912 – 1969). These pioneering lighting practitioners played an important role in transforming the conventional Western theatrical lighting landscape, from mere practical visibility concerns. Instead, they elevated lighting to an art form capable of shaping atmosphere, conceptual engagement, and overall perceptual experience of a performance. As noted in Chapter One, the role and capacity of the lighting designer has advanced with the technological advancements of the time (Mumford, 1985, p.47). The control of electricity formed part of the Second Industrial Revolution which occurred around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Davis, 2016). As Nicholas Davis (2016, p.2) points out, “The Third Industrial Revolution began in the 1950s with the development of digital systems, communication and rapid advances in computing power, which have enabled new ways of generating, processing and sharing information.”

This too affected and enhanced the capacity of the lighting designer, with advancements in lighting fixtures and lighting control systems being able to be programmed at a much more advanced level.<sup>39</sup> Lighting fixtures have become more automated and lighting lamps more reliant on LED technology developed in the 1960s. Lighting Control is now almost exclusively computer-based software, although based on the control systems developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Christopher Baugh aptly notes “the narrative potential of light, enabled by the digital and its computer control, has significantly redefined the core ingredients of theatre and performance” (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.218). This technology, as previously negotiated, was almost exclusively developed in the West and provided technology to

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<sup>38</sup> As negotiated in Chapter One: The term ‘conventional’ theatre and lighting design will be used in this dissertation to speak of mine and many others’ experiences of working in mostly proscenium arch-based venues. This does have its history in a predominantly western style of theatre and has been appropriated into local contexts (as have many aspects of western civilisation).

<sup>39</sup> Davis goes on to explore the Fourth Industrial Revolution which we are said to be living through now which he describes “as the advent of “cyber-physical systems” involving entirely new capabilities for people and machines” (Davis, 2016, p.2).

Western styles of theatre. However, South Africa, marked by its complex history of colonialism and globalisation (also briefly discussed in Chapter One), has absorbed much of this technology in its bigger more traditional theatrical venues like the former Art's Council facilities such as the State Theatre, PACOFs, the Playhouse Company and Artscape.

Amplifying the voices of South African (and Southern-based) lighting designers, alongside my own voice, as advocated by the autoethnographic nature of this research, is one of the primary aims of this dissertation. Despite a growing body of writing about lighting design that prioritises creative process over simply procedure and technology, such as Katherine Graham, Scott Palmer and Kelli Zezulka's *Contemporary Performance Lighting: Experience, Creativity and Meaning* (2023) being a recent example of this. The majority of this discourse remains anchored in the Northern Hemisphere, with limited representation from and about Southern-based lighting designers

This chapter accesses two resources to fortify the Qualitative nature of research for this dissertation and its agenda to enhance Southern-based voices in lighting design.

The first section delves into Denis Hutchinson's 2012/2013 interviews on The Theatre Lighting Archive's YouTube channel as one such source of speaking to lighting designers who worked during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as lighting design came into being as a practice in South Africa (theatrearchive, 2012). Contact with the creator of The Theatre Lighting Archive, Denis Hutchinson<sup>40</sup>, revealed that while the intended website could not be sustained due to financial constraints, the video interviews are preserved on the Theatre Lighting Archive's YouTube channel<sup>41</sup>, constituting a significant and accessible resource in the public domain and for this dissertation.

The second section introduces diverse contemporary Southern-based lighting designer's perspectives by incorporating interviews conducted with five established South African lighting designers, many of whom specialise in dance and physical

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<sup>40</sup> Contact was made via email exchange in January 2023

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/@theatrearchive>

performances (although not exclusively). These interviews offer rich insights into their respective lighting design practices, and this chapter subsequently reflects upon these insights and experiences.

## 1) Interview Methodology

The methodological approach employed for the interviews comprised a standardised set of open-ended questions (detailed in Appendix A) aimed at ensuring the uniformity and consistency of data collection. These interviews were facilitated via the Zoom platform, subsequently transcribed for reference, and can be found in Appendices B (Michael Broderick), C (Christine 'Tina' Le Roux), D (Lerato Ledwaba), E (Nkosingiphile 'Mancane' Dlamini), and F (Oliver Hauser).

The questions for the lighting designers were framed around understanding their contexts, how they came into lighting design practice and how this has developed over the years. This was especially aimed at trying to understand their processes and the genesis of ideas shaping their lighting designs. All interviewees signed and agreed in writing to acknowledging their names being used to quote them directly as well as the use of their photographs for discussion. The template Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research form can be found in Appendix O. The interviews were underpinned by an engagement with phenomenology (explored in Chapter Two), as primarily advocated in the writing by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1969). Phenomenology, with the “living body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.63) at the “centre of experience” (ibid), serves as a fundamental understanding in this research, emphasising the dissolution of the object-subject dichotomy. This dissolution of object/subject relationship as advocated by Merleau-Ponty (and others who have taken his research further) explains “It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.135). Through the personal narratives articulated by the lighting designers about their lives, work, and practice, a combined analytical framework is established, to compare my own practice, understanding that all these elements are inseparable and connected.

Significantly shaping how the interviews were conducted is the methodological framework of sensory ethnography, again primarily championed by Sarah Pink in *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2015), where she develops a way of “thinking about and doing ethnography that takes as its starting point the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice” (2015, p. xi). This methodological approach was directly integrated into the interview process through inquiries related to sensory knowledge, aiming to discern how the lighting designers built their expertise through sensory encounters, particularly in the context of visual perception's role in impacting a performance and its reception. Importantly, Pink’s sensory ethnography advocates for the use of images as a point of discussion in interviews that recognises “the role of visual images as a standard medium for communicating about and invoking other sensory experiences” (Pink, 2015, p.90). To this end, each lighting designer brought an image of their work to discuss while also engaging in dialogue surrounding an image drawn from my own work, as will be explored further in the case studies detailed in Chapter Four. The lighting designers did agree in writing to the use of the pictures as part of this dissertation and the template form, which all interviewees signed, is attached in Appendix O.

My interviews with South African / Southern-based lighting designers who are mostly with Durban-based lighting designers - with one designer from Johannesburg.<sup>42</sup> All of the lighting designers were born in South Africa and continue to work here. Representing a diverse group of race, gender and age, they allow for a broad understanding of current lighting design practice as practitioners working in the Global South. The interview list is as follows,

1. Michael Broderick (Appendix B), is a well-known Durban-based lighting designer and has worked nationally and internationally on a variety of styles of performance. He also writes and creates his own work such is the case with *One Man One Light* (2016).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> There was intended to be two more interviews with designers from other cities, however owing to work commitments the other two lighting designers were not able to make interviews.

<sup>43</sup> For more information on Michael Broderick: <https://dwrdistribution.co.za/people/legends/michael-broderick/> [Accessed 10 April 2023]

2. Christine 'Tina' Le Roux (Appendix C), a Durban-based lighting designer also currently employed as a production manager at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. She has lit a variety of productions and was awarded a prestigious Naledi Award for lighting in 2012 for her work Neil Coppen's *Abnormal Loads* (2016). Her lighting design work with Jay Pather and Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre's *rite* (2015) is explored in the interview.<sup>44</sup>
3. Lerato Ledwaba (Appendix D) was born in Limpopo and has worked in Durban since 2016. He is currently employed at the Durban University of Technology. He has worked nationally and of importance for this research is his lighting work on *Udodana* (2018) with Musa Hlatshwayo and Mhayise Productions.<sup>45</sup>
4. Nkosingiphile 'Mancane' Dlamini (Appendix E), is a Durban-based lighting designer currently employed at the Playhouse Company where she works on a variety of productions at her venue. Her lighting work with Kristi-Leigh Gresse on *Sullied* (2018) at the National Arts Festival is discussed in the interview.<sup>46</sup>
5. Oliver Hauser (Appendix F), is a Johannesburg-based lighting designer and is currently self-employed. In particular, his work on *Cion* (2022) with Vuyani Dance Theatre and Gregory Maqoma is explored in the interview.<sup>47</sup>

These interviews adhere to the premise suggested by Hamilton, Smith and Worthington that "A broad description of 'culture' would include evidence of shared patterns of thought, symbol, and action typical of a particular group" (2008, p.22). By extension, it is posited that lighting designers collectively embody "patterns of thought, symbol and action" (2008, p.22) through our common practice of lighting design.<sup>48</sup> The interviews thus serve as a repository of responses that engage these shared elements, fostering a holistic exploration of the lighting design discipline within this broader cultural framework.

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<sup>44</sup> For more information on Tina Le Roux: <https://www.sneddontheatre.co.za/tina-le-roux.html> [Accessed 10 April 2023]

<sup>45</sup> For more information on Lerato Ledwaba: <https://za.linkedin.com/in/lerato-Ledwaba-7a3a97112> [Accessed 10 April 2023]

<sup>46</sup> For more information on Mancane Dlamini: <https://www.facebook.com/nkosingiphile.dlamini.336> [Accessed 10 April 2023].

<sup>47</sup> For more information on Oliver Hauser: <https://www.hldesign.co.za/> [Accessed 10 April 2023]

<sup>48</sup> This is most notable by our use of technical terms/jargon for our practice that are commonly understood and shared by people working in different environments but with similar conditions.

The questions asked in the interviews are primarily rooted in the phenomenological and sensory ethnography frameworks established in Chapter Two, facilitating the unpacking of embodied knowledge and practice. The interviews aim to understand how the human body perceives, in turn, facilitating an understanding of how knowledge is acquired and implemented in practice. In addition to the broader framework of Southern-based lighting design practice, the comparative analysis is instrumental in understanding my personal lighting practice, an area that will be elaborated upon more in Chapter Four. To enhance this approach, I also subject myself to the same set of open-ended questions, effectively engaging in a form of 'self-interview' (refer to Appendix G), which serves as a foundational reference for the subsequent exploration of my practice in relation to the autoethnographic nature of this research. These interviewees thus enhance the use of a "critical friend" (Costa and Kallick, 1993, Quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.5) or critical colleague (Henderson and Hyun, 2017, Quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.5) in this research and my own analysing of the two case studies in the following chapter.

## 2) The Theatre Lighting Archive

The Theatre Lighting Archive, as previously mentioned, was originally conceived as a web-based repository intended to house interviews and information concerning lighting design and its practitioners in South Africa. Denis Hutchinson, the creator of this initiative, emphasised the primary objective of the archive was to centre around video interviews featuring individuals who laid the foundational groundwork for lighting design within the South African context. Hutchinson stipulated the criteria for inclusion in the archive are that individuals needed to be over 60 years of age and possess a minimum of 20 years of professional experience within the South African lighting design arena (Hutchinson, 2012<sup>49</sup>). The archive includes interviews with five South African lighting designers who began their careers in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a transformative period in which lighting design emerged as a distinct vocation within the South African context. Most of these lighting designers began their professional journeys as master electricians, who would light shows under the director's guidance. With the advent of technological advancements, they eventually transitioned into

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<sup>49</sup> <https://dwrdistribution.co.za/the-theatre-lighting-archive-2/> [Accessed 7 October 2023]

recognised lighting designers after gaining greater control over the properties of light through the technological advancements previously mentioned. Despite the influence they exerted upon the field, limited documentation exists on these lighting designers, except for Mannie Manim (see below) because of the national and international success as a lighting designer he has achieved. A brief biography of these designers is thus offered:

- 1.) Joe Freedman grew up in the theatre starting as an apprentice with African Consolidated Theatres and toured South Africa and Zimbabwe. Freedman joined the Natal Performing Arts Council in 1972 as chief of lighting and electrics at the Alhambra Theatre - the only theatre that could handle large touring productions in the then province of Natal. Freedman was a lighting designer for the majority of the former NAPAC Dance Company's productions (Artsmart, 2013, np; theatrchive, 2012, *Joe Freedman 1*).
- 2.) Dave Freedman, brother to Joe Freedman, worked in a variety of venues in South Africa, such as the Johannesburg Civic Theatre, Alhambra Theatre (Durban), Colosseum Theatre (Johannesburg) and His Majesty's Theatre (Johannesburg). (theatrchive, 2012, *Dave Freedman 1, 2 and 3*). He and Joe Freedman are considered to "represent the last of the traditional master electricians who lit shows with the director in the English tradition" (DWR Team, 2012, np).
- 3.) Richard Parker started as a follow-spotter, then became a mechanist, then a general stage hand, then a stage manager and then found his way into lighting. (theatrchive, 2012, *Richard Parker 1*). He dedicated many of his years working at the then NAPAC and its transition into the Playhouse Company lighting a variety of works including dance productions for Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre.
- 4.) Mannie Manim began his career in theatre as an usher at the Brook Theatre in 1955. From this humble beginning, he rose through the ranks to become company manager before moving to the Johannesburg Civic Theatre and the Performing Arts Company of Transvaal (PACT) to realise his vision in 1976 to co-found the Market Theatre with Barney Simon. In 2011, the South African government conferred him with the Order of Ikhamanga in Silver for

his excellent contribution to the development of South African theatre and in the field of creative arts in general (Market Theatre, 2022, np).

- 5.) John T Baker was born in Croydon (United Kingdom) and worked at the Watford Palace Theatre and the Northcott Theatre in Devon. He moved to South Africa in the early 1970s to work at the then Nico Malan (now Artscape Theatre) and continued to work there until 1996 (Baker, 2023<sup>50</sup>).

## 2.1) Early 20th Century South African Lighting Design Practice: The Theatre Lighting Archive

This section is a drawing together of thoughts and ideas from the five interviews of the Theatre Lighting Archive that outline:

- 1.) Inception of Practice: An exploration of how these South African lighting designers came into practice
- 2.) Technical Aspects of Lighting: Examination of the lighting equipment and rig configurations utilised during the mid-20th century.
- 3.) Creative Process: Insights into the creative workflows and methodologies embraced by these South African lighting designers.
- 4.) Prospective Vision: Exploring their envisioned future of lighting design practice.
- 5.) Guidance for Young Designers: Reflections on valuable advice these practitioners would offer to emerging designers.

Modern Western conventional lighting practice only took its formal shape in the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD, once the controllable properties of light were able to be harnessed with the introduction of gas and then electric lighting (Abulafia, 2016, p.33), as part of the Second Industrial Revolution. Kevin Dreyer, notes from an American context, that before the advent of lighting coming into a practice of its own, the director or set designer was often tasked with lighting the space as an extension of their vision for the production or for the set design (Dreyer, 2020, p.14). This context aligns with the interviews on The Theatre Lighting Archive where Joe Freedman and Dave Freedman,

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<sup>50</sup> John T Baker Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100005685579303>

Mannie Manim and John T Baker acknowledge that productions relied on electricians to place instruments in general directions and then adjusted the intensities (theatrearchive, 2012). Freedman, Manim and Baker go on to explain further saying that the director would be the person to instruct the chief electrician on the states required for the production and this is how they often came into lighting design (theatrearchive, 2012). It is important to recognise that many of these early lighting designers began as electricians and acquired the skills of lighting design informally, learning the practice through hands-on experiences, particularly in the absence of formalised training (theatrearchive, 2012). This training modality highlights the notion of mentoring or apprenticeship (which no doubt comes from the electrician's background where apprenticeship forms a part of one's training).<sup>51</sup> Skills and knowledge are passed on to a younger generation from those who are already practising. In the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, because of rudimentary communication systems new skills would be learnt from touring technicians (theatrearchive, 2012, *Joe Freedman 1*) and then also from other lighting designers (theatrearchive, 2012, *Joe Freedman 3; Dave Freedman 3; Richard Parker 1*).

The lighting rigs employed during the early to mid-20th century closely resembled the configurations still in use today. These lighting rigs featured conventional lighting positions of front, overhead, footlights and cyclorama lighting (theatrearchive, 2012, *Joe Freedman 1; Mannie Manim 1*). Mannie Manim also notes that there was “not a lot of side lighting” (theatrearchive, 2012, *Mannie Manim 1*) and as noted in Chapter One this practice of side lighting, especially for dance, was more formalised by Jean Rosenthal (1912-1969) in America during her working career, a practice which has now become synonymous with dance lighting because of how it sculpts the body in three-dimensional space.

Joe Freedman defines his process of lighting as being discussions with the director, set designer, and costume designer; then you draw your plan and choose colours; finally, you use their idea to create effect and mood (theatrearchive, 2012, *Joe*

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<sup>51</sup> An electrician apprenticeship is part and parcel of electrician training. Your training, and apprenticeship can be arranged through the Electrical Contractors Association of South Africa (<https://ecasa.co.za/>)

*Freedman 3*). Richard Parker's (theatrearchive, 2012, *Richard Parker 2*) approach is notably similar:

If it is a play, start by reading the script; if it is an opera and you can't read the score, listen to a recording; and for dance, lighting comes from music. Then speak to the director/choreographer, watch rehearsals and sketch moves. Next, you decide on colours, which are influenced by costumes and what the director says, and what they are actually doing.

Richard Parker goes on to answer the question of what makes good lighting: "Visibility goes without saying. Lighting should match what is happening on stage. Lighting is good if no one notices it – but does depend on what you are doing style-wise" (theatrearchive, 2012, *Richard Parker 2*). Mannie Manim cites Jean Rosenthal as his favourite lighting designer highlighting her notion of "lighting the air - get the quality right and what takes place is then lit perfectly" (theatrearchive, 2012, *Mannie Manim 2*). Dave Freedman credits Mannie Manim as one of the first to plan out lighting in advance in South Africa thereby meriting the title of 'Lighting Designer' (theatrearchive, 2012, *Dave Freedman 3*).

From the interviews, it becomes evident that the creative processes and practices of these luminaries of South African lighting design during the early to mid-20th century bear a striking resemblance to contemporary methods. This continuity will be explored further in subsequent interviews with contemporary lighting designers and in my examination of my own lighting practice in Chapter Four.

Joe Freedman acknowledges the rapid advancement of equipment especially in "Spotlights, that is more than just a spotlight, it's a spotlight and it's a fresnel, and it's a flood - you can just adjust" (theatrearchive, 2012, *Joe Freedman 3*). Intelligent lights, however, were deemed somewhat beyond his scope at the time but later became an integral part of larger theatre productions. Richard Parker also acknowledges that moving lights have changed the most in his career as they have a "big impact... and the lights are brighter" (theatrearchive, 2012, *Richard Parker 3*). Mannie Manim notes "LED lights as most fascinating" as you can do "extraordinary things in light without having to change the bulbs" (theatrearchive, 2012, *Mannie Manim 3*). Manim also acknowledges that audience expectations have shifted, "People like it brighter and get irritated with low levels of light" (ibid) and as such lighting designers must adapt to this

evolving dynamic. John T Baker acknowledges substantial advances in equipment, especially as lighting control is all computerised (theatrearchive, 2013, *John T Baker 3*). He also advises emerging designers not to be daunted by technological advancements but, rather, to embrace them fully (ibid).

Some of these practitioners also offer valuable guidance to young lighting designers. Joe Freedman's advice for younger designers is to "learn basics, work with a good technician and learn with a hands-on job" (theatrearchive, 2012, *Joe Freedman 3*). Mannie Manim's advice for aspiring designers, when they start to light, is to "get a group of friends, link with a director, get into a room and start to light. Learn what the equipment can do and trial and error" (theatrearchive, 2012, *Mannie Manim 3*). John T Baker encourages young lighting designers to "just go out there and do it... Go out and light small things; learn by mistakes, and then go up the chain. You only learn by doing it" (theatrearchive, 2013, *John T Baker 3*).

### 3) The Interviews

The discussion above around the Theatre Lighting Archive interviews presents an encompassing framework of lighting design practice as it came into a vocation here in South Africa in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. It can be noted that the lighting designers spotlighted by the Theatre Lighting Archive are cisgender white men. It can be proposed that if the Theatre Lighting Archive had continued it would have grown to include the voices of others as lighting design (and theatre) practice has opened up in post-apartheid South Africa. Subsequently, this dissertation proceeds to explore a series of interviews I conducted with five contemporary local lighting designers who are currently active within the South African context. These lighting designers reflect a diverse group of genders and races that open up/challenge the perception of who can be a lighting designer. The interviews were conducted using the same set of open-ended questions as shown in Appendix A. The full transcripts of the Zoom recordings can be found in Appendices B (Michael Broderick), C (Christine 'Tina' Le Roux), D (Lerato Ledwaba), E (Nkosingiphile 'Mancane' Dlamini) and F (Oliver Hauser). In engaging the interview responses, I am primarily guided (as indicated above) by the methodological frameworks of phenomenology and sensory ethnography. At their core, phenomenology and sensory ethnography are rooted in the primacy of the

experiencing "living body" as articulated by Merleau-Ponty (1962). The insight drawn from these interviews aims to construct (and propose) a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of lighting designers, their creative processes, and the dynamic interplay between their sensory perceptions and their practice.

Furthermore, this broad framework serves as the foundation for subsequent Chapter Four. This chapter will embark on a comparative analysis of my own lighting design practice within this broader "cultural group" (Hamilton, Smith and Worthington, 2008, p.22) represented by the interviewed lighting designers. This chapter will begin with a "self-interview" methodology, wherein I engage with the same set of questions, that explore my practice in relation to the collective experiences and practices of fellow lighting designers (refer to Appendix G).

### 3.1) Home is Where the Work is: Context and Community

Within the scope of this research, the element of context assumes an important role, particularly the geographical context in which the interviewed lighting designers operate. For the majority of the lighting designers interviewed, this is the city of Durban (eThekweni), in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, also a Durban-based company note on their website that their "home is on the East coast of South Africa in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. It is nestled in the heart of the warm ocean-facing city of Durban. Our sense of geographical location is important as it offers a unique flavour to this African contemporary dance company" (FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, 2021<sup>52</sup>). Durban is also host to the JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience which is hosted by the Centre for Creative Arts at the University of KwaZulu Natal, which in 2023, is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as "South Africa's longest running dance festival" (JOMBA!, 2023<sup>53</sup>).

Michael Broderick says that "there's been some amazing people that have come from here [Durban]. Not all of them stay, in fact, most have gone but if you look at it, there's a genesis or something that starts here" (Appendix B, 2022, p.156). During the early

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<sup>52</sup> <https://flatfootdancecompany.webs.com/> [Accessed 19 October 2021]

<sup>53</sup> <https://jomba.ukzn.ac.za/jomba-celebrates-historic-new-partnership-with-the-market-theatre-in-johannesburg/> [Accessed 26 April 2023]

2000s, (as I was beginning my career in theatre) there was a bloom of contemporary dance in Durban with companies like Fantastic Flying Fish Dance Company (est. 1998), Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre (est. 1994), FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY (est. 1994), Floating Outfit Project (est. 1997) and Phenduka Dance Theatre (re-est. 2001) were all in operation and creating work. My own professional trajectory intersected with many of these companies during this period, affording me invaluable experiences of working in various capacities. Michael Broderick had a strong working relationship with Fantastic Flying Fish Dance Company, Tina Le Roux with Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre, and myself with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY.<sup>54</sup> This strong affiliation with a particular dance company is a common thread among the interviewed lighting designers, as is evidenced by Lerato Ledwaba's close collaboration with Mhayise Productions, Mancane Dlamini's extensive work with the former Playhouse Dance Residency's Kristi-Leigh Gresse, and Oliver Hauser's affiliation with Gregory Maqoma and Vuyani Dance Theatre in Johannesburg.

Moreover, the concept of 'community' within the context of Durban is a recurring theme. Both Tina Le Roux and Michael Broderick expand on this notion, while Oliver Hauser identifies a parallel sentiment with his home city of Johannesburg. It is where these theatre lighting designers have built working relationships and although they may travel elsewhere in the country or world to work, it is this connection to home roots that remains. Of the interviewee pool, it is only Lerato Ledwaba who now works in a different province to which he was born.

What is noticeable about all the interviewees is that they all have tertiary qualifications: three of the interviewees, Michael Broderick, Lerato Ledwaba, and Oliver Hauser, have training in the technical aspects through a diploma in Entertainment Technology with subsequent specialisations in lighting. Two of the interviewees, Mancane Dlamini and Tina Le Roux, on the other hand, pursued studies in Drama and Performance Studies at a tertiary level, subsequently transitioning into lighting. The interviews collectively emphasise the importance of learning through practical engagement, highlighted by Meskin and van der Walt's acknowledgement in Chapter Two that "practice is *always* embodied; it happens in *action* and happens *through* and *of* the

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<sup>54</sup> As reflected in this research

body” (2018, p.41 italics in original text) as we learn by doing from someone who has learnt the skills already.

### 3.2) Learning From Those Who Came Before Us: Mentorship As Practice

The embodied concept of mentorship emerges as a cornerstone in the transmission of knowledge across generations, as echoed by The Theatre Lighting Archive interviewees who speak of learning their practice in this way. Only one of the interviewees, Lerato Ledwaba acknowledges that he didn't have a specific mentor but acknowledges that he “used to consult a lot and also used to go to companies just for more knowledge” (2022, Appendix D, p.200). This idea is in alignment with Pink's assertion that “knowing in practice” is always “embodied and [a] multisensorial way of knowing that is inextricable from our sensorial and material engagements with the environment and is as such an emplaced knowing” (Pink, 2015, p.40). We don't simply mimic others, we create our practice through “emplaced skill and knowing” (Pink, 2015, p.41) that then “becomes acceptable to others” (ibid). Michael Broderick acknowledges that “the key lies with the protégé for me - if they are willing to learn and move on” (2022, Appendix B, p.159). During their formative years, all the interviewees exhibited a willingness to delve deeper into the nuances of their craft, characterised by their willingness to inquire and explore. Much of this education transpired through practical, hands-on experiences. Mancane Dlamini, for instance, recounts her mentor's guidance in the making of cables, “And then the next day he was like okay you saw me making cables yesterday... fix this cable then and then I had to... okay... remember, Oh ja, that's how you fix the cable and then we learn on the go” (2022, Appendix E, p.228). Oliver Hauser acknowledges the physical act of being in a theatre with his mentor when he “got to experience the space and I got to experience how a professional was actually creating a design from scratch” (2022, Appendix F, p.250).

Each of the interviewees subsequently carries the role of mentorship into their own professional journeys, fostering the development of emerging talents, frequently within

the scope of the institutions with which they are affiliated.<sup>55</sup> However, there is a prevailing sentiment in the interviews that contemporary novices exhibit a different attitude toward learning. Perhaps this is because of a lack of spaces of support where Le Roux suggests “I don't know how the next generation absorbs that knowledge when there are not spaces available for them to do that in anymore?” (2022, Appendix C, p.186). Perhaps there is an unwillingness to “get their hands dirty” as Dlamini (2022, Appendix E. p.229) suggests. Conspicuously, a significant gap appears to be widening between those entering the industry, particularly within the realm of theatre and dance, Michael Broderick notes “If we don't feed [the industry], it is going to die, what we do is a dying art, in some ways - if we don't nurture it” (2022, Appendix B, p.160). Hauser acknowledges, “I do believe there's a major shortage, a skill shortage in... design. There are a lot of technicians but even the technicians themselves are not quite at the level that... the internationals are running at. I tour quite often so I know what that gap is and the gap is quite large” (2022, Appendix F, p.252). This research, through its interviews and investigations, aspires to shed light on the complexities of lighting design practice, thereby leading to a heightened awareness of its significance and potential vocational appeal to a younger generation.

A fundamental dichotomy prevalent in the practice of lighting design is that which distinguishes between a technician and a designer. While a lighting technician possesses a comprehensive understanding of the mechanical and electrical facets of the job, including rigging and dimmer systems, a lighting designer should ideally possess all of these technical skills as well. However, the designer's role extends beyond mere technical acumen to contribute artistically to a production.<sup>56</sup> Kelli Zezulka (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.107) notes

In the 1950s (in the UK), the move to a specialist lighting designer (a job role that had previously been undertaken by the director or chief electrician) brought about a corresponding change in the existing power relations of the creative and production teams.

As explored in the Theatre Lighting Archive section above, these first-generation lighting designers also working in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century mostly started out as

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<sup>55</sup> Most theatres and its practitioners are open to the idea of passing on information, especially if they are based in places of learning such as Ledwaba at DUT and Le Roux and myself at UKZN. The Playhouse Company where Dlamini works offers an apprenticeship for learners. Broderick and Hauser offer workshops in lighting design.

<sup>56</sup> Sometimes the lighting designer may be the technician, as is often the case, especially in South Africa, owing to budget restraints.

electricians, and then shifted to technicians and then after several years shifted to calling themselves lighting designers.<sup>57</sup> Zezulka continues,

For lighting designers, this meant, among other things, vying for creative and authorial agency and input in a role that had traditionally been seen as ‘technical – to make the lights work as required by the Producer and Designer’ (Guthrie, 1952, p.11; quoted in Rebellato, 1999, p.92). While this attitude is certainly no longer the case, it could be argued that the residual effects of this historical hierarchy still linger in contemporary practice. (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.107-8)

This understanding of the lighting designer as a “creative” with “authorial agency” (ibid) is an important distinction to make and as Robert Solso suggests, in engaging with artists that they “don’t see the world differently, they ‘think’ the world differently (2003, p.153). “Whether they are born with such intellectual perspicuity or develop it through years of training is, of course, the question psychology has grappled with for centuries” (ibid). In attempting to understand if there is a natural aptitude to being a lighting designer, Michael Broderick self-identifies as a “visual person” (2022, Appendix B, p.158) and Tina Le Roux’s reflects on her capacity of “borrowing and absorbing knowledge from all these different practitioners that informed that world, that backstage world for me and allowed me that place to explore and develop my own voice” (2022, Appendix C, p.185). This highlights the suggestion that being able to translate visual cues from the everyday world, using the technical equipment and conventions of theatre is part of the skill set of a lighting designer. These, as mentioned earlier, are skills that are learnt in situ, in practice, and often learnt from a mentor.

As no two lighting designers’ life experiences are identical, each professional will inevitably carve out a distinctive approach to lighting design, thereby yielding unique impacts on the audience. Exploring the development of my lighting practice and how this impacts on performance will be explored in the next chapter. It may not be known definitively whether an artist is born with the skill or can learn it, however, Robert Solso’s suggestion that the dual influence of nativistic and directed perception in the creation of schemata (2003) is invaluable in understanding how individuals interpret and create art.

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<sup>57</sup> Once again linked to the shifts in technology that allowed them to control the properties of light with more effectiveness.

### 3.3) Articulating the Lighting Design Process

As previously examined in Chapter One, specific conventions in lighting design, especially in dance, draw attention to well-established ways of working. For example, McCandless's three-point lighting system with a key light and fill light at 45-degree angles and a back light (McCandless, 1947, p.55) and Jean Rosenthal's practice of employing fixed-side stands to light the dancing body on stage further highlights these conventions (McAfee, 2019, p.33). The conventional lighting positions mentioned above: front, overhead, footlights and cyclorama lighting (theatrearchive, 2012, *Joe Freedman 1; Mannie Manim 1*) as well as side lighting positions for dance, collectively form the 'tools of the trade' in order to implement the design. Nevertheless, this dissertation aims to unveil the multifaceted role of the contemporary lighting designer in the context of dance. Paradoxically, lighting designers rarely engage in discussions about their work. In theatrical scenarios, the invisibility of light predominates, aligning with the naturalistic conventions of scripted theatre. In dance, as Mumford suggests, there is a potential freedom that "does not have the limitations that a script might impose on actors in a theatre" (Mumford, 1985, p.54). Lighting moves more into the abstract realms of poetics, atmosphere, meaning and mood and an expressive medium in its own right. The challenge lies in the difficulty that designers encounter when articulating their processes, primarily because these processes are highly individualised – as Broderick notes "it changes from individual to individual" (2022, Appendix B, p.160)

Notwithstanding the personal nature of the lighting design process, certain shared elements often comprise its underlying processes. Kevin Dreyer notes this in his book *Dance and Light* (2020) which outlines what he terms a "designer's toolbox" (Dreyer, 2020, p.166): these are some of the physical elements that a lighting designer will use to create a lighting design:

1. In-depth conversations with choreographers and other collaborative designers to delve into the work's intricacies.
2. Attendances at rehearsals to gain first-hand exposure to the choreography.
3. Assessment of the available equipment options for lighting the piece, considering venue specifications and budgetary constraints.
4. Selection of optimal lighting positions.
5. Determination of the colour palette.
6. Generation of a lighting plot.

7. Conception of lighting cues.
8. Execution of the lighting rig setup during the venue's get-in week.
9. Programming of lighting cues on the lighting desk during the get-in week.
10. Rehearsal and execution of cues during performance and rehearsal, with necessary adjustments being made.

Below are some of the ideas and steps that the interviewees articulated in describing their individual lighting design process as elicited through the interview questions (refer to Appendix A).

Michael Broderick's approach to the lighting design process appears less prescriptive. Broderick speaks less about planning in advance and more about “being in the space, that makes you realise things in a very different way and you adapt to suit those situations” (2022, Appendix B, p.161). This approach resonates with the phenomenological notion of embodiment, as again particularly articulated by Merleau-Ponty (1962), and how the body is our “primary way of being in the world” (1962, p.162). By being open to physically responding and adapting to various spaces, Broderick allows his sensory engagement with the environment to directly inform his lighting choices—a process that can only occur within the actual performance space. Broderick elaborates on this aspect by describing how he enjoys the disruption of established conventions and the subsequent exploration that emerges from creative discomfort. He suggests that “being restricted is often the greatest freedom” and thrives in pushing the boundaries of creative potential when working with limited resources (2022, Appendix B, p.162).

Tina Le Roux speaks, specifically in South Africa, of the reality of the constraints of budget, space and time when it comes to creating theatre. Le Roux emphasises the multifaceted concept of space, revealing how practical considerations such as the choice of location can profoundly influence her work. Le Roux also refers to “talking about space as a journey and emotional storytelling and how do I, as a lighting designer, come to that and add to it. Is it a colour choice? Is it the angle at which that light source is coming from? Is it what I can't see?” (2022, Appendix C, p.181). This too echoes Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodiment (1962) where her approach embodies the phenomenological perspective of embodiment, as her sensorial and physical experiences become vital aspects of responding to and creating a lighting design.

Lerato Ledwaba speaks of the importance of collaboration and engagement in his design process, consulting the director/choreographer and other collaborators. This is with the aim of understanding ‘what the flow is’, what is the choreographer looking for: setting, mood etc. that need to be figured out (2022, Appendix D, p.202). At the same time, he confronts the practical limitations posed by various venues, some of which restrict the movement of lighting fixtures. These constraints necessitate a creative approach to accommodate the limitations while remaining faithful to the vision (2022, Appendix D, p.202).

Mancane Dlamini presents a structured, three-phase approach to her lighting design process. “Phase one will be the meeting and then two will be rehearsals and then three developing the plan” (2022, Appendix E, p.229). The meeting of phase one is with the creator/choreographer where she learns about the concepts and ideas behind the work. This is followed up with a production meeting with the rest of the team so that all are on the same page. Phase two involves attending rehearsals, the first which is just sitting and watching and thereafter involves taking notes around “skin tone, the movement, who moves where, when, why” (2022, Appendix E, p.230) and a third rehearsal for checking the mood of each scene. From there she moves to phase three of developing the lighting plan and cue list in order to start work in the theatre.

Oliver Hauser's process is detailed through his involvement in a specific work, *Broken Chord*<sup>58</sup>, where he was engaged from the early stages of creation. He acknowledges the importance of having “input from the entire creative team because it helps mould the work from the very early stages and it helps open up ideas from a technical perspective for the director or the choreographer” (2022, Appendix F, p.254). The production was workshopped and aimed at being performed in a variety of venues, regardless of the technical specifications/limitations that were involved. He began this project with an “idea of the concept, but not so much the structure” (2022, Appendix F, p.255) so that he could mould the piece in terms of “overall feel and the atmosphere that you want to create” (2022, Appendix F, p.255). This method is emblematic of the

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<sup>58</sup> *Broken Chord* tells the story of the first Black South African Choir which, towards the end of the 19th century, performed in Great Britain and North America, and inspired choreography that talks of African identity, migrations, and closed borders. It is written and directed by Gregory Maqoma and premiered in 2021 and continues to tour internationally. <https://www.tut.ac.za/news-and-press/article?NID=486> [Accessed 15 December 2022]

shift toward what Rick Moran calls an “integrative lighting designer, who works against this traditional model of practice and is more regularly part of the discussions about the production from the beginning” (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.109).

### 3.4) Inspiration Behind Ideas for the Lighting Design

The creative and artistic elements of lighting design provide a fascinating perspective into the underlying inspiration that fuels the generation of these lighting ideas. Michael Broderick says “I’m constantly trying to reinvent how people look at light” (2022, Appendix B, p.163) and not purely as a spectacle but rather returning to find the “connection between light and what’s happening on stage” (ibid). He speaks vividly of being visually attuned to the visual images of light that is around us all the time and “the more you’re aware of [these visual images], the more you practice it, the more it comes to you without you even having to look for it” (2022, Appendix B, p.164). With this awareness of the visual images around him, he says to people “Create a reference in your brain, like a library of references that you can tap into and say I remember that; how can I achieve that, with these things, for this moment” (2022, Appendix B, p.164). Ultimately he speaks of being a ‘sculptor’ with light because he believes “we work in a 3D medium<sup>59</sup> and we are continually manipulating something: to give it shape and form” (2022, Appendix B, p.165).

Tina Le Roux similarly speaks of the impact of the world around her, “it’s the environment in which we grew up. It’s our day-to-day living” (2022, Appendix C, p.182). What also interests her is the interplay between the “idea of light versus darkness” (2022, Appendix C, p.182), of what is seen and not seen, what she as a lighting designer chooses to highlight and not highlight and thus focuses the attention of the audience to, or get them to question what is not visible onstage. Her notion correlates with Solso’s concept of schemata (2003), as she sensually accumulates and applies knowledge in the creative process. In the context of collaborating with choreographers and directors, her approach hinges on inviting others into her perceptual realm,

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<sup>59</sup> It is quite common to speak of the lighting designer as a painter, painting a stage with light, however this notion of working in three dimensions is very important to understand as we do work with the length, width and height of stage (and even perhaps 4D with the added dimension of time).

allowing for a shared narrative. This shared perception can trigger latent inspirations, previously undiscovered. It's a collaborative dialogue, emphasising the importance of asking questions to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the choreographer's vision, ensuring that the lighting designer is well-equipped with knowledge.

Similarly, Lerato Ledwaba approaches his design process by deeply immersing himself in the collaborative dynamic. When it comes to the design and collaborating with a choreographer/director it is about bringing “you into my perception, maybe that triggers something in you that I'm not even yet aware of and let's talk about that” (2022, Appendix C, p.184). Lerato Ledwaba speaks of being the kind of “person who prefers to sit and ask as many questions as possible before I even consider sitting and starting to design” (2022, Appendix D, p.208). This process of asking questions is in order to understand as much about the choreographer's ideas as possible so he is “well equipped with knowledge” (ibid). This importance of collaboration as mentioned in Chapter One with reference to John Hopgood, highlighted in his observation,

Ultimately, though, in each of these interactions lies the potential for something wondrous—a dynamic and unique creation that tells a story more powerfully and evocatively than any individual could alone. It is that potential that makes the risk worthwhile and drives us onwards. (Hopgood, 2016, p.24)

Mancane Dlamini draws her influence from the world around her she says, “It's nature and the social... you see the things that are happening around us they inspire me the most but then the main thing that's inspired me is the storyline” (2022, Appendix E, p.231). In order to find inspiration for the storyline Dlamini uses a “What-if question”<sup>60</sup> which she describes: “come up with a question that will summarise the whole concept but questioning it not answering it and then from the question you will answer using your lighting design” (2022, Appendix E, p.231).

### 3.5) Language Barriers

A pivotal aspect of the collaborative nature of dance is the need to address the perceived language barriers that exist between choreographers and lighting

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<sup>60</sup> A similarity can be drawn to Konstantin Stanislavski's 'Magic if', where an actor places themselves in the situation of the character in order to gain a better understanding of their motivation.

designers. Kevin Dreyer in his book *Dance and Light* (2020) notes that “one of the barriers to better collaborations between lighting designers and choreographers is the absence of clear, jargon-free, communication” (Dreyer, 2020, p.ix). Dreyer advocates throughout his book for lighting designers and choreographers to learn each other’s languages in order to assist in understanding how each other work and ultimately benefit for the work.

Michael Broderick articulates “I think of what a lighting designer does and it’s understanding and interpreting what’s expected of them from a person who doesn’t speak our language” (2022, Appendix B, p.165). This notion of languages, interpretation, and effective communication, particularly concerning a choreographer’s concepts and the transmission of technical ideas by the lighting designer, constitutes an important element in performance. Kevin Dreyer quotes fellow American lighting designer, Judith Daitsman in saying “The communication that needs to happen around a lighting design is clearly a dialogue; it is unfortunate that it often devolves into parallel monologues with neither party fully understanding what the other is driving at” (Dreyer, 2020, p.255). A choreographer uses a language specific to the domain of dance, and the lighting designer should familiarise themselves with these terms to discern their significance for important moments and lighting transitions within the performance. When collaborating with a choreographer, the perceived language barrier becomes especially relevant when addressing the emotional and atmospheric aspects of a performance. Choreographers often possess a visceral understanding of the mood they wish to convey but may find it challenging to articulate the technical means of realisation within a theatre. The role of the lighting designer extends to translating these abstract notions into practical, stage-applicable elements. Tina Le Roux speaks of acquiring skills beyond just lighting that are “intrinsic to what we do” (2022, Appendix C, p.188). She also speaks about how lighting needs to be adaptable. It is one of the last elements to be actualised (as it only physically happens in the theatre). Sets can be built in advance, costumes made in advance, and the sound worked out in advance. Lighting, although planned, is only visible once the production is in a theatre<sup>61</sup> and one can see what it looks like. Francis Reid concurs “Lighting cannot be realized until it is

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<sup>61</sup> Modern visualisation programmes can give an indication of what lighting may look like in a venue, although these are in idealistic world, where the variance of lighting fixtures (for example the age of a lighting fixture) is not taken into account and will always seem artificial in a way. These programmes are also costly and not everyone has access to them.

created” (Reid, 2001, p.111) and that only happens physically in the theatre. Zezulka also notes “[Light] is the only visual design element that can only be seen when in situ, being reliant on the articulation of both space and time” (Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.103). Because the lighting is usually the last element to be added, if a set is in the way, or something is not working – for instance the colour of the costumes looks wrong - it is the element that needs to be adjusted the most in the venue. Regardless of how much planning is done in advance, even if a lighting designer is using visualiser programs; only once all the elements come together onstage is there an understanding of the effect light has on the stage.

Lerato Ledwaba notes that “we have to combine our ideas and put it together so that we are both happy with the outcome” (2022, Appendix D, p.202) thus emphasising the importance of communication. Similarly, Mancane Dlamini observes “Communication for me, is key and meeting up and discussing our concepts because at the end of the day there's one vision which is the production or that dance piece so we at the end of the day have to serve that vision” (2022, Appendix E, p.232). Oliver Hauser highlights the importance of those “early conversations about how they [the choreographer]... what they're creating and what's the story behind their piece and what narrative is it sort of following and what do they want to feel you know what are they trying to what's the message” (2022, Appendix F, p.264). The interaction between choreographers and lighting designers hinges on transcending linguistic barriers, facilitating meaningful communication, and ensuring the seamless realisation of artistic visions. This collaborative dynamic underpins the artistic output of dance performances.

### 3.6) Lighting and the Senses

Revisiting the sensorial nature of lighting design and the impact it can have on human senses, Michael Broderick (2022, Appendix B, p.171) notes,

the audience needs to interpret that visual however they want to. I'm not going to dictate to them what to see. All I'm doing here is saying to you: 'Look at this; take your senses, wherever you let them' and that's essentially what I'd love to always be doing: let people interpret things.

A lighting design for dance does not necessarily have to be didactic (especially in comparison to a script-based naturalistic productions which may require lighting to

reflect a certain situation, for example, dawn or night). This artistic freedom of lighting designer in dance as suggested by Mumford (1985) in Chapter One, invites diverse understandings and enriches the audience's engagement with the performance. Scott Palmer also broadens the scope of lighting design in what he calls post-dramatic theatre "Light is not bound to the potential restrictions and requirements of the naturalistic stage, and indeed the absence of light has also become a key expressive element in shaping audience experience" (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.36). Broderick notes (as do many other lighting designers, Jean Rosenthal explicitly) "Dance is probably for me, dance and opera, are the two most creative mediums of lighting" (2022, Appendix B, p.171). Tina Le Roux adds a layer of individuality to the discussion, emphasising that her personal history informs her specific lighting choices, resulting in a potentially distinctive viewing experience for each audience member. It is this openness to their design work that allows for open interpretation of the work, and as this is always through the senses (perhaps even multi-sensorily) it allows for the audience to use their own schemata in order to understand/experience the work in different ways.

Mancane Dlamini adopts a more pragmatic perspective of how the lighting design "helps the eye to see or rather to... it directs the eye on where they should look" (2022, Appendix E, p.233). Oliver Hauser accentuates the centrality of light and vision, "Everything is visual. The sun's light itself is what makes this world, it's what made life. Light is life and I think that's why lighting plays such an important role on stage and it's also that role that no one necessarily thinks about" (2022, Appendix F, p.265).

He goes on further to reflect on the importance of lighting as a visual medium, one that significantly influences the human psyche. He observes in his own further studies<sup>62</sup> a notion regarding 'human-centric lighting' where, for example, in an old age home, lighting designers recreate the natural movement of the sun and it has improved the lives of Alzheimer's patients by approximately 20%<sup>63</sup>. Hauser notes "Light really affects the human psyche and I feel like that translates on stage" (2022, Appendix F, p.265), highlighting the potent effects of light on the human psyche extend to the stage, where

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<sup>62</sup> A post-graduate in Illumination Engineering/Architectural lighting

<sup>63</sup> An example of this kind of research can be found here: <https://www.alzinfo.org/articles/prevention/how-light-may-help-people-with-alzheimers-disease/> [Accessed 12 March 2023]

it plays a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics and impact of live theatrical performance.

### 3.7) Decoding The Language of Lighting Designers

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, of importance to the way in which the interviews were conducted is the methodological framework of sensory ethnography, as primarily advocated for by Sarah Pink in *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2015). This research hinges upon asking questions about sensory knowledge, aiming to comprehend how these lighting designers have cultivated their practice through sensory experiences. Pink's sensory ethnography also advocated for the use of images as a point of discussion in interviews that recognises "the role of visual images as a standard medium for communicating about and invoking other sensory experiences" (Pink, 2015. p.90). Each lighting designer was prompted to bring an image of their work to the forefront of discussions, we also discussed an image from my lighting design work (primarily from the case studies used in Chapter Four as well as another recent lighting design work). This image-oriented approach was motivated by the intention to unravel the language and lexicon inherent to lighting designers when articulating their lighting design process.

However, it is imperative to acknowledge the inherent limitation of still photographs in encapsulating the full multisensory, three-dimensional nature of live performances. While videos might have introduced an element of temporal context, they too would fall short of encapsulating the full breadth of a sensory encounter. Additionally, due to logistical constraints posed by remote interviews and issues around data and connectivity<sup>64</sup> conducted via Zoom, the use of photographs emerged as the most feasible medium for dialogue.

Revisiting some of the broad definitions of lighting design discussed in Chapter One, I can highlight Kevin Dreyer's notion that it is "the need to make choices, choices driven by an artistic or aesthetic set of circumstances" (Dreyer, 2020, p.8). This is extended further into that "it speaks to style, it speaks to artistic vision, to partnering with the

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<sup>64</sup> It can be noted that in at least two of the interviews there were issues with connectivity between myself and the interviewees.

dance (Dreyer, 2020, p 153). Peter Mumford's definition that it is "evoking of atmosphere and ideas [and] definition of space and 'body form' in relation to space" (Mumford, 1985, p.46) gives an aesthetic understanding of the role of lighting in performance. Finally, Richard Palmer's notion that "you must control light itself and, ultimately, what and how the audience sees" (Quoted in McAfee, 2019, p.23) leads to a broader understanding of the impact of lighting that "through lighting design, many light artists have indirectly had an impact on how our sense of light and the corporal events of seeing and viewing are understood in dance art" (Tenhula quoted in Humalisto, Karjunen and Kilpeläinen, 2019, p.146).

From these broad definitions, primarily emanating from Western/Northern-based perspectives, this dissertation leverages the images brought forth by the current lighting designers during interviews to unearth the language and terminology they use when discussing their designs. This lens is intended to encapsulate the deeply phenomenological and experiential voices of these designers as they navigate their own artistic practice. In the context of these discussions, the images also facilitated dialogue around my case studies, a theme that reverberates with the thematic significance of how lighting designers talk about light and lighting design.

When discussing their photos, the lighting designers all had a clear concept in terms of the overall work and the specific moment of the photo. For example, Michael Broderick was to marry the elements of technology and humanity (2022, Appendix B, p.168).



*Image 12: One Man, One Light (2016) JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience. Photo by Val Adamson*

Tina Le Roux's concept was about recreating the "vast oppressive space" (2022, Appendix C, p.190) of a site-specific work into the theatrical space of a proscenium arch theatre:



*Image 13: rite (2015) by Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre. JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience. Photo by Val Adamson.*

Lerato Ledwaba was playing with themes of isolation:



*Image 14: Udodana (2018) Choreographed by Musa Hlatshwayo. JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience, Sneddon Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson*

Mancane Dlamini was looking at the idea of the 'light at the end of the tunnel' in terms of Gender-Based Violence:



*Image 15: Sullied (2018) by Kristi-Leigh Gresse. National Arts Festival. Photo by Megan Kelly/Cue*

Oliver Hauser's concept was highlighting the natural and metaphorical elements of a 'grieving scene' in relation to the larger ideas of the work:



*Image 16: Cion: Requiem of Ravel's Boléro (2022) by Vuyani Dance Theatre. Choreographed by Gregory Maqoma. Photo by John Hogg.*

This concept is usually always in relation to the choreographer's ideas which can be prescriptive (as in Ledwaba's use of the corridor which was requested by the choreographer) or not (as in Le Roux's idea, which the choreographer embraced). There is always a sense of collaboration; lighting does not happen in isolation; it is always in relation to the ideas of the choreographer/other designers working on the piece. This synergistic relationship aligns with the notion that contemporary dance serves as a platform for "the ever-evolving search for authentic (and multiple) African contemporary dance voices that speak to culture, politics, art and (most significantly) identity and self" (Loots, 2018, p.1). Other notable trademark qualities of contemporary dance as mentioned by Adrienne Sichel are "invention and reinvention of artistic and cultural forms and functions" (Sichel, 2016, np) and its ability to disrupt, displace, connect and survive (ibid). Contemporary dance speaks the personal and the political; and questions and probes the contemporary world we live in; it inevitably has a voice and something to say. As such, lighting design is tasked with complementing the

essence and messages of the work, highlighting the importance of a well-defined lighting concept.

In talking about *One man, One light* (2016), Michael Broderick falls outside of the conventional choreographer/lighting designer dynamic explored in most of the other interviews. The idea for *One man, One light* (2016) came from Broderick himself, although he did have collaborators in the making of the piece. His aim was to “create a relationship between an artist, a performer and a light and take them on a little journey where we explore everything a light can do” (2022, Appendix B, p.168-9). This ‘dance’ between technology and humanity is done through using mostly a single intelligent lighting fixture and a solo performer. Broderick remarks how he is still on a journey “of challenging people to explore what they have more [with] limited resources” (2022, Appendix B, p.169) and as such not to get lost in the use of technology for technology’s sake. He also acknowledges the importance of story, “Without a story, what is there? Dance is an incredible medium for telling stories” (2022, Appendix B, p.169). Le Roux also highlights that even though it may not be a literal story in contemporary dance, asking “What story am I telling?” Is it an emotional journey that I need to be speaking about here? Is it how am I supporting what is happening on stage?” (2022, Appendix C, p.182) becomes a necessary way of understanding how she navigates creating a concept for her lighting designs.

When describing the lighting design concept, the discussion often transitions into an exploration of the emotional impact their designs have on themselves and the audience. This can be thematic in terms of describing mood and atmosphere, for example, Le Roux and Dlamini both play with light and darkness, but in different ways to create different impacts on the mood of the work and thus how the audience receives it. Le Roux's analysis emphasises the audience's complicity in the violence portrayed on stage and the role of lighting in this context. Le Roux notes “It was that play between working with this idea of what I'm lighting versus you standing in the dark watching - and how does that make you complicit in the violence?” (2022, Appendix C, p.191) that contrasts the use of a single bright, low hanging light onstage to the well-known sacrificial scene as part of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913) which Jay Pather's *rite* (2015) is based on. Dlamini, in contrast, employs lighting to kindle hope in the face of darkness, highlighting the thematic facets of Gender-Based

Violence. Light offers hope that the female dancer “will see the light at the end of the tunnel and if you look from her breast to her face, it is a bit brighter/highlighted the area of the body to indicate hope and faith” (2022, Appendix E, p.235). This is in contrast to the darkness of the frame around the female dancer and the “darkened the face of the male figure” (2022, Appendix E, p.235) to seem ominous. The use of metaphorical representations such as light and dark, good and evil, visible and hidden enriches the choreography with layers of possible meaning, allowing for diverse interpretations of the work.

When describing the effect of their lighting design on the choreography as represented in the images, the lighting vocabulary does shift into the technical descriptions/jargon of how the effect was achieved – how they made the lighting moment happen. This involves an analysis of the lighting equipment, encompassing elements such as the type of lights, their intensities, colours, and angles. Oliver Hauser's example provides insight into this intricate connection between artistic intent and technical execution. The choice between a 45-degree cross-wash and direct front light becomes a pivotal decision, as it influences the dynamism of the performers' faces (2022, Appendix F, p.272),

If your intention is to separate the stage and isolate certain parts of the stage then maybe a straight-on focus is a good idea but if you want to create a little bit more dynamic on the faces and isolation is not so important, then you can possibly look at a cross-wash or possibly using your slot positions for better, for more moulding on the faces rather than this flat look.

Upon discussing my images of lighting design, the dialogue primarily revolved around the composition and mechanics of the specific moment captured. While technical terminology took precedence, some coaxing was required to extract the deeper artistic dimensions. For example, Lerato Ledwaba, who battled at first for the words when discussing an image from Vincent Mantsoe's *SoliiDad* (2019) was eventually able to come up with a clear description.



*Image 17: SoliiDad (2019) Choreographed by Vincent Mantsoe. JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience, Sneddon Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson*

The part of the conversation between myself and Ledwaba went as follows,

WM: How, what is it, what do you feel when you see it?

LM: the atmosphere is a bit lighter... but then again... it's like... from this is what I think...

WM: There's no right to wrong answers - this is your opinion.

LM: ...it's like... the confidence and hope. It's somehow been lost. Looking at this picture...

WM: Because of what? Because of what...?

LM: Like... if you are confident – like you wouldn't put your head and open your arms like this. It's like he's in search of help... needs to be rescued or picked up from a certain situation that he's been going through. So hence I'm saying I feel like there's loss of hope. I think.

WM: Yeah and does the lighting contribute to that? and if so how?

LM: The lighting... it is a highlight because I think the eyes are even closed, if I look properly...

WM: Yeah...

LM: Ja... at least I'm still able to see...

(laughs)

WM: Yeah, keep going...

LM: I think there's a... lighting also plays a role here... Ja...

WM: In what way? In what way? That's why... I'm trying to figure out the words. How we talk about it...

LM: Ja... How do I put it...? How do I say this? Like, from this picture what I'm seeing: this person, is in need of help, rescue for hope to be restored. I'm not sure if I making sense? (2022, Appendix D, p.218-19)

In contrast, Mancane Dlamini was able to give a concise understanding of the possible meaning of the lighting in the picture of *Seven Way to Say Goodbye* (2021).



*Image 18: Seven Ways to Say Goodbye (2021) Flatfoot Dance Company, performed at the Playhouse Drama Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson.*

Mancane Dlamini understood the use of “isolated specials, dimmed compared to the lights behind” (2022, Appendix E, p.237), which “evokes the social issues of self-quarantine or self-isolation that we are going through at the moment” (ibid). This was especially specific in understanding how the lighting in that moment was used for the piece and thus the desired effect for the audience. Her insightful grasp of the lighting's role in contributing to the thematic interpretation suggests a shared language and perspective between the lighting designers, thereby enhancing the interpretation that closely aligns with the creator's intention.

Lucy Carter in her chapter in *Contemporary Performance Lighting* (2023) notes “I am reminded of how incredibly hard it is to talk about light. Light is a feeling, a sensation,

an emotion” (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.74). It is this difficulty in speaking about and comprehending art that Solso reminds us at ‘Level 3’ awareness “becomes more of a sentience than an intellectual explanation; more of an engrossment than an analysis of a piece; more of a feeling than an appraisal” (2003, p.8). Although there was some difficulty in coming up with the words in the interviews (Ledwaba’s interview quoted above as an example<sup>65</sup>), eventually all the five lighting designers were able to mediate an understanding that embraces these ideas of “sentience”, “engrossment” and “feelings” (2003, p.8). It is through understanding that the lighting designers are intrinsically connected and a part of their work through an embodied practice - Merleau-Ponty’s “ontology of flesh” (Aarø, 2010), that by engaging in sensory, embodied explanations of their processes, they are able to talk about their work. By peeling away the layers that have veiled lighting design, these designers are at the forefront of unmasking the vital role that lighting plays in the realm of theatrical performance and contemporary dance. By utilising methodologies such as Sarah Pink’s sensory ethnography (2015) and engaging with sensory memory, the interviews with the lighting designers become an “inextricable element of how we know in practice, and indeed part of the processes through which ways of knowing are constituted” (Pink, 2015, p.44) and as such steps allowing us to speak more freely and openly about our craft and practice. Their contributions serve as pivotal steps in widening the dialogue and comprehending the intricacies of this theatrical discipline.

#### 4) Other Notable Points and Closing Remarks

Another notable discussion that came out of the interviews is that there is an ever-growing shift towards the increased use of technology, as Ledwaba notes “Everything is going digital now and it’s soon, I think... I think there won’t be generics anymore because of the development that’s coming and due to the fact that we are trying to save the environment and the power as well” (2022, Appendix D, p.222). This technological shift introduces both advantages and disadvantages to the realm of lighting design. On the positive side, technology has streamlined and sped up the lighting design process. The advent of single fixtures that offer dynamic colour-

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<sup>65</sup> It can also be noted in the context of South Africa and it’s 11 official languages, that Lerato Ledwaba is not a first language English speaker, and although articulate in his lighting design practice and knowledge, this may have led to some misunderstandings of the question

changing capabilities has simplified tasks that once required multiple light fixtures. However, it is also acknowledged that a potential downside arises when technology eclipses the core essence of practice. Michael Broderick emphasises, “There's something about being that hands-on tactile playing with things, discovering things and making mistakes for yourself at a console that opens a few doors” (2022, Appendix B, p.176). Tina Le Roux concurs,

I think there's a rough magic to really conceptually engaging in these ideas and then exploring unconventional sources which I think when you have money and time and hours and hours in a studio... it can be bigger, but sometimes storytelling needs to be small and the smallness in itself is beautiful, the smallness of lighting a body with one source of light, or simple side lighting, is part of who we are as South Africans because our stories don't need tricks and always to be added on. (2022, Appendix C, p.196)

Oliver Hauser, even in the context of larger productions, emphasises the importance of efficiency and maximising the use of each lighting fixture (2022, Appendix F, p.260). The South African context, where substantial budgets for the arts, especially in dance, are not the norm, contributes to the prevailing understanding of the significance of simplicity and embracing the "smaller things" (2022, Appendix B, p.177), as articulated by Broderick. In essence, this approach keeps lighting design grounded in a human and embodied connection.

This dissertation has begun to trace conventional (proscenium arch) lighting design practice that has been heavily influenced by European and American sources in practice and the existing literature on the subject through to how it has become a practice here in South Africa. The utilisation of Denis Hutchinson's 2012/2013 interviews on The Theatre Lighting Archive's YouTube channel provided a historical backdrop, outlining the broad practices that were established during the mid-20th century in South Africa. These practices are not dissimilar to how current lighting designers work as established in my own interviews. However, a significant shift over the latter part of the 20th century and into the present is the emergence of a heightened awareness of the artistic agency of the lighting designer as a “creative” with “authorial agency” (Zezulka quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.107-8) enabling them to approach their practice with intention.

This realisation leads to the question: has this transformation yielded a distinct South African lighting design aesthetic? In practice, our theatrical venues are based on those of the West, and our equipment is purchased from Europe and America too.<sup>66</sup> There have been great advancements in the technology used in lighting design, from the type of fixtures to the control equipment used to programme, this technology has filtered down to South Africa, however, the ever-present budgetary constraints in many venues may not always allow them to keep up with these technological strides. Consequently, South African lighting designers have often had to use simpler, authentic approaches to lighting that suit their financial constraints. These conditions paradoxically foster creativity and a unique relationship with light, necessitating intentional choices to maximise the limited resources available. When these designers do get to work on bigger budget productions, they carry through that more nuanced use of light, their focus remains on how light can contribute to the performance in a deeply meaningful way. Michael Broderick encourages, “Before you turn on 100 lights and make them look great, work with a limited amount of stuff and explore that one source. If you can do it with one source, imagine what you can do with more” (2022, Appendix B, p.169). Broderick also notes that perhaps we look too much to the North to how we create lighting design and believes “that we have enough talent here for us to pursue our own idea of what we are” (2022, Appendix B, p.175).

Finally, Tina Le Roux advocates, “We need to tell South African stories, in a South African way” (2022, Appendix C, p.196) this, as discussed earlier, is influenced by the lives we live, in the context that we live, that create our unique ways of seeing and engaging with artistic practice. The diversities in South African experiences give rise to distinct ways of seeing and engaging with artistic practice. While this diversity does not entail that all South African lighting designers will adopt a uniform style, there seemingly exists a shared cultural and artistic backdrop that shapes the South African perspective on lighting design. This unique perspective may differ from those in other parts of the world and serves as fertile ground for exploration and celebration within the field of lighting design. It could potentially become the foundation for future research focusing on Southern-based lighting practices.

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<sup>66</sup> Although some equipment is now made in the East at cheaper prices, in line with a global technology economy.

The interviews above have richly revealed that lighting designers in South Africa approach their practice with a high degree of intentionality, emphasising the importance of understanding the impact of light on the sensory experiences of the audience. They view lighting not only as a technical aspect of a performance but also through their embodied practice, as a means to evoke emotions, create atmospheres, and enhance narrative. A recurring theme in the interviews is the importance of collaboration. The designers value open communication and the exchange of ideas to create a cohesive performance. The interviews also highlight the significance of understanding the language and terminology used in lighting design. Bridging the gap in language barriers between lighting designers and choreographers is crucial for the success of a collaborative production.

Furthermore, the interviews expanded on opening the sensory and emotional dimensions of lighting design. The designers acknowledge that lighting not only has a visual impact but also engages the other senses. Audiences are encouraged to interpret the visual elements of lighting in their own unique ways, thus allowing for individualised and multi-sensory experiences. Technology's influence on lighting design in South Africa is examined, with an increasing shift towards digitalisation and the use of advanced lighting technology. While technology streamlines processes, there is a recognition that an essential element of discovery and human connection may be lost when it overcomes manual exploration of lighting.

The chapter has also traced the historical development of lighting design in South Africa, illustrating its trajectory from mid-20th-century practices to contemporary approaches. Lighting designers are increasingly recognised as creative artists with the power to shape a production's aesthetics and storytelling. While South African venues and equipment have largely been influenced by Western models, the country's unique context and constraints have prompted designers to explore innovative ways of using light with limited resources.

With this broad framework in mind, I now go on to explore my own lighting design practice in the following chapter. Chapter Four explores my specific case studies of working with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY and their work *days like these* (2015) as well as Vincent Mantsoe and our collaboration *SoliiDad* (2019).

## Chapter Four - *Living Light*

This chapter situates itself with the chiasmatic “ontology of flesh” (Aarø, 2010), which is the central theme of Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), that places us as both subject and object in perception, suggesting an inseparable way of understanding that our perception and what we perceive (and hence know) are connected. This perspective highlights the inseparable connection between my perception and my relationship with what is perceived, emphasising the intertwined nature of my practice and research. I remind myself of Loots’s call to “take up Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body, my body, as the prime means of communicating with the world (1962) and this is the phenomenology of speaking from the embodied ‘I’” (Loots, 2018, p.99), which as a lighting designer for dance takes centre stage in this research.

Chapter Two previously integrated Robert Solso’s *The Psychology of Art* (2003), as a lens to navigate how we view the world through two simultaneous processes of *Nativistic Perception* and *Directed Perception* leading to Solso’s suggestion of how we create Schemata (2003, p.223). I explored his suggestion that the creation of art and the experience of art is said to happen at ‘Level 3’ awareness. Solso’s notion that art and its experience occur at a level of awareness difficult to articulate in words aligns with Susan Kozel’s notion of Affect in *Somatic Materialism* (2013), where she speaks of performance working in this area of Affect which she says it is more like “particle systems or fields, affect is an ever-fluctuating exchange of forces [it] inhabits bodies and the spaces beyond them” (2013, p.69). This difficulty of speaking about her lighting design artistic practice is echoed in the offering by lighting designer Lucy Carter of light being “a feeling, a sensation, an[d] emotion” (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.74). It is in this difficult-to-describe and articulate, transforming embodied sensory space - in which artistic practice is suggested to happen and be experienced - that I begin to analyse/engage my practice.

### 1) Methodologies of Self Enquiry

In this chapter, I pose fundamental questions about the origins of my instincts, the notion of “knowing in our bones” (Meskin and van der Walt, 2018, p.37) and how I apply this embodied, tacit knowledge in my practice. To tackle these inquiries, the

dissertation employs the multiple methodologies of sensory ethnography, self-study and autoethnography to engage my practice.

Sensory ethnography, already set up in Chapter Two, is central to how I have conducted and analysed the Chapter Three interviews and how I go on, in this chapter, to offer an interview with myself, and the interviews with the choreographers I explore in this chapter. It also continues to frame how I engage the sensory nature of my practice. This inquiry centrally places the phenomenologically embodied 'I' (Loots, 2018) through how I navigated how my body perceives the world (and in this research, theatre and dance making) and how I use that perception in the artistic practice of lighting design. Pink reminds me that perception is always "culturally linked" (Ingold quoted in Pink, 2015, p.10) and "emplaced" (Casey quoted in Pink, 2015, p.34) which underpin the autoethnographic nature of this research. How my personal experience of my practice (auto) is written into the cultural practice<sup>67</sup> of contemporary dance making (ethno) and how this is described and analysed (graphy). It is through a "wide-angle lens with a focus on the social and cultural aspects of the personal" (Hamilton, Smith and Worthington 2008, p.24), that I cast my autoethnographic gaze in this chapter.

Some of the specific autoethnographic research strategies that will be engaged in this chapter, as offered by Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008, p.22) are,

- 1) Note-taking, specifically in the analysis of rewatching my work, but also looking at my notes taken and plans made during the design processes.
- 2) Memory work, reflecting on the process of the design for these two case studies, which all happened at different times in the past.
- 3) Narrative writing, incorporating my voice in the writing of the research.
- 4) Observation, in the watching of videos and what the lighting was doing in relation to my note taking during the process, and my overall observations of lighting

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<sup>67</sup> As proposed in Chapter One that contemporary dance is "the ever-evolving search for authentic (and multiple) African contemporary dance voices that speak to culture, politics, art and (most significantly) identity and self" (Loots, 2018, p.1)

5) Interview, with the choreographers as a critical friend<sup>68</sup> comparison.

Because this dissertation has my practice as its focus, it is also my choice to include self-study methodologies, as navigated in Chapter Two. This is engaged in order to help with understanding how my embodied practice impacts on the lighting for contemporary dance work I have created as a lighting designer. Anastasia Samaras (2011, pp.10–11 quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.4) recommends five focus areas within self-study that will be addressed and used in this chapter

- 1) “personal situated inquiry”, which in this case, involves a study/inquiry of my lighting practice.
- 2) Should involve “critical collaborative inquiry”, which in my interviews I set up conversations and dialogues with the choreographers with whom I worked on the chosen case studies.
- 3) Should be designed for “improved learning”, understanding my practice more deeply and in relation to others is a necessary step towards my personal growth as a lighting designer and how it impacts performance.
- 4) Should involve a “systematic and transparent research process”, as is made clear in the design and implementation of my research methodologies.
- 5) Should result in “knowledge generation and presentation” as are the outcomes of this research and its contribution to understanding the role of lighting in contemporary dance.

Finally, with phenomenology central to how I engage my practice, I utilise Susan Kozel’s steps provided for performing a ‘phenomenology of lived experience’ articulated in *Closer* (2007) and listed on page 61 of this dissertation. I use Kozel’s ideas in how I engage in re-watching and re-experiencing the recorded videos of the case studies, where “memory and imaginative reconstruction are involved” (Kozel, 2007, p.55).

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<sup>68</sup> The notion of a “critical friend” (Costa and Kallick, 1993 Quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.5) is borrowed from self-study methodology and used in this dissertation to explore my observations in relation to the choreographers with whom I collaborated on the case studies.

I reiterate Susan Kozel's suggestion that "we dare to do our phenomenologies because the subjective voice may yield new knowledge [...] where the objective voice may repeat old beliefs that are remote from lived experience or simply uninteresting" (2006, p.39). It is through my observations of my lighting practice that I contribute my voice to the growing lexicon of writing about lighting design, that prioritises the creative process over simply procedure and technology (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023).

Previously, in Chapter Three, I interviewed and engaged local South African lighting designers on their different design processes, the inspiration behind ideas for creating a lighting design, language barriers with choreographers, the sensory impact on their design process, and how they speak about lighting design practice. This began an exploration of the myriad of ways possible/available for fellow lighting designers to engage in lighting design. Their practices involve a high degree of intentionality, and emphasise the importance of understanding the impact of light on the sensory experiences of a performance. The interviewed lighting designers offered an insightful understanding that stage lighting is not only a technical aspect but is also a deeply evocative means to harness emotions, create atmospheres, and enhance performed narratives. Another recurring theme in the interviews was the importance of collaboration and clear communication between choreographers and lighting designers. The interviews expanded on the sensory and emotional dimensions of lighting design, acknowledging that lighting not only has a visual impact but also engages the other senses.

Following this, Chapter Four is broken into two sections where I explore my practice of lighting design through two case studies<sup>69</sup>, one with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY and the other with Vincent Mantsoe. FLATFOOT was the first company I formally designed lights for in 2007. *days like these* (2015) was chosen for examination because it was an important experience of collaboration with the company in creating the work and, I feel, explores how lighting significantly can add another layered voice

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<sup>69</sup> Originally this research intended to have two case studies by FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, as can be noted by the interview questions with lighting designers and choreographer. The second work which was going to be explored was *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* (2019) which would have further explored the relationship between my lighting design practice and work FLATFOOT, but owing to limitations on the scope of this MA research it was decided to omit from the final dissertation.

to the choreography. *SoliiDad* (2019), choreographed and performed by Vincent Mantsoe, further explores these notions of collaboration and specifically looks at the dynamic interplay of lighting and choreography with an exploration of how my sensory perception leads to how lighting can possibly transform the performer, me as the lighting designer, and an audience's experience of this performance.

I begin this chapter by offering my answers to the same set of open-ended questions I engaged the five contemporary lighting designers (refer to Appendix A). The full self-interview is attached in Appendix G. In re-examining the archived video of the performance of *days like these* (2015) and *SoliiDad* (2019), secondly, I engage the above steps of a "phenomenology of lived experience" (Kozel, 2007) that leads thirdly, to engaging Samaras (2011) five focus areas for self-study methodology. This is finally supported by Hamilton, Smith and Worthington's (2008) research strategies for autoethnography. These multiple methodologies will assist me in understanding how my lighting design impacts/works alongside the case studies.

The final step in the analysis of the case studies will be to set my own experiences and findings alongside the interviews and articulations of both choreographers. This is set up as an engagement with a "critical friend" (Costa and Kallick, 1993 Quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.5). These two interviews were done through Zoom and the full transcript with Lliane Loots can be found in Appendix I and with Vincent Mantsoe in Appendix J. The same set of open-ended questions (Appendix H) for both choreographers were framed around understanding the choreographers' understanding of lighting within their choreographic practice - and this in relation to the specific case studies chosen. Both interviewees signed and agreed in writing to the interviews being recorded and to acknowledging their names being used to quote them directly in the dissertation. The template Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research form can be found in Appendix O. These interviews took place near the end of this research and writing process, so as not to affect my writing.

## 2) Self in context

### 2.1) How I Came into Lighting Design

I was born in 1980 in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, during the end of Apartheid and grew up as the country transitioned to democracy in 1994. My parents were middle/working class, with my father working as a self-employed electrician<sup>70</sup>, and my mother was a stay-at-home mom. I am the middle child of three siblings, with an older sister and a younger brother. My upbringing was in middle-class suburbia, and attended the then 'Model-C' schools<sup>71</sup> as 'black' students were integrated into formally previously 'white-only' schools. During this period, I was mostly unaware of the political changes happening in the country.

It was only after I completed my schooling and enrolled for a Bachelor of Arts degree, with a focus on Drama and Performance Studies at the then University of Natal (now University of KwaZulu Natal), that my worldview began to shift. I acknowledge one of the important influences on this shift was exposure to contemporary dance and how it, as previously negotiated, speaks to "culture, politics, art and (most significantly) identity and self" (Loots, 2018, p.1). During my undergraduate and Honours degree studies, I engaged with contemporary dance both practically (through practical classes and FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY's training company) and academically (through selecting dance as my major for my degrees). While at university, I also assisted with departmental productions backstage and started to learn about various technical including lighting aspects. During this time, I had the opportunity to learn from a mentor named Julian August<sup>72</sup>, a lighting designer who also used to work at the Elizabeth

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<sup>70</sup> My father, as a young adult and electrician in the early 70's, had assisted on some occasions on shows at the old Lyric Theatre<sup>70</sup> in Umbilo, Durban, which was close to where he grew up. Although he never took it further, this echoes the sentiments of the Theatre Lighting Archive Interviewees, whom acknowledge that they often began as electricians by day and came into lighting practice later on (theatrearchive, 2012).

<sup>71</sup> The establishment of Model C schools dates back to the dying days of apartheid, when the politically dominant National Party took steps to protect white schools-the best resourced in the system-in the face of impending change that would necessarily see the end of racially-based privilege. Christie, P and McKinney, C (2017). Decoloniality and "Model C" schools: Ethos, language and the protests of 2016. *Education as Change*, 21(3), 1-21. <https://dx.doi.org/10.17159/1947-9417/2017/2332>

<sup>72</sup> In line with the limited documentation of who these lighting designers are: Julian August was born in Cape Town and began his theatre training at the then Nico Malan, now Artscape Theatre. He was Production Manager at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre between 1991 and 2003 before moving to working in the live events industry with Black Coffee Design between 2003 and 2008. Since 2010 he has worked at Wits University and is currently Head of lighting for the Wits

Sneddon Theatre and had lit many of FLAFOOT's earlier works. This mentorship played a crucial role in my development as a lighting designer allowing me to learn from a more experienced lighting designer with "emplaced" (Casey Quoted in Pink, 2015, p.34) knowledge and experience, mostly at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre<sup>73</sup>. I did not initially consider a career in lighting but found that my background in performance and aptitude for the work made the transition natural.

After completing my Honours degree in 2002, I was invited to join FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY as they formed a professional performing company. I performed in two productions *Below the Surface* (2003) at the Square Space Theatre and *The Orion Project* (2003) performed at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. I also continued to work backstage as a freelance technician, honing my technical skills and gaining experience. I only performed with FLATFOOT for a year but continued to assist with the technical portfolio on a tour to Johannesburg in 2004 and other projects in subsequent years.

From 2004 to 2007 I worked for a live events production company, Black Coffee Design gaining further technical practical experience and on-the-job training. In 2007, I left the production company to pursue freelance work, focusing on theatre, which I found more fulfilling than the live events/corporate environment.

In 2007, I was asked to create the lighting design for FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY's new season of work, *Premonitions* with two works choreographed by Liane Loots and David Gouldie. This was a significant leap for me, as I transitioned from assisting with productions to being the primary lighting designer. Despite initial challenges and self-doubt, this marked the beginning of my journey as a lighting designer.

## 2.2) Developing My Lighting Design Process

Broadly my lighting design process involves first and foremost collaboration with the choreographer. This process for me, is heavily informed by my physical experience of

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Theatre. <https://za.linkedin.com/in/julian-august-42981719>; <https://www.wits.ac.za/witstheatre/staff/> [Accessed 30 August 2023]

<sup>73</sup> For more information on the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre: <https://www.sneddontheatre.co.za/>

watching and experiencing parts of the rehearsal process where the choreographer and dancers are in the studio making the dance work. Rehearsals aim to map out/focus my understanding of the elements of space, moods, and tones to be used in the choreography, whilst taking into account practical elements like video, sound, set, as well as costumes. I often work with limited equipment and budgets, which requires me to make the most of available resources at the venues we perform in. I am used to working efficiently and making quick decisions, often relying on my instincts to translate ideas into the design on stage.

### 2.3) Sources of Inspiration for Lighting Design

I draw inspiration from firstly my deep love for dance and my exposure to various people, ideas, and styles in the field. I have been involved with dance for the majority of my life and have a background in Spanish/Flamenco dance which I have done (and continue to do) since the age of 6. Flamenco performance is intrinsically connected to the elements of rhythm, style and emotion. This understanding of these elements of Flamenco also informs my lighting design work. Timothy Mitchell, one of the few flamenco scholars writing in English, describes flamenco as a folk song style that has “undergone a peculiar, intense evolution” (Quoted in Vargas, 2010, p.41) and Linda Vargas, my main teacher and choreographer in Flamenco dance, continues further that it cannot be traced to one source but emerges “from the interaction of several cultures and contained elements of several ethnic groups” (Vargas, 2010, p.41) in particular the marginalised Gypsy, Jews and Moors. I particularly mention the influence of Flamenco on my life, as it is something I have practiced for most of my life. The way in which Flamenco navigates rhythm, expression in dance and bringing your own life influences into how you perform has, and continues to, affect me in the most profound ways.

I also acknowledge that I am visually inclined and appreciate other art forms such as visual art, film, and video, which influence my use of colour and mood when it comes to lighting design. Additionally, I find inspiration in other lighting designers and continually seek to learn from my colleagues. This is noticeable in my work on the

JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience<sup>74</sup> that allows me to work with other artists from around the country, continent and globe. The JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience will be explored more in section three because of the nature of my collaborations with Vincent Mantsoe, which have mostly happened within the festival environment.

## 2.4) Collaboration with the Creative Team

I often take on multiple roles in a production, such as lighting designer, production manager, audio-visual designer, rigger and operator for lighting, sound and audio-visual. This multifaceted role mostly allows me to collaborate closely with choreographers, dancers, and any other team members in the creation of the work. Effective communication and long-standing working relationships with choreographers and dancers enable smooth collaboration in more recent works. Over time, trust has developed between myself and the choreographers I work with, in which ideas are discussed, and I am trusted to bring those ideas to realisation.

## 2.5) Sensory Knowledge and Multi-Sensorality

As has been evident in this research so far, I am particularly interested in the concept of sensory knowledge and how the senses, especially sight, play a role in impacting a performance and its reception. I emphasise the importance of multi-sensorial experiences, where movement, tactile, audio, and visual elements all influence my reactions to a performance. My lifetime of sensory experiences - Solso's schemata (2003) - contributes to my 'instinctive approach' to lighting design, drawing from my own, what Michael Broderick calls "library of references" (2022, Appendix B, p.164) to enhance performances. In speaking of instinct, Liane Loots (2018, p.142) reminds me,

Instinct is not, of course neutral. 'Instinct' is born from years of training both mind and body, of years spent in dance studios and in rehearsals, of decades spent watching dance, of physically and intellectually negotiating dance process and practice. 'Instinct' becomes an

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<sup>74</sup> The JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience will be explored more in Section Three below, by how it relates to the creation of the case study with Vincent Mantsoe on the festival platform. For more information on the festival go to: <https://jomba.ukzn.ac.za/>

embodied sense of knowing that Merleau-Ponty (1962) reminds us is always related to the physical experience of living in and with a body.

Although not specifically speaking of lighting design, this observation by Loots, highlights my journey as both a dancer, and lighting designer for dance, and how these two are, within me, inseparable. This continued life-long dance-related journey becomes the emanating point from which this dissertation emerges.

### 3) *Days like these* (2015) - FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY

#### 3.1) About FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY

Chapter One (p.33) introduced FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY as a twenty-year-old Durban-based company that was formed under the artistic direction of Lliane Loots unofficially in 1994 and registered as a professional performing company in 2003. Over its twenty-year professional performance history, FLATFOOT has continued to produce work and tour nationally, continentally and internationally. Its work often engages “with memory and history, FLATFOOT has developed a unique identity as a contemporary South African dance company that is known to offer politically and socially charged dance theatre work” (FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, 2021).<sup>75</sup>

Although FLATFOOT has increasingly started performing their work outside of conventional theatre spaces, for instance at the KZNSA Gallery and the Durban Botanical Gardens, most of their major annual seasons have all been performed at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre housed on the UKZN Howard College Campus since 2003's *The Orion Project*. “Founded in 1981 by the late Professor Elizabeth Sneddon, the EST [Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre]<sup>76</sup> has the proud reputation of being the first theatre to service a drama department at an academic institution” (Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, 2023). The Sneddon Theatre seats 400 audience members in an intimate relationship with the performers onstage. As mentioned above, I first encountered the Sneddon Theatre as a student in 2001, then as a dancer in 2003, and then as a freelance technician up until 2013, including my first lighting design for FLATFOOT in

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<sup>75</sup> <https://flatfootdancecompany.webs.com/> [Accessed 19 October 2021]

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.sneddontheatre.co.za/> [Accessed 11 October 2023]

2007. In 2013 I was offered a full-time position as a Production Manager, and this has allowed me to continue my work with FLATFOOT when they perform at the venue and when space and opportunity have allowed me, I can take leave of my duties at the Sneddon Theatre and work with FLATFOOT in other venues or on tour.

### 3.2) *days like these* (2015)

*days like these* was performed from the 25-29 March 2015 at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. Created by Lliane Loots, in collaboration with the dancers, *days like these* particularly delved into the theatre-making methodology of Verbatim Theatre or Documentary Theatre which “asks the playwright to gather live testimony and the spoken word of real people to construct the dialogue of a drama” (Programme Note, 2015, Appendix K). Using the dancer’s memories around three specific topics of “food, politics and love/loss” (ibid), the company took “what seem like everyday memories and excavated from these the sacred in the everyday” (ibid) resulting in what Loots call’s “an incredibly tender and beautiful interior dancescape that will poignantly remind an audience of what it means to be human; and what it means to be an African” (ibid). The programme note also acknowledges the co-collaboration of filmmaker Karen Logan, whose “videoscape sits at the heart of the work as it was her task to capture, verbatim, the final memories and stories collected” (ibid). The programme note also acknowledges me and my lighting design, “whose challenge was not only to support the manifold projections but to also find a way to light the dance that helped the stories unfold” (ibid). “With multiple projections and light, as the images, the voices and the dancing bodies begin – in truth and vulnerability – to layer the stage space, so the remarkable magic of dance theatre starts to happen” (ibid).

*days like these* is chosen for this research because although I already have had a long history of working with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, I note this as a work that particularly engaged notions of collaboration, as articulated in the programme note above and that is evident in the layered final work. This layering is evident in the dancescape and videoscape mentioned above along with the soundscape composed of the voices of the dancers speaking as well as recorded tracks. The final layering element is of what I propose to call a ‘lightscape’ for this specific work in terms of my

lighting design. I propose to call it a 'lightscape' not only because the suffix 'scape' had been used with video and dance in the programme note, but in rewatching the work I acknowledge the observation in the programme note that the lighting supports the dance and video elements that work together to create the visual landscape that the performance takes place in. This idea of a lightscape also has its roots in the work of Adolphe Appia who compared the role of light in a production to what music is to the score, "and in consequence the lighting plot should be perceived as a score that expresses constantly evolving and changing states of light" (Baugh in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.208).

Employing Susan Kozel's (2007) methodology for performing 'a phenomenology of lived experience', the following observations regarding the use of lighting within the performance became apparent. This approach involved taking my attention into the moment, calling attention to my body and what it is experiencing and then articulating those thoughts after some time (Kozel, 2007, p.52–55).

Notably, I am struck by the prominence of video elements, specifically the large projection spanning the rear cyclorama and the projection of dancer's faces onto the scrim cloths positioned on stage right, corresponding to the live performers on stage. How the stage lighting adapts to these other light sources and visual images becomes an important technical and aesthetic aspect to negotiate.



*Image 19: Indicating the large cyclorama video projection used in days like these (2015) Flatfoot Dance Company, performed at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson.*

The work comprised several sections, characterised by a primary story of one of the dancers which is reflected in the large 'place films' (Loots, 2016, p.386) projected on the back cyclorama which identified by the dancers that "they felt offered another visual key to who and what they are" (ibid). It can be noted from the above image how the large projections frame the backdrop of the performance, with the dancer (mostly lit from the side) in front of the image. The projection is an element I needed to be cognisant of and had to navigate carefully in the lighting, with the awareness of the projectors as light sources in the work. This is in particular relation to how it influenced the spatial perception of the stage by opening up and closing the space, especially as the videos frequently faded in and out within the different sections. The videos themselves were mostly black and white or hued in sepia, with colour occasionally being used, although not boldly. This transforming of the space in particular by the 'place videos' on the back cyclorama opened and closed the space in a way that affected the lighting as well, casting spill and reflections when there was a video showing and then reducing the performance to just the stage lighting when the video faded out.

An additional element in the interplay between 'live' and 'digital' images is heightened by the use of a single shadow light on the apron of the stage that when the video fades

out, I bring it in to cast the dancer's live dancing bodies onto the back wall where the video was previously playing. This shadow-light interplay between real and projected bodies also hints that these deeply personal spoken and danced stories of the FLATFOOT dancers have a broader socio-political resonance that moved the personal storytelling into a more shared performance public domain.



*Image 20: Indicating the smaller faces video projection on scrim cloths used in days like these (2015) Flatfoot Dance Company, performed at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson.*

The second use of projection was that of the speaking faces of the performers projected onto the scrims on stage right. These scrims provided a technical challenge of side lighting the dancers – it can be noted in the above image the side lights catch the bottom of the scrim cloths. This challenge was overcome by focussing the side lights lower and reducing intensity when the video played. The importance of the use of scrims allowed for a layered visual of the performers' faces speaking the narratives used in the performance. These stories, while interwoven, do not follow a linear progression. Different music tracks also demarcate the different sections and alongside this so does the lighting. One of the ways this was achieved is by the careful

use of colour temperature in the work, which alternates between cool and warm depending on the thematic essence of each section. Colour in lighting design has been the subject of extensive discourse in its potential to influence perception, yet it is crucial to acknowledge that the personal associations and cultural context of the lighting designer, such as myself, play an important role in how this can be used. Abulafia (2016, p.94) offers a summation,

Previous attempts to analyse the emotional effects of coloured light have provided more complex and contradictory results, caused by the differences in cultural background of the examinees, their visual education and individual personality, while physiological studies failed to conclude that a certain colour results in one given effect.

What becomes important are my associations with colour that may have similarities to other designers and audience members, but create my associations for how I use it in my lighting designs. This aligns with observations by Michael Broderick (2022, Appendix B, p.175) and Tina Le Roux (2022, Appendix C, p.184) in Chapter Three regarding the importance of their associations of lighting references. My associations with colour, shared by many within the field, often align warm tones with happiness and cool tones with sadness. This is supported, for example, by Abulafia who notes “warm and cool coloured light have shown a differential influence on people’s moods and also their attitude toward the illuminated environment or object” (2016, p.95) and scientific experiments such as Shahidi et al.’s *Effect Of Warm/Cool White Lights On Visual Perception And Mood In Warm/Cool Color Environments* (2021, p.1380) concur that “Blue is the most popular color, because it is cool, comfortable, relaxing, peaceful, and calming. Red is considered warm and arousing and stimulates human feelings and activates people.”

Sections in *days like these*, such as the first one with dancer Sifiso Khumalo’s narrative around his early encounters with violence in his home township of Clermont<sup>77</sup> have a harsher narrative and are marked by cooler and more stringent lighting. This is particularly evident in the second-to-last section with the story around Tshediso Kabulo’s friend who was assaulted by a gang and the choice of lighting enforces the harshness of the narrative. Conversely, sections that edged more towards lighter stories, such as the second section around Zinhle Nzama talking about her

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<sup>77</sup> A township area close to central Durban/eThekweni

grandmother, make use of warmer tones, especially in the side lighting – to enhance the warmth of the story. This is most evident in ‘Gondolas’, Section 7, which takes a lighter playful narrative around sandwich making and the overall lighting brightens and takes advantage of the use of warm colours to enhance it.

My lighting for the work, however, predominantly avoids the use of strong colour throughout, contributing to its documentary/verbatim style aesthetic (a type of ‘gritty realism’) that aims for authenticity and truth in the portrayal of real personal stories. This said, the final section deviates from this established pattern, as does the choreography, which sees the dancers return on stage in formal attire as they waltz around the stage to a cover version of Leonard Cohen’s *Dance Me to the End of Love* (1984). This is not a traditional waltz, as the dancers have their heads covered in white fabric covering their faces referencing René Magritte’s *The Lovers* (1928) painting. My choice was to adopt a purple-lavender wash that resembles more traditional dance lighting practices, yet maintains an undertone of unease through the use of stark, white side-lighting, thus connecting it to the broader context of the work – this can be noted in the image below.



*Image 21: Indicating the final section with the dancers waltzing and their faces covered in days like these (2015) Flatfoot Dance Company, performed at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson.*

In order to further engage my practice through using self-study methodologies, I set up now to engage Samaras's (2011) recommended five focus areas in re-evaluating the work. My primary source of information regarding this is reflecting on the notes taken during the rehearsal process which are attached here as Appendix L and the lighting plan at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre (Appendix M). *days like these* was made in 2015 and reflections on this work involve engaging with archived recorded material and reflectivity, and as such involves "memory and imaginative reconstruction" (Kozel, 2007, p.55). Both of these aspects can be fallible; however, it is through making "public the most indefinable aspects of [my] embodied creative practices, pedagogic beliefs, and research principle" (Meskin and van der Walt, 2018, p.53) that I offer insights to my creative process and how I arrived at the final lighting design.

The impulses for the lighting design are in direct response to my embodied experiencing of the choreography in the rehearsal room. Through the physical watching of the dancers performing their narratives in the rehearsal room, I begin to map out my experience of the choreography. This mapping out, evidenced in the lighting notes (Appendix L) provides a choreographic skeleton of movement pathways, sections of choreography, and transitions that become central aspects of how I create the final lighting design. As it does for me, the lighting design may eventually provide another map that may help the audience navigate the final work in performance.

This choreographic mapping not only assisted me in noting where to light the dancers but also gave me an overall impression of how the piece flowed. Unless a particular step is required for a cue to trigger a change, I don't mark down what choreographic steps the dancers are doing. I will mark different sections; in this case, they are just numbers and the primary dancer's name – essentially because a dancer's primary story and videos were used to demarcate that section. These may have been different to what the dancers and choreographer call them, but these notes are primarily for me to use and make sense of. I usually note the music changes and sometimes the mood of the music that gives me impulses for lighting choices. For example, the first section uses a *Southern Cones* (2000) track and I note it as "ambient noise" (Appendix L) in Loots's Section 5, I note the music as "jazzy" (Appendix L).

Because of the predominance of the video installations in this piece, the video also affects the lighting and the lighting choices. In the rehearsal room, the video maker, Karen Logan, would run the video on small monitors so that I could see what they would look like. In the first section, I note “grey skies” (Appendix L) for the first video; this observation subsequently affects my choices especially when it comes to colour and colour temperature as noted above. Section 2 notes “warm houses” (Appendix L) and again as noted earlier a choice to use warm side lighting in this section matches the warm houses in the video. Sometimes there are notes to highlight certain elements using specials which may or may not materialise in the final work. In Section 2 I made a note with a question mark “pool of light C-ish? (sic)” and when I rewatched the video and looked at the lighting plan (Appendix M) I didn’t see this evident in the final product. Whereas a note for Section 6 “maybe a pool of light DS PS?” is evident on the lighting plan and in the final work. Sometimes I make suggestions for myself, for example, Section 4 notes “play with shadow lxs”<sup>78</sup> and this is again suggested in Section 6 – without a specific reference to when and how it should happen (Appendix L). These are ideas and inspirations that I then took away to work on the final lighting plan (Appendix M) and eventual cues used in the piece. The rehearsals that these notes were taken at (and there were probably at least four or five that I attended) were near the end of the rehearsal process for the dancers, once most of the choreography was completed however, before the production moved into the theatre.

The rehearsal notes, in conjunction with some ideas that may not explicitly be recorded or remembered, guided the creation of what would then become the cues of each of the lighting changes in the design.

The plotting of lights involved taking the above-mentioned notes created in rehearsals and the pre-drawn up/mapped out design and implemented lighting plan to create the different lighting scenes that each of the choreographic moments happen in; and the transitions between these moments. This happened in conjunction with the projected videos in this work because of how much it impacts the overall visual landscape. Kelli Zezulka notes regarding technical rehearsals,

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<sup>78</sup> ‘lx’ - Short hand for light or lighting

Lighting designers (as well as lighting programmers<sup>79</sup>) are required to complete their work on site in theatre spaces during technical rehearsals and are thus subject to an exceptional set of spatial and temporal constraints that differentiate their creative working practices from those involved in other scenographic processes. (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.103)

This intricate process, as it operates within the “confines of spatial and temporal constraints” (ibid), also engages with Solso's concepts of nativistic and directed perception (2003). This process happens through my bodily experience of watching and processing the primarily visual stimuli of the performers onstage, although as noted the other senses are involved as well. This happens along with simultaneously using my existing embodied lived experience of schemata of references to light and visual images, in order to make “creative” and “authorial” (Zezulka Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.107-8) choices that align with the performance's different moods and atmosphere. This practical action is inherently embodied, encapsulating the aforementioned notion that "it happens in action and through and of the body" (Meskin and Van der Walt, 2018, p.41).

In addition to designing and operating the lights for this work, I also called<sup>80</sup> the sound and video cues to other technicians operating those elements as these cues would often happen with lighting changes<sup>81</sup>. These timings are worked out as much in advance as can be seen in my notes (Appendix L) and then fine-tuned on the stage so that the whole piece flows coherently and according to the choices of the choreographer whose overall vision the work falls within. The layering of lighting, sound, and video to the dancer's performance on stage thus becomes an important aspect of any theatrical production but in particular on a dance work like this, where there needs to be a synergy to all the elements so they work together for the overall effect of the work on an audience.

Having engaged with the sensory impact of the lighting as well as my practice I return to the primary aim of this research which is the autoethnographic engagement of

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<sup>79</sup> In this instance, and most times I design, I take on the role of both.

<sup>80</sup> Traditionally this would be the job of a stage manager, and although this production did have someone managing the stage, they were not able to attend prior rehearsals and thus I took on the responsibility of calling these cues to the video and sound operators.

<sup>81</sup> In subsequent years and as technology became more available, I have taken to operating sound, lighting and video from one computer and thus are not reliant on other having to call cues to other people. These cues can be pre-programmed and timed all in advance.

describing and analysing (graphy) of how my personal experience of my practice (auto) is written into the cultural practice of contemporary dance making (ethno).

The choreographer Liane Loots has written extensively about her choreographic process for *days like these* (2015) in her article 'The autoethnographic act of choreography: considering the creative process of storytelling with and on the performative dancing body and the use of Verbatim Theatre methods' (2016) for *Critical Arts*. In this article she speaks about "Dance [as] one example of the visceral and lived experience of using the body to write and create meaning; of exerting the 'I' into a position of agency" (2016, p.380). She claims herself as "curator/choreographer, ethnographer and autoethnographer" (2016, p.383) and describes her overall vision for the work

a vision that began to acknowledge that small and seemingly insignificant memories, when placed and performatively structured against one another, begin to tell a bigger story of what it means to be a contemporary South African. As Wall (2006: 9) echoes, I was interested in this "link between the personal and the cultural". (2016, p.384)

This aligns with Loots's earlier proposed definition of contemporary dance as "the ever-evolving search for authentic (and multiple) African contemporary dance voices that speak to culture, politics, art and (most significantly) identity and self" (Loots, 2018, p.1). It is suggested in the telling and performing of the personal 'verbatim' stories that the piece becomes an act of cultural and political importance. In this context, my lighting design choices must blend with the choreographer's and the dancers' voices, with each element playing a vital role in the overall narrative. The lighting design can sometimes be more overt or more nuanced, such as in this piece, yet it serves as a mapped out guide for the narrative and choreography. In particular for the work, *days like these*, the lighting transcends mere aesthetics to aim to deliver a cultural and political voice by giving a 'lightscape' for the personal stories of the dancers to exist within. This is acknowledged in the programme note for the work where Liane Loots acknowledges the "subtle and imaginative lighting design" that found a way "to light the dance that helped the stories unfold" (Programme Note, 2015, Appendix K). This is echoed in the one archived review found for *days like these* where the reviewer, Caroline Smart, acknowledges that my lighting "adds subtle colours and shades to enhance the movement" (Smart, 2015).

It can then be suggested that during the process of blending sensory and visual elements and making lighting design choices based on my own personal sensibilities and cultural associations that I contribute my voice to the collective narrative of the performance. Ultimately, the weaving of lighting into the choreographic narrative proposedly brings it closer to the cultural and political aspirations noted within the choreographic aims of the piece. This layering of artistic voices (choreographer, dancers, videographer, lighting designer) subsequently invites the audience to further engage with the broader socio-cultural narratives evident in the work. Through my personal experience and embodiment through my practice, I contribute to the choreographic synergy that gives voice to the personal stories as a shared political and cultural act.

In retrospect, through understanding the genesis of these lighting choices, I was able to use lighting as a supportive layering in *days like these*, and in my own small way, it is offered as a proposed act of personal and political significance that brings my voice in support of those making a cultural and political stance in the contemporary dance work already. These are conscious lighting choices made in what Gernot Böhme calls a “tuned space” (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.38) where the experience of light and performance is amplified (ibid). The understanding of these choices with a conscious mind allows me to perceive my voice within the production, as it relates to the seamless interplay of all elements in the performance. Yaron Shyldkrot observes “Light and sight are never neutral” (Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.86) and this must be born in mind when creating the visual lighting design that these performances unfold within. Consequently, the lighting designer is suggested to operate within a transforming, embodied, and sensory space, assisting in shaping the performance through a phenomenological, chiasmatic relationship with the work. “Light creates the conditions in which we encounter body, space, movement, and gesture, but also continually reconfigures those conditions’ (Graham in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.83). The strategic use of light thus can influence how the performance is perceived and, as such, the impact it has on an audience.

### 3.3) In Conversation with the Choreographer Liane Loots

The final methodological step of this section is to engage the choreographer of the work as a “critical friend” (Costa and Kallick, 1993 quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.5). This is in aid of not only shedding light on the collaborative nature of contemporary dance but also further understanding how lighting can affect the choreography itself. This short interview, like those with other lighting designers, was done through a Zoom interview and the full transcript with choreographer Liane Loots<sup>82</sup> can be found in Appendix I.

Loots begins by noting her personal journey of integrating lighting into her choreographic process, from beginnings of not knowing much to a far more intentional use of lighting in more recent works where lighting becomes one of her “choreographic principles” (2023, Appendix I, p.299). Loots highlights the importance of collaboration, inviting someone who will come into the process to watch rehearsals and contribute to the choreographic process. Loots importantly thinks about lighting “as another choreographic layer” (2023, Appendix I, p.300) and that working with a lighting designer, as an “artist that is working in the medium of light” (2023, Appendix I, p.300) will understand how to use lighting to effectively highlight the body on stage. It is through how light tangibly “cuts, touches, evades, is absent or present on the body” (2023, Appendix I, p.300) that makes it important for a physically embodied medium like dance, that places the body central to the performance.

Loots also notes the importance of collaborations especially in *days like these* with the dancers, videographer and lighting designer to “bring all the artists involved into a space to tell stories” (2023, Appendix I, p.301). Loots echoes the importance of the lighting as was highlighted in the programme note, “that allows each story to have its own look, but that it would thread the work as one work” (2023, Appendix I, p.301). Loots too acknowledges the impact of the video projection on the overall visual landscape of the work and the technical challenges this posed to the lighting design. Additionally, on the notion of collaboration, Loots also observes the importance of an

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<sup>82</sup> The interview with Liane Loots (who is also my supervisor for this dissertation), methodologically implemented an external moderator to sit in for the interview to ensure ethical boundaries. The external moderator for the interview was Clare Craighead from the Durban University of Technology.

“environment of collaboration, of trust and of participation” (2023, Appendix I, p.309) that allows for the fruitful exchange of ideas that ultimately serve in elevating a work. In specifically speaking of our working relationship, Loots acknowledges that “we preempt each other a little bit” (2023, Appendix I, p.303), of how she gets a sense of how I would light the work, based on years of working together, that informs part of her lighting/choreographic journey.

Finally, regarding lighting, Loots observes her perception of the aim of lighting, is exactly that “it's illuminating, it's illuminating the choreography” (2023, Appendix I, p.305). Loots also acknowledges lighting as “giving your eyes a frame in which to look at the work” (2023, Appendix I, p.305). Furthermore, in its most “subtle and most beautiful [way, it is] helping the audience to read the work” (2023, Appendix I, p.305), acknowledging the importance of lighting in aiding the voices/narratives of the work. This offering from Loots understands lighting as a part of the narrative of the work, which, as advocated for above, acknowledges how my lighting design and implementation become relevant in elevating those personal, social and political narratives.

I have a close association with the FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY because of an over 20-year working history, with a notable synergy between my artistic agency and the voices of the company who have become renowned for their socially and politically impactful work. This familiarity - this embodied knowing - allows for a more seamless collaboration, facilitated through my considered use of light, which allows my contribution to the broader cultural dialogue and political discourses of the company's performances.

When it came, later on in my career, to working with Vincent Mantsoe, it is framed as a relatively new working relationship having only worked with him for the first time in 2016 on his piece *Konkoriti* (2016) as part of the JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience. Mantsoe works differently from FLATFOOT and his choreographic style will be explored below.

## 4) *SoliiDad* (2019) – Vincent Mantsoe

### 4.1) About Vincent Mantose

In Chapter One (p.32) this dissertation introduced Vincent Sekwati Koko Mantsoe, whose personal and artistic journey has been notably informed by his rich cultural and spiritual heritage. Born in 1971 and raised in Diepkloof Zone 2 Soweto, a township near Johannesburg. His grandmother, mother and two of his aunts are sangomas (traditional healers) who are “involved [with] consulting the ancestral spirits and going into states of trance” (Sichel, 2018, p.203). Mantsoe, with permission from his family, later transposed these rituals to the dance stage (ibid). In his view, it is this rich interior life, based on traditional teachings and the pantheon of his native Zulu culture, mediated by his ability to enter altered states of consciousness, which forms the basis of his gift as a performer (Quoted in Cauthery, 2007, p.238). Bridget Cauthery goes on to articulate how Mantsoe describes his work as “Afro-fusion” (Mantsoe, 2006) drawing on traditional African dance forms and contemporary approaches from modern, ballet and Asian forms such as Tai Chi, martial arts and traditional Balinese dance” (Cauthery, 2007, p.240).

As noted above, my first experience of working as a lighting designer with Vincent Mantsoe was on his piece *Konkoriti* (2016) as part of the JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience that year.

### 4.2) JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience

The JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience “is a unique contemporary dance festival in that it sits squarely within the Centre for Creative Arts and the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s vision of a centre of excellence in arts that supports, first and foremost, the university community” (JOMBA! Brochure, 2019<sup>83</sup>). It notes as a curatorial vision to the 2019 festival (during which *SoliiDad* was performed) “To invite current South African dance theater works that are breaking boundaries, causing controversy, and offering performance excellence” (JOMBA! Brochure, 2019).

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<sup>83</sup> <https://jomba.ukzn.ac.za/jomba-2019/> [Accessed 11 October 2023]

JOMBA!, as noted in Chapter Three, celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2023 as “South Africa’s longest-running dance festival” (JOMBA!, 2023). Vincent Mantsoe has a long history with the festival having performed several times over the last 25 years of the festival, including the first festival in 1998, and was named the legacy artist at the 2022 festival. I first engaged with the JOMBA! festival as a student at the then University of Natal, and I would have first seen Vincent Mantsoe perform in 2001, my third year of studies, when he presented his solo *Motswa Hole* (2001) at the festival.

Since its inception in 1998, the JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience has primarily been housed at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, which as previously noted is my primary place of employment since 2013 and where I have primarily done the majority of my lighting design work since 2007. My involvement with the festival started in 2002 assisting on the festival and expanded over the years to encompass various roles, including handling lighting responsibilities from 2007 and eventually assuming the role of overall production manager in 2009. This convergence of roles highlights an important aspect of the lighting design profession noted in Chapter Three – the designer is rarely confined solely to the role of lighting, frequently engaging in multiple capacities. In my specific case, this multifaceted engagement has proven to be advantageous, as it gives me an intimate understanding of the performance space, which significantly enriches my lighting design capabilities at the venue.

The festival environment is very different from separately mounting a season for a company (such as was done for the case study with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY). Notable distinctions include firstly the shortness of time, for instance on the JOMBA! festival has as little as eight hours allocated to the technical setup, lighting design, and rehearsal of a production, and as little as four hours for shorter works featured on a double bill. Second, you are bound by the confines of the venue and the equipment they provide as there is not often additional budget to hire more equipment. Third, there will only be one or two performances (as in the case of JOMBA!). There is a heightened sense of urgency, with quick turnovers and multiple concurrent activities. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience has allowed me the opportunity to witness how other designers work, but also allow me to work with other choreographers from across the world. One such collaboration that has come from the JOMBA! festival has been with Vincent Mantsoe.

It can be noted that this section does not have the significant resources of the above case study's lighting notes and plans owing to the shortness of time of the festival environment. Mantsoe also does not live in South Africa, so attending rehearsals is not possible. There is a condensed engagement and embodied process of creating the lighting design which is different to the full planning as outlined in my work with FLATFOOT. The first time I saw Mantsoe's choreography was during the four hours of the technical get-in for the JOMBA! festival and as such, there are no notes to contribute to my understanding of the choreographic process. My primary means of engaging this work is through the re-watching of the video recording of the performance, our email correspondences, and a *JOMBA! Khuluma Digital* (2019<sup>84</sup>) response piece I wrote. The response piece entitled 'A Meeting of Two Spiritual Journeys' was written as a guest writer for the *Khuluma* following a shortage of writing about Mantsoe's work with only one other article offered to engage his performance. This piece was published in the 2019 digital edition and can be found on the JOMBA! website<sup>85</sup>. This response piece forms a significant resource for this dissertation as it captures some of my immediate responses to the creation and performance of the lighting design for *SoliiDad*. As such, it is used throughout this section of the chapter to engage how the lighting affected the choreography and the choreography affected me as the lighting designer.

### 4.3) *SoliiDad* (2019)

In 2019, Vincent Mantsoe was set to return to the JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience and premiere his new solo work *SoliiDad*. Given our prior successful collaboration with *Konkoriti* (2016), Mantsoe extended an invitation for me to take on the lighting design for this performance at the festival. He asked<sup>86</sup> if the lighting plot for this work could be adapted from a previous work *Opera for Fools* (2012) but with some modifications for this work. It was a conventional lighting rig with some specials created by his former French lighting designer, Serge Damon. Throughout the early

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<sup>84</sup> The JOMBA! Khuluma comes out a writing residency that runs alongside the JOMBA! Festival. The writing residency began in 2010 under the mentorship of Adrienne Sichel and is currently hosted by Clare Craighead with international collaborators from the UK and the UAE. The digital outcomes can be found at <https://jomba.ukzn.ac.za/khuluma/>

<sup>85</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ink0Hil1spO-nOFV2hYG0F7OT2vEnGwE/view> [Accessed 11 October 2023]

<sup>86</sup> These communications mostly happened via email correspondence prior to the festival beginning.

collaborative process, detailed discussions unfolded, exploring the desired lighting effects and their alignment with the overarching artistic vision. Notably, the plan needed to provide a foundational guide, able to be adapted to suit the specific needs of *SoliiDad* – at the festival and potentially if it would go on tour. In tandem, we also discussed his ideas for the set, which for this piece would be suspended ropes at the rear of the stage as well as two ropes traversing the stage and finally two rope pendulums that would fall at the end of the work. Mantsoe notes in our interview for this research, that the effect of the ropes was to create the effect of mirage lines, as one would encounter in the Kalahari or Sahara Deserts (2022, Appendix J, p.320). I would assist him in sourcing the ropes and preparing them as he was not able to fly from France with them.

With the arrival of the festival and his performance being scheduled at the end of the two-week programme, (and as previously mentioned) as part of a double bill with Lulu Mlangeni. This gave us only four hours to set-up, plot and rehearse his piece. I draw on observations made in my written response piece to the work ‘A Meeting of Two Spiritual Journeys’ - published in the *JOMBA! Khuluma Digital* (2019). In this written piece, I reflected on the making, the running and the response to the work. I describe the plotting session as follows,

We create the first state; we create several states – based on where he is on stage and the mood he is trying to express. We put them all down on the desk – he tries to explain cues as to what he is doing at the time to trigger the lighting – sometimes it is a movement, sometimes it is a music shift. How fast do the transitions need to be? We work it all out – we rehearse it – he marks through we think we understand we finish the rehearsal process. (Maherry, 2019, p.39)

This broad description provides a small window into the intricate process of collaborative design, highlighting the added complexities introduced by the festival environment. In the programme note for the piece whose full title is *SoliiDad, an abstract journey to oblivion*. The title refers to ideas of ‘loneliness’, ‘abstract journey’, ‘travelling’, ‘quests’, and utilises a quote by Lao Tzu: “A Good traveller has no fixed plan, and is not intent on arriving” (JOMBA! Brochure, 2019)<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> This philosophical connection to Lao Tzu, resonates with the quote by Robert Solso (discussed in Chapter Two) to describe ‘Level 3’ comprehension’, “[it] is as much a feeling as a cognition; it is the tao of the painting and yet, like the Tao (as Lao-tzu wrote), “the Tao that is the true Tao is the Tao that cannot be told.” Solso’s quote highlights the difficulty in describing this act of experiencing art which he likens to the ‘tao’ or the natural order of the universe which Lao Tzu notes in it is essence cannot be fully grasped but is rather intuitive.



*Image 22: Vincent Mantsoe performs in blue state of lighting with red on the ropes in SoliiDad (2019). Photo by Val Adamson.*

The image above is one example of a lighting state created for *SoliiDad*. The stage is washed in a dark blue colour with red light on the ropes. The use of the colour blue to wash the stage continues my earlier discussed connotations regarding cooler colours being associated with more melancholy tones in the choreography. The use of red lighting on the ropes opens up interpretations around my ideas of anger, blood and death etc., as noted in my self-interview (Appendix G), that would be linked to my response to the tone and feeling of this section. Mantsoe, as the dancer, is lit in an open white light from the side to make his movements and expressions appear visible and more dynamic to the audience watching.

Embracing once again Kozel's 'phenomenology of lived experience' (2007) re-watching *SoliiDad*, I am made aware of the performance as a ritual not only because of my previous working relationship with Vincent Mantsoe but by how - in this work - his body is sacred, and through his transformation into the spiritual realm, elevates the

personal dance into “cultural, spiritual and traditional modes” (Maripane, 2022). It is by being “able to open himself to the mysteries and healing energy of the spirit world, becoming a vessel for their knowledge and blessings” (Cauthery, 2007, p.238). In Mantsoe’s own words he acknowledges further, “(I) could be a vehicle for enlightenment and spiritual communion” (Quoted in Cauthery, 2007, p.241). It is in his personal transformation that he activates the socio-political transformation in the audience watching, and much like FLATFOOT’s *days like these*, the deeply personal narratives of this storytelling begin to echo greater public/political synergies in an audience

I am also aware of how Mantsoe navigates the full stage space when he dances and how the lighting follows him. This occurs by the lighting opening up and closing the space, and figuratively by changing colour and angles to shape the different tones and feel of the different sections of the work. The lighting is also influenced by the soundscape that shifts and changes over the different sections, and specific sounds such as “Tibetan horns, mixed with Shembe horns, percussion, bells, fires crackling and silence – most importantly silence” (Maherry, 2019, p.39) which I note in my *JOMBA! Khuluma* response piece. This soundscape kept me present when I watched then, and is acknowledged again when I re-watched the performance for this research. The lighting follows Mantsoe on his journey in the piece and quite often there is a sense of openness and desolation to this single solo dancer in the stage space that highlights the choreographic subtitle – ‘a journey into oblivion’. I worked to light in a way that made the space seem desolate and open allowing this lone figure to dance and conjure his ancestors (through his use of a trance-like state) to help guide him on his journey. This is evident in the image below of the opening section of the performance, where the use of a bright full stage wash, which comes from behind the performer to make the light visible with the use of haze. Bright side lighting is also used to light the solo dancer providing a visual of a traveller caught up in the vastness of the stage space, like a desert, as part of exploring ideas of ‘loneliness’, ‘journeys’, and ‘travelling’ explored in the themes of the work.



*Image 23: Indicating the openness of the lighting used SoliiDad (2019) Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. Rehearsal Photo by Wesley Maherry.*

We created the states together during the plotting session, and I adjusted them when he was on stage rehearsing and running the work during those four hours of technical rehearsal. The notable challenge in the lighting for this work was in the operation and running during the live performance. Usually, once cues are set, they do not change during a performance, with the idea being that the same or similar type of performance is delivered every performance. By the nature of Mantose's performance technique: traversing into using elements of trance, although there are set points along the piece, this sometimes can lead to moments where Mantose is caught up in the trance. During these moments he does not follow the exact choreography, as he did in the rehearsal, but will always return to set moments in the choreography as points to ground himself and return to the set choreography. I note this in 'A Journey of Two Souls' (2019, p.40)

The skeleton we had worked out yesterday becomes exactly that, a skeleton – the cues shift – the impetuses change – sometimes it is the music sometimes it is his movement, different to the day before – but I hold back only shifting when the impetus feels right. I am not just a button pusher, mechanically going with cues where I have been told. This performance is alive – it is breathing, it is organic – this is my soul reacting to his soul – anticipating, connecting, enhancing. At some point I am behind on cues – did he do that movement? Did I miss it? It doesn't matter, the previous state had worked for this part of the journey, and no change was needed. He finds a moment of still – I recognise the cue and I jump cues to be at the same place, breathe with him again and then carry on until the end as he walks off stage.



*Image 24: A moment of stillness with back bright diagonal light in SoliiDad (2019) Vincent Mantsoe. Rehearsal Photo by Wesley Maherry.*

The above image indicates the moment of stillness that I reconnected with Mantsoe in the above-mentioned operating of lighting for the performance of *SoliiDad*. Trusting my instincts and response to the performance on stage in what Sarah Pink calls “knowing in practice” (Pink, 2015, p.40) which she continues is always “embodied and [a] multisensorial way of knowing that is inextricable from our sensorial and material engagements with the environment” (ibid). This strong moment of lighting from a back diagonal wash and the performer crouched still on the stage, provides a moment for the lighting design and performer to find their synergistic journey together once again.

In the case of *SoliiDad*, I note how the lighting design (as implemented through the operation of the lighting cues) becomes an active participant in the choreography, an alive and responsive element, following the performer's (in this case Mantoe's) movements and cues. This dynamic engagement transforms lighting design from a passive aspect to an active and intuitive contributor, aligning with Kevin Dryer's perspective in *Dance and Light* (2020, p.153) regarding the partnership between lighting and dance,

It speaks to style, it speaks to artistic vision, to partnering with the dance. It is about attention to the whole thing, to the opening up of a moment on stage in a way that brings the audience along at the pace we want.

I am arguably transformed as Mantsoe is transformed on stage. I note in 'A Journey of Two Souls', "for a moment – a brief transient moment – I got to connect my life experience, to a performer's life experience – and the purpose of live performance becomes clear again for me – these moments are rare" (Maherry, 2019, p.40). In the JOMBA! Khuluma response piece I continue as a then summation of my practice in general,

I don't pretend to understand contemporary dance in a conventional way and what all its movements mean – this doesn't matter. Contemporary Dance is a world I have worked in for about 15 years, starting as a dancer and then working on the technical side, I have experience and this experience comes out in working practice – I can understand feelings and moods, this is the world I work in – I understand space and using lighting as a tool to sculpt space, and somewhere between knowledge and practice this comes together as live performance. I am fortunate, my intuition is often right. I don't know how to explain it – in the same way, I can't explain the spiritual connection – but it is there and when it works, it works. (Maherry, 2019, p.40)

This interaction between light and choreography, which is distilled from my personal experiences and histories highlights the possible transformative role of light within live performances. This transformative aspect of lighting design can be analogised to the medieval practice of alchemy which attempted to convert base metals into gold. It is in this transformational realm that the lighting designer becomes akin to an alchemist, translating personal reactions to a performance into the lighting design in practice. Lighting designer, Paule Constable, notes the use of the word 'alchemical' because of the transformative nature of light when it comes into a space (In Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.182). This personal interpretation is a vital element in understanding the fusion of lighting and performance.

Furthermore, the embodied, affective, and multisensorial nature of the sensation of light is acknowledged. This is highlighted again in the suggestion from Lucy Carter regarding light, "It is actually because it isn't an image in my head at all, but a feeling in my body that I want to create, a sensation" (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.74). As a bodily sensation argued this way, lighting design is always an embodied process.

The role of light is expanded beyond the mere function of visibility; it is positioned as a key contributor to the performance medium, capable of both revealing and concealing, affecting mood and atmosphere, and, most significantly, adding an

element of transformation to the performance itself. This dynamic interplay of lighting, performance, and audience response is autoethnographically relevant within the broader context of contemporary dance. Contemporary dance, as previously negotiated, seeks to give agency to the personal voices of all those involved in the creation of the work, and extend those personal narratives into the social and political commentary of engaging with the 'now' of the contemporary world.

This reframing of the role of lighting design offers an insight into how the personal sensational and affective interpretation of the lighting designer can impact the design process, ultimately affecting the experience of the audience and performers alike. Erika Fischer-Lichte notes “An aesthetic experience of light, then, is a product of an affective encounter. This is not necessarily an explicit process; as attests, light in performance is often received on the very ‘threshold of consciousness’” (2008, p.119 quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.175). Jennifer Tipton further suggests “99.9 percent of an audience is not aware of the lighting, but 100 percent is affected by it” (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.10).



*Image 25: Vincent Mantsoe caught in side lighting with red lighting on the ropes in SoliiDad (2019). Photo by Val Adamson.*

In the above image, I note in my self-interview (Appendix G), how the lighting of the ropes in a side red light almost gives a slightly ominous feel (connotations of blood and death etc.). This is in contrast with the dancer in the foreground with his arms wide open, head and chest, facing up towards the sky, indicating a kind of hopelessness in this ominous background. I continue to note, in reference to the above image, that it is the journey of the dancer in the piece that I associate with most. This performance and its themes resonated with me at a time in my life when I was beginning a new journey. The lighting of this piece thus reflects my own interior journey to match that of the performer's narrative journey in the work and is once again offered as a suggested act of personal, and as such political, importance.

#### 4.4) In conversation with the choreographer: Vincent Mantsoe

As with FLATFOOT above, the final methodological step of this section is to engage the choreographer of the work as a “critical friend” (Costa and Kallick, 1993 quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.5). This interview was done through a Zoom interview and the full transcript with choreographer/performer Vincent Mantsoe can be accessed in Appendix J. The same set of open-ended questions (refer to Appendix H) for both choreographers was framed around understanding the choreographers' understanding of lighting in the choreographic practice, and this in relation to the specific case studies. The answers were accessed in relation to understanding my practice as explored in the above sections. This dissertation has primarily explored the important relationship between the lighting designer and the choreographer. What has become a significant dynamic to document from this interview, is the experience of light on stage by a dancer given Mantsoe's dual role as a choreographer and performer in many of his solo works.

On speaking about the experience of light as a performer, Mantsoe (2023, Appendix J, p.324) observes,

It [Lighting] has definitely influenced the energy of where I am at that particular moment and also sometimes, it affects the power of how light, it can actually give a booster into the expression of a movement or the expression of the transformation of a movement.

Further noting, “If I feel a particular light hitting my body, it definitely transforms the notion of that particular moment, of what's happening, what I should be doing, where my thoughts are, where my spiritual being is at that particular moment” (2023, Appendix J, p.324). This further enhances the transformative possibilities of light noted above especially as the performer physically experiences the materiality of light: its colours, its warmth (or lack thereof) and its impact on a performer. Mantsoe also notes how the lighting can “trigger a certain element of that extra spirituality” (2023, Appendix J, p.324) and highlights that this dynamic can be enhanced by the use of haze, which he likens to the traditional ceremonial use of burning ‘Impepho’<sup>88</sup> (2023, Appendix J, p.316).

Mantsoe reflects on the use of colour and “how to understand where this particular performer is and then what they are feeling at that particular moment” (2023, Appendix J, p.324-5), as an example of the interplay between light and emotion. He observes the individual responses to lighting that is around us every day and then transposed to the theatre stage; depending on what you are looking at it will affect you. For instance, blue may have connotations of the sky whereas red may have connotations of rage, blood or anger (2023, Appendix J, p.325). Ultimately suggesting that “the lighting, more especially in the theatre perspective, the lighting, it really gives a sense of the underneath elements of different things that we are seeing every single day” (2023, Appendix J, p.325). With these visual references in mind, lighting then serves to give choreography a “boost... to even more elevate into a different standard” (2023, Appendix J, p.327).

Vincent Mantsoe, much like Lliane Loots, notes that this understanding of the importance of lighting was not always part of his choreographic process. He jokingly remarks in particular around the early 90s that “maybe somehow the choreographer didn't really care that much about the lighting” (2023, Appendix J, p.314) or conversely lighting designers “maybe somehow they didn't really understand what the choreographer was looking for” (2023, Appendix J, p.314). He notes an important collaborative residency that took place in South Africa called *Crossings* of which he

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<sup>88</sup> Impepho is an indigenous African plant that, once dried, is burnt and creates a strong smoky odour which is then used in order to communicate with one's ancestors during traditional African ceremonies.

was part of the artistic direction team. *Crossings* was based on an idea developed by French choreographer Michel Kelemenis which sought to be a “training workshop for international and South African choreographers, dancers, composers and lighting designers, with a view to giving them the time and the space to explore the relationship between dance, music and lighting design” (Zwange, 2011, np).

There have been three *Crossings* residencies<sup>89</sup>, I was fortunate to take part in the second iteration of *Crossings* in 2011 which took place in Johannesburg from 24 July – 7 August that year. The experience of being able to work closely with choreographers, dancers and music composers over a practical intense two-week residency was influential in shaping my artistic practice as it is today. This shaping was done through a growing exploration and awareness of the interconnectedness of these artistic elements in contemporary dance.

In speaking of the specific collaboration with myself in recent years, Mantsoe notes the importance of me, as the lighting designer, “understanding the journey that I was trying to explore in the choreographic process” (2023, Appendix J, p.314), despite me not being present with him at the beginning of the process. He further notes the importance of collaborative qualities such as “mutual understanding”, “respect” and “patience” (2023, Appendix J, p.289). He also notes the important role of a lighting designer for his solo performances, as he is not able to see everything when he is performing on stage and as such the lighting designer has a broader sense of where things are and what is being seen by an audience. Mantsoe (2023, Appendix J, p.323) notes,

It's really about really having to work together as a team, as I believe that a lighting designer is also performing. The tensions of what's happening, and because you have to understand that, it's not only just about the movement itself, but then it's about something greater than that.

Mantsoe's characterisation of the lighting designer as a performer alongside him emphasises the proposed notion that the lighting designer's work is a form of artistic performance that complements and dialogues with the choreography. It can contribute an authorial voice to the overall performance. This voice, as previously offered, is

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<sup>89</sup> A fourth *Crossings* took place during the COVID lockdowns, although it did not have the full artistic team and explorations of the collaborations between the four practices of choreography, dance, composition and lighting

inherently driven by the lived experience/schemata of the lighting designer which is suggested to work in the liminal spaces of “sensation” (Carter in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.74, “affect” (Kozel, 2013) and “Level 3 consciousness” (Solso, 2013). This personal contribution of my ‘voice’ in relation to contemporary dance is once again offered as an act of personal, social and political importance, making it autoethnographically relevant in its impact on contemporary dance.

## Concluding Remarks and Observations

This dissertation began with a quote from Stanley McCandless: “Stage lighting is often surrounded by a thick and impenetrable veil of mystery which is due, undoubtedly, to a lack of knowledge of both the limits and potentialities of the problem” (McCandless, 1947, p.9). This study has begun to open up ways to see through this “impenetrable veil” (1947, p.9) on lighting design practice especially as it relates to contemporary dance in South Africa.

This dissertation gave voice to selected Southern-based lighting designers through an exploration of the Theatre Lighting Archives interviews with five local lighting designers who worked during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as lighting design started to seriously come into being as a vocation in South Africa (theatrearchive, 2012). This discussion is followed up with interviews with five more current (2022) contemporary Southern-based lighting designers, many of whom specialise in dance and physical performances (although not exclusively). These interviews offer rich insights into their respective lighting design practices and are used as a context for establishing a framework in which to analyse my own lighting design practice.

This dissertation further offers up my voice/lighting design practice to the above archival findings and interview discussion, through an autoethnographic framework that sees my position as a lighting designer research practitioner interrogated. I have engaged a phenomenological research methodology as advocated in the work of (for example) Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968) and the phenomenologically embodied methodologies of self-study and sensory ethnography (Pink, 2015) in order to support the autoethnographic nature of this study.

In light of the above aim, the critical research questions this study engaged were addressed as follows:

Research Question One: What is the history and process of theatrical lighting design, how does it impact specifically the cultural act of contemporary dance, and how does it speak to current social and political issues, especially in South Africa?

In addressing this, Chapter One looked at how we see light and what it means to us both physically and as an abstraction. The chapter offered a brief history of the emergence and development of 20th-century lighting design practice globally, then locally, and then shifted to specifically looking at lighting design for dance. The chapter traced the history of lighting design practice in modern conventional Western theatre, by highlighting pioneering lighting practitioners who played important roles in transforming the conventional Western theatrical lighting landscape, from mere practical visibility concerns to an art form capable of shaping atmosphere, conceptual engagement, and overall perceptual experience of a performance.

Chapter One then delved briefly into looking at South African theatre history and how alongside this, lighting design has developed into a crucial element of theatrical performance. The Theatre Lighting Archive (theatrearchives, 2012) interviews with South African lighting designers Joe and Dave Freedman, Richard Parker, Mannie Manim and John T Baker give insight into how lighting design has developed as a practice in South Africa.

Chapter One finally engaged briefly with examining South African contemporary dance, as a contested term for the broad category of socially conscious dance that has emerged in South Africa. It particularly highlights Liane Loots's offering of contemporary dance, as is used throughout the dissertation, as “the ever-evolving search for authentic (and multiple) African contemporary dance voices that speak to culture, politics, art and (most significantly) identity and self” (2018, p.1).

Research Question Two: How do notions of embodied practice, as it relates to how we gain knowledge and apply that knowledge in a practice and specifically in a practice that involves stimulating the sense of vision through the use of light such as lighting design – and how does this compare to other local lighting designers working in similar contexts?

In Chapter Two, I explored the multiple methodological frameworks of phenomenology, sensory ethnography, self-study and autoethnography. This dissertation posits that theatrical contemporary dance performance is a multisensorial act and Hamilton, Smith and Worthington further note that “from a postmodern view,

there is no one way to capture experience; instead, questions and perspectives can be gathered to question perceived realities” (2008, p.22). As such, I draw on multiple methodological approaches in order to offer observations around my practice and process for lighting design for contemporary dance.

Central to this research are theories of phenomenological embodiment, a return to centralising experience through and of the body, as importantly articulated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968), and how they have been adapted into theatre studies as both critical theory and methodological approaches. Phenomenology, with the “living body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.63) at the “centre of experience” (ibid), serves as a fundamental understanding in this research.

Of importance methodologically as to how I engaged the interviews and how I go on to speak about my own practice is Sarah Pink’s (2015) framework of sensory ethnography. Sensory ethnography assisted in how I engaged the senses being impacted by a performance, especially in an area like lighting design, which is impacted, and impacts on, the sense of sight, and how that translates across all other senses. This sensory aspect of lighting design is suggested to work in the liminal space of “affect” (2013, p.69) which Susan Kozel explores in *Somatic Materialism* (2013), offering it is more like “particle systems or fields, affect is an ever-fluctuating exchange of forces [it] inhabits bodies and the spaces beyond them” (ibid).

Chapter Two also embraced Robert Solso’s (2003) suggestion that Nativistic and Directed Perception leads to how we create Schemata (2003, p.2). These Schemata, which are developed through the lived experience of an array of perceptions over any life span, form the basis of our ability to engage in artistic practices and create the lens through which we experience art. Solso also suggests that the creation and the experience of art happen at ‘Level 3’ awareness where “at this level, our appreciation of art becomes more of a sentience than an intellectual explanation; more of an engrossment than an analysis of a piece; more of a feeling than an appraisal” (Solso, 2003, p.8).

Following this, I then embraced self-study methodology, defined by “the role of ‘the self,’ by the ‘situated practice’ being examined, and/or by the ‘purpose’ for the study,

which can reflect multiple reasons that are often integrated” (Samaras and Freese quoted in Tidwell and Jónsdóttir, 2020, p.3). Also, of importance to this dissertation and how I have navigated embodied practice, is Meskin and van der Walt’s suggestion that our “practice is *always* embodied; it happens in *action* and happens *through* and *of* the body” (2018, p.41 italics in original text).

This dissertation is, however, overarchingly informed by a reflective autoethnographic approach. Carolyn Ellis in *Autoethnography: An Overview* (2011) defines autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (2011, p.1). How my personal experience of my practice (auto) is written into the cultural practice of contemporary dance making (ethno) and how this is described and analysed (graphy) is the reason for choosing an autoethnographic methodology. Lucy Carter reminds me of “how incredibly hard it is to talk about light. Light is a feeling, a sensation, an emotion” (Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.74) because “It is actually because it isn’t an image in my head at all, but a feeling in my body that I want to create, a sensation” (ibid). In addressing this difficult-to-speak-about practice, I employ a multi-vocal approach to lighting designers sharing their personal practices (and stories).

Chapter Three amplifies the voices of South African (as Southern-based) lighting designers, alongside my own voice, as advocated by the autoethnographic nature of this research. As noted, the majority of the discourse around lighting design remains anchored in the Northern Hemisphere, with limited representation from and about Southern-based lighting designers. Chapter Three was broken into two sections. The first section delved further into The Theatre Lighting Archive’s interviews and provided a historical backdrop, outlining the broad practices that were established during the mid-20th century in South Africa. The second section introduced a diverse group of contemporary Southern-based lighting designer’s perspectives by incorporating interviews conducted with five established South African lighting designers: Michael Broderick, Christine ‘Tina’ Le Roux, Lerato Ledwaba, Nkosingiphile ‘Mancane’ Dlamini and Oliver Hauser. My interviews revealed observations that these selected lighting designers in South Africa approach their practice with a high degree of intentionality, emphasising the importance of understanding the impact of light on the sensory

experiences of the audience. As discussed, they all view lighting not only as a technical aspect of a performance but also as a means to evoke emotions, create atmospheres, and enhance narrative. Through their lighting designs audiences are encouraged to interpret the visual elements of lighting in their own unique ways, thus allowing for individualised and multi-sensory experiences.

From this broad framework, I addressed Research Question Three:

Research Question Three: By unpacking and documenting my process of lighting design, as it specifically relates to contemporary dance making in my context of South Africa, how do I, by analysing my two case studies of *days like these* (2015) and *SoliiDad* (2019), affect/effect how the dance works can be perceived and experienced by all those involved in the process of creating a performances.

Chapter Four began by exploring my collaboration with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY and its work *days like these* (2015). Suggestions from analysing the performance include: through the telling and performing of the personal/verbatim stories of the performers, the performance becomes an act of cultural significance. In this context, my lighting design choices blend with the choreographer's and the dancers' voices - with each element playing a vital role in the overall narrative. I suggested that during the process of blending sensory and visual elements and making lighting design choices based on my own personal sensibilities and cultural associations, I argued that I contribute my voice to the collective narrative of the overall performance. Ultimately, I proposed the weaving of lighting into the choreographic narrative brings it closer to the cultural and political aspirations noted within the choreographic aims of the piece. This layering of artistic voices subsequently invites the audience to further engage with the broader socio-cultural narratives evident in the work. Through my personal experience and embodiment through my practice, I contribute to the choreographic synergy that gives voice to personal stories as a shared political and cultural act.

The second part of Chapter Four explored my collaboration with Vincent Mantsoe and his work *SoliiDad* (2019). Observations around the interaction between light and choreography, which are distilled from my personal experiences and histories as the

lighting designer highlighted the possible transformative role of light within live performances. This design voice is inherently driven by the lived experience/schemata of the lighting designer where lighting design practice is suggested to work in the liminal spaces of “sensation” (Carter in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.74, “affect” (Kozel, 2013, p.69) and “Level 3 consciousness” (Solso, 2013, p.8). This personal contribution of my voice in relation to contemporary dance is once again offered as an act of personal, social and political significance, making it autoethnographically relevant in its impact on contemporary dance.

### 1.1) Possible Implications of this Research

The implications of these observations and findings align with a growing body of writing about lighting design that prioritises the creative process over simply procedure and technology. Moreover, it importantly contributes Southern-based voices to this growing lexicon through the multiple voices of interviews with other South African contemporary lighting designers. Additionally, this was achieved by offering my own analysis and observations of my lighting design practice. These diverse voices offer insights into our practices that come from the changing dynamic of who perceivably could be considered a lighting designer, observing that historically this has been the vocation of cisgender white males. Understanding that lighting design is an artistic practice that can (and has been) learnt without having to formally study it, but rather is suggested to be honed from years of practical learning and experiencing, will hopefully open up the vocation to others who might not understand what the practice involves.

By sharing my, and other lighting designers’ intimate processes, this dissertation has set out to begin to demystify the practice of lighting design for dance so that others who work in theatrical performances, can begin to understand and look into how we arrive at a lighting design. My aim has also been to push the voice of South African lighting designers in a research and praxis environment that often overlooks these Southern creative voices.

## 1.2) Potential Limitations of this Research

Limitations acknowledged by this MA dissertation and its cognate specificity of focus, include my containment that looks at only South African contemporary dance. While providing valuable insights, this does not include looking at lighting for other styles of theatre making – which was outside of the agreed ambit of this research but could potentially be a further research area. Additionally, the scope of the case studies and interviews is limited to only two productions and five lighting designers who were available to be interviewed. There is now the scope for the findings of this research to push into looking at more South African dance productions and lighting designers.

Finally, this research acknowledges my subject position as a cisgender white male, which (as observed above) is historically the dominant subject position of lighting designers. However, in the same way that this research has posited that I can, in a suggested political act, contribute my voice alongside that of the primarily black dancers that I work with, in supportive and complimentary ways, I hope that my contribution to the lexicon about lighting design can offer insights and doorways to others working in the field, and expand on the possibilities of the capabilities of light and lighting design practice.

## 1.3) Reflection on the Research Process

As a practising lighting designer, this research process has been invaluable in helping to understand my own under-interrogated lighting design process. As noted, this is not something that I often reflected upon. Taking a step back and reflecting on past works, that are notably important to my lighting design career, has provided valuable insights into my often ‘instinctual’ lighting design choices. Understanding that these instincts are born of a lifetime of experiencing and observing that I draw on to apply to specific lighting design choices required for a performance. I have learnt to trust and rely on these instincts and will do so in the future, understanding that they are informed by my ever-growing lived experiences. Most importantly, I aim to be more of what Nick Moran calls an “integrative lighting designer, who works against this traditional model of practice and is more regularly part of the discussions about the production from the beginning” (Moran Quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.109).

Finally, I highlight what I believe is the transformative nature of lighting design and that of the lighting designer akin to an alchemist, translating personal reactions to a performance into the lighting design in practice. I offer Nick Moran's extension of Jean Rosenthal's aquarium metaphor of "Dancers live in light as fish live in water. The stage space in which they move is their aquarium, their portion of the sea" (1972, p.117), observing that

*light is the water the production swims in and that light on stage rarely works alone, and it is part of the thing that it supports – this water is inside the production as well as all around it.* (Moran, 2017, p.169 - 170, quoted in Graham, Palmer and Zezulka, 2023, p.178, emphasis added)

This phenomenological understanding of lighting design underpins the concluding observation that lighting design can only be an embodied process. Lighting for dance utilises the personal sensory and emotive experiences of a lighting designer to holistically contribute to the choreographic synergy of contemporary dance that gives voice to the personal as a political and cultural act.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Questions for Interviews with Lighting Designers:**

Where were you born? / Where do you live now?

How were you introduced to lighting design?

Did you have any formal lighting design training?

Did you learn from a mentor? [And do you mentor younger designers?]

What is your lighting design process?

What inspires your ideas?

How do you collaborate with creative team in this process?

One of the focusses of this research is on “Sensory Knowledge” so I am particularly interested in the senses, how we have learnt our practice from sensory experience and how we use, specifically, the sense of sight to impact on a performance and how it is received. What are your thoughts on this?

Discuss a picture of an example of your lighting design work? What was the inspiration behind the design? And paying particular attention to the senses, what mood / atmosphere does it evoke?

Discuss a picture of an example of one of my lighting designs used in the research? Again paying particular attention to the senses, what mood/atmosphere does it evoke for you?

General thoughts around lighting design in South Africa and how practice may or may not be different from other contexts?

Any other comments on lighting Design practice?

**APPENDIX B**  
**Transcript of interview with Michael Broderick (MB) via Zoom**  
**9 March 2022**  
**Interviewed by Wesley Maherry (WM)**

WM: Firstly thank you Michael for joining me, it's going to be, I think, an absolute pleasure to discuss lighting and lighting design practice and the whole real intention of this is just to establish South African ideas around lighting. Everything that I've read and everything that you see comes from Europe and America and I am trying to figure out what we do here in South Africa? I began with the question of asking where were you born and where do you live now and you answered Montclair and Hillcrest and I suppose one of the questions is why are you still in Durban? What about Durban makes it interesting of somebody of your calibre? You could work anywhere in the world, never mind the country?

MB: That's very flattering, thank you. I'm not sure I agree with you, but to answer that: it's interesting. It's what I've always known and I must say I do ask myself and I have asked myself a number of times why am I still here? I think, I don't really know how to answer it that would fit sort of what you're asking for. I've been fortunate to travel a bit and experience theatres in other parts of the world and I would love to have the opportunity to work in a Broadway or a West-End or even Off-Broadway or Off-West-End, if there's such a thing. There is something quite special about the organic nature of how we work here in Durban and if you look back through a lot of the artistic... let's say all the different genres that cover art in Durban, especially, there's been some amazing people that have come from here. Not all of them stay, in fact most have gone but if you look at it, there's a genesis or something that starts here. I don't know what it is and I don't know what it is about Durban that almost generates that kind of person. Whether I could put myself in that category, I don't know, but there's something about it that just... there's something organic that happens here and you'll find it as I say across all sorts of artistic genres. So maybe I just haven't had the opportunities to say "take me" and "I'm going to go". Of course with what we do as designers, we don't need anything other than what's in here [gestures to his head] to move into a different space come back here, live here, but then move somewhere else. We're not carrying

gear around, we're not carrying anything around. I can live here and work elsewhere and just always come back here.

WM: I one hundred percent agree with you: there is something about Durban and artists and how we work together; how we collaborate, that is different to anywhere else and as you say part of the joy is we can work elsewhere as well but we always come back here. I know with me I've been fortunate to find people that I can work with really well. So you establish those kind of relationships that are based here and I suppose we have been able to travel with them but there is something here. You were especially working with [Fantastic] Flying Fish [Dance Company], going back a little while, in the real golden age of contemporary dance in Durban where you had Flying Fish, you had Siwela Sonke [Dance Theatre], FLATFOOT [Dance Company], Phenduka [Dance Theatre]. There was a real something that started here. It has kind of dissipated and moved out but there was something that really worked here, and came out of here.

MB: And it will come up later I'm sure with collaboration, but certainly for me, I just got swept along with that tide. I was just in the right place, right time and I think like anyone in this in this field, or even the artistic field, you get lucky and you latch on to people who are really good and they take you along and you learn from that and I was very fortunate.

### *Internet interference*

WM: Can you hear me now Michael? I'm sorry that was me I think. I'm also having a problem with my Macbook and every now and then it's just... I'm waiting for a new battery to come.

MB: Did you get what you needed?

WM: I think I did, yes.

MB: So basically I was saying I just got swept along and I was extremely fortunate to be in the presence of those people.

WM: Right place, right time. There's a kind of serendipity of working with people and meeting people. There's an openness to saying yes and going with it but I think we are fortunate in many, many occasions.

MB: Absolutely and that said, now I've been thinking a lot about this, especially in our current situation [The Covid-19 pandemic] and for me I'd say to a lot of people: it is tricky now, this the infrastructure is so thin at the moment, but I do believe this is an opportunity to just hit reset

WM: and start from the beginning.

MB: start from the beginning. Wonderful work has come out of Durban before why not now? Why not start a fresh and start new ideas and new concepts?

WM: I will come back to that in terms of the other work that you have still been creating over the time. The thing is: how do we learn this practice and how we got into it? You said you studied at Entertainment Technology at the Natal Technicon, that course doesn't exist anymore – but getting into the design part of it, as you said; what was it about lighting that took your interest?

MB: I think I'm a very visual person for a start so that was an easier thing for me to choose. At Tech we could choose sound or lighting or I think it was stuff around set design. You could go three ways and I chose lighting just because it seemed to me, it was a very visual choice. Sound has never been my thing, I'm slightly deaf in one ear - I'm not a musician, I always feel like if you're a muso it's easier. So I chose that and from there it was no looking back - I just embraced it, it was such a wonderful medium and everyone is stimulated by the visual aspect of life; unless of course you're visually impaired. It was an easy choice for me to make.

WM: I trying to think, does it does it take having certain capacity or I don't know, interest in it that would be different to maybe to what a normal person would; kind of any special skills that one might have an aptitude for?

MB: Yeah, I think there is that, I think I'm visually stimulated by many things and I think I've always had that whether it's art, as a youngster, I just love looking at even the great artists: the Rembrandts and the Van Gogh's. I've always been stimulated by that and interested in them. I think there's always been that connection and I must say that has helped me immensely, just being able to reference those things or anything, whether it's photography; initially I wanted to do photo-journalism so there's always been some kind of link to a visual art. I do think we have a certain tendency, or step ahead of other people, if you have those visual stimulants that help you, that stimulates you.

WM: Then this idea of a mentor and the passing on of skills; as I've been researching and thinking about it for myself, I was very much mentored by Julian [August] and learned and it's not that it's so much about the training, because I didn't have any formal training. It really was about passing on of skills and learning how to do things from somebody else. Almost like old trade's crafts... there's something around this idea, around mentorship and learning skills from somebody else.

MB: I think the key here Wesley, is the key lies with the protégé for me. If they are willing to learn and move on... A lot of people will come to me and say "we want to learn, we want to learn" and I'll say "come along". But actually they don't, they want to get to the top immediately. They're not prepared to put in those hard yards. The key really lies with the protégé and you really have to have, every ounce of you needs to want to learn. I'm worried that there's a danger of these mentors falling away, there aren't a lot around. A lot of people I've come across, people who don't want to share knowledge and I find that incredibly short-sighted and I don't know what it is. Maybe they worry that their place will get taken away, they'll be replaced by new blood. But I think it just challenges you to be better. If you've got some young upstart coming taking your work and you think hang on, I got to learn and get better from this. So I'm absolutely in agreement with you: having a mentor is absolutely the way to go. But there's not a lot of them around anymore.

WML: You do offer workshops on lighting and things, so you really are proactive in sharing skills and sharing knowledge and sharing information and I think that's rare, as you said.

MB: I am. I want to see young guys come up and continue to do this. If we don't feed them, the industry is going to die, what we do is a dying art, in some ways - if we don't nurture it.

WM: As I said, and particularly after the last two years, as you said, there's a real.. it's not something like you ever thought: "oh I'm going to grow up to be a lighting designer or even work in theatre never mind that..." "

MB: Well it's interesting, someone once said to me "what do you do?" and I explained to them: I focus, put the lights here and I change the colours and I make them happen when they happen and "Oh, does someone do that... I didn't know that." How do they change?

WM: The beginning of my dissertation's ideas comes from that quote from Stanley McCandless, that's why it is called "Lifting The Veil on Lighting". That stage lighting is often surrounded by a thick impenetrable veil of mystery. People don't know what it is that we do. They don't know what it takes to get from beginning to end product.

MB: and I like that mystery that that hangs around it, there is a mysteriousness about it because... anyway this stuff will come up later as we go and stop me if I'm talking too much

WM: No, that's the whole point is to hear your point of view, mine will hopefully come out in the actual writing and comparing of things. So then to talk about this lighting design process. Everybody does it differently, obviously there are some basic rules and there's some basic structures that we're working with. You talk about an organic process...

MB: Look, I think it changes from individual to individual. Often I'll get really nervous when someone says to me send me a lighting plan and you're going to a massive theatre with lots of lights because there's a huge expectation when you have that and for me there's something very different about seeing a space on a 2D surface or even in a 3D render. Being in the space, it just changes things and I think you'd agree with

me, you can do a lot of planning and I do planning, as much as I can. But there's something about being in the space that makes you realise things in a very different way and you adapt to suit those situations. As a lighting designer, I do light a little bit 'off the seat of my pants', for want to a better expression, because something just comes and you feel an energy or something from a certain moment that you're experiencing. But without a plan you're on a 'hiding to nothing' full stop. There's nothing worse than a guy, and I think I've been a culprit of it with you in the theatre where I've walked in and said: "this is this show... we're just going to do this this, this and this" and I have been a culprit of that but in fairness, well actually there's no excuse for it, but I think as I've gone through the years and I've given more and more workshops I've actually practiced more what I preach in those workshops as I've gone forward now because it actually is a lifesaver, having something to follow.

WM: this idea of embodiment, that's also where my research and things have gone around So it's a physical presence; you talk about it being actually in the theatre and reacting to the space and how it is shaped... because even though theatres are similar they are very, very different and how they feel and how you can use them. Those are kind of the things I'm trying to figure out. When we talk about these ideas and where do these ideas come from it's just trying to figure out the tough, the liminal spaces at the edge... we talk about instinct we talk about and these ideas yeah and those are the things that I'm really [interest in] because I'm not so on the technicalities of lighting...

MB: sure

WM: It's trying to figure out this process and this this way of doing things and that's where I'm trying... that's where my little avenue is that I'm trying to figure out

MB: I think it's a really hard thing to actually nail down what you're asking because even you know doing workshops and stuff, when you get to the creativity side, it's a really hard thing to teach. You can offer people examples and you can show them things but I don't believe that people... I don't like it when people say: "I'm not creative" or whatever. They just haven't found their avenue of creativity. I think in what you're talking about I certainly have I think a fairly unique approach in that I try and upset the

apple cart, and not on purpose, I just like to try and approach thing in I suppose a 'disruptive', would be a corporate word to use. I look at where technology is, where it's going and I try and say to myself: "how would I do that without the tools<sup>90</sup>, the cheat tools, in other words the very expensive tools that they're using" How can I achieve that with a very limited sort of set of tools that I have and I try and do that because it challenges me. I often say to people: "being restricted is often the greatest freedom..." and maybe it's a cop-out, maybe it's if I had all the tools in the world, would I'd actually be able to produce the real goods - so I thought well I've only had that and that's the best I could do but honestly I like to be restricted, I like... it's almost how creative can you be with very little and it actually pushes you way out of your comfort zone and I think that's where I thrive. In some ways I would probably, as I was saying to a friend of mine, that I'm actually a bit of a hack as a lighting designer and I get by doing it but I don't, there are others that do this, that plan it down to the very last detail knowing all the theory and, and, and... But for me something gets lost there - it's a little too clinical. It's a little bit like if you find musicians or artists, rock bands or music that you really love you'll often find they'll put out a demo version of one of their songs because it captured something really special rather than have all the clinical engineering behind a song that eventually ended up on the radio and I'm a bit like that. I like that roughness that comes with not planning something to the n<sup>th</sup> degree, am I getting somewhere here?

WM: Yeah there's two things there... maybe again it's something about working in KZN. We don't generally have access to the big budgets and things, so we've almost always been forced to find innovative ways to work which is as you said, you find it because a creative process of: "Well I can't do it with that... how else can I do it and create similar kind of effects?" When I worked at the Playhouse last year, they've got a tonne of moving lights and I switched them all off and used all their generic fixtures because that was the feel I wanted to use for that work... There was another point but I can't think of what it was... but just this idea between a technician and a designer and this kind of maybe between a technician and an artistic practice and I think they're two very different things. Often we have to embody both of them, we have to

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<sup>90</sup> By tools, he refers to the actual equipment/lighting fixtures that we use to light a production and the increase in use of "intelligent" lighting fixtures that can change colour, move and focus via programming on the lighting desk.

understand the technical of how to rig it, how to set it up but I think there's a difference and maybe that's the designer part of it has become somebody who has the artistic ideas, the creative ideas that are slightly different to just being able to set it up, run it and do the technical sides of things.

MB: and I think Wesley, I think you know with technology that's at our disposal now, it's quite easy to achieve something that looks pretty spectacular very quickly and most people with sort of a fair amount of knowledge can achieve that. Often with a new console it's just hit that, hit that and then look of wow... and I'm not about that and I find that quite detrimental to the art of lighting design for me, because really there's something really beautiful and pure about a light hitting a subject in the right way and they say at the right time, it's a beautiful moment and some of that is gone.

WM: I was going to say that kind of leads me around and jumping around a little bit in terms of especially the work you've been creating lately and not just particularly dance. I think something like *Jakob*<sup>91</sup> where you really are using light as stimulus for ideas and how you can then expand and be creative with it, which I don't know anybody else doing in that kind of way. There's something really magical about it.

MB: I think... and sorry if I think I may have jumped ahead there...

WM: it's conversation we are meant to... it's not meant to follow the structure

MB: For me, it is about trying to create something new with a medium that I've learned to love over the years and because it's been done in a lot of ways - it's been done, I'm constantly trying to reinvent how people look at light. But not just to stare at light and see ooh wow, wow because that isn't really a stimulus. It needs to be a connection between light and what's happening on stage. You cannot just look at light and watch it change, you're going to get bored; there's no emotional attachment. So for me that's what it's about, finding a link between our visual medium, light, and whatever's on

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<sup>91</sup> *Jakob* is a 2008 production based on a short-story by Broderick and also directed by Broderick featuring Bryan Hiles and intricately plays with light and darkness in the story line

stage which we are enhancing. That's what it is for me and finding new and innovative ways to do that.

WM: That aren't reliant on technology, as you say, there's a raw element that kind of takes it back to its basics.

MB: Absolutely, you know, absolutely.

WM: That's exciting, that's interesting. So... they're kind of those ideas around inspiration... I mean you talk quite vividly of just been attuned to things. It's these two ideas of understand the technical part/aspects of it but also just trying to understand or just being aware of the inspiration of it. I mean, if I look at your video screen how the light lights you differently... you don't have to be particularly attuned, you just got to be aware that it's there, it's all around us, all the time.

MB: You're right, I do think the more you're aware of it, the more you practice it, the more it comes to you without you even having to look for it. It's a weird thing. It's almost like a snowball effect and I say this to people: "just look, just try and notice things and you see that and you see this... that light falling in that way" and now I cannot go anywhere without seeing something that's visually stimulating. It's like anything in the world whether it's sound or whether it's light or whether it's whatever; a shape, they're there everywhere and it's beautiful when they just jump out at you all day. So I take them in and I try and store them in this... and I say to people create a reference in your brain, like a library of references that you can tap into and say I remember that; how can I achieve that, with these things, for this moment... that's the rest... you just do. But you've got to understand your tools to actually then make them work.

WM: As I said, it's always that that play between the two, kind of artists, and technical and it's that constant finding the middle ground between the two. It's an interesting thing that we do.

MB: I also think we are interpreters. Very often I've worked with people who are geniuses as directors or choreographers in their own right and we often get all the credit but actually it's their ideas and we've got to find a way to interpret that idea and

make it visually what they're asking for. So a lighting design is an incredibly nuanced role. We are compromisers. We are interpreters. We are sculptors - people say painters, I say sculptors: we work in a 3D medium and we are continually manipulating something: to give it shape and form.

WM: and it is this process of collaboration; it's not lighting on its own, it is always part of something and other people's ideas and we're always part of a team and it is as we're kind of saying earlier: we're fortunate to have good collaborators so it makes the process that much easier... where you can almost learn how each other work so you know how things are going to happen. It just makes the process easier.

MB: It does and you know what it's like, you start with something and you see the first rehearsal and sometimes you just say: "well my job's done", all I've got to do is throw some light in the general direction and my job's done. Then of course you can enhance and manipulate and turn things into a thing of beauty but very often your work is easy. Other times it's not and often when I've been put in a situation where people say: "I'm relying on the lighting", I get very nervous because of the old saying: "if it's not on the page, it's not on the stage" - if you don't have something worthy of lighting, no matter what you do, lighting's not going to help. It is about having everything falling into place in the right way.

WM: I know I sent you a dance book<sup>92</sup>, but this idea of speaking each other's languages: speaking the director's, speaking the choreographer's [language] and them learning your language as well; which is not about the technical aspect but it's understanding... and I think that's probably some of our work to do as people working in it. It's a difficult thing to understand each other and work properly.

MB: You're 100 percent [correct]... you've hit a very big part... you've landed on a very good part I think of what a lighting designer does and it's understanding and interpreting what's expected of them from a person who doesn't speak our language. I think too often what's happened is: lighting designers become gods in the process. There's a lot of ego and that sort of stuff attached at the moment and "get away from

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<sup>92</sup> Dreyer, K. (2020) *DANCE AND LIGHT: The Partnership between Choreography and Lighting Design*. Routledge: New York

me... this is not a collaboration..." I've heard that said from lighting designers and it actually appals me because I have my views on that and maybe I'm not right but I do think that we've really got to learn... Someone once said to me: "you more than just a lighting designer" and that was because I was understanding what they were saying. I was understanding the situation it was ending [up], understanding the stress they were in - so I think we need to bring so much more. You need to bring personality to the table as well and also understanding people's emotions, where they're at, encouraging them through things - so we're almost a psychologist, I guess in some sort of way. We're hearing things and we're interpreting things and you've got to be that person.

WM: actually there is a thing... you're that point of contact. If I think of a festival or whatever, you're the point of contact in the theatre. You generally have the choreographer or director sitting next to you, engaging with whatever happens on the stage whilst because we often compact things... you're that real point of engagement with everything else that almost has nothing to do with you but everything to do with you...

MB: Absolutely and think about it Wesley, when we do go into production, we're often the very last element of the design. The set has been done, the costumes have been done, the show's been rehearsed, we move into the theatre, the lighting is, and I guess sound is, the last thing that gets added on to this entire sort of work that's been created and if something [changes], we have to compromise, we could come with a plan but if there's something in the way, we've got to adapt. We can't say: "go remake the costumes" or "cut the set", we've got to adapt and if you don't have that ability, you're going to struggle. They're not going to want to use you next time if you say "no, change the set or change the costume". You got to put up your hand and say... if the director says: "I don't like the way that costumes come out". You say well let me try something I could maybe throw a little bit of different colour on that, to give it the mood and feel that you want. We're that guy.

WM: Most of our process happens in this kind of theoretical 'idea' space: it is only in the theatre, in the moment, with all those other pieces in place that you get to realise

what it is. I mean no visualizer, nothing can actually work out what that is going to look like in the moment. It's a very strange thing that we do as well.

MB: You're right and I would have colleagues... my colleague that does his thing with 3D rendering and what, that would disagree with me but he's not a lighting designer, so I would argue with him until the cows come home that he's not right, I am. You know what it's like the space, you're in the space... that's not going to work. On paper it looked good on 3D rendered, it look good. It's different and I'm going to move that light, we'll change that colour and it's as simple as that. There's a beauty about that because it can only happen there in that space.

WM: and it's again that idea of being in the moment. I think a lot of our stuff also happens in rehearsals. You're kind of stimulated by things, so you're physically reacting and you're part of it. Then when you move into the theatre, that process happens again, where you're constantly reacting to what it needs to be and it probably makes us the most flexible - because you have to be, because everything else you can't really change at that point.

MB: and the beauty of mistakes; you don't make them in a 3D render: you delete it and you do something, whereas the person walks into a light, it's on at a specific time and if you realise wow: that moment... "how can we do that... what can I do to recreate that moment in a show". It happens often and I think we don't keep them when we make those mistakes on a plan or in a 3D render. I love those moments, some of the best moments that I've ever created have come through that.

WM: I would completely agree as you said: "it didn't quite work out how you thought it would"... you have the idea and you can't go "oh!" but then actually it ends up being something really, really remarkable and again maybe it's these ideas of instinct and being open to it that just come into play or going: "yes that is what is right at this moment" and "that's what it needs to be".

Mb: You've got to be a open to those... you've got to be an open book when it comes to that and not... I think if you're too narrow-minded and too blinkered about your approach. You're actually not going to end up with the best possible product.

WM: Let's move on to talking about one of your works. I asked about bringing in a picture and I can bring it up now.



*One Man, One Light* (2016) JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience. Photo by Val Adamson.

We're talking about *One man, One light* (2015)<sup>93</sup>, again because my focus is specifically on dance, I'm kind of trying to attune to those ones. Maybe talk a little about how did it come about... this little production?

MB: My idea was to actually... I am very concerned that technology is taking us away from humanity in many ways. I think we're losing the art of something. We're losing the soul of things by chasing technology. There's a famous quote, misquoted actually to Albert Einstein saying: "technology has surpassed humanity" and that got me thinking: to how can I try and tie these two things together in a way that makes people

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<sup>93</sup> *One Man, One Light* is a short performance created in 2015 featuring performer Belinda Henwood and mostly using one Robe BMFL lighting fixture, it was designed by Broderick and directed by David Gouldie. It was also performed at the 2016 JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience, which is referred to here in the text

maybe think about these two elements and marry the two, so that they are one. You can use them to your advantage. So the idea was just to try and create a relationship between an artist, a performer and a light and take them on a little journey where we explore everything a light can do. But then also explore perhaps a human element, that we didn't even think technology had and that's what it really was about. It was also in a way trying to say to people: "before you turn on 100 lights and make them look great, work with a limited amount of stuff and explore that one source. If you can do it with one source, imagine what you can do with more". I think that should hoping I would push people to be a bit more experimental when they have limited resources. Rather than just putting a hand up and keep saying: "I need more budget... I need more budget... I need more budget!". That's really what it was about and I'm still on that journey. I'm still on the journey of challenging people to explore what they have more [with] limited resources and also to try and not get lost in technology and to remember that the story, is the story. Without a story, what is there? Dance is an incredible medium for telling stories.

WM: I think that idea of storytelling and I suppose, again, you're again maybe in a slightly different position to most of us, because you're often generating the ideas and so you're creating plays and work like this. You're driving the narrative which is unusual. So you begin to do something... that maybe the rest of us are adding on to somebody else's ideas, whereas these ideas are coming from you and I think that puts you into a unique position.

MB: Well I've done enough shows where I had to pander to someone else's ideas. So for me... and often you think: "if only, if only I could have done that" but you were stuck within what they wanted to do. So there's a freedom that comes doing it this way and I'm allowed to do whatever I like and that's great. In this case I was very fortunate once again: right person - right time. Someone bought my vision<sup>94</sup>. I would never be able to do this. That's a R120 000 light. Where would I be able to borrow that for two weeks. So I was lucky, I was so lucky that someone got my idea and said run with it. I think what it is also for me, I'd love to encourage people if you have an idea and you really believe in it; run with it. Do whatever you can to push someone to believe in your vision,

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<sup>94</sup> DWR Distribution is a technical supply company which Broderick works for and sponsored the light for the production

because that's all this was. It was I had an idea and I believed in it and I think that, if anything, if anyone takes anything from the show, it's that: chase your dreams as best you can and I was lucky.

WM: But also you've had years of experience to do it. It's not like it was on a whim that "oh let me go find a light", it's more than luck, that takes work and you might have had the connections to realise it, but the idea was still yours... and came to fruition.

MB: Yes, and that said, but also I had an amazing team of collaborators. I think no great work exists without the support and help and ideas from people you trust and believe in. From there things just spiral into something beautiful and unique. I had great collaboration on this: so the kernel of an idea turned into this thing, that actually became a really successful piece of work. But I'm always open, I don't shut doors and I'm always open to introducing other people, because I know... I think we become quite sort of closed in where it can go and I'm not precious about things. I may be precious about certain elements but most of the elements I'm just open and say: "go" and if I trust that person then I know it can only get better. So collaboration, again, collaboration is a massive thing.

WM: and then, it's one of the things that it's kind of coming up: this idea of sensory awareness and so that's why the idea of the pictures is, is so maybe just you can talk... Here one with Belinda [Henwood], I particularly like, this one with the sticks. I think it's was such a fantastic moment, if I remember. It's just the idea of maybe language around senses and I know a picture doesn't indicate the whole show and the whole piece, but if we look at a picture: how can we translate what is visually there to others" We talk about coldness and warmth and things like that. If you're briefly looking at a picture like this, if you were to talk around the senses involved in it, what would you talk about?

MB: That's a very interesting question. I'm not sure what I'm going to do it justice. I'm a great believer in magic... in creating... into taking people to another place. In this instance, there's a little bit of magic there where she's swiping that stick across the beam and it's almost like we are creating an extra plane in space. So there's a sensory thing to that that takes you beyond where you're sitting. It takes you into another world,

in a sense, because you're asking yourself, as a viewer, "how's that happening?" and it's really just creating a false plane and sensory wise, that is taking you somewhere else and that's what art does. I read the most beautiful quote the other day, I think it was Picasso he said: "if I had to explain this, I might as well have just written down at the bottom and not presented a picture." That to me, it was a beautiful way of saying the audience needs to interpret that visual however they want to. I'm not going to dictate to them what to see. All I'm doing here is saying to you: "look at this; take your senses, wherever you let them" and that's essentially what I'd love to always be doing: let people interpret things. Often with stuff I've done, people have come back to me and said "wow, wow", "this I got this and that at one" and I was like: "really? I didn't mean that" but hey, artistic license.

WM: I suppose... it's not about being prescriptive of this looks like that, and I think maybe that's particularly for me, the joy of dance as opposed to kind of more realistic theatres where you need to create the sunset or the daylight of, or the kitchen scene or whatever... In dance, particularly, we have this opportunity to go beyond realism and realistic aspects of light must look like this. We get to play.

MB: Dance is probably for me, dance and opera, are the two most creative mediums of lighting and when they come, they don't come very often, but when they do come, you're just like "wow... yay". Because you're not prescribed by the norms of having to see the face and I've got to throw more light at it. It will obviously just creates now suddenly a flat sort of thing that you're looking at, because you need to see more. So it's a wonderful medium because also people interpret it in their way. I've often seen the dance piece and then I've read what it's supposed to be about afterwards and I didn't get that. I got a whole lot of something else, which I think is the beauty of it. And it is a very sensory medium; there's so much going on and so many levels: whether it's sound, it's the visual thing, there's so much going on and that sensory side is beautiful.

WM: I think that's why we do it... it's what makes, as I said, it gives you something really different to use. I think for me particularly something like this and you're also

really playing around, if you go, kind of Adolph Appia's "Active light"<sup>95</sup>, of really light being used completely differently, not in the way that you would expect it to...

MB: It becomes another performer, in a sense, in this respect. But think about dance, think about it, if you didn't light dance, if it was just done in the open air. Yes a dancer can still be a beautiful dancer. But the dancer in light, lit in a beautiful way - it just takes it to an absolute another plane. Am I wrong?

WM: No, you're 100 percent correct and that's why we do it. I think that's the interesting part... I count myself fortunate to mostly work in dance and have these collaborators because it really is a different experience.

MB: and they know it... most people know they know that without you... they know that you're going to bring something that's going to take their thing from ten percent to a hundred.

WM: That's it and that's the collaborative process again. So I'm going to switch now to just having a look at one of my pictures (I think I did send it to you).



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<sup>95</sup> For example, as referred to in Tenhula, A (2019) European and American dance and developments in lighting design from the early 1900s to the present day. In Humalisto, T. Karjunen, K. and Kilpeläinen, R. (eds) *360 Degrees Focus on Lighting Design*. University of the Arts Helsinki, Theatre Academy

*Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* (2021) Flatfoot Dance Company, performed at the Playhouse Drama Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson.

It's just to talk about different ideas. We've spoken about one of yours... I'm not kind of interested to what you see in a picture like this, this is again being quite a traditional dance production (whatever that is).

MB: I was looking at this last night which is very interesting... what I'm particularly interested in is the sharpness, the angular of this. If you look at the way that those, those beams are coming in. Obviously hard focused, and I know I'm talking very technical here, but what I was quite curious about is, was there intention behind that or was it just something... that guy was there that light would hit him was there... an intention about the starkness of that in terms of the source? I was quite interested in that?

WM: So you're dealing now with also two things because it is what is the camera capture during of a moment in a moving dance piece so and there are actually, look at this one, it's two corridors [of light] one upstage and one downstage... again so you can understand... so it is about the angular points of those lights. They happen to also be paired on the bar so I had to use four lights to create one corridor. But again it was something that kind of happened to come out in that moment that it really made them really strong and really bright. The two dancers downstage are in fact in a corridor as well - stage left, and then you have the dancer upstage in the centre who happens to pitch his light perfectly of being in the middle of that, so it really focused your attention to him even though you have the performers downstage.

MB: Well what I really love about this now, I'm at the moment, I'm on an asymmetrical journey and there's an asymmetricality about this that actually really ticks my box - all the boxes for me. There's a balanced thing here going on: he's much further upstage, he's much smaller there's two people more to the right and he's on the left but there's a balance here that is, and for me - if you ask anyone asymmetricality is a really hard thing to achieve. There's something here that I'm really, really in tune with, because of that.

WM: Which is really, really strange because I'm all about symmetry. I was having a conversation this morning about a logo and I was like "no"... because I wanted it centre, because it's got to be symmetrical and I do, I don't know, I have a symmetrical brain. I like balance, I like things... to be even.

MB: Just look, I'm not saying I'm an asymmetrical designer - I'm striving, I'm pushing to try and understand how to do it. This may not have been intentional, but there is a thing here that really appeals to me because there is an asymmetrical and I've been looking up and reading up about it and it's about how you balance. But some things have to be symmetrical full stop, but asymmetry is balance - it's just balancing in a non-kind of linear way...

WM: ... conventional way and I suppose it's like your idea of breaking the rules. You know what the rules are and you understand how they work; to break the rules - is a really hard thing to do because you would expect it to be one thing whereas it's still going to work in that way and in an asymmetrical idea...

MB: But do you agree with me in that, that picture is asymmetrically balanced?

WM: Yes and that's a choreographic moment as well, so you're working with what the dancers are doing in those moments...

MB: ...you've balanced it by the way that you've lit it. And that for me is a crucial element of lighting design because it could go horribly wrong where the focus is in the wrong place...

WM: It's true and your reliance on what is available for you tool-wise...

MB: and time...

WM: time... That's a big. This one was fortunate, I had a week get-in, which is completely unusual. It's one of the things that we do often, we're going back to earlier, we're the last element to be added in the shortest amount of time to do that work. It's about putting the production on in time: so you want to start on a Tuesday, as opposed

to starting on a Wednesday or Thursday which is finances and companies have to do that. We put a lot of work into a really short amount of time with a whole lot of planning that you don't know it's going to work until that actual moment. It's a strange, strange thing that we do... and hopefully we every now and then we get it right.

MB: And experience helps.

WM: Experience does help and practice helps... and even if that practice is being more attuned to lighting... what we practice is what we do.

MB: and not being afraid to try things and being aware of your mistakes and learning from them. Make mistakes... nothing wrong with that.

WM: You learn how to fix them really quickly. Because we said, we often don't have the time to say: well that didn't work, let's start from the beginning.

MB: Or recognising them for what they are and keeping them - when they could be used.

WM: So Michael as we move kind of towards the end of the discussion... some, any general thoughts of specifically South African lighting design practice? You talk about trying to be too influenced by overseas whereas we should use our own instincts and ideas.

MB: I do... I feel strongly about that and I think too often in many ways and even in all art forms, whether it's fashion... we are influenced so much by the West. We influenced so much also by the East or whoever what's the current trend. I really believe that we have enough talent here for us to pursue our own idea of what we are. We see the world so differently to someone who's living in Scandinavia or someone who's living in the Northern hemisphere. We see colour every day in a sunset... sunrise in the way that we are in summer we have beautiful green... and we see colour here... so we should then reflect that. Of course if you're doing an Ibsen play or something that's set in Denmark and it's being set there, of course you've got to light it that way. If you're doing an interpretation of that where it's set in Africa, light it the

way you would see it here. I think we need to be pushing more our agendas; how we see the world and being innovative and people looking at us and saying: “look how they're doing it... let's copy them”. That's what I believe... I think follow your gut.

WM: I think we also work differently... How many times has it been you, in a theatre, on your own, setting up: there's no-one [else]. But there's something that is also part of that, that understand the process beginning to end and, as I said, what is the big international guy that DWR got out?

MB: Patrick Woodroffe<sup>96</sup>

WM: He talks about his team of people... He comes in and ‘lighting designs’, whereas we often don't have that luxury. We are doing everything.

MB: I asked a colleague of mine, he's a Naledi award winner. He's done all Nathaniël's shows. I asked him the other day, I said: “Would you ever be able to do what Patrick Woodroffe does: just sit back and say: “can I get a bit more this...” and he said No and I would tend to agree with him. I don't think I could sit back as a lighting director and say to a guy: “okay a little bit more of that... a little bit more of that...” There's something about being that hands-on tactile playing with things, discovering things and making mistakes for yourself at a console that opens a few doors that I think Patrick Woodroffe will never open, because he's not doing that anymore.

WM: Which takes us back to those ideas of embodiment... that physical doing whether it be in the space, in the rehearsals, behind the desk even as you said, just the tactile stuff of actually... What happens if I go up by a percent... I find myself often using a wheel as opposed to entering percentages. When you're behind the desk, so that you go: “Ah that's what it is” and the choreographer will ask you what percentage is that and I have no idea. It's not actually about a technicality, it's about a physical reaction...

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<sup>96</sup> Patrick Woodroffe is an internationally recognised lighting director and was brought out to host a lighting workshop at the UJ Arts Centre in Johannesburg by DWR Distribution in 2017 along with his colleague Roland Griel.

MB: A feel and I think a lot of people would disagree with me. A lot of designers, maybe they Joshua Cutts's<sup>97</sup> of this world who are doing these big *Idols* and *The Voice* and things because that's a different process. We're working in a different medium here where I think there's more soul involved. Where we need that hands-on tactile...

WM: it's a little bit smaller... those are hopefully most of the people I'm speaking to in these interviews. Yes there are big names and you are a big name, I know you don't claim it, but you choose to also prefer to work in slightly more smaller environments.

MB: Sure, absolutely...

WM: and maybe because we get to play in those environments, as opposed to it having to be the big rock musical...

MB: and I think those things would dictate how we work and they would change how we work, like Josh, I think Josh is a fantastic designer. I think he's lighting a Lara Foot [Newton] production, or just has, I think it's a JM Coetzee novel<sup>98</sup>. He does those things too... but when it gets to those bigger things there's an out of touch relationship that has to happen, because of the size of the beast. I much enjoy working on these smaller things where there's a connection that you have to always keep.

WM: it's that last line... there's a humanity and it's not, there's still a person and you're still a part of it and again it goes back to that idea of collaboration... that you're part of... we can make magic in these spaces; that the bigger things it gets a little bit lost because it becomes about the spectacle.

MB: Yes and that's where I really believe we're losing our way a little bit and not to say that those things don't have a place but I think we are losing our way and we're losing touch with what's it essentially all about; and it's storytelling

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<sup>97</sup> Joshua Cutts from Visual Frontier is a well-known South African Lighting Designer who and has created the lighting for many large-scale productions such as the music competitions *Idols* and *The Voice* South African versions.

<sup>98</sup> *The Life and Times of Michael K* premiered in 2022 at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town, directed by Lara Foot in collaboration with the Handspring Puppet Company.

WM: and it's understanding those basics. You can do that in some ways... but it always comes back to those basics, and as you said it was before we started recording maybe after two years of Covid and restrictions and everything shutting down<sup>99</sup>... maybe this is the moment to rekindle those ideas and build them from that position?

MB: I'm absolutely in agreement with you on that it's going to take people like you and I to actually spark that fire... start that understanding... a renewed interest in this beautiful medium called light.

WM: It doesn't have to cost a lot of money. It can start at the basic points... Michael I think that's the perfect point to leave the interview on because I think that is really, really interesting and I'm sure there's enough here that I can use.

MB: Thank you and what an honour... It really has been a real joy talking about the medium that we both love, so thank you.

WM: Thank you and we will have to get the coffee in person one day.

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<sup>99</sup> During the Covid-19 pandemic over 2020/1, public gatherings in closed spaces such as theatres were mostly closed under the National State of Disaster Act enforced over this period, there has been a slow reopening of these spaces since 2021.

**APPENDIX C**  
**Transcript of interview with Christine 'Tina' Le Roux (TLR) via Zoom**  
**10 March 2022**  
**Interviewed by Wesley Maherry (WM)**

WM: Welcome Tina and thank you for joining me in a little discussion around lighting

TLR: I'm glad to be doing this

WM: The first question I asked was: "Where you were born and where do you live now?" You said Ladysmith and Durban and I'm interested why we stay here in Durban and what happens in Durban that makes it a little bit different to anywhere else? Because we could work anywhere in the country and possibly even the world but I think some of us stay here in Durban?

TLR: I've had this conversation often when I've toured to Johannesburg and Cape Town with shows, with other kind of artists and technicians saying: "But why don't you do this and why don't you practice in this way?", because I think our community as theatre practitioners and artists and designers in this town is quite different and quite unique in that it's really quite a small community, well smaller than Joburg and Cape Town is, and it's a working relationship between people that goes, that extends over years and years of practice. So it's not something that you can necessarily just step into, that you kind of work your way through the kind of ladder rungs - if that makes sense? In Joburg and Cape Town, I think they work with more isolation - that's my general impression about being on tour there. That there's not so much a collaborative kind of process between a choreographer and a designer, or a set designer and a lighting designer. They go away, they do their computer drawings, they do it, go away and they do a ground plan and then they come back and they put it together in the get-in week. But in Durban, it feels like I have more of a relationship with people and I think that's why I stay. Yeah?

WM: No... I can, maybe jumped to that following question - how do we collaborate, because I think again we do collaborate differently here than in other places and how we work with other artists in this field?

TLR: Absolutely, I know for myself it's not... I came to lighting design only in my late twenties, so it was 10 years into my theatre career already. I think I was allowed a space in Durban to be able to go: "Hey, somebody can move from being a stage manager or company manager into lighting design", you don't have to have the paperwork. You can just have the years and years of experience and willingness to engage. I think that's why you make those leaps here in Durban and probably more easier than you do in Joburg.

WM: And coming from a stage management background, how do you think it makes you approach lighting differently or does it?

TLR: When I was answering your questions and writing I talked about this idea of space but space could be the script, yeah, if it was a scripted show. It could be the body in a rehearsal room, and that's where my stage management started. It always started with a script, a person, an idea, a concept in a rehearsal room and I think that's where I can really kind of break it down into smaller components. Because stage management does that: where does the cue go? How does this cue affect what the next designer is doing? Can the projection work here, if the set designer is placing something over there and quite practically I'm able to work through those ideas, because of my stage management background. So I think that's definitely informed my practice.

WM: that's... you're almost talking of two things there: from that being able to bracket it into moment to moment, but also this bigger picture thing - which I think stage management does teach you as well. So those are really, really handy skills that I think we almost take for granted as people who work in this field, but actually I'm sure being as a stage manager probably heightened a whole lot more?

TLR: Absolutely, if stage management has taught me anything, it's taught me about how the individual cogs all turn to make the bigger picture happen. How do we tell that story? Whether it's an emotional space that we're telling, whether it's a journey that we're having to tell. How does my individual contribution add to, and build onto, what everybody else is doing?

WM: Because it is, it's a collaborative process, where one part... I spoke a little bit with Michael... also it's a difficult one, because a lot of what we do is imaginative, and practical, and thinking of what it's going to look like, and only right at the end of the process do we actually realise that in action. So there's a lot of hours in the rehearsal room; working things out and going: "oh, if I did this and I did that..."; but physically and practically, we only get to see what that is, right at the end of the spectrum.

TLR: Those things, in terms of the process, also are informed, unfortunately in this country, by things like budget and is there a space and is there time, whose time is always relying on money, in making theatre? Is there space and time to do those things and I think in Durban because we make... our community is so much smaller and we have those built relationships, we often can juggle six balls at the same time, in the air and go: "Yes, I can be in that rehearsal room and I can be at the same time working on my next script for a production that's only two months away". I think it's definitely a unique thing to Durban. Actually in terms of space...

WM: which... let's go on to this idea space. I think you speak about it quite eloquently and quite interestingly as... space not as an overarching theme but how can I add to the space and tell the story.

TLR: Sometimes it's more practical; it's very practical like the story must be located in a specific space - so it is literally, quite literally, the building. But I'm also talking about space as a journey and emotional storytelling and how do I, as a lighting designer, come to that and add to it. Is it a colour choice? Is it the angle at which that light source is coming from? Is it what I can't see? So all of those things are I think... probably in my head I spend a lot of time considering and then probably dismissing more than I actually use in reality.

WM: Well, that's part of it as I said, again, where a lot of it were making it up and thinking about it and building ideas, throwing away ideas and then ultimately trying to select what will work for that moment in each little part of the production.

TLR: Because I don't think space can... when you're telling a story, any story and contemporary dance is not a literal story necessarily. In those formats you go "well,

what story am I telling?” Is it an emotional journey that I need to be speaking about here? Is it how am I supporting what is happening on stage? I think in comparison to other forms, maybe contemporary dances is unique in that way because you're needing to access the material that's being performed in a way that is maybe not literal and you want to help the audience make it more accessible.

WM: Then shifting onto the next kind of question: what inspires those ideas? Because everybody is different and kind of where you get your ideas from in making these lighting design choices?

TLR: I think it is a unique process but I think as lighting people, it's the environment in which we grew up. It's our day-to-day living. It's the way the sun falls on my skin in winter in May in Durban, as opposed to summer in Durban. It's quite literally how long is my shadow in sometimes; because, for example, when I was doing *Abnormal Loads*<sup>100</sup> with Neil [Coppen] it was how do I practically create somebody in silhouette with a lighting fixture but then also how do I get those shadows to play. Or in Siwela's<sup>101</sup> piece how do I use footlights to create this idea of many bodies being on stage; so we're getting lots of shadows in the same picture. I think it's... what inspires me, is probably more so than anything: day-to-day living of course but definitely this idea of light versus darkness and I don't know if that's unique to the way I think about work. And that goes across the genres for me in terms of the lighting design. It's not only what the audience is looking at that specific moments on stage; so how am I helping support that specific moment. But also what am I not showing them at that specific moment - so what is left in the dark.

WM: I really like that notion, because we always go the point of lighting is to make visible but actually what is it that's not visible, what is on the side-lines, and again it's small moments and big pictures that we're dealing with simultaneously. Maybe we're

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<sup>100</sup> *Abnormal Loads* is a 2011 production written and designed By Neil Coppen. It was Directed by Neil Coppen and Jana-Ramos Violante. The production premiered at the National Arts Festival 2011 and later has seasons at the Playhouse Drama Theatre in Durban and The Market Theatre in Johannesburg in 2012. <https://thinktheatre.co.za/show/abnormal-loads> [Accessed 20 October 2022]

<sup>101</sup> Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre was founded in 1995, in Durban and named after the isiZulu term for “crossing over to a new place altogether”.

not always even aware of it - but it can be read, it can be perceived by somebody else, so it's a good thing to think about and be aware of that play between light and dark.

TLR: I think light and dark is intrinsically in every human being, so no matter... you might come to a contemporary dance piece and think "Oh, I don't know what this is about?", as an audience member, but I felt something and what did you feel, because that isn't linked completely to what I felt in a moment is what perhaps was in the dark. What was not being said by those bodies - I don't know it's kind of really hard to articulate those ideas to non-theatre practitioners maybe?

WM: And that is the point of what these interviews and conversations are about, is to really... I don't know... I don't think we have the answers but I do think we can start to talk about it, and hopefully be able to pass on some of those ideas to maybe even other lighting designers or other people making work. I think these are important conversations, just to try and understand what it is that we do a little bit more. That idea I think you spoke of, of what the audience felt in that... and this idea of the senses. Obviously we're dealing specifically with light, that is something that is definitely one of the senses. How our senses impact what it is that we do, and then that impacts on an audience. I don't know if you want to talk a little bit about that?

TLR: I'm aware often that what I perceive as, for example, when I'm choosing a colour to use in a specific scene, I might choose something to go "okay, I'm creating a desert: it needs to be hot, it needs to be dry". I bring to it my own understanding of what that desert space needs to be but I'm aware in the doing that, that might not be the same experience for somebody else, but that's also okay and I feel like that's where people get all precious about: "No, you needed to understand that it was in the desert. It was supposed to be hot". Well maybe you didn't get that but maybe you just got that it was really bright and it was really stark in that scene and it was washed out and that's a sensory experience that is quite... it sits on my skin almost - doesn't it? And I feel it because I bring my history to it...

WM: It is culturally dependant... you bring your story, and an audience member's story and probably a performers members stories will impact on how they experience what it is that we're doing.

TLR: Absolutely, I can remember being in Grahamstown and having these long conversations with Neil Copen about a colour choice for *Abnormal Loads* because the play is set in Northern Natal. I grew up in northern Natal and I know the saturation of those sunsets. Neil would say: "but it's Fanta Orange" and I would laugh and go: "Neil, have you looked at a sunset in Northern Natal?" so I was quite specifically locating it and then having to bring him into that journey to go, this is what it is for me, let's talk about why you're not seeing it in the same way...

WM: and how you can bring the two together. Because again, we're not also not working in realism, it doesn't hundred percent have to be what a Northern Natal... but it has to be what an audience... what a sunset looks like, and what people will recognise and maybe that's part codes and things, that people are almost unaware of. That we have to maybe pay a bit of attention to.

TLR: I think that's why this dialogue is important, because if we can bring people, quite literally I go back to this idea of space, if you can bring people into that space and go: "okay this is my understanding of what that sunset looks like or that desert looks like or what a ritual in the dark needs to look like". If I can bring you into my perception, maybe that triggers something in you that I'm not even yet aware of and let's talk about that. That's the unique thing about Durban: we talk about that in the rehearsal room. In Joburg and Cape Town it almost happens by... maybe, it's just my perception as well, it almost happens by coincidence. I'm not even talking about contemporary dance, I'm talking about musical theatre and pantomimes, in many senses. I feel like that they're not as collaborative in that process and coming to... and building that space to go: "this cog can add to that and we can turn the wheel in a new way - that none of us had thought about individually" and hopefully in doing that, I turned something for an audience member that they hadn't thought about and I'm not even aware of...

WM: and our job is done. However that happens to be... I just want to take one a step back around this idea of mentorship: who you learn from because I think... I have this feeling about that... this passing on of skills that we learn from other people and then

the counter point is of who we are passing on to and what happens with those skills after us?

TLR: I was fortunate because I think I must have just been an annoying student as well. I spent all my free time in the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, asking questions, painting stages, laying dance mats - really entry-level backstage theatre work. It opened a door for me to go: "I can look at how theatre is made now, not just the performance of it". How those tiny moments are built... to make that bigger picture and in watching those tiny moments being built, I would be watching work done by Mike Broderick, or I'd be watching work that you've done and I'd go: "I'm feeling this journey. I'm engaging literally with my skin. I'm getting goosebumps" or I am going: "that is beautiful" - maybe it's beautiful in a disturbing way at times but it's absolutely beautiful to be engaged in: how do we make that magic that is so ephemeral? That's there for one night and then it's gone?

WM: I really think... that's maybe... it's a Durban thing as well: we, and it's I'm definitely inspired by other artists and not to say that I'm stealing but definitely borrow things that I've seen and find it in a way that how I can use that in the piece that I'm working on.

TLR: Absolutely, I borrow ideas from all over the place: I might be watching a film or reading a book that just describes something incredibly beautifully. Sometimes it's very practical, it's the scene needs to be set at midnight and what does the moon look like at midnight? So it's investigation of not only the world around me but it is about borrowing and absorbing knowledge from all these different practitioners that informed that world, that backstage world for me and allowed me that place to explore and develop my own voice. I think if we go back to what happens to the next generation of theatre practitioners. I think I was fortunate because I came into theatre practice and the backstage world at a time where there was infrastructure to support somebody, developing her own voice or exploring an idea and that's where my drama degree... I don't have a formal qualification here, I don't have a certificate in Entertainment Technology<sup>102</sup>. But I'm so glad actually that I have a performance background because

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<sup>102</sup> Entertainment Technology used to be a diploma course that you could study at the Durban University of Technology that specialised in training student on the production side of performance: Lighting, sound and stage management.

I can bring to that understanding of how does the director approach a work, how does the actor on stage feel, how do they all tell the story and then what can I add to that? And that place... I don't know if that place exists in the same way for the next generation and it's alarming for me because I have certainly made connections with people in this industry where I've gone: "Hey, Nosipho<sup>103</sup>, for example, come and work with me. Let's roll some ballet mats up" and now she's her own fully fledged lighting and theatre practitioner in her own right. So there are people that you influence that I'm not even aware of in the same way. I was very physically involved in every day coming to the Sneddon and going: "can I sort out your gel cupboard? Why are they labelled with numbers" and asking questions. I don't know how the next generation absorbs that knowledge when there are not spaces available for them to do that in anymore?

WM: and is there a willingness of a younger generation to do those kind of things that we did, into and working our way through? They want to be the rock-star lighting designers before having done... Michael brought that up, which is why I mentioned it.

TLR: Maybe it's my assumptions of what that generation comes with, because it's also when we see that person behind a desk going: "Oh, can I be a lighting designer on day one", when they've walked into a theatre and they've got no backstage experience, no understanding of how theatre is made. I go: "Well... you've missed steps one through six thousand and you want to jump right in to the fire", and I go: "Sure I can teach you how to bring up a channel on a lighting desk or how to make your moving light flash", but that's not a lighting design. A lighting design is a creative process, it's a collaboration. I don't know... maybe it's also a privilege thing actually, because I had a family that went: "Hey, I'll pay your rent this month while you explore the world of backstage theatre" - that's also something that we should maybe consider. But the next generation for me hasn't made that leap yet. I don't see, there should be people 10 years younger than me, who should be doing lighting design work in the city and they're not. I'm going: "but where are you?" Maybe they're in Joburg and Cape Town, flashing lighting desks around and being the rock stars - but that's not lighting design.

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<sup>103</sup> Nosipho Bophela is Durban based technician who free-lanced for many years and is currently employed at the Durban Playhouse.

WM: It's a complex... and it is it's those two things and again part of this, we've spoken about it before, is being a technical person, who can learn the nuts and bolts of how to do something and maybe we are a little bit arrogant calling ourselves lighting designers, but we have been doing it a little while that I think we can earn that label, that is maybe something more artistic and more collaborative and more part of a team that works in a different way. They are different things.

TLR: It took me a long time when I made the leap from being a stage manager to actually physically saying to somebody: "Hello, I'm Tina, I'm a lighting designer". I had to interrogate for myself why that was, because I felt like lighting designers were... I put people on pedestals, in my own career and I always looked up to them and they were always like 10/15 years older than me, so they had 10 or 15 years of experience that I didn't have. I thought "Well, I'm only 30 something, or now I'm only 40 something, how can I call myself a lighting designer? I don't have the experience Mike Broderick has or Brandon Bunyan<sup>104</sup> has, or Julian August<sup>105</sup> has? But in the same way I think it's not selfish or arrogant to call myself a lighting designer now because it's a skill set that people from the outside, don't know what we do and this is why this dialogue is so important because they don't, they can't physically... they see some lights on and then they go home. Because they're not involved in the unrolling of the dance mats, the painting of the floor, working out where the set goes in relationship to the dancer, in relationship to the lighting plan. I think there's a whole missing steps on those rungs, that I feel like a younger generation... I just want to go: "You can't jump into the fire, you need to body proof yourself first".

WM: and I think you said that there are a lot of skills, outside of being a lighting designer, that are almost part of your job without you knowing it, but you do, we do it anyway...

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<sup>104</sup> Brandon Bunyan is a former technician at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre and currently runs his own production company Black Coffee.

<sup>105</sup> Julian August is also a former technician at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre and currently works at the Wits Theatre in Johannesburg.

TLR: It's intrinsic to what we do: like planning and working out the details to the very last nuts and bolts.

WM: It impacts everything else... the set person can work in isolation, the costume person can work in isolation, even the choreographer can work in isolation with the dancers - but the lighting design impacts at all of those aspects.

TLR: I always talk to Greg [King] about that; I always say: "you can build your set for six weeks/eight weeks before the show moves into the space", I can literally only physically start building my design, off paper, off my mood board - if I've stuck a mood board up in the office, in the get-in week and that's because... our... we're going to create the space in which we can then now tell that story, but really practically, it's the first time we can step into it and go: "okay, that idea is working. Oh, I need to have skill sets behind me, back up plans as well", and those backup plans come over years of knowledge, to go: "Okay, so that side lighting's not going to work for that cue – how can I re-look at that, in a short time frame, which completely..." the set designer, the choreographer is going: "Why are you working those hours? Why are you... and I go: "Oh geez... no..."

WM: No, it's that last minute adaption and changing and because the set design is not going to cut off a section of the set, so that your light can shine through at that particular moment. You're going to have to, we're going to have to move the light.

TLR: I think we're going to have to move the lights... exactly... or I'm going to have to negotiate with the sound team because they want to put microphones down stage and it's blocking where I've planned for six months now... how I want to put that angle in and there's a monitor or there's a microphone in the way .

WM: Then the one question, I do have to ask, because there are only two of you out of the lighting designers, is being a woman in this industry and how it is different?

TLR: I don't know, I've been really fortunate to never feel like my gender has impacted on whether I've been allowed to do something and I think that's been a real privilege. I recognise that as a real privilege because I think a lot of women do battle in their own

industries to break into male dominated, traditionally male dominated, spaces. It's a very physical job, so there are times where I recognise that physically I can't lift or carry or move heavy gear, that maybe a guy could do but that is the practicalities - that's not the design work and it took me a long time to be okay with... it's okay that my body can't do this but my mind and my creative process can still impact and create work that is beautiful. That maybe I need to bring a rigger in to help me - that's the only thing I would say that maybe is unique to being a woman in the industry is that... physically maybe I can't do something but I've never felt unsupported by my male colleagues in the industry. If anything, my Durban industry has been open to me asking questions and phoning Mike and saying: "I need to create a fireplace on stage, obviously I can't use real flames - what do you suggest?" and literally quite literally picking his brain.

WM: It was a curious question to ask, again a different perspective which I think let's lead on to discussing one of the pictures that I asked you to bring along. Let me bring it up in the share screen... excellent.



*rite* (2015) by Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre. JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience. Photo by Val Adamson.

Maybe we can discuss a little bit about how this project came about. It is *rite* (2015) by Jay Pather and Siwela Sonke, and from your response is that translating of an idea in an outside theatre space, into a theatre space... is a really fascinating discussion.

TLR: *rite* was unique for me, well not so much unique for Siwela, because Siwela does a lot of work in unconventional spaces. *rite* is something... is a production that we performed in Johannesburg for Dance Umbrella<sup>106</sup> first and we performed at an art gallery in Maboneng<sup>107</sup>. This scene in the piece, which I call 'the ritual', was set in an abandoned parking lot with a very low ceiling. I spent the greater part of a day removing light bulb tubes from the fluorescent fixtures in this car park because I wanted it to be, in Maboneng... I wanted it to be quite a dark space where the audience literally surrounded the performers so they would be surrounding the ritual that was being performed on stage. We left a single light bulb, in this vast oppressive space. Moving it into JOMBA! and into the Sneddon Theatre for later on that year was an interesting challenge because when I talk about space earlier on, yes I quite literally wanted to recreate that space - the feeling... the feeling of being oppressed. So bringing this fluorescent light tube into a really low height, just above the performance was really an important thing for me. And interestingly, Jay, in my collaboration process with him and how do we transfer this work; Jay was immediately open to this idea because I said: "it was the feeling in Johannesburg that I wanted to recreate with lighting in Durban". So now I'm in the Sneddon and it's a proscenium arch theatre. It's got heights... it's got... How do I create that oppressiveness that allows the audience to feel complicit in the violence that is being told. Quite physically I did it by lowering the lighting bar<sup>108</sup> in. Then then the other interesting question for me in this scene was so now it's ritual, ritual... specifically in telling of *rite*... it was... it's meant to be a really dark moment. It deals with violence on stage. It's really, really dark. How do I light that to juxtapose this idea of light and dark? Because if I'm just creating a pool of white light, that's shining onto a very dark scene, maybe I can then go: "you are telling the audience", I can then say: "you have to move your eyes now to the only light source that's in this room and you have to watch what's going on underneath it", and you, as the silent witnesses to that violence, have to feel how dark this moment is, with me. That was what I was trying to achieve. It was a very clear choice on my side in Joburg

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<sup>106</sup> The Dance Umbrella was an annual Contemporary Dance Festival in Johannesburg which began in 1989 and currently runs under the title Kucheza Afrika Festival re-imagined after the onset of the 2020 Covid pandemic.

<sup>107</sup> Maboneng, meaning 'place of light' in seSotho, is an cultural precinct in the inner city of Johannesburg that is considered a creative hub for Johannesburg's Urban Artists.

<sup>108</sup> A lighting bar is often trimmed to set height so that the lighting instruments can barely be seen, but can be lowered to attached lights to them.

and then also again at the Sneddon, to shine a really cold white light onto the violence in that scene. It's the only source of light in that scene. I forced the audience to... from their proscenium arch removed auditorium, to still then really focus onto stage and what is happening around that single light source and hopefully in that way make them feel some of that violence and trauma that's being explored on stage. It was that play between working with this idea of what I'm lighting versus you standing in the dark watching - and how does that make you complicit in the violence? How can I add to that, without literally doing a red gel and going this is about bloodletting. So I went: "hmm... what happens if I take a white light and make it the only source and make it really low?", and I think it worked quite successfully. I certainly hope it did.

WM: I think it did and I think that's... and you said... that's obviously it's a very strong moment but that's what we're trying to do. We're looking... it's that impacting on an audience that... that's where we... and part of it is, I think what I'm going to end up trying to find; is those areas... because I don't think it's also quite just the physical senses. It's cross-sensory, it's experience: these are the places that we find ourselves working at.

TLR: It's interesting in Joburg because... when *rite* was being performed in Johannesburg, we did each 'scene' in a different location in the art gallery; so the audience travelled with the piece into the next performance space. They went into that dungeon space and that dungeon space became so oppressive that even in the rehearsal process, I said to Jay: "I can't be in here, it's too dark for me". It was interesting... I'm saying it's too 'dark' for me because that was a sensory response to what was happening in a space that I was lighting, with white light and flooding...

WML: so darkness is actually not just a physical light thing. Darkness is also a emotion and an experience.

TLR: It was bringing to of... I don't know... I think as South Africans, we all have a level of trauma, but my own trauma was really... this piece, I think was in 2014 or 2015 and it was quite a traumatic time in my own life and I quite literally couldn't go down into that dungeon space and thank goodness, even as the lighting designer in the performance, I didn't have to go down. It was a dark space that the audience walked

into and were drawn like a moths to a flame, to the only light source in that venue to perform underneath. I think that's the joy of having worked with Siwela for so long in those unconventional spaces and having to think about: "Well I can't get three-phase power and a dimmer rack down here, how am I going to light this work? How am I still going to be able to tell the story through an unconventional light source?" and I think a generation, the next generation coming up, my impression is that if you're going to come into lighting design wanting to be a rock star, you're going to want to put moving lights in that dungeon space. You're going to want to make things flash and move just because you can show me how fast you can program on a lighting desk. I'm going: "but you haven't made me feel anything and I've made you feel something with the single white light..." and it's not a... it's a considered choice in making those decisions. It's not something I arbitrarily decide. I went and visited those spaces with Jay, probably three or four times before we even started setup. Navigating how we felt in those spaces: what part of the story we could tell in this specific art space and then moving it to the next space, in Johannesburg and then looking at how, when we moved to the Sneddon and how we could translate that into proscenium arch theatre and it was challenging... it was challenging. It was challenging for the backstage team who had to clean up cabbage leaves in Durban we had to go: "okay, we're doing really unconventional things in one scene like bringing in a lighting bar down really low - not hiding it, as we would behind borders and legs in a proscenium arch theatre - breaking convention. In the next scene, I'm bringing in the front curtain... in the same work and going: "you need to perform downstage while my backstage team cleans up your cabbage leaves"

WM: But there's just an inspiration that comes from those real spaces that we are then translating into a theatrical space?

TLR: Absolutely and embracing what the venue can give you, embracing: "okay, I'm not in Johannesburg, in a car park. I'm in Durban, in a proscenium arch theatre: how can I still tell the same story?"

WM: It's really, really interesting. I'm going to try now a screen share again. I think that was part of the problem, let's see what happens. I might not leave it up for our whole conversation. It's just a picture from me, again I think this might have actually

been the same year as *rite* at JOMBA!... not at JOMBA! but a Flatfoot work and it's quite a... I've got a couple of them, this is one I chose because I think there's almost quite a traditional look to this picture.



*Days like These* (2015) by Flatfoot Dance Company. Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson.

I just want to get some of your thoughts and ideas, and these ideas: what you sense, feel for a picture like this. I know it's quite difficult because also dance is a 3D experience in time and place and everything else - but this is just part of the objective, is to using a picture, see what we can draw from it and build language. I think that's quite important of how we talk about lighting.

TLR: Absolutely, when I look at this, it's interesting for me. My first thought was look at how beautifully the lighting is collaborating with those costumes and what is that making me think, and feel, and engaging with. Immediately I'm going: "Well it's not just lighting of dancers, I'm looking at the costumes now" and in this image I can go: "Well Wesley, as the designer, is immediately going "Hey, Tina, look at this body: I've taken the head space away with the costume, but I'm lighting this body in a kind of three-dimensional way - with side lighting" and going "Now, what are you feeling?" and I think that play between those two, between those three things actually: the costume design - is what I can visually see, the lighting design and then go "the body moving

in that space” and that makes me feel like: “Sure, that's a considered moment for me to go I'm lighting darker skins in that space; I'm lighting costumes which are very vibrant in colour”. It's making me feel like it's definitely more than just: “Oh, I've switched the lights or I'm making something flash in the background”

WM: And that's hopefully... I suppose... Michael talks about it again as ‘sculpting’ and it's more than just a picture, it's this three-dimensional...

TLR: Absolutely... I can immediately look, because of my background as a lighting person, I go: “Oh, look how beautifully those bodies are lit”, because I am able to see every aspect of those... the closeness of those masks and trying to breathe under those coverings on their face. Looking at how those bodies are moving, you go, even in traditional style, it looks like traditional lighting in terms of ‘I'm lighting dance with side lighting’ but you go even in the body shape, I'm going: “It looks quite traditional in terms of partnership with a man and a woman”. There are traditional things which you are building onto as well, in that moment, in support with your lighting.

WM: It was a moment in the work, this was again, it was a contemporary work and actually the rest of it is quite stark in terms of lighting and then you have this ending which they were doing, I think a Viennese Waltz, which is maybe not always quite contemporary. It was also... it was quite... with the covered faces. So it's traditional but also starting to just... start...

TLR: break those barriers

WM: to break those barriers

TLR: Absolutely and I can see that in the lighting choices. Traditionally we would go: “hmm, why is it... why are you putting blue into that scene?”. “That’s something... I look at why is it blue” because blue makes me feel things like desolation, isolation, sadness. Why are these black bodies moving in that space, dancing a waltz, that is making me feel loneliness and isolation at the same time, when music is playing a waltz, which is a dancing joyous celebration normally. So it's adding layering to the layers of meaning. I suppose in a really interesting way.

WM: Layers of experience. I think more than... so it's not just about me, it's about... it's as layers of experiencing the work.

TLR: Good point, I would completely agree with that.

WM: So that it's not just quite semantics of it means this and it's that... which maybe you do more in traditional theatre, but specifically (I'm going to clear this in case it freezes). That it's that... it's layers of experience and layers of impact that is hopefully what we do.

TLR: and adding on to, not only the space and telling the story but adding on to spaces in which Liane [Loots] can collaborate with Wesley, we can collaborate with the choice of music, can collaborate with the dancers, to collaborate with the costume choices, to make a story. It might not be a traditional story with a beginning, a middle and an end; but a story that somebody can feel or go on... absolutely.

WM: And then just to end off the discussion, any general thoughts around lighting design in South Africa. I think Michael said it as well, that people look overseas too much but what can we look to here in our context?

TLR: I think South Africa has, I think maybe it's our history... with Poor Theatre<sup>109</sup>. I think there's a rough magic to really conceptually engaging in these ideas and then exploring unconventional sources which I think when you have money and time and hours and hours in a studio; you go: "Oh, well I can bring, if I'm overseas, I can bring in equipment; I can bring in gear. I can do this, it can be bigger", but sometimes storytelling needs to be small and the smallness in itself is beautiful, the smallness of lighting a body with one source of light, or simple side lighting, is part of who we are as South Africans because our stories don't need tricks and always to be added on. I'm in the exploration of light and dark, I love that place of rough magic: where I can go: "sure this is me as a South African, telling a South African story". That's unique to

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<sup>109</sup> Poor Theatre is a style of theatre that gets its name from Jerzy Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre*, where a minimal amount of set and props are used. It became especially popular in South Africa during the Apartheid era as a style used for protesting against the government. [https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Poor\\_theatre](https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Poor_theatre) [accessed 21 October 2022]

this performance space in Johannesburg or Durban and not necessarily something that somebody in London is going to interpret in the same way; and bring to it perhaps a huge budget and a technical team of hundreds of people who can work on those things. But a collaboration between one lighting designer and an artist, in a rehearsal room... in a sweaty studio in Durban, that results in this same magic because despite not having the budget or the hours and hours to set something up; I can still take you on that journey and I think that's so important. We need to tell South African stories, in a South African way.

WM: and that's... and Michael mentioned a little bit as well, that's maybe what a younger generation and youth also kind of hints at it, will maybe miss and it is important to remind them that it's not all about the tricks and toys and everything that you may have at disposal. It is in that... your small moments, the rawness of trying to find that essence of it, that we tell our story.

TLR: Essence is a good word. I think a generation that comes in that just wants to... that is perhaps has more access to technology now, that wants to just make things... I'm being really simplistic in my understanding of who they are... but who wants to make things flash or move or jump straight into it as a 20 year old; is not going to bring... and maybe that's okay too, but it's not going to bring the same level of considerateness of South African history, of being a South African who survived trauma. Who's been through the 1980s in this country.

WM: Who doesn't have everything at access at their fingertips...

TLR: Exactly and I think a new generation needs to understand that you can still achieve things in smaller ways. It doesn't have to be explosive and colourful and joyous the whole time, because lighting is so much more than just what I can see, I can paint... by moving some lights around. It needs to be that moment, in that sweaty studio where you make a breakthrough with the choreographer and you've talked about "Hey, what do you feel in winter on your skin with the sun?".

WM: and I think that's a great point to end on. It is that embodied experience. It is ourselves as people working in this field of design, in collaboration with the same other kinds of people, that come together, to make this work.

TLR: Can I add on there, I think it's interesting in Durban that they've been very specific relationships built. For example, your relationship with FLATFOOT, has developed over years of experience in working together and collaborating together. My experience with Siwela has been... I started as company manager for them when I was 19 or 20 years old. It's a history over 20 something years now. Where Jay and I don't need to talk about how... what height I want to trim that lighting bar to, because he trusts me. He trusts me to add meaning into his work, in the same way I trust that if something is really not going to work for him he's going to come to me and say that implicitly - just by glancing over his shoulder. We get to know each other so well in Durban; over those years and years of experience and collaborative work, that I don't know you achieve in Johannesburg or Cape Town or bigger cities - where everything's moving much faster. I don't know... it's just my observation...

WM: and maybe I think we're lucky and fortunate for it and hopefully...

TLR: I recognise the privilege.

WM: Hopefully some of the other discussions with designers in these other centres will figure out. Maybe there is something we do differently here –

TLR: there is... when Joburg people come here as performers, they talk about it. They talk about it, particularly in my musical theatre stuff, when a Joburg singer comes in and has to perform in *Sweeny [Todd]*, for example. They talk about this collaboration that they don't feel in Johannesburg or Cape Town. It's not just you and me but I love that this dialogue, can start a place where we go: “hey, it's not just happening between the director and the singer on stage - that collaboration is also in the rehearsal room in Durban, that collaboration is also every time Tina has to go and negotiate with the sound team to say “hey, guys you need to move your microphone over a bit so it's in the way”, or “no Greg's really not going to cut that set down, is he?”.

WM: Tina, I think that's a perfect point to leave it at and just want to say thank you very much for participating in this.

TLR: Such a pleasure

WM: Cool, thank you

TLR: Bye

WM: Bye.

**APPENDIX D**  
**Transcript of interview with Lerato Ledwaba (LM) via Zoom**  
**17 June 2022**  
**Interviewed by Wesley Maherry (WM)**

WM: Welcome Lerato and thanks for joining me again and making the time to speak about our practice and about lighting design and how we do things. What I'm trying to establish is just getting different people's perspectives on how they do things and then I'll compare it to my own process and kind of see how it's different or similar. Quite interestingly at the moment, it's figuring out how we do things here in Durban: whether it's different to anywhere else? So it's just to get those perspectives. So the first kind of question I was looking at, it was where are you born and where do you live now?

LM: Oh... I was born in Limpopo in a village called Marabata just outside and Polokwane and I've been in Durban since 2016, March.

WM: Excellent and the next question is then how were you introduced to lighting design and lights? yeah...

LM: I was introduced to lighting design... when I was still young I used to play a drum kit. So, as time went on my granny had a traditional group where they used to dance. I also used to play drums there and then when I got to grade 8 I went into DJ'ing. Then from there I decided let me go study something. Only to find out when I got to TUT<sup>110</sup>, which was 2013, I got introduced to make-up, textile, props, décor, your sound and your lighting. And then when I had to specialise, I knew that I wanted sound and I went for the technical, which is both sound and lighting. Then that's how I got introduced to lighting. That's how I fell in love with it.

WM: And what was it about lighting that sparked your interest?

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<sup>110</sup> Tshwane University of Technology

LM: Everything about it: from your soft patch, hard patch<sup>111</sup>, your design, programming... everything. It was so interesting everything, so that's why I decided to go for lighting.

WM: How did your studies kind of then... learning about lighting versus actually once you've finished studying, getting into practice... what was the difference? And did you have to learn a lot on the go once you finished or was... did you learn a fair amount whilst you were studying?

LM: To be honest, I think lighting... it's not that complicated. Because once you get to know or once you get to understand your patch, it doesn't matter what programming or desk you're going to use, as long as you're able to know the basic then there's nothing much to learn. 'Cause I remember when I was doing my internship, the only thing that I learned was... the only thing that I was introduced to was using 15 universes<sup>112</sup>. But from everything else, it was just the basics. I knew that when you get to this console you've got four universes. When you go to others... it's two but only when I was doing my internship, when I was introduced to more lighting and so forth but overall I learned everything I was still studying.

WM: Yeah... Then the thing, and I found it with myself, I was fortunate to have one, is this idea of learning from a mentor and that this passing on of skills that somebody who knows and passes on to you. So the first part of it is: did you have somebody who mentored you in the process? And then the next part is, do you mentor anybody kind of... of the younger generation coming up?

LM: I never had a mentor but just that I used to consult a lot and also used to go to companies just for more knowledge.

WM: So kind of that working experience/practice, because you did move quite around with working with different companies, working on just different festivals, if I'm correct?

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<sup>111</sup> Hard patching is when a person manually plugs a circuit into the dimmer. Soft patching is done digitally through console. <https://entertainmentportfoliovittoria.weebly.com/lighting/the-difference-between-hard-patching-and-soft-patching> [Accessed 11 November 2022]

<sup>112</sup> A DMX universe is the set of DMX compatible fixtures connected to the same DMX daisy chain using the same set of 512 DMX channels. [https://www.chauvetlighting.com/downloads/DMX\\_Primer\\_rev05\\_WO.pdf](https://www.chauvetlighting.com/downloads/DMX_Primer_rev05_WO.pdf)

LM: Ja, we do festivals as well in lighting while I was still a student as well, because I remember there was this other company, they used to trust me with all their lighting because they didn't have anyone in lighting. I remember we're still using Avolite<sup>113</sup> back then... Ja... but then I never had a mentor but I did used to mentor people and then one of the students that I did mentor, she's currently doing her Master's now at TUT and this side I did try it but interest, it's not the same compared to that side...

WM: Yeah, I mean I think....

LM: They do approach you and say their interested but then you can't just be... err... there has to be a starting point. You'll give them a basic thing like go and find out what happens in lighting. Go and find out what a profile is, what a par can is then that's how they disappear they never come back...

WM: Ja... It's something that came up with Tina [Le Roux] and Michael Broderick, there has to be an interest on the person wanting to learn and we're finding that less and less... possible. They want to be the rock stars. They want to be able to do everything straight away, whereas they're not really kind of willing to put in the work building up to all the things that we did of learning the basics and figuring things out and then eventually you can do the full-on design.

(Somebody interrupts in his office)

LM: Yes.... Sorry about that.

WM: No, it's all fine but and then to shift it slightly, because I also think they're two different things: so you can be a technician and you can know all the technicalities of things... but I know you are, because you work a lot with Musa Hlatshwayo in particular and that's the kind of thing... There's also this idea of design, so that there's also an artistic practice that is slightly different to just knowing how to bring up a light and what

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<sup>113</sup> Avolite are company that sells lighting equipment and consoles.

light to use etc. So how... do you think there is a difference and how do you find it different. Coming up with these ideas, these inspirations for things.

LM: I can say it is different. I believe that designing is something that you're born with because I can learn your skills but when it comes to design... designs will never be the same. Hence I'm saying this, because when it comes to design, it's something that you need to put your mind, your full focus into. It's not something that you can wake up and be like "Ah I studied lighting: I'm a designer." It's more than that, there's more to it. There's more, it's not about knowing that I know a profile can do... iris... no... There's more to that and most people don't seem to understand it.

WM: And what would you say that more is? Is it an aptitude? Is it a creativity? Is it... Ja... I don't know... these are the things that I'm trying to figure out. That's why I'm trying to push you a little bit because this is something different that we do.

LM: I think it's a creativity... a collaboration and open to ideas as well. Because I might have a certain idea but then when I start preach it... to preach it to the choreographer or the director, you might find that we have something similar but in the end we have to combine our ideas and put it together so that we are both happy with the outcome.

WM: Yeah. So there's two things I'll pick up there. The first part, so what is your process? How do you come up with ideas for lighting?

LM: It depends... It depends on the type of show that I'm doing... but in most cases, as you did mention earlier on, when I'm working with Musa, what we do, we can sit like for hours trying to understand... explain what the flow is. What he's looking for so that when we start to sit down and when I start to design then I have an idea of this is what we are looking for: this is the setting, this is the mood that we need to figure out and all those things. So for me it's always about consulting. It's more consulting...

WM: Which as I said that is the next part of the question: this idea of collaboration: because obviously we don't work in isolation. So I think it's... we are... it's this idea of collaboration is very important because we're working with different aspects: with the costume, with the choreographer obviously in terms of how they're placing and things.

And maybe a set designer or maybe one person doing all those things? And we also start to cross over, that you're not just the lighting... you're... it impacts on the costume, on the set and what happens if we do that. So, ja, this idea of collaboration... what's your opinion and things on that? I mean obviously I bring up Musa because I also have worked with him and I understand some of his ideas. I mean I think he's one of the most visually creative people probably working in the country. So it's easy and difficult to work with that.

LM: Exactly. (Laughs)

LM: But it's easy sometimes and then it gets difficult sometimes because sometimes you might find that I'm expecting this to happen but when you get to a certain venue you find that there are certain things that you can't find. So now you need to go back and try to design with whatever that's there. And in some cases choreographers and directors they will literally kill us for that and you find that it's not our fault but in the end we have to make sure that it works and they are happy, in the end. So collaboration it is good... it is good because in regardless of... I'm coming in as a designer or I'm hired as a technician, it doesn't mean I know everything. There's something that I can learn from that technician and something that technician can learn from me. So, I think collaboration is a good way to go about the work.

WM: And what you see there as well is also we're the most... We have to be the most adaptable aspect of the work and everything else is done in advance whereas lighting you can only do it in the situation...

LM: Yeah...

WM: ...and that changes...

LM: And sometimes you find that they say: "okay submit your lighting plan." You submit your plan when you get there they tell you that "we have a fixed rig. You can't do anything with it... you can only focus that, that and that." Already, that's going to cause frustrations because from what you designed you knew that: "Okay, if I do this, it's going to be easy to achieve one, two and four" but now you're walking into a venue

with that expectation, only to find that you're not given that opportunity or you're not given what you said you want. So it's...

WM: ...So how do you adapt what... how do we do things on the fly so, not easily, but we're so used to it but what is it again how does the brain works to go: "Okay, I can't do that, but now I can do this. And if I do this then that will happen"?

LM: Oh well at first when it happens you become really frustrated. It's frustrating, I don't want to lie. Like, there was a... sometimes, you even think of, but what's the point of me being here? What was the point of me supporting all those things? Like, there are so many questions that arises but then again as time goes on, you know that... "Oh... Playhouse<sup>114</sup> fixed rig"... whatever that I do let me just try to get those certain elements. Like your... the one that I really, really want...

WM:... Ja, so you start to pull down really it's basics of going: "Okay, what is it that I really need and how can we adjust like that" without ruining anything. But the practicalities of working...

LM: ...Yeah

WM: ...Which I suppose I don't know... You've said you've worked in Durban for quite a while, do we do things... and you've also toured... You're going down to National Arts Festival<sup>115</sup>... do we do things differently here in Durban or not really? I don't know. What's your experience of that?

LM: (Sighs) What can I say, it is different. Very, very different from where I come from because in my own training I know that if I were to get into theatre, within that day I get to rig, I get to focus, I'm done. But when you come to Durban, it's possible, for maybe three days, you're busy rigging. When it's 16:00 they tell you, "time to go out, we're done". 10:00, tea break. Like I'm not saying... I know they're entitled to that. But

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<sup>114</sup> The Playhouse Company is the largest theatre complex in the city of Durban and an agency of the Department of Arts and Culture.

<sup>115</sup> The National Arts Festival (NAF) is the largest arts festival in South Africa and takes place in Makhanda in the Eastern Cape, formally known as Grahamstown and hence the referral to the Grahamstown Festival.

we as people, we work in a different manner. I'm the person who prefer to work and see the progress before leaving the theatre. So that's how I was trained... That's how I was trained. But then when you get this side, it's a matter of adapting: "Oh, this is how they're doing things... this is how they're doing things and then when you go to your National Arts Festival it's the same. It's the pressure that I'm used to working with. I know that if I'm striking this I can rig this within the same day then the following day is a matter of programming. Done.

WM: So it ends up being a lot of work... I mean... it's not a... ja I mean as I said it's about getting the job done so whatever it takes almost...

LM: ...And it's not about working hard but it's rather about working smart. So if I've got enough time I'd rather use that time to get certain things done, unlike saying "I'll see it tomorrow" so that when there's a problem tomorrow I know that I'm only dealing with a certain problem not with other problems that could have been avoided...

WM: ...And that's a planning thing as well as I said so I often find myself... it's almost trying to... you're trying to almost eliminate... you're trying to get things done so that you're eliminating things that can go wrong. So it's like if I make sure... if I know everything is working at this point then that's done then we can move on to the next thing, so its...

LM: We move on to the next thing...

WM: Cool. So I'm going to bring up a picture now because I think it's going to end up talking quite a bit, because as I said it is particularly about your... and I bring up as I said Musa, because I know you do a lot of work with Musa and I think a lot of us as designers have... have a strong relation... working relationship with a certain choreographer or person and so it might be as this way.



*Udodana* (2018) Choreographed by Musa Hlatshwayo. JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience, Sneddon Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson

To begin with... was... how did this come about...? How did you end up working with Musa Hlatshwayo and then we'll talk about how you work and for... and using this picture as an example. So ja, how did your working relationship come up with Musa?

LM: Musa and I, we met at AFDA<sup>116</sup>. I'm not sure which year it was but we met at AFDA. He came in as a guest lecturer and I was there as a technician to assist with the lighting. So that's how we met we exchanged our numbers then we started communicating and then that's how our working relationship started.

WM: And obviously then that's also an interesting shift: how do you go from just being the technician to being somebody who actually works creatively with somebody?

LM: Ja... to be honest for this show, specifically it was 2018 I think...

WM: Yes.

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<sup>116</sup> AFDA is a private Higher Education institution that offers courses in film, television, performance, business innovation and technology, radio and podcasting

LM: ...It was a lot of pressure for me because it was the nominated show for the Standing Ovation<sup>117</sup>. So, most people were there to see the show.

WM: Mmmm...

LM: I wouldn't say it was something that... it wasn't a walk in the park but due to communication and visuals all the designs that Musa came up with in terms of the chandelier, it made my designing a lot easier because I think it's easy when you are working with bodies and set to light unlike when it's a Poor Theatre<sup>118</sup>. When it's a Poor Theatre you don't have such - it's empty stage, it's quite difficult... to light that.

WM: So what do you... okay so let's take it one step back before we discuss, so what do you do when it is Poor Theatre? How do we make it different because quite often that is the case we, especially in dance and I know you also work at DUT<sup>119</sup> and things so, especially in dance very often there isn't a set and there isn't a thing, so how does lighting become that?

LM: For me when it's a Poor Theatre I normally prefer to go for isolations as much as possible in order to avoid the empty stage that's there, because you find that maybe it's a one-hander/two-hander, it's impossible for one to use the entire stage but if it's a dance at least I've got my... my lights from the sides, it's easy to shine them from both angles and then it gives you that ambiance. And one other thing that I normally try to do is to play around 40/30<sup>120</sup>, that's it... and then go above and don't go above that.

WM: Okay...

LM: Ja...

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<sup>117</sup> The work was created as Musa Hlatshwayo was the Standard Bank Young Artist for Dance that year.

<sup>118</sup> Poor Theatre is a style of theatre that gets its name from Jerzy Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre*, where a minimal amount of set and props are used. It became especially popular in South Africa during the Apartheid era as a style used for protesting against the government. [https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Poor\\_theatre](https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Poor_theatre) [accessed 21 October 2022]

<sup>119</sup> Lerato Ledwaba is employed as a Technical Assistant at Durban University of Technology, Courtyard Theatre

<sup>120</sup> This refers to the percentage of power that a dimmer outputs (controlled by the lighting desk) and will make the lighting fixture shine dimmer or brighter.

WM: That's an interesting rule. A little thing... a practice to have, no but it understands that often, more often than not, sometimes less is more...

LM: Less is more...

WM: ...and that's... so it's not about throwing everything on at the same time. It really is, and as you said, because we're having to do that on a practical level; often of just finding out what is necessary, so we really start to reduce and really use 100 percent what is absolutely necessary.

LM: And it also gives you... you are able to create those silhouette... especially if you've got a cyclorama it's easy to play around with those things especially at lower lighting.

WM: So then coming specifically to this work, what was kind of the inspiration, and again and as I mentioned, I know Musa said comes, has these visual things and obviously talking to him, so then what do you bring to counter act that work with whatever it is that the choreographer is bringing to this work?

LM: please repeat for me?

WM: So what is your inspiration behind ideas and that? Okay, we're looking at a picture, so maybe in this moment but also over in the work generally: inspiration behind the ideas... for lighting?

LM: Well, one kind of a person who prefers to sit and ask as many questions as possible before I even consider sitting and starting to design.

LM: Like, for example, if you check the corridor<sup>121</sup>...

WM: Yes...

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<sup>121</sup> In terms of lighting is focused special of light in a rectangular shape and is commonly used in dance to isolate space

LM: ...like we said, we spoke: Musa was like: "I want a corridor". I was like: "You want the corridor?". He was like: "Yeah". Then from that, that's how the design came about because now he's coming with his ideas as a choreographer, as a creator, but then again you, as a designer, you need to grab those ideas and put them into action. And one other thing, we do travel a lot before we can do any show. Just take a drive to kwa-Maphumulo, so just to clear our minds and then sit we would... Some ideas, they come from sitting in the fire. We would sit in the fire up until maybe 12am/1am in the morning - just busy sitting, talking. And then when we... once I'm done with the rigging and everything else and focusing; I like to play a lot with isolations: so sometimes I find that I'm playing with isolation and I'm like: "What do you think of this. What do you think of this? What do you think of this?" then in the end, we get together all those ideas and then we put them into one thing. And one other thing that also helps in terms of our lighting: it's the projection that we use a lot.

WM: Yes.

LM: It also helps a lot because you are able to get the feedback... that... on the face like you or not, yeah?

WM: And it's an interesting thing and I think a lot of people under consider the use of it where projection is a light source so it actually very much becomes part of the lighting design - not just a backdrop.

LM: It's not just a backdrop. It's not just a backdrop... ja...

WM: And...

LM: ...Maybe it needs to be revisited at some point, somehow and maybe such conversations need to occur, so that we are able... we are well equipped with knowledge. As I said before collaboration: it's the way it goes so that we learn from each other.

WM: And it's... and it's learning each other's languages. That's what I'm finding more as we speak a language, a choreographer speaks a language, so the lighting designer

in particular very much becomes the interpreter of understanding what the choreographer is envisioning. And we're finding practical ways to make that happen.

LM: Ja...

WM: What are your thoughts on that? Because it is a language/visual language that we're working with.

LM: It is a language on its own. I wouldn't say that it's a stage language, because you do also use the same language in outdoor events and corporate events but then again it's a matter of meeting the choreographer, or the director halfway and interpret whatever language that he's using into our own technical language. And in that, you also get a plan as well because you might find that someone... you are talking about, one in the same thing, just that the problem is the proper term for whatever that person wants.

WM: Ja, so you're often helping them along, as if they will think it's this idea and it's called that but you don't... "Okay, it needs to be this" and it helps when you also have to move and work in other spaces... so that you're understanding... so it's a bit of sharing of knowledge and sharing of... and it's not to say it's right, but that's just what it's generally accepted as.

LM: Yeah...

WM: and then also coming today and it's a thing I'm trying to explore - this idea around sensory experience and obviously working with Musa you... he is very, very good at working with the senses and across senses: smells, sound and just how the senses start to impact on a performance of how we make it and how it is received? What are your thoughts?

LM: Mmm... senses...

WM: Yeah...

LM: Mmm.. (pause) Ah... How do I put it?

WM: And it may... as I said I think also culturally, it might be different for different people... I haven't sat around the fire talking to a choreographer. There must be something really visceral that happens when you do that, when you're talking about it... and that's really... ja...

LM: Senses... it's... what can I say. I come from a background whereby it's a culture orientated but ever since I came this side I've been trying to adapt to the Zulu culture and one thing that I can say they are very culture orientated and with that being said I'm learning a lot. I'm learning a lot, hence it's easy for me to adapt and have an idea of what is it that we are going with... the play, what is it that he wants to achieve. And the thing is, for example, the cow dung, some might say it stinks, it's what, what but if there's more to that, there's more to that when it comes to culture. Some even use it when they've got a bruise or they're breeding. Apparently the nutrients that it contains they are able to help you heal and then it's also used for cleansing yourself after a certain ceremony. So senses, it's still a learning curve. I believe it's a learning curve for me and I believe that one can never be satisfied or be brave enough to say: "I've acquired all the knowledge I have." In life there will always be something new that we learn on daily basis.

WM: No, that's...it is... that's how we do it. So then just coming back to this picture sensorily and again it's part memory and it's parts... You've also just... We'll still have one more question after this about having taking it to other spaces and things because you've done it at least three times in different spaces, most recently at the Playhouse. But just if you look at this picture: sensorily, what does it evoke for you? What can you, in terms of when we talk about moods, in terms of feels warm cold and things like that anything that jumps out at you when you look at... look at this picture? Because part of it's about language. It's about language and I know that's a hard part because we don't always have the language for what it is that we're doing. So I'm just trying to push you to these things.

LM: There's a lot of goosebumps when I see this picture because in... from us as men typically, we are not used to, especially as where I come from we are not used to...

WM: Just to... so I can put it in the interview you again just remind from Polokwane, so the culture there would it be...?

LM: They are... there's Tsonga people, Venda, there are Pedi's, there's Ndebele. So I'm born... my mom is Ndebele, my dad is Pedi, so I practice both cultures. So by looking at this, seeing Musa with lilies, it raises a lot of questions and when you get to sit down and understand that thing... there's nothing to be ashamed of - especially as males. We need to love each other enough and encourage each other like, for now. The same thing that Musa was talking about, I don't know, a heart from a head, and I don't see it happening which is something that we need to challenge as well and be open enough to talk about such things because there's nothing wrong from loving your brother, your uncle, your father the same way that you would typically love your girlfriend also. So this picture has a lot of content in it...

WM: So it's also... you're being impacted by the work that is being made as well. So, you're not just an outsider, you become part of it which is really interesting so that you start... you're engaging with as much in the work as it's being made as you would hope an audience member does.

LM: Ja. Because it sometimes it feels as if the work has been created from my own thoughts, what I'm going through. Only to find out but it's not that it's something that we as black men we are facing all together out there. But it's a matter of how do we challenge all these things? How do we educate one another and so forth and so forth.

WM: Then the last part would be how do you make that happen in... how do you translate that into your practice because obviously you're being impacted, so how does it change how you work?

LM: Actually, it doesn't. It actually motivates me. It becomes therapy for me because I'm able to deal with it. I'm able to let go, to voice it out so it becomes motivation. If possible, I wouldn't mind going on tour, educating all... everyone, especially men: this stigma that they carry, men, some it's wrong ideas, some they like... there's a lot of definition. Some you might tell them that we can't share the same room with a female

'cause of one, two, three. And you go to Eastern Cape you find them they'll tell you "I'm from the mountains". This, this, this, this. And then you go to Limpopo, you find that they also go to the mountain. But then the range from different age group as well as Mpumalanga. So hence I'm saying for me, it becomes motivation. I become eager to do more and learn as well.

WM: And practically and how you create the design? How does it impact in choices... Let's stop that...[screensharing the image] How does it impact in choices that you make?

LM: Can you please elaborate further?

WM: So, terms of... it's obviously impacting you in your kind of thought processes. How does it influence then practically: "how do I use the light to create the feeling?" How does it... Ja... how... I know it's difficult these are not easy questions but it's just so that it becomes... How does it physically impact the work that you make?

LM: For me, I do play a lot. I do play a lot because it's not... to set the mood is not something that you can get right at the first attempt. So what I do practically, I would set the mood. Let's say maybe start at a certain percentage and then increase it and then come back up until I find a perfect mood that I'm looking for and in most cases, in regardless as me being the designer as such, in the end I'm hired to do a certain job. So in order for me to make my job easy I prefer sitting with a choreographer and asking: "how is this? How is this? How about we add this? How about we do this? How about we do this?" Then it becomes easy for me to do that, because if I say: "Okay let me do it on my own", imagine you are sitting there for hours programming 100 cues<sup>122</sup>, only to find that none of those cues the choreographer is impressed with. So with that it's time consuming, so hence I always sit... prefer to sit and ask - unless if it's an ongoing show we've been doing it for months and so forth.

WM: You know what it was and that's what it is. But now to go interestingly, this work, as I said, I know of at least three different iterations of it. You did it at the National Arts

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<sup>122</sup> Cues refers to the individual scenes or looks created by programming the fixtures and dimmers via the lighting desk.

Festival, then came to the JOMBA! festival<sup>123</sup> that year and then now three/four years down the line you've redone it again at the Playhouse Foyer<sup>124</sup>.

LM: Playhouse yeah... and the one at the Playhouse Foyer when Musa came with the idea: "Let's go for different platforms<sup>125</sup>", I kept quiet, I looked at him, because now in my mind, I have the show already in my mind. I know that using corridors using squares so forth and so forth. But then again when we are bringing it here; how will that go about and for that as well we had to go back into studio to go and rehearse and do the spacing and so forth. I even went back to the original video, the one that was shot at the I think Sneddon<sup>126</sup> or National Arts Festival, I sat, I watched the whole show again from scratch and then I went back to rehearsal again. Then I was like: "Oh okay, we haven't changed anything. It's just a matter of spacing". So now it's a matter of how we're going to light it based on these different platforms. And then for me, the Grand Foyer it wasn't that challenging, it wasn't challenging but when we first did the show that was a challenge. But it's now...

WM: ... Because you have the ideas, you know what you... it is that you needed to create in those different moments and it's just finding the different way to do it...

LM: Yes...

WM: ...without losing one...

LM: ...without losing the content...

WM: ...which you had established what that was already. And then just one further and because Musa also likes to do it and you get tagged along is working in these

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<sup>123</sup> The JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience, is annual contemporary dance festival hosted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Centre for Creative Arts.

<sup>124</sup> The Playhouse Grand Foyer is a venue at the Playhouse Company in Durban, it is a not a traditional Theatre space but was adapted by Musa Hlatshwayo and his company for this performance of *Udodana*

<sup>125</sup> Raised stages which the performers made use of – they in fact mirrored the original lighting specials of the original work.

<sup>126</sup> Founded in 1981 by the late Professor Elizabeth Sneddon, the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre is a 400 seater venue located on the University of KwaZulu-Natal Howard College campus and the main venue of the JOMBA! contemporary Dance Experience.

unconventional spaces so how then, because it's not a theatre, how then do you work in those kind of spaces?

LM: I take it as a challenge and a learning curve but then again at some point I had to sit back, I was like: "But we've got a proscenium theatre, we've got an amphitheatre, so now let me treat this as a theatre in a box" so with that being said you know that if you're facing the other direction this light then changes from being a key<sup>127</sup> to back, changes from being a side, to key. So it's a matter of getting to know all those basics and how to play around with it.

WM: And when you don't have the equipment that you would have in a theatre because you've been in that situation before?

LM: It's... it's frustrating but then again the show must go on in the end. So in the end you have to make it work and with what we did at the Grand Foyer it worked, it worked. But in my mind I was thinking theatre, theatre, theatre so being easy to adapt, it's also important when you're working in different places because it saves you the amount of running around looking for your typical theatre design. It's a matter of adapting to that certain environment and making it easy for you and everyone else to work. 'Cause if you...

WM: Ja, as we said earlier, when you're working in different spaces in the theatre, you've got to learn to let things go and find adapt. So then to be able to do that in another space is a similar process.

LM: It's a similar process and it also helps when you work with companies like Playhouse because I know how they operate and know how they work, so I try to avoid too much stress as possible. From the first meeting that we had, that's where I need to make sure that okay, "this is doable, this is not doable". If it's not doable then, let's see what are the other possibilities for us to make it. So it's always adapting...

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<sup>127</sup> Your key light in theatre is generally considered to be your main light source and because of plays is considered to come from the front of the stage.

WM: I think I found myself working similarly where you try to be as little problem to somebody else's problem, obviously trying to still work and be true to the work and what it needs to be but ja... we try to... and maybe that's a Durban thing... maybe you've been working here long enough that I don't... I think we're less... we're also used to working in many spaces, in a different context with different things, so you do try not to be problematic and or not diva-ish but still keeping true to what it is that needs to be done.

LM: Ja... Because in the end, we need to establish that working environment between I as an outsider and the residential as well so that when we come back next time we know that we still have a working relationship that has not been contained in any wrong way or wrong manner.

WM: Yeah. No, that's... I think that's important because it's a small group and community of us who do this, so we kind of, you have to work together a lot in different places.

LM: We have to. Exactly. Because we might find that we are doing this when we move to elsewhere, Joburg, we are forced to work together. How you going to work with that person if there is bad blood already? So it's always important to be working... a good working relationship as well.

WM: Okay, so then moving secondly on and it's just part of the process of... So you... we'll talk about one of yours and now to talk about one of mine



*SoliiDad* (2019) Choreographed by Vincent Mantsoe. JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience, Sneddon Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson

This is, was, a work by the wonderful Vincent Mantsoe, also at the JOMBA! at the Sneddon theatre... Ja... so... a kind of... When you look at it, what do you see and what does it evoke for you? Again, using the sensors particularly or just what does it evoke when you see this kind of picture?

LM: For now my focus is those... the backdrop. That's what I'm trying to figure out. Because it's giving me... it's challenging me in in some way.

WM: What kind of way?

LM: That... Him...I can see and now I'm trying to figure out if those are LED lights or what's happening...And the string I can see there... hmm...

WM: Okay so practically and I'll... obviously I know, that is just rope that has been lit - so it's hanging down pieces of rope that have been side lit by red that give it that...

makes it glow in a different way. So understanding practically what it is, what interested in, what evoked you about it, is it... what does it look like to you?

LM: I could see that it's some sort of a backdrop,

WM: Yeah...

LM:...but it's some of the things I've never seen before. So when I see different things they become interesting because I become interested as to but how was this achieved, how was this achieved... what mechanism was used here.

WM: No, I think we all learn from each other, we borrow and share and so you see something and then you always go... I think maybe that's our brains, as we always go to try and go: "Oh, how are they doing that?"

LM: Ja...

WM: Yeah...Because that's how we work, so we quite often are always looking at it with a technical brain, of trying to figure out how it's done. So if we try to move past that and as I said and the thing I'm trying to push from you: is what does it evoke for you when you look at this image?

LM: Evoke...

WM: What is it? What is it? What do you feel when you see this, and again it's just a picture and it's difficult because obviously it's part of a work that has many different scenes and things so this would try to isolate a moment. What do you think the tones of it are? Does it look like a light work or a happy work or was it more dramatic/darker. I don't know what, without trying to say the words for you... How, what is it, what do you feel when you see it?

LM: the atmosphere is a bit lighter... but then again... it's like... from this is what I think...

WM: There's no right to wrong answers - this is your opinion.

LM: ...it's like ... the confidence and hope. It's somehow been lost. Looking at this picture...

WM: Because of what? Because of what...?

LM: Like... if you are confident – like you wouldn't put your head and open your arms like this. It's like he's in search of help... needs to be rescued or picked up from a certain situation that he's been going through. So hence I'm saying I feel like there's loss of hope. I think.

WM: Yeah and does the lighting contribute to that? and if so how?

LM: The lighting... it is a highlight, because I think the eyes are even closed, if I look properly...

WM: Yeah...

LM: Ja... at least I'm still able to see...

(laughs)

WM: Yeah, keep going...

LM: I think there's a... lighting also plays a role here... Ja...

WM: In what way? In what way? That's why... I'm trying to figure out the words. How we talk about it...

LM: Ja... How do I put it...? How do I say this? Like, from this picture what I'm seeing: this person, is in need of help, rescue for hope to be restored. I'm not sure if I making sense...

WM: Yeah... that's the thing but I'm trying to figure out and then how the lighting will add to that by angles, colour, all the things we use in our process. How does... can you see anything in the lighting here that contributes to those ideas?

LM: Is this the open... no I think it's... open...

WM: Open white, yeah... yeah... On the dancer...

LM: Ja... I think there's no... because I'm seeing this one shining from the left hand side...

WM: Yes.

LM: Yes. That's the one that I'm seeing and then the red as well it's adding onto the mood...

WM: By?

LM: The red strings...

WM: Yeah... How does it add to the mood? What does it do to the mood... for you? That's your opinion, as I said, what, using red, what...

LM: For me, I'm going to interpret it as a blood. There's been a blood spill. So now we in sync for help, to restore peace... if it's peace... Ja.

WM: No, that's perfect as I said, it's a diff[icult]... and it's hard. We don't, because we also don't often talk about it and explain the ideas and I said it's not, I mean this again is mine, so this is just trying to see what somebody else, who working in the industry, looking at a picture and again a picture doesn't explain everything but it captures a moment and how we can then start to talk about it and obviously I mean things like colour... I'm going to stop the share, the share screen... and things like colour are very different for different people. I think everybody uses colour slightly differently and we

use angles slightly differently. So things, all those things contribute differently to how a work is made and then how it is read.

LM: Yeah... And these days we are using more intelligent light so we are doing away with the colour details that we used to use before and with that you can see the change in colour correction. It's no longer how it used to be...

WM: It's either a red and then a blue light comes on so there's something that happens in that shifts how it is that we make the work that it is that we do. Do you bear that in mind or is it: "Oh, I'm still going to use red and if it goes through purple to get to blue that's what it is or..."

LM: I always consider that, I always consider that because the shift in the in colour: there's no way you can avoid it, even someone who's not...

WM: ...So it becomes part of it or so it's... so you're not also just working at the scenes you're also having to look at the crossover from one scene to another.

LM: Ja... So it's a matter of playing when you when it comes to colour especially. When you're using the LED's it's a matter of how smart you're going to trick it so that it doesn't... you can't pick it up. What I'm trying to say is you can see that okay, from this colour to this colour the moment, that the fact, that it's two colours then you're coming up with a different colour because if this colour makes your face, it gives you something else. But you are not using that colour, so in order for you to transition from one colour you're going into a different colour before you get to that. So hence I'm saying you have to be smart on how you're going to trick it. But me, in most cases, I prefer gels<sup>128</sup> - especially for general washes because with gels you can never have such. It's just a matter of switching from here to there, here to there and then maybe in between use those LEDs.

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<sup>128</sup> Gels are specially made polycarbonate sheets of colour that project the colour when placed in front of lighting fixture, the most common types are made by Lee and Rosco.

WM: Which kind of brings us to the last part of the conversation is just any general thoughts around lighting design in South Africa specifically and how we may practice differently?

LM: General thoughts...

WM: Mmmm... you said you... that you start to talk about how it is that we use and that's an increasing thing as more as the technology changes and grows is how do we use technology differently to 10 years ago.

LM: 10 years ago compared to now, there is a huge change. There is a huge change... like we are, we have, we no longer going with your analogue dimmers, your analogue desk. Everything is going digital now and it's soon, I think... I think there won't be generic anymore because of the development that's coming and due to the fact that we are trying to save the environment and the power as well. So the more we use automated lights and your digital thing... it's an easy way for us to save, but also it requires... I'm not sure if training is a better word... because each and every equipment that's there, for it to be in the market, we need to know what it does, what it does, why should we go for that equipment and so forth. As I'm saying I'm not sure if training is a better way. One other thing... it's challenging in this industry because you might find that I have a qualification, but then when you get to a company there's someone who doesn't have a qualification but you are doing the same job or you're even reporting to that person or you find that that person has been with the company for more than 15 years. Now you are coming in, with a qualification, that person needs to report to you. It becomes a problem, which is something that we are not talking about in the industry and because we've got people who are sitting without qualifications, but they're not able to find work... reason being some people go for rigging course a month. Done. Then you come and work... some people go for training MA<sup>129</sup> or whatever console. Then they come, they start working so I think those are the other challenges that we are facing in the industry. And one other thing that also impacted us: it's the Covid, the damage that has done it's too much. Some people are not even able to recover. Companies are shutting down yet every year people are

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<sup>129</sup> The MA is series of Lighting Consoles.

graduating with qualifications and the short courses being offered. But then what is it that we are doing to make sure that these people are secured; they've got bread on their table every day?

WM: I mean... ja... That's probably been one of the last is like going on for a future generations. How... what needs to happen and what... how... No, I'm obviously not going to solve the issue in a short conversation now but it's just to go: "What can be done... what are the things... what are you able to do? Anything and how, what, what is it for future people coming on. What is it that can be done? What would be options for them to think about?"

LM: It's quite a tricky one... it's quite a tricky one... because some in regardless of how short the market is, but someone who is interested in something, they are interested regardless of what you say or do. Once I've made up my mind that I want to do lights, no one will come and change my mind. But I think that the government should open up more opportunities for people, especially in the arts. Because we are not, we are considered but not that considered. I think it's a matter of the government changing... the way... they do things and there are theatres that are closed. If those theatres can be open... open it up to the community. That's how you get the kids off the streets. We've got a lot of people who are smoking out there. It's because the government has promised to give them jobs, but it's not happening... it's failing. So I think if we can open those theatres and open them up to the community, surely there will be people to come around and sponsor those things. By doing that, there is... there will be change... some people will change and they will adapt to that. Then in that way we'll be keeping the job secured and the youth safe as well.

WM: It's like I don't think people... I don't know if you, when you're growing... I never thought of a lighting designer as a job - as something that I would end up in and I don't think that many people think of it as a possibility even these days.

LM: Exactly. Like, most people don't even know that you can actually go and study become a lighting or technician or to be study to become a designer.

WM: And I think... There are less... they are very... I think TUT is the only one still at the moment that offers the full-time course and a lot of them do that and I know things are in the process hopefully for DUT to offer something in the future again but it's... it's to make it open and to make it available so that we can... so the industry can continue

LM: Yes...

WM: ...hopefully beyond us.

LM: ...Because there's a lot of market out there like your cruise ships...

WM: Yeah...

LM: ...they need these people but if you've got only one University who is able to offer that, then it raises a lot of questions.

WM: Perfect, any other comments from you Lerato?

LM: Well for me, I wish such conversations could happen and maybe, whereby we get together... and collaboration as well. Getting to know "Oh... this is how this is achieved. This is how... this is what it's achieved" then ja... I think...

WM: Well that's hopefully... that's my aim in doing this research is to kind of open it up a bit. Lift a bit of that the title of it is lift the veil off it so people... don't, can't see beyond just that it's not something that happens, that there's things that happen behind and hopefully that's the beginning of these conversations and we'll be able to take it further from there.

LM: Yes...

WM: So what I want to say is thank you very much and... Ja... we'll be in contact further about how it all goes from there.

LM: No problem.

## **APPENDIX E**

**Transcript of interview with Nkosingiphile 'Mancane' Dlamini (MD) via Zoom**

**17 June 2022**

**Interviewed by Wesley Maherry (WM)**

WM: Cool... So welcome Mancane<sup>130</sup> and thank you for joining me on this... so basically it's to start to just discuss our lighting design practice... and kind of just see how other people do it and then I can compare it to how I do it and yeah we'll take it from there. So thank you for joining me.

MD: Thank you so much

WM: My first question on the list is where were you born and where do you live now?

MD: I was born in Umzinto at Scottsburg and I now live in Mayville here in Durban.

WM: And what would you... was it work... or that you work more centrally now as opposed to living down the coast?

MD: It's because of... I moved here because of... studies and then from studies then obviously to work and that's the only reason why.

WM: So that's just my next question is... did you have any formal training in lighting?

MD: No I call it informal because um...

WM: ...So what were your studies in?

MD: ...Sorry?

WM: What were your studies in?

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<sup>130</sup> 'Mancane' is Nkosingiphile Dlamini's nickname and translates from isiZulu as 'they are small'

MD: I was studying Drama and Production studies at DUT<sup>131</sup> but then... there was this one production they showed us in our first year... which drawn me in because of lighting you know? So I started asking questions and how does that happen and how do they change colours on stage and stuff like that. So that's where the theatre lighting technician of that production... started to say, you know, you can work with me, you can shadow me and then I can teach you and then that's when I was introduced into lighting.

WM: Yeah that was... you answered my next question of how you were introduced. So then you...

MD: (laughs)

WM: No, this is this conversation that's how it goes. And so then how did you learn... and get involved further into where you are now compared to where you started?

MD: During that three years period of me studying drama and production...

WM: ...which is mostly a performance degree or diploma if I'm correct, ja?

MD: Ja... so we had a theatre, Courtyard Theatre and you know, you get a chance to direct, you get a chance to be a stage manager but luckily for me because I was curious I started that in my first year to be a stage manager because I was shadowing that person so... they ended up putting me in a programme they call co-op or education whereby... they know that from eight o'clock to two o'clock I'll be doing Drama and Production studies and then maybe from three o'clock up until four, I'm in the theatre learning and helping wherever I can. Ended up doing lighting for directing projects and for my fellow students.

WM: Excellent. So I think you're kind of answering it as well so you learned from a... mentor... somebody taught you how to do this... can you mention who they were and...

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<sup>131</sup> Durban University of Technology was formed in 2002 following the merger of Technikon Natal and ML Sultan Technikon.

ja... because I think a lot of... a lot of the skill I know for myself and I know some of the other people... it is... we learn from somebody on how to do these things, of passing on these skills... more so than actually studying it... and I don't think... is it necessary to study it? Is one of the questions that will come up

MD: Ja... it was Mthandazo Mofokeng and he was the Theatre Manager/Lighting Technician at the Courtyard Theatre so I learned from him and then... (laughs) ja...

WM: Okay cool and... and so... and how do they... it's a practical process of learning, it's not so much... and so how do we learn from these people? I don't know... anything, thoughts on how do they... did they show you how to do things? Or did they do things and you just watch them do it?

MD: They do things and you watch them doing it and then the next day you are supposed to do it exactly as they were doing it, it's like learning on the go you know, you are doing what you are learning. Because I remember the other day he was making cables, making cables and then the next day he was like okay you saw me making cables yesterday... fix this cable then and then I had to... okay... remember "Oh ja, that's how you fix the cable" and then we learn on the go.

WM: And then the following on question that and I think you do as well, do you mentor new people coming into the industry? (Laughs)

MD: Yes... (laughs)

WM: So, what is the program and kind of how do people get into it and how do they... how do you work with them... in this process? Because I think you're one of the few people who have the capacity to do that because of where you work<sup>132</sup>?

MD: Okay basically I... I saw Michael<sup>133</sup> (laughs) you know, I usually... I host an annual technical workshop which doesn't focus only on lighting but from stage management:

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<sup>132</sup> Mancane works at the Playhouse Company, the largest theatre complex in the city of Durban.

<sup>133</sup> Michael Broderick, a fellow lighting designer in Durban

behind the scenes in theatre and from there we see, I note the people who are more interesting... more interested I mean, to the behind the scenes and then I mentor them. I take them to Imbewu Art Festival to see how the festival works. Sometimes... okay... but now they're not doing it here at the Playhouse whereby people will come and tour around the Playhouse. So I usually do that but now they not doing it here at the Playhouse but yeah it's those annually technical workshops that helps a lot and then I pick those people who are more interested and then I mentor them.

WM: Yeah it's come up again as well where it's... it's not so much having people who you can... what... there has to be a desire to learn in the people that are coming forwards and I think we had it whilst we were working I mean you said you showed initiative of trying to find... so it's not so much also just about being able to... it's about finding those people and then they have the initiative, they want to learn, they do the things and then they can kind of step into the industry... I think that's getting harder to do because I think people are less interested in learning the nuts and bolts... I don't know what do you think? Putting the hard work in...

MD: ...they don't want to get their hands dirty. They don't want to... they just want to sit back and enjoy money, if I may put it like that. So they don't want to put in the hard work and that's why most people they call themselves 'lighting designers' but they don't understand that before being a lighting designer you are a lighting technician you need to understand the whole thing from the beginning, you can't just be a lighting designer without getting your hands dirty.

WM: Yeah and that kind of again now leads me on to my next step of they're almost two different things but similarly linked you have to know the one to be the other. Being a lighting designer is a different process and it involves different things to just being able to bring up lights and create something on stage. So, I'm kind of looking to understand what your lighting design process is?

MD: Okay... I usually differentiate it into three phases. The phase one will be the meeting and then two will be rehearsal and then three developing the plan. So in the meeting, the first meeting I meet up with the creator or rather a choreographer whereby he or she will be telling me about the concept or the idea behind that choreography

and usually in that first meeting I record it so that I go back home and then I listen to the conversation and then start to visualise and painting pictures of how am I going to tackle this type of choreography or this type of idea and then from there visualising, I then develop or rather come up with a "what-if" question or a statement that helps me to carry the lighting design of that particular choreography. So from then we meet up with, what we call a production meeting, we meet up with the rest of the team so that everyone is on the same page and then we're done with the meeting. I then attend the rehearsals. I normally ask to attend the rehearsals once they are running doing runs so that I'll see from the beginning until the end. So first visits of that rehearsal I just sit and watch the show and enjoy the rehearsals and then second visit and then I come up with my notepad take notes of the skin tone, the movement, who moves where, when, why and stuff like that. And then from there the third one is the third visit is whereby I detail each scene. I check the mood of the each scene so that I'll be able to have a proper lighting design. Then from there then *ke*<sup>134</sup>, I developed a cue list with some of the choreographers they like to get involved, some they don't care they just let develop your own cue list. So I develop a cue list and then decide what gel colour to use and then from there I then draw up the lighting plan then I'm good to go to the theatre and start the work.

WM: No... you've got a very clear process which is very lovely to hear and actually... and more so than I think I recognise of how I do and that's... which is great and I think everybody does work differently and... and yeah. So to hear that clear process is really lovely...

MD: I hope I can hear yours (laughs) I so hope to hear yours...

(Both laugh)

WM: I mean it's all similar I mean... I think I don't maybe don't formalise it as clearly as you do but that is really lovely and to go "I break it down into these different stages" and things like that and I think I throw myself into it a little but though those steps are achieved in the way I do it without saying "this is how I do it". So, no, that's lovely to

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<sup>134</sup> *Ke* means then in isiZulu

hear and what inspires your ideas when it comes to coming up with the concepts and the things of what you're going to create with light. Anything inspire you?

MD: (laughs) It's nature...

WM: I mean that's the biggest, if you want, the biggest light source out there it's, I mean it's all around us all the time and nature in what kind of way?

MD: No, I'd say it's nature and the social... you see the things that are happening around us they inspire me the most but then the main thing that's inspired me is the storyline because from the storyline that's where I come up with my own statement or rather my "what-if" question that I mentioned earlier...

WM: I was about to ask you to expand on that so please do because that's a lovely... that's a lovely idea and I think it's necessary to put on paper.

MD: "What-if" question is like... Okay you see, oh you're listening to... you listen to the whole concept of the piece. Let's just say the piece is about black tax<sup>135</sup> or let's just say the piece is about woman abuse. So you come up with a question that will summarise the whole concept but questioning it not answering it and then from the question you will answer using your lighting design, so you will answer it using the pictures, the colours yeah?

WM: And where do you find those inspira-... do you do mood boards or inspiration boards or is it all visual? You imagine it in your head.

MD: It's visual shame... it's visual. I walk with these files...

WM: No that's it... that's... no, some people... you will like go and find pictures and go these other things but we can also we use... we are imaginative people so using your imagination is a key aspect of it.

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<sup>135</sup> Black tax is a South African term that is now widely used around the world. A term acted out in Black communities, it refers to the financial support which is expected of a black working-class individual by their families. <https://editor.guardian.ng/life/black-tax-brotherhood-or-burden/> [Accessed 9 November 2022]

MD: Yeah...

WM: ...which I mean you kind of spoke it's...this idea of collaboration and it's clear that it's an important part of the process. We don't work in isolation. We're always part of a team... how do you collaborate, I mean, you obviously spoke a little bit, how do you collaborate with people in the process? How do you bring your ideas to their ideas?

MD: I always like, okay, I don't want to call myself a nonsense but I keep on following people, calling people, okay "please tell me about your concept", as I said designer for this piece "how are you going to come up with this set design?" "How are you going to come with the sound design?" You know, I keep on, communication for me is key and meeting up and discuss our concepts because at the end of the day there's one vision which is the production or that dance piece so we at the end of the day have to serve that vision and then... we don't want to go to the theatre and say "okay the lights are doing something else" and then the sound will say something else, so it's called communication for me and I'm always open to hear other people's point of views in those communications and sharing ideas.

WM: And it's a language thing it's... also I find it's almost we're having to learn each other's languages. Lighting has to learn what sound is doing, what the set is doing, what the choreography is doing and they have to learn ours, so you talk about communication being key; it really does become an important aspect of it...

MD: And I always say that... each production contains different people: your set, your sound, your lighting so at the end of the day it's all about collaboration so I'm like "okay, body and light, they collaborate, choreographer and lighting designer they collaborate, dancer and sound, costume and set, they all come together to produce one thing.

WM: It's all these little dialogues happening at the same time and when it works, it works and when it doesn't work it's generally quite noticeable: you can see that's not working with that. So that's an interesting way of understanding these little dialogues happening all the time with all the different aspects. Because it is... it's multi-sensorial and it's different things happening at the same time. Which brings me on to my next

point of this idea of 'sensory knowledge' and dealing with the senses obviously we're dealing with lighting that is very much about the visual sense but it's also how do other senses impact on our practice? And do they? Do they not? And... yeah... what is our memory of things? And how do we bring that into what it is that we do? Just so that, yeah, I don't know if anything this idea of sensory experience and how it impacts on performance?

MD: For me I think senses plays a huge role in this line of work especially the sense of sight, with the help of lighting, moving from different directions helping the sight. So, but with a dance, as a concern first the movement and bodies moving to space, the eye then is like "Okay, the dancer was here", okay and then they move to here and then the lighting designer as well in that particular order helps the eye to see or rather to... it directs the eye on where they should look. So it plays a huge role for me.

WM: And then it's also more than just the visual because it then starts to be the colours that we use, the feel, the atmosphere which is something more than just visual...

MD: ...which paints pictures (laughs)

WM: Yeah but also it creates feeling and it creates...

MD: A lot... a lot...

WM: ...and some of those are structured and some of them are your own ideas so it might also be different I think they're also quite... yes they're kind of common we go: the blue is colder and amber is warmer but there are there are things that you will bring to it and that might be your own life experience of how you see the world is slightly different.

MD: Mmm... (agreeingly)

WM: Do you work... I mean, you work at a venue where there's lots of productions in and out is there anybody you kind of enjoy working with or can work more closely with than anybody else?

MD: Ja... okay well if you say is there someone I enjoy working closely with you mean...

WM: ...in terms of the creat- ...or creative team or the choreographer or...

MD: Ja... There is, only because... the way they come in the venue prepared, knowing what they want...

WM: Can I ask who it is? because... you don't have to mention if it's not necessary...

MD: (laughs) ...No I can tell you it's fine. They come in the venue prepared and know exactly what they want: it's Michael Broderick, the lighting designer. So when he comes in the venue he knows exactly what he wants, although as you said, that we the designing process is different although he doesn't come with the lighting plan he just comes and okay "I need this, there, there, there" and "okay, sharp" and then we fix that and then done then you go to the board... he's prepared, he knows, he's got the cue list he knows which goes when and why. And another thing is that his... he knows how to work with people, he's good, but then when he gets to the venue, he humbles himself and you know he treats all of you the same.

WM: And I think we all learn from each other in that way and that's the important thing is, again it doesn't happen isolation, we all learn from each other - we see each other work, we see how people do things and again that's part of the experience of it. I think specifically here in Durban it's a small group of people who work in this industry and... and... I've been fortunate to be able to speak to people, like Michael and to have you on the same platform as we just kind of talk about it and figure it out... It's a... I hope that's some of what comes from these interviews. So I'm going to bring up the picture you sent so that we can look at an example of one of your lighting.



*Sullied* (2018) by Kristi-Leigh Gresse. National Arts Festiva, Makhanda. Photo by Megan Kelly/Cue

Cool so can you tell me a little bit about this and the work where the, what the project was?

MD: Oh that was *Sullied*<sup>136</sup> at Grahamstown festival<sup>137</sup>. The inspiration behind this picture, is the woman, the women in our society who get abused every day yet they still have faith and hoping that one day they will see the light. So I came up with the saying that says "there is light at the end of the tunnel" no matter how dark it is, but at the end of the tunnel there is light. So I came up with that... that statement which... helped me to design for this particular scene and the female figure you see in this picture... kept hoping that she will see the light at the end of the tunnel and if you look from her breast to her face, it is a bit brighter/highlighted the area of the body to indicate hope and faith and then there's a darker frame around them. So that you get the sense of darkness she's in and then darkened the face of the male figure and in the picture to indicate the darkness of his heart and then... our sense of sight is drawn to the woman... (The lights flash in her room) Oh my god...

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<sup>136</sup> *Sullied* is work by Standard Bank Young Artist for Dance, Kristi-Leigh Gresse originally created in 2018 and which one an Ovation Award at the National Arts Festival.

<sup>137</sup> The National Arts Festival (NAF) is the largest arts festival in South Africa and takes place in Makhanda in the Eastern Cape, formally known as Grahamstown and hence the referral to the Grahamstown Festival.

WM: (laughs)

MD: (laughs) What just happened?

WM: Little lighting effect there happened (laughs)

MD: Flip... ja neh... blackout and then lights out. Okay, okay as I was saying, I'm sorry about that. Okay, as I was saying our sense of sight is going to the woman's face to see the pain and her body language is expressing that he... she wants to get out but then she doesn't have power to do that because the guy is holding her hands.

WM: And what I really find interesting, we're talking about light on this almost metaphorical level when you're talking abo-... so... so we see, we talk about light and darkness, we talk... which is kind of metaphors for good and bad, and we talk about enlightenment, we talk about the light at the end of the tunnel being you know these things, light is so impactful in our lives and... I said it becomes it comes to mean something more than just brightness and dark, it's it becomes metaphorical, there's meaning to... to lighting and how we use it.

MD: Mmm ja, that's true. I always say that lighting is a storytelling on its own but then you are telling the story visually. You are painting...

WM: Yeah it is it's all storytelling and you said and obviously the ideas of collaboration come through within that. No, excellent thank you spoke really... because yeah, I mean, you spoke around atmosphere and tone and things like that and I said it's just as interesting I said almost metaphorical level of what life can possibly mean and it's not... and maybe the audience reads it differently and that's okay, you have your ideas and... and it collaborates with everybody else. So to then counter that, I'm going to bring up one of my designs it's a show I did last year in your theatre at the Drama<sup>138</sup> with Flatfoot Dance Company

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<sup>138</sup> The Drama Theatre is one of the venues at the Playhouse Company and seats 468 audience members. Mancane is currently the lighting technician for this venue.



*Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* (2021) Flatfoot Dance Company, performed at the Playhouse Drama Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson.

And again it's just to... what atmosphere... what moods does this picture evoke in you and again it senses or whatever it is... what do you feel when you see this? You also were fortunate to get to see this in the live, which I think is a very different experience from just bringing up a picture. So again, it becomes things of memory and what, what the picture evokes for you?

MD: Okay... the picture, for me automatically my sense of sight is drawn to the light behind neh? However, I am able to simultaneously see all the dancers on stage and identify that they are in isolated specials, dimmed compared to the lights behind, which for me evoke or evokes the social issues of self-quarantine or self-isolation that we are going through at the moment<sup>139</sup>. So, for me the performance and that bright light behind (laughs) ...it's very difficult because you are the designer... okay but anyways that light behind breaks a fourth wall<sup>140</sup> and then... the performers are saying "here we are isolated. Yes we have family, yes we have friends but we are... we have to isolate to follow protocol. We are not lonely in this isolation, we don't have jobs some of them..."

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<sup>139</sup> The piece was performed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and at this point the State of Disaster act was still in place, requiring a restriction of gatherings, especially indoors such as theatres, and encouraged people to self-isolate to avoid cross-contamination.

<sup>140</sup> The fourth wall is a theatrical convention, often marked by the proscenium arch, which places an invisible, imaginary wall between the performers and the audience.

some of them are mentally ill, yes they have to isolate to follow protocols". So with those dimmed specials, they are saying "our lights are fading out every day slowly while we are isolated from one another" but with this bright light shining to you, what are you going to do about this situation. Are you going to be able to manoeuvre around and change the situation or you're just going to sit there and do nothing?

WM: That's an excellent reading of it more so than I probably even put effort into making it but no those are the ideas, no thank you that is... and again there is and I think maybe it's a joy in what we do. There doesn't have to be a right answer... we are creating things in ways and yes, some it has to be... but things can be read differently and that's okay and part of the joy of it of what we do is that it can be read in a different way and people can take... make their own impressions of things and that's quite a that's quite a fortunate thing to be able to do. If somebody speaks lines and they get it wrong it's going have a different meaning whereas lighting we've got a bit of freedom and that's quite a nice place to be in and a quite nice opportunity to have and to be to be creative with.

MD: Mmm... mmm... ja, that's true.

MD: Okay. thank you, thank you - and again for what I'm trying to just do is find language and find how we speak about it because we don't speak about it often. We do it a lot and people see it and they... but they don't understand what it involves to get to there and then the importance of it and hopefully part of the research is realising that there is a real importance to lighting design and how it affects the work. So, any kind of general thoughts around lighting design in South Africa and one of the things I want to ask especially as a woman working in the industry how do you find it?

MD: (laughs) Yoh... okay it's... very nice to be a woman working in this because it's male-dominated industry however, *eish*<sup>141</sup>, you find people who will disrespect you just because, especially me because I'm a little tiny, you get in the venue and then they'll be like okay "no we are waiting for a lighting designer" you'll be like okay "I am the

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<sup>141</sup> *Eish* is southern African an exclamation expressive of surprise, agreement, disapproval, etc. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/eish> [Accessed 9 November 2022]

lighting designer" okay and then "*hhayi*<sup>142</sup>, we'll see, shame..." "oh *wena*<sup>143</sup>, we'll see, shame". They just, they look at the person, especially if it is a woman, and then they think we are unable to deliver because maybe I don't know, we are weak in their eyes but sometimes it is really difficult but most of the time it's very nice especially in Durban, it's very nice. But then...

WM: ... How do you overcome it when, when it's not nice? Do you have any strategies or is it just about doing the work and showing that's what it is?

MD: For me it's just showing... just doing the work and then show the people that I am not as weak as you think I am. I can deliver and this is the real... these are the results.

WM: And then, I mean, it's this question of, I mean of tech... how much technology has changing what it is that we do... How are you finding it? How do you work with it? How do you... in terms of... especially moving lights and intelligent fixtures as opposed to generic... How do you find working with it?

MD: Okay...Can you please maybe rephrase the questions.

WM: This is just like, I mean lighting technology is changing quite quickly so we have more intelligent fixtures, less reliance on generic. How do you work with that? Does it affect your working process? Do you adapt? Do you miss, do you prefer to work with intelligent fixtures as opposed to generic fixtures?

MD: Okay... okay as a lighting designer I'm not going focus on dance now specifically...

WM: ...No that's fine, that's fine

MD: ...but for me the generics, I prefer the generics when I am doing dance and then the moving heads when maybe I'm doing musicals and all and, but still you know the generics are the thing man... moving heads for me it's just a cherry on top you know.

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<sup>142</sup> Hhayi translates from isiZulu as 'not'.

<https://translate.google.com/?sl=auto&tl=en&text=hhayi&op=translate&hl=en> [Accessed 9 November 2022]

<sup>143</sup> *Wena* is the isiZulu word for 'you' <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/wena> [Accessed 9 November 2022]

I like to play with colour with generics, to challenge my mind in finding out which colour to use because of the skin tone and so forth so I'd say I prefer generics however if it's a musical then obviously I'll add the moving heads<sup>144</sup>.

WM: And I think it comes from also a place of finding what is absolutely necess-...when you've got something that can do everything it becomes to showy... but especially something like dance where you can try to simplify things and we often forced to simplify and find the essence of things so what can one light do more so than having everything that might just be for the showy effect? Whereas something... there is something beautiful about a side light hitting a body in a certain way...

MD: Mmhmm... (nods in agreement)

WM: ...that's maybe a little bit different than 30 lights on or turning and moving at the same time and it depends on what it's used for and I think contemporary dance, specifically the tone of it's very different and it requires something to match that... Any other kind of thoughts around lighting design? If I have to think of like an upcoming generation of people what... would you say to them coming into this industry?

MD: (laughs) Okay...okay I'd say it's... it's a very interesting industry but it's challenging mentally. You have to be prepared to use your mind, to be prepared to use your sixth sense, you need to be prepared to get your hands dirty, obviously, and then just know that you will work tirelessly until the production is produced. Until you see the result and you need to be someone who is a team player. Who is able to collaborate because... the production is not made by one person. It's a game of collaboration. So that's all I can say.

WM: And then one last question because you're the only other person I know of going to do it... you have applied to do your Honours and study further. So I want to know why and what you're looking to get out of this... in terms of tertiary studies because there is very little in South Africa that people can do to study lighting further maybe it's

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<sup>144</sup> Intelligent lighting fixtures where the head of the fixture can rotate and be pointed where you need to or be programmed via the lighting desk to move in a predetermined pattern

not also we're not really studying lighting we... we're... it's lighting as theory, lighting as practice and things like that...

MD: Well for me, it's technique, okay, because talking from my experience if I didn't study Drama and Production Studies I don't think I'll be able to analyse or rather come up with the statements that I come up with when I'm designing. So it's very important to study because of those techniques that you won't get from a person...

WM: ...because those are ideas they're not... they're not... it's not the physical practical thing of a light does this. It's a conceptual understanding that you look, that you're looking to expand, am I correct?

MD: Yes... yes... yes that's true. So going to school and further education is very important just to... knowledge and those techniques that you can't learn from someone but you need to go to school to... to learn.

WM: And what do you hope to achieve from it when you're finished?

(Both laugh)

MD: Okay... I won't lie, my goal is to have a Doctorate. So me studying as building up to you know, the PhD and I am hoping that I will get as much as I can, knowledge, and I'm hoping to learn something new that I don't know now because I'm that kind of a person who likes to be challenged, who likes to learn something new every day you know.

WM: And that's important to what it is that we do we are constantly working...

MD : ...and learning...

WM: ... and learning. Every day is learning and learning... as I said it's not necessarily about what a light... but it's also conceptual learning and thematic learning and learning styles and so that's an interesting progress and I don't know many other people doing it so it's, thank you for speaking a little bit about what people can do as I

said it's not necessary, you don't have to learn the lighting design practice, there are other things you can also do alongside it that contribute as much to the process.

MD: And then someone once said to me "once you stop learning then you are good as a dead person", because you know you need to constantly keep on learning every day.

WM: Excellent, thank you Mancane. I think that's enough and I know you do have to run... but we covered everything anything else from you?

MD: Yes from me to you, please explain the picture I sent to you.

WM: Which one? Yours?

MD: How do you see it? Ja, my picture.

WM: Your picture, actually that was quite interesting because I didn't... I didn't think of kind of that, I mean obviously, I mean I'm looking at the sculpturing of the bodies the kind of the technical but that... I noticing how brightly lit Kristi-Leigh is compared to.. that idea of hope, no definitely is the, I mean that's... there's also this hardness, there's also harshness to that light that bright white light that...as you said it feels with the guy holding her with that hard light, just that very oppressive and kind of trying to find a way out. I mean obviously you know the work, I can't I don't know the context as I don't know the hope, I can't see the hope yet in the picture is that at this picture this moment it does look very hard and very suffocating and harsh. But hopefully there is always hope (both laugh).

MD: And yours?

WM: In fact... I mean you nailed actually in terms of the work, all the things that the piece was doing. For me it was a real interesting thing of playing with that backlight of the projector because so often a projector is projecting onto a surface and that is it. And the whole idea of this was what happens if we use the projection light as a light source in itself? And then that becomes something else. So there was also ideas of

the light at the end of the tunnel. Funny enough there was a... there was something like that, so that you have this backlight but part mostly it was really about lighting the audience because we're still under fairly strict Covid protocols of, I think there were 50 people in the audience or whatever it is and there was a lot of things, and you just you open up the space of watching. Usually would watch theatre dance in a darkened theatre, at the end to reveal the audience and the performers in the isolations and the audience in the isolation was part of the statement that needed to come across from it. (Laughs) I mean you were there you got to see some of it in the person and they said their ideas and ideas and we try things out the whole idea I had, no idea if it would work until we got into the theatre...

MD: ...Mmhmm...And it worked.

WM: And so I there was a bit of an inspiration from a... I was at that point doing videos for Jay Pather and funny enough it was also a show in the Drama Theatre but he did this constant thing of taking up and down the back cyclorama and it wasn't used for this effect but it was, I just... I love the idea of revealing the projector and then closing it off again and then for what this work needed for me it was trying to find something at the end that just gave it a difference, a different feel and it's these ideas that we try and sometimes it works sometimes it doesn't. I was fortunate in this case that it hopefully works

MD: It worked

(Both laugh)

WM: I'm taking it down to the National Arts Festival in a week and a half's time and I can't do the same effect and I'm still trying to figure out how I can do the same effect without being able to fly out the screen and the reveal projector and so it's going to be an interesting one because it's trying to then figure out what is the essence of it? What is the effect that I want to create. Is it about the blinding light? Is it about the revealing the audience? is it about... I'm still figuring that one out as to how I translate the idea into another space without being able to do the same thing and that's... often what we do, we're trying we're constantly shifting and finding ideas and going well that doesn't

work and this does work how can I make that work in here I mean you deal must deal with it a lot because you have traveling shows that'll come from somewhere else and you need to find a way to adapt and as lighting we are the things that probably have to adapt the most, because every space is different, equipment is different I mean the set they'll bring the same set and put it up in roughly the same place the lighting has to shift and we are constantly shifting and adapting.

WM: Okay... anything else are you good?

MD: No I'm good.

WM: Cool and let's leave the recording as that. So thank you very much Mancane. I'm just going to push stop.

**APPENDIX F**  
**Transcript of interview with Oliver Hauser (OH) via Zoom**  
**19 August 2022**  
**Interviewed by Wesley Maherry (WM)**

WM: Okay, let's begin. Thank you very much for joining me Oliver for a little discussion around lighting design and in particular design practice. We'll talk a little bit about what you're doing. But going through the questions was, the first one was where were you born? And where do you live now?

OH: So I was born in Johannesburg, born and raised in Joburg at the Joburg Gen<sup>145</sup>, so I'm very much a Joburg boy and I always will be and I currently stay in Killarney, also in Johannesburg and I've, ja, I've just been here my whole life.

WM: A choice to stay, or I mean, because I mean you're talented enough that you probably could also work anywhere in the world, but ja? (Laughs)

OH: Yeah, it's various different factors involved. I really like the fast pace that Joburg has to offer. I like it because it's a cultural hub you know there's, there's a lot of different cultures in... in Joburg there's a there's a very different energy to any of the other cities in the world actually which I've always kind of been in love with. A lot of people hate Joburg especially if you come from the coast you can't stand Joburg but if... you've grown up here it's a different energy. I've found that the artistic landscape in terms of live performance is ripe and... people are always pushing the limits here in Joburg, in terms of live performance to some... degree it's where some, in my opinion, some of the best work is happening and that's what sort of kept me in Joburg and also some of my... long-term clients like Greg<sup>146</sup>, for instance has... sort of kept me in Joburg as well. He tours all over the world constantly but, we... it all started at the Dance Factory<sup>147</sup> in Joburg so, ja my love lies here I mean obviously we all know South Africa

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<sup>145</sup> The Johannesburg General Hospital is a central hospital in Johannesburg now known as the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital

<sup>146</sup> Gregory Vuyani Maqoma is the founder and Executive Director of Vuyani Dance Theatre, an internationally acclaimed dance company established in 1999.

<sup>147</sup> The Dance Factory is situated in the cultural precinct of Newtown, central Johannesburg. Along with the Moving Into Dance Mophatong Studios, where Vuyani Dance Theatre are housed, form a dance hub in the city.

got its problems but we're South Africans and we know how to deal with them, to some extent that's what it's keeping me here.

WM: I think when we find those communities that we fit into, it is a choice to stay and it is choice to work in these environments that we actually are quite fortunate...

OH: Ja...

WM: ...I know with other people I've spoken to already have also had similar ideas of yeah... I think we're quite fortunate to be able to still work and do... and with these kinds of people that we have found and that you keep us here.

OH: Ja I mean it's... it's very similar to the way it works in Europe, where you find your little artistic community and you find the people that you click and gel with creatively and... you kind of somewhat stick with those people because you see eye to eye and... you're just on the same wavelength whereas you can branch out from there but often it's very difficult to find a group of people or at least it could be a director, choreographer, who sort of share the same wavelength as you and I find that a lot of ideas differ and that's what artistic collaboration is all about. But truly finding that one person or two or three people that you really, really just see eye to eye with and... you kind of don't struggle to create work with each other and those are kind of few and far between and it takes time to find those kind of people, so and I found those people those people in Joburg and I think it's just part of being a creative in general especially being a lighting designer. A lot of people say actually a lot of designers say that lighting is 40 percent actually lighting and 60 percent networking and 60 percent speaking to people and being involved in social networking, to some extent. That's most certainly the case in, I think overseas and I think it's somewhat the case here to a certain extent but it's finding the right people and gelling with the right people is a hard thing in its own right.

WM: So next question is then how were you introduced to lighting design?

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<https://www.joburg.org.za/play/Pages/Play%20in%20Joburg/Things%20to%20do/ATTRACTIONS/ATTRACTIONS%202/The-Dance-Factory.aspx> [Accessed 15 December 2022]

OH: I went to the National School of the Arts when I was in high school and I went to the School of Arts for drama because my mom thought I was going to be the next Brad Pitt which clearly is not the case...

(pause)

WM: I think you muted yourself...

OH: Sorry,

WM: Yeah...

OH: I was just thinking before and no one really knew how to use the lighting system or at least knew how to patch, good old patch bay, simple patch bay and a dimmer and Strand GLX<sup>148</sup> and no one sort of knew how to use the system and I kind of was always interested in how things worked backstage rather than actually performing. I mean obviously had to perform and I did but I was always so interested in how... live performance comes together from the darkness of the wings. So I remember I got roped up because I was, essentially the teachers found out that I was really interested in that so they were like, I was stage managing and I was... mopping stages, the stage and doing all the 'nitty gritty' that no one else wanted to do. None of my mates wanted to do and I just... one of my teachers, my movement teachers, asked me if I knew anything about lighting and I told them I absolutely know nothing about lighting but I've always been interested to learn about kind of how it works and all of that and he's like "well our system is", excuse my French, "[fucked], so don't you want to find out how to fix it?" and that's what I did, I made it my mission. It took me about two weeks. I made it my mission to fix the lighting grid basically you've got new lamps for the old Strand Pattern 123's<sup>149</sup> which actually were much older (laughs) they didn't come out when I was in high school but they were the only fixtures that we had there and... ja, I got the system up and running you know fixed some plug tops and the dimmers were still

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<sup>148</sup> An old manual lighting desk with faders to control the percentages of the dimmers.

<sup>149</sup> Strand Pattern 123's are an old Fresnel type lighting fixture that were very common in many venues around South Africa.

actually working they just needed some fuses and... I worked out you know little old analogue, oh gosh what do you call it? Forget its name but before DMX...

WM: Yes... yes.

OH: Din... [Fok]...Name escapes me now but anyway, I fixed that cable and, and got a six-pack dimmer working and I lit the next school production using a six-way dimmer Strand GLX, which was actually quite fancy for then and open white... I had I think I had about eight pattern...

(Pause)

Sorry these guys are really trying to get a hold of me because my car is in the workshop and they are really trying to get a hold of me so I'll call them back afterwards.

WM: Okay...

OH: Anyway and then I don't know that first show it was, oh gosh, not *Orpheus*... *Othello*, it was *Othello*...

WM: Yeah...

OH : ...and I let it with yeah I think it was eight Pattern 123's, a six-way dimmer and a Strand GLX and it was great. I had no gels, I had nothing and I just played with where I could put the lights, and in terms of how far I could run cable but that was about it and... like from there that bug bit me and I was like cool, this is really interesting I want to do this. This, this is cool. Is there a profession? Is there... any like... do people actually do this? and that kind of started me off.

WM: And did you study formally thereafter?

OH: So I spent five years at National School of the Arts and then I went to... Tswane University of Technology and I did Entertainment Technology. Majoring in lighting and sound which is such a bizarre combination...

WM: (laughs)

OH: ...like no one does lighting and sound it should be lighting and set...

WM: Ja...

OH: ...I mean and it was never an option which was bizarre to me but I did lighting and sound for three years and I got a National Diploma and I did some Arts Administration. I've got my degree in Arts Administration and now I'm currently actually studying Illumination Engineering, which is a fancy...

WM: (laughs) Which is... just what I was about to ask because I do know that you are doing that now as well you said.

OH: I'm doing my post grad in Illumination Engineering and I plan to do my Masters and that's like a fancy term for architectural lighting, which is also a field that I'm incredibly passionate about and also that I feel that I can add a theatrical feel to and... my sort of live... creative side of things and kind of add that flair to... the architectural environment which...really lacks that... aesthetic...

WM: Yes...

OH: ...so, Ja...

WM: No, that's interesting and ja, I don't know many people doing that avenue as well so it's ja... really fascinating to extend it even further...

OH: (connection breaks)...It was Covid that triggered it and I didn't have nothing to do... the one and only time that I could actually do the studies because it... takes a lot of your time as you know...

WM: 100 percent, I understand that...

OH: and if there was any time to do it was then, so I took that opportunity.

WM: and then it's one of the things I... experienced it and this idea of, did you learn from a mentor once you had kind of started working in the industry? And then the question is also then is there anybody that you're mentoring younger coming through, this passing on of knowledge... idea?

OH: I actually worked very closely, so after varsity, I worked very closely with a gentleman named Declan Randall and he took me under his wing and I worked for Congo Blue Design directly after varsity so where a lot of my peers went to production companies, like corporate production companies, I was very lucky to get a place with... as Declan's associate essentially and he taught me most of what I know and at the time he was somewhat of a kind of cutting edge kind of sort of new age lighting designer, pretty young and doing a lot of the musicals and... and big shows that were happening on stage in... in Joburg at the time. And he also was doing architectural lighting as well so Congo Blue was a mixture of architectural lighting and theatrical lighting. He had broken into those two worlds and I suppose that's probably what planted the seed for the architectural side of things for me as well... at a much... at an early age but I mean I would sit with him in, as in the very beginning it would be just sitting in the theatre till 02:00 am in the morning and watching him programme and just seeing the entire design process come to life. So that that gave me a good boost into the theatrical side of things, because during... at varsity we would always work on corporates: we would be loading in and loading out corporate events. So we didn't get much time in theatre except for the theatrical productions that the varsity put on and then, so essentially, when I started working for Declan I really got to get into the space, I got to experience the space and I got to experience how a professional was actually creating a design from scratch. I would go into the office with him and I would help him with CAD drawings and often it would be the start to the finish of an entire production whether it be a musical or a dance production or even an architectural project. So I was very fortunate to have been pulled under his wing and taught by him in that in that essence and so ja, he's... basically pretty much responsible for a lot of the work that I do and a lot of the influence on the work that I do.

WM: And is... and do you have anybody that you're mentoring coming up through the industry... at this point?

OH: At the moment, no because I actually worked for SplitBeam<sup>150</sup> for quite some time and during that time it was just too busy to, well obviously during Covid there was no work and during my very short time in the beginning, when I first joined SplitBeam, I was working as in-house designer and... head of lighting and there was just, there was just a lot of work to do so I just didn't have the time to mentor anyone and right now I have no one mentoring me at the moment no one's really asked, essentially

WM: It's... I think, I mean there was a bit of discussions in Joburg... I know we're battling right now just kind of the future of the industry, there is a concern of... like we said when we started we didn't think of lighting design as an option as a career or something that, and we just found I mean I think Covid has affected that quite dramatically that a lot of people who were working in the industry have moved on to either doing other things or moved on to another country or whatever it is. So we are, I know, ja finding that pool of people that are... that have the knowledge and also the new, I mean new, people coming into the industry is getting smaller and smaller.

OH: It is... it is and it's a real shame because you know I'm... so happy to have even if I'm ridiculously busy it doesn't really matter. I mean I'm now on my own again and I'm so happy to have someone sit with me and if it's a high-pressure environment, it's fine we just need to know when to ask questions and it's something... that I really enjoy doing as well is... is... is teaching lighting is... a real passion of mine I've actually come up with a with a one day and a one week crash course into stage lighting design, which is something that I actually implemented at AFDA for a while and that's what kind of sparked... sparked me into kind of creating a little tiny little syllabus or like a crash-course into stage lighting and it kind of grew from there and I just really enjoyed the sessions that I had with... a lot of the students there. And then I often, I would often get calls, so this was prior to SplitBeam, I would often get calls regarding me coming

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<sup>150</sup> Splitbeam is a member of the Gearhouse Group of companies. We provide a professional equipment rental hire service and stockholding that meets the specific needs of the theatre industry and is priced towards long-term rental. <https://www.splitbeam.co.za/> [Accessed 15 December 2022]

to like Barry Straydom and would call me to go to Saint Mary's school and give the kids a crash course, a day crash course which is almost impossible but there's certain elements in lighting that you can touch on and you can give an overview in a day but it's a lot to take in. But I do believe there's a major shortage, a skill shortage in... design. There's a lot of technicians but even the technicians themselves are not quite at the level that... the internationals are running at. I tour quite often so I know what that gap is and the gap is quite large... which is seriously unfortunate because I think we can fix it, but obviously there's such a select few of us that... can donate our time which makes it very difficult to broaden that scope. I think DWR<sup>151</sup> is also doing a lot of good work somewhat and you know Michael Broderick is helping them with training and I think that's a good platform because they've got the reach in terms of marketing and all of that but it's definitely it's an area that we are struggling in, I mean just from for me on *Third World Express*<sup>152</sup> like I just really wanted to explore the notion of not programming myself and actually taking a step back and having a programme of my own and me sitting in the auditorium... and actually watching the show...

WM: ...Being a designer... (laughs)

OH: ... which I've never done...

WM: ...It's a big difference. I mean I remember when Patrick Woodroffe<sup>153</sup> came and when you sit there and you be a designer and you've got these people, I mean we're often in these positions where it's impossible and we don't have that luxury. You're setting up, you're plotting, you're designing, you're managing...

OH: ... You're doing everything...

WM: ...you're doing everything...

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<sup>151</sup> DWR Distribution is a technical supply company based in Johannesburg but also offer training in various aspects of live events/theatre.

<sup>152</sup> *Third World Express* is political musical written and directed by Gregory Maqoma and contains original music by Mark Cheyne and premiered at the Joburg Theatre in 2022. <https://www.702.co.za/articles/454833/new-musical-based-on-sa-s-1990s-politics-hits-joburg-theatre-on-sunday> [Accessed 15 December 2022]

<sup>153</sup> Patrick Woodroffe is an internationally recognized lighting director and was brought out to host a lighting workshop at the UJ Arts Centre in Johannesburg by DWR Distribution in 2017 along with his colleague Roland Griel.

OH: ...And the... the problem with that is, you don't you, the only thing that suffers is the design itself and you obviously, major burnout and (laughs) but essentially the design suffers because you can't watch the piece for what it is because you're so busy doing so many other things at the same time and that's always been the nature of the industry in South Africa because there's never been major... budgets for almost any production and that means that there's no budget for a programmer, there's no budget for the total design, there's no budget for the guys mopping the stage, there's... Whereas the rest of the world is working on a totally different... a totally different mindset. The U.S. is... it's crazy I mean unions manage everything in the U.S. If you move a ladder like that's your job you don't... move a ladder, don't go and move a ladder in the U.S. because someone's going to say "hey you're taking my job", but essentially you're just going back to kind of doing everything yourself. It just impacts the design itself. I think I've done it once where I've had the luxury of having a programmer and it was amazing to see the results of the design and... the true intricacy that you can that you could nit-pick on and fix and change and really mould and kind of build that design to what it actually should be and what... it really is in your mind you know but when you're concentrating on the console and... trying to catch up while you're rehearsing, you also programming and it's just... you just never really get to achieve the design that you that... you that you really want. And that's... one of our biggest downfalls I think in our industry as well, there's just not this... there's no real culture of having a programmer and having the designer as a separate entity.... so ja, I mean that's... about it on that side.

WM: Ja, which then brings me on to the question of, kind of your lighting design process, I mean it's the things we don't often talk about. So it's just trying to understand... and again well I'm looking specifically at contemporary dance...

OH: Mmhmm...

WM: ...which I think is different to other art forms and how we create lighting for them. So ja, and the kind of, the lighting design process for contemporary dance and kind of what your process is... on that?

OH: So contemporary dance and just dance in general has always been my favourite... my favourite medium to light, just simply because of the creative freedom and I'm sure you're also aware of that...

WM: 100 percent agree. (Laughs)

OH: ...it's... a beautiful art form because also you're not worrying always about visibility. Visibility is taking somewhat of a back seat which is, which is very interesting because it also opens up a new world into kind of moulding the space and moulding the body without always worrying about visibility. But essentially what I normally do is, I'll take *Broken Chord*<sup>154</sup> for instance, it's the first real dance production that I was involved in from the very, very, very, very beginning of the creative process, whereas in the idea was just an idea it was nothing else but an idea and I started with the production at that moment, which doesn't happen very much often...

WM: Which is very... ja I was about to say, it's a rare thing...

OH: ...Ja... it's actually almost, it happens almost never, especially in South Africa you, they will always bring on your lighting designer or sound engineer two weeks before they open or maybe a month before they open so at least they've got some kind of content. But I've always believed with dance, especially when you're creating a new work, it's important to have the input from the entire creative team because it helps mould the work from the very early stages and it helps open up ideas from a technical perspective for the director or the choreographer. So my experience with *Broken Chord* was quite interesting because it was a work that was very difficult to light and it still is a challenge to light so the whole idea around this production was to create a dance piece that could be performed in any environment. Which is in itself is a major challenge because you could... perform in a church or you could perform in the street or you could perform anywhere, almost like Industrial Theatre<sup>155</sup> essentially, but it

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<sup>154</sup> *Broken Chord* tells the story of the first Black South African Choir which, towards the end of the 19th century, performed in Great Britain and North America, and inspired choreography that talks of African identity, migrations, and closed borders. It is written and directed by Gregory Maqoma and premiered in 2021 and continues to tour internationally. <https://www.tut.ac.za/news-and-press/article?NID=486> [Accessed 15 December 2022]

<sup>155</sup> More than a new form of communication, Industrial Theatre has become a new form of training...It has resulted in a more holistic approach to communication which is both engaging and also promotes dialogue and reflection. <https://howround.com/industrial-theatre-born-south-africa> [Accessed 15 December 2022]

needs to have something that gives it character and that thing that gives it character is light and trying to give it that character and not lose the continuity in completely different spaces is... was a major, major, major challenge. So essentially what we did was we'd come into... we started with almost just ideas of what the piece is going to be about and there was a seed, the seed of the story so the story was about this choir that that toured and we worked with that seed essentially and we'd go into the rehearsal room and we would workshop or at least Greg would workshop, just play around, he would play around with the performers until they created some sort of a narrative. So it wasn't like someone sat down and wrote a script because dance is very different. Dance doesn't rely on a script but there still is a story to be told. So from that aspect it's very different from drama or typical theatre and it also somewhat makes it a little bit more difficult because you don't know where the piece is going to go and it often evolves so much more and changes constantly so being involved from the very beginning is a real bonus because you can... you get the idea... you get an idea of the concept but not so much of the structure, in the beginning and I think that's super important because then you can get an idea of how you want to mould the piece in terms of the overall feel and the atmosphere that you want to create. So you don't... you're not thinking about cues, you're not thinking about anything like that. You're thinking about what kind of atmosphere you want to create for this piece. So we would sit in rehearsals, or at least workshop rehearsals, we sat in for about two weeks I think it was and I would, I mean I was also doing set as well, so I was kind of bringing in different props to play with you, bringing in different elements that the cast could just play with and a lot of it just got chucked out because it just didn't really work and it wasn't something like "oh I'm choosing this for the production" it was more like "yoh, maybe we can try this" or "can we try that", you know, "can we bring a par can in and you know switch off all the lights and play around with just walking around with this par can and see what we can create", simple stuff, so it was more the experimental phase which is very interesting to me and a vital part of the creative process in the very beginning. And then obviously the piece starts to take shape now it starts to... it starts to evolve into a story. Not all dance pieces have a story but this specific one did start to have a story but it wasn't a literal story it, was more of we had sections... sections in the piece. So we basically found out that cool this is the beginning, this is the middle and this is the end and that structure started to evolve more until we had this timeline and that timeline then created the concept of now, we can start looking at

understanding how we want to create each part of this timeline and that's where the cueing would come in. Then after that entire process then we started to kind of refine, you refine the different sections, so we would go through each section of the timeline and mould that timeline and tweak that timeline and the dancers would... Greg would start to work in choreography but it was also mixed with sound and live vocals. So the entire piece is a mixture of live vocals and dance obviously. So, it was a mixture: we had a musical director on site as well who was creating the music as well, so he was composing the music at the same time, so we had many different elements that were all being rehearsed all at once which was really interesting to be involved with and eventually we kind of locked down each scene and we locked down and we tweaked each part of the timeline and then from there it was... a process of working out... for now I had enough information at that stage to try and put my ideas on paper. So that was the next step was to put all my ideas on paper and work out how I'm going to light this thing in an unconventional space as opposed to a theatre and I'm just using this as an example because it's just easier to explain it with a production in mind...

WM: That's great...

OH: ...So the next... the next stage was "cool how am I gonna light this thing? And how are we going to place fixtures... where we're going to place fixtures? What colours am I going to use" and that whole process in itself is often the hardest process for me lighting-wise, is figuring out a good base for the design and then working on that base and then pulling it into CAD, and what I will often do is I'll sketch out my design, first, by hand not like professionally... not like the old-school guys did with stencils and stuff like that but I'll literally just take a piece of paper and I will draw what I think... where I think things need to go whether it be and I'll sketch what kind of instruments I to need to use whether it be a profile or moving light or a fresnel or whatever the instrument might be and I just do just a basic sketch and that came from early days when I was at school when I had to draw up a lighting plan it would be literally on a piece of paper or a piece of tissue or what whatever the hell it was whatever, get my hands on and getting those ideas as a visual reference. So it was more of a visual reference for me getting my ideas on paper and seeing it in sort of as a visual plan view essentially and then I would start kind of working it into CAD essentially. But that's very... that's a very difficult process, especially when you haven't actually done the production or you don't

have a venue to put the production in yet so you can't work in a space, so you can't say cool here's the theatre

WM: ... this goes there...

OH: ...and you know what I mean? It was, and that was one of the biggest challenges was like we still need to sell this piece but we need to design the lighting for it as well. So essentially it actually stopped. I stopped putting it into CAD and I decided that I was rather going to think of the design as a feel rather than something that I would put on paper. So I decided that this is what I wanted to feel in each scene and that's what I jotted down so I made sure that I made notes of each scene and how I wanted it to feel in each scene. And that formed a good base for me when we finally sold the show and we went to our first venue that helped me create the design itself on paper...

WM: ...ultimately that's what we're trying to do is whatever the technical is, it is to create a look, a feel and an atmosphere.

OH: Absolutely. And also to try and you know, as we all know, lighting needs to help tell this story and then dance it's very different because you're not physically, I mean you're physically telling the story but you're not telling it...

WM: ... verbally...

OH: ...you know, so light plays a huge role in dance in trying to help tell that story and a lot of people who watch dance, feel dance, they don't necessarily try and follow the story, they want to feel something or be moved in some way when they watch a dance piece because also dance, contemporary dance is extremely subjective. When you walk out the theatre, every person has a different... walks away with something different because it's not literal in many respects so that's why light plays such an important role and that's why I like to build in that process between putting it down on paper and the rehearsal process. So attend the rehearsal, figure out how you want to feel in each piece and how you want it to look in each piece without thinking about the instruments. That's very difficult at some point but essentially that little part of the process I think is super important with dance because creating that mood and

atmosphere, for those moments is crucial and then how you gonna do that is another story, how you actually gonna execute that is another story and that's the next part of the process. With the drama it's a different process where you have to read the script, you have to I mean, we were always taught you read the script three times so you'll watch rehearsals but before you even watch rehearsals you'll read the script three times the first one is to get an idea of the story, the second time is to highlight specific lighting changes or specific... scene changes anything that affects lighting, and the third time is jot down your notes and write down where you think cues are gonna go right? So it's... it's a different process but in terms of contemporary dance this is my process. Then essentially we sold the piece and we put it into... I needed to now figure out how I'm gonna create what I have in my head. And the first venue was the Palau de la Musica in Spain, which is a massive concert hall and it's built for, specifically for, orchestras and choirs and this was a very unique space because it's not built for what we're very used to. So I had to I had to come up with a way of using the instruments that they had because obviously there wasn't much money in terms of renting extra gear and all of that and which is always a challenge as you know. So with the base of...

(Connection interruption)

OH: ...that's them calling me, calling me again, sorry.

WM: (laughs)

OH: ...and essentially it actually became relatively easy for me to light the piece because I had done so much research and we had gone through that workshop phase and we had, I'd been there from the very beginning it was actually... gear that they had and used space that they had to create what I had in my mind because I knew exactly what I wanted to do and the challenge was to try and select and use the space in such a way to try and kind of...

WM: ... all those ideas...

OH: ...show what I needed to do. And then obviously you'd, we'd need to get into the space so now you've done your CAD drawing, and you've worked out what instruments you're going to use, you've worked out what colours you're going to use. I was obviously very fortunate in this production that pretty much everything was moving lights which is not what I envisioned in my head because I love to think of conventionals<sup>156</sup> always when I start lighting. I don't think of lighting a production with moving lights the first time I see a production and that's just my own... and that's just from growing up in an industry that wasn't moving lights

WM: ...fully automated...

OH: ...to make it into the mainstream ja, it was... where... I was studying and I was learning at a time where moving lights were very expensive for theatre and they weren't quite there yet, moving lights were just not quite there yet, they were on Broadway and they were on West End and on productions that had money but we you know I grew up just using conventionals you know and learning how to use gels. But it was an interesting... it was an interesting segway because I was in the industry and I still... I'm in the industry in this amazing fourth industrial revolution of lighting, it's incredible. So I designed this piece with conventionals in mind but then I had an entirely moving light rig essentially. So I lit it as if I had conventionals because that's what I had in mind, so...

WM: that's the feel...

OH: Exactly... and none of the moving lights actually moved during the production unless they were doing a move in black...

WM: (laughs)

OH: ...that was pretty much it, there was no flash and trash there was none of that. So I lit it as if I was lighting it in a space that only had conventionals or generics and because also, in the touring process and you've always got to think, especially if you're

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<sup>156</sup> Another term for generic lighting fixtures

lighting a piece, you've got to ask yourself the question "whether you're going to tour the piece, or not?" and that's going to affect the design as a whole. Often the first premiere of the piece will be slightly different to what the touring piece will be, always. But every piece that I light especially, dance I light it in order to tour so I make... the design needs to be efficient, super, super efficient because if you design a piece and you deliver something that cannot be delivered somewhere else because of budget or anything like that, then you are at a crossroad and you end up spending a lot more time on the design and redesigning it for tour. So just as a rule of thumb, I always go into a design thinking that it's going to tour. Often it would be a question to the creative team is this thing going to tour and if there's a maybe then there it is...

WM: ... bear that in mind...

OH: I'm going to design it in that way you know. If it's a once-off and it's something that might just tour the country or whatever and you have a good idea of the venues that it's going to be in, then no problem, super, super easy to relatively get an idea of how you want to do it but it's also about creating an efficient lighting design. I think a lot of people miss that: is creating a design as a once off versus creating a design for touring is quite a challenge because you often give up a lot of little things that you really want in the design because of budget restraints. But it's the same concept as you're given 10 par cans to light an entire show, you use every single one of those par cans to their limit, in terms of intensity and colour because that's pretty much the only thing, and beam angle you know and that's the only thing you can do with those 10 par cans. You use them to their full extent whereas if you have a rig of 100 moving lights you're only going to use the rig to 20 percent of what they can really do...

WM: ...Create the same... ja

OH: ...so design efficiency essentially and that's... and that was also involved in this creative process or the design process...

WM: But if your... but if your ideas are concrete as you're talking about... of how the mood is, what it is that you want to create in each of the scenes, you should be able to use similar equipment or things like that to be able to create that...

OH: Exactly because...

WM: Ja...

OH: ...because you've got your narrative, you've got your lighting narrative

WM: That's it...

OH: ...and if you've got your lighting narrative, and I find the best way is to write down that narrative. Write it down because if you don't write it down you forget and you and also like I'm a little bit ADD that way where as if I don't write [ \_shit\_ ] down I don't remember stuff and then I veer off the path that I was that I was traveling during the rehearsal process and during that workshop process. So it's so important to just write [shit] down and collect your ideas and then put it in front of you and then ingest it because that's... that for me is the most important thing. Then actually putting the design together using different rigs becomes somewhat of second nature because you have your lighting design narrative in your head. One of the biggest challenges is trying to explain that narrative to someone who doesn't understand light, that is the hardest part especially when you're doing a production like *Broken Chord* where I'm very lucky that Greg gets my... and he trusts my creative decisions so even though he can't envision it before it's on stage, he... we have that trust whereas a lot of directors and choreographers don't have that trust and then they limit you in many ways whereas they go "no, it must be... it must be that look" or "it must be like that" but at the same time you... I find a lot of designing is educating as well, it's educating your fellow creative team constantly actually is not educating in a in a forceful way where "No! Green on faces is going to look like [shit]". No, it's not more like "listen can we use this kind of green because maybe that kind of green is going to work" you know what I mean or "maybe can we try something else? Let me show you what it's going to look like and you tell me if you like it". So it's more that kind of approach to try and convince the creative team that you... what your ideas are...

WM: Yeah...

OH: ...because everyone is...

WM: because often it's a... it's a language thing and it comes out... it's the different languages that we speak in these different areas and often lighting's in the middle of it all...

OH: It is...

WM: ...where you're having to directly speak to say to sound, to the choreographer. You're the lighting person come and you're often having to translate ideas and translate choreography ideas... ideas too and then say but what I'm saying is this to bring you into this understanding of the visual image I'm trying to create.

OH: Exactly, and I think that's also one of the biggest challenges, especially in dance, is if you're not working with a team that you're familiar with, they want to know what it's going to look like but it's sometimes impossible to do that before, unless you have the budget to do some renderings or whatever it might be you know...

WM: Do you use renderings and things a lot? Or are you more in the kind of space, kind of...

OH: ...So for dance, for dance not I've never used a rendering for dance. I've... because I'm also involved in set design often you'll find I'll do lighting design... lighting and set design especially for dance I don't really do lighting and set for like musicals and stuff like that because I just don't have that experience but if it's a very simple set, I'm happy to design a set or...

WM: ...You're working in the visual aspect of it, ja... and it all becomes connected...

OH: ...and it's... and it and it all comes together as an entirety and if I'm in control of that environment it's great. Not to say that it's not good to have a separate set designer but for dance for me, it's nice to be in control of all the visual elements and to some extent, because then it means also you have more control over how the production is going to tour and how... what the overall look is going to be in the end. But, gosh...

WM: We've jumped all around now... but it's cool. But that's it... and I think the other important thing is that you, as you're talking, is this and the importance of this idea of collaboration across the creative team...

OH: ... it's so important man...

WM: ...I think we can't put enough into it... ja.

OH: Absolutely and going back to what I was saying in the beginning is... trying to convey the idea that you have in your head to the creative team or at least your choreographer. A lot of choreographers, especially in South Africa, I tend to think that they have a lot of trust, especially in the contemporary world, as soon as you start to get to the ballet world the more formal things get and the things are done a certain way in ballet. So different dance forms have different requirements from the choreographer and different artistic requirements. I think contemporary dance is the one dance form that you have complete freedom because the choreographer himself is still creating the piece, and he's right then he's also thinking about the mood and atmosphere but he or she is thinking about the mood and atmosphere but they're more concerned about the story that they're telling on stage with movement. So a lot of the time in contemporary dance it's more of "dude, you do your job man" like "you come and attend rehearsals, you just do your thing and just... dude, just try and try and help me tell this story" and because a lot of choreographers also, especially choreographers that I've worked with, are not... they're very concerned about the lighting but not meticulously you know what I mean they're not like "[\_fuck\_] it must be that way" or there are certain choreographers that are that way, that think specifically about how they want the piece to look which is great because it gives you extra direction, to some extent. But it can also be limiting in many ways, it's like lighting a drama there's a lighting a very specific Shakespeare for instance and there's a script to follow, there's a story to be told whereas in as in dance and go back to what I what I said before, there's this freedom, especially if it's a new work. So sometimes I find it's great with choreographers if they can provide some sort of lighting input because it also gives you fuel as a designer to go "cool, actually I'll grab that idea". Sometimes you'll walk into a piece and there's no creative input in terms of lighting where they just

go "cool this is the piece and you must light it" you know what I mean? It's like okay but what do you... what...like where... what... you know? So I always also start by interviewing the choreographer about what they want to feel in the pieces...

WM: ...those conversations...

OH: ...ja... the early conversations about how they... what they're creating and what's the story behind their piece and what narrative is it sort of following and what do they want to feel you know what are they trying to what's the message...

(connection breaks)

(Pause)

OH: ...that helps me develop the design you know, that helps me move the design forward essentially.

WM: Yeah. So moving on a little bit, one of the ideas that particularly, and I think you're quite interested in this regard, when you start to deal with set and lighting and that is... just the idea around senses and how we learn through our senses because I mean that's how we interact in the world but how particularly, as an art form, we engage... how we manipulate and engage the senses in what it is that we do on stage?

OH: Well I think that's a great question because a lot of stuff that I'm following overseas is a lot of, sort of, installation work where it's more of an experience rather than watching a show so it's an... auditory and a visual and in a sense explosion essentially, it's a sense experience and that's happening a lot in Europe at the moment but maybe not with dance only, it can be digital art forms, what they call 'data artwork' whereas you walk into the space Olive-... a gentleman who I look up to hugely and I get a lot of inspiration from is Olafur Ellison... Eliasson, who's a master of light but he's an artist and he does really big scale and small scale installations that are... that touch your senses essentially, whether it's a visual experience, whether it's an auditory experience whether it's... any type of experience. So trying to translate some of that on the stage is interesting because it's not always that easy to do. But one of the

senses that everybody cannot do without, and I most certainly would much rather lose my hearing than lose my sight, is vision. Everything is visual. The sun's light itself is what makes this world, it's what made life. Light is life and I think that's why lighting plays such an important role on stage and it's also that role that no one necessarily thinks about and no one really... I mean, there's a saying that "what you cannot see, you cannot hear"

WM: Mmmm...

OH: ...and it's kind of it's one of those things that... it goes unnoticed and that's always a good thing because, if you're lighting a DJ and it's flashy flashy in the eyes which I'm... I've done before...

WM: ja...

OH: ...it's about it's about that but essentially creating an experience on stage from a senses point of view, lighting is by far what I think the most... is the most important of all the senses and that's why lighting, in my opinion, is the most important thing on stage...

WM: Yeah...

OH: ...in many respects...

WM: But it's also more than that because we do it... isn't... it's not... yes sometimes, it is about the invisibility but I mean I think especially with... I mean you're... we're really playing on it, we're using it where, I mean especially if you're doing the set kind of stuff, we're heightening it...

OH: I'm actually, I'm sorry to cut you short, I'm actually doing a very interesting module in my studies at the moment which deals with human-centric lighting and human-centric lighting is about how lighting affects the human psyche and this little module that I'm doing at the moment is very interesting because it deals with, like, lighting in an old age home for instance or lighting for Alzheimer's and how lighting can be a

tool... a medicinal tool essentially to help people feel better essentially in that environment and I feel like that translates in theatre, in many ways but people don't think of it that way. People don't think that lighting, I mean it goes back to mood and atmosphere, that's what lighting does it either makes us feel good it makes us feel safe...

WM: ...and it affects so much more than just the visual picture, it crosses over... ja...

OH: Exactly it crosses... it affects... ja... it affects so much more. A lot of people think like when you walk into an office right, for instance, and the office is lit with a single daylight fluorescent at like 6 000 Kelvin<sup>157</sup> and that thing is [fucking] old and it's flickering at like a thousand hertz per second and you you're getting a [fucking] migraine and you can't concentrate and no one goes "oh wait, it could be this [fucking] fluorescent" right?" But it is. So light really affects the human psyche and I feel like that translates on stage very much so and it's interesting because I'm finding this interesting gap between theatre and illumination engineering that I'm like "this is interesting, they correlate with each other in many respects" because we take the audience on an emotional journey over an hour. Whereas... I we looking at human-centric lighting in the... in this all in an old-age home where there's an old-age home in in Switzerland that's recreated the sun's... the sun's movement...

WM: ...okay...

OH: ...and it mimics because the building is not quite in the right place, not north facing, it's just in an awkward environment. The lighting designers tried to recreate the sun's movement and the feeling of true daylight in this space for these Alzheimer's patients and these old people essentially and it improved their lives by like 20 percent or something crazy, something stupid like that. I don't know what it was but it just shows you how light is actually just so important for...

WM: And that's what we do...

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<sup>157</sup> Colour temperature is a term used to describe the colour of visible light... Colour temperature is measured in Kelvins (K) <https://www.onstagelighting.co.uk/lighting-design/colour-temperature-guide/> [Accessed 15 December 2022]

OH: ...human beings...

WM: ...That's what we do on stage is, we're manipulating and we're recreating and we're being inspired and we're being metaphorical and all these things all at once

OH: Absolutely... absolutely in such a short period of time...

WM: ...time, ja.

OH: ...and it almost makes you feel incredibly in control of people's emotions...

WM: ...Ja...

OH: ...you know in many ways...

WM: ...and the importance of...

OH: ... and we need to respect that

WM: 100 percent respect what it is that we're doing so that's not coincidental, it's not by chance it's things, it's choices and it's things that are... makes you work, ja.

OH: Absolutely.

WM: Which I would love to then... if do you... are... is it possible, do you have any pictures that you could possibly bring up quickly of your work that we could just talk a little bit...

OH: I can.

WM: ...because these other things, the languages that we use around it and the importance, as we're talking specifically of a visual field.

OH: Let me see if I have. I've never done this on my cell phone but let's... let's try this...  
uh... google drive...

(Pause) Can you see what I'm doing?

WM: Not yet.

OH: Not really. Okay cool just give me a sec... connect... oh god... accept cookies,  
yes.

WM: (laughs)

OH: No man, I don't want to do this. No, no, no, no, no I just want to share my screen  
I don't want to share all of that... bollocks.. bollocks! Sorry just be a sec...

WM: ...in Zoom...

OH: Ja... just want to like screen share essentially...

WM: Ja...

OH: Just give me a sec, just give me a sec. Let's do a photo... allow... drive... okay,  
okay there we go. Let's see... (pause) I don't know maybe we can use...

WM: Have you got of *Broken Chord* or anything...

OH: I don't have... there's not... because it's such a young piece...

WM: Yes...

OH: ...you don't have, and it's only premiered overseas, so we don't have...

WM: ...production shots yet...

OH: ...we don't have professional production shots but I do have on *Cion*<sup>158</sup>...

WM: Let's do *Cion*. I've seen the images and it looked extraordinary.

OH: I'm sure you have. Gosh, what's another good one, I think while we're talking contemporary dance, or African Fusion, I think *Cion* probably the best that I have...

WM: I think it is and it's also your relationship with Gregory that has been a long time which I think I hope we can talk a little bit as well as you bring it up and...

OH: I don't know what's happening here. It's like downloading oh okay...

WM: There you go it's starting to share screen... ja. There we go. Yes.

OH: It's weird, it's like downloads one picture and it doesn't screen share it, like I want a screen share that's what I want to do. Hold on. Sorry. Share whiteboard, share... god, you can't actually share screen, it only gives you an option to share documents, share... ja so... oh my god this is... okay, hold on. HOD... project... pictures... Okay let's just do one at a time then.

WM: It really just has to be one and we can use it to talk about the overall production so choose the best one and then and as I said it's just an idea... this is a visual stimulus to...

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<sup>158</sup> An intrigue of dance and music that spins on the weight of mourning, *Cion: Requiem of Ravel's Boléro*, was conceived and choreographed by Gregory Maqoma who combined movement with his two inspired source materials: Zakes Mda's novels *Cion* and *Ways of Dying* and *Boléro*, a piece of music by French composer Maurice Ravel. <https://www.news24.com/channel/movies/news/gregory-maqomas-cion-requiem-of-ravels-bolero-is-back-in-joburg-20220204> [Accessed 15 December 2022]



Vuyani Dance Theatre in *Cion: Requiem of Ravel's Boléro* (2022). Photo by John Hogg.

OH: This is a this is a good one. I really enjoy this photo because it just it captures a lot of emotion and it's not entirely about the light but it's... there's different things going on in this photo. So I did the set and lighting for *Cion* and this shot is actually from the amplified version which we did the with Soweto Gospel Choir on the Joburg Theatre main stage and this is the opening scene where it's... so the story revolves around a professional mourner, revolves around a book by Zakes Mda called *Cion* which is a sequel to *Ways of Dying* and the piece reflects or at least tells the story of Toloki who's this professional mourner and it's his journey throughout his life, essentially, not his life but sections of his life. And this opening scene is specifically a mourning scene so it's a scene, not morning as in daytime morning...

WM: Yes.

OH: It's like grieving... it's a grieving scene and it's a scene of extreme grief and this specific mourner who's almost, in my mind, almost manipulating the mourning process within this this grieving period that we're seeing on stage and that's what he's doing with this gentleman at the front. Kind of twisting his ears almost twisting... twisting how he needs to mourn in or making him cry more, making him grieve more, just having that influence on the mourners essentially. And one of the main contexts was how,

we're not going to bring religion in, but one of the big symbols is, the crucifix and that's a quick way, it was a quick way to sort of establish...

WM: Yeah.

OH: ...as a scene without bringing on major amounts of scenery essentially. And we highlighted this cross specifically for the scene because actually, this shot was taken from stage left but if you look from the front it was almost a clump of the griever and the cross was hovering just above them, and this was just sort of an element to try and create this space but also we created the space using lighting as well, confining the space but using two different tones of light and actually there's three colours in this specific photo. We've got some kind of warm white coming from stage right side sort of a slot<sup>159</sup> position stage right side...

WM: Yeah.

OH: And then we've got some cool white, sort of almost a 201, 202<sup>160</sup> on the cross itself and also as a strong backlight. And then we've actually, if you don't see the floor, but we've got some gobo work which kind of established as being outside in a cemetery essentially... almost being under moonlight... and the moonlight kind of... almost trickling through trees and just kind of giving us a beautiful dappled kind of look on stage without feeling too realistic. The whole piece was completely, like, completely surrealistic but essentially the gobo work just helped us with the mood of that moment. Not going "oh there's some trees here" you know, it was more of just creating that texture but also making us feel like where the lighting is coming from.

WM: So you're doing two things there with the lights, you both establishing scene and you're also creating the kind of mood and atmosphere simultaneously which is...

OH: Exactly, exactly and also you know this scene, there is quite a bit of acting involved in this scene and in the whole of *Cion*, there is a lot of facial expression so

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<sup>159</sup> A slot position for lighting is usually from the Front of House position and to the side.

<sup>160</sup> Lee Gel/Filters: L 201/2 are colour correction cool filters that adjust the warmth of an incandescent light bulb to the cooler spectrum of the Kelvin scale.

there needed to be some decent key light but at a level that... was low, but not straining to see and I think a lot of people it takes a lot of experience to figure out that balance between key<sup>161</sup> light that doesn't feel like key light or front light or FOH light...

WM: (laughs) Yes. Whatever you want to call it

OH: ...whatever you want to call it. We'll call it key light in this in this instance but essentially light for visibility on faces. It's interesting, I always... I almost, for dance, I never use direct front light, ever. I only use slot positions almost 100 percent of the time just because it gives us the dynamic on faces so it gives us more shadow, it gives us more moulding on the face because facial expression is important but it's not as important as it is in Shakespeare. So we don't need, there's no need to have direct, direct front light which makes everything feel very flat and it also washes out your stage...

WM: Yeah.

OH: ...and it makes you... things feel very flat. A lot of people who start lighting for the first time that's the first problem that they run into, they go "cool the director says we need to see more faces" and they [ \_fucking\_ ] blast the FOH at 100 percent and then it just washes out their beautiful atmosphere and it just, yes now we can see faces but we lose everything else. So in this photo it kind of gives you a perfect, it's almost the perfect composition of being able to see what the perfor-... what the actors or at least the dancers are conveying emotionally in their facial expressions but without destroying the mood and atmosphere that we're creating in the background.

WM: Yeah.

OH: So that's something that I've struggled, I mean, it was something that's taken me years to learn and just trial and error. Like a simple thing like a classic FOH cross-wash is so much better than a straight in wash you. But obviously you've got to figure

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<sup>161</sup> Your key light in theatre is generally considered to be your main light source and because of plays is considered to come from the front of the stage.

out what your intentions are? What is your intention? If your intention is to separate the stage and isolate certain parts of the stage then maybe a straight on focus is a good idea but if you want to create a little bit more dynamic on the faces and isolation is not so important, then you can possibly look at a cross-wash or possibly using your slot positions for better, for more moulding on the faces rather than this flat look. I've also found that with key light sometimes you've got to go "how much key light do I actually need? Do I only need it in two scenes, in a 10 scene production?" If that's the case then what are those scenes and choose a specific fixture to do that specific key light...

WM: ...at that point.

OH: ...don't do a full FOH wash just for those two scenes. So an experience teaches you that. Over time you know a lot of people will start with their, if they're doing a design, they start with their key light. I don't do that. I start with, often when I'm lighting dance, I start with backlight and side light first...

WM: Yeah.

OH: ...and the very last thing that I deal with is key light.

WM: Yeah. And I think again, and we're fortunate to be able to do that because the priority, as you said, it depends on what the priority is and because we're doing more in mood and atmosphere that hopefully will take precedence over complete visibility of washing out...

OH: Yes...

WM: ...but as you said, visibility is still important but it can... it becomes very... about how articulates and how cleverly you use it.

OH: I think so. You know in most contemporary pieces, nowadays, so what I've seen just trending, there's a lot of emotion and it's like ballet, ballet has always been "you must have lots of front lights", "so we can see the performance", which I agree with

but it's how clever you are with it and I feel like every dance piece should have some sort of key light...

WM: Hmm...

OH: ...because there is a lot of emotion in the faces especially during sections... there's always going to be a moment where you're going to just want to see what that dance is feeling in that moment...

WM: Of course...

OH: ...you know, but it's about being creative with that with that key light you know it doesn't have to be front light that key light can be sidelight...

WM: Yeah.

OH: ...you know, it could be a moment of two booms<sup>162</sup>, lighting the face on either side. Or it could be a foot light, it could be foot light you know, it could be...

WM: ... there are other ways, yeah.

OH: Exactly. There's many other ways and I think a lot of the upcoming guys... have not really... it's not something that's, that like I was taught. No one actually said listen this is how you do it? I was taught cool you can do a straight in wash and a cross-wash you know I mean. But no one really teaches you: cool it can go so much further than that.

WM: Yeah... and that's experience and that's and that's working and it's being in situations and ja, as I said it takes time. We don't arrive at these positions overnight...

OH: ...and also it's trial and error...

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<sup>162</sup> A boom is another name for a floor lighting stand, in theatre it is often placed in the side wings, and will hang lights at a shin, mid and head position.

WM: Yes...

OH: It's trial and error. Often I will be sitting in a programming session and some of my favourite moments are in programming sessions where I've got bodies on stage and I've got the actual performers on stage. And I'm programming, so they're rehearsing a scene so it's not important for me to run the scene lighting-wise but I can do my notes...

WM: Yeah.

OH: ...while I... while they're running that specific scene and I can really just play with angles and I can go "[\_fuck\_] that looks amazing" for that moment

WM: But that is where...

OH: ...I can store it in... because...

WM: It's that... is not... it's that physically being there, it's having the bodies on stage, it's having those things, it's... there is something we can design ideas we can have things but there's also something that really happens in the physical practice... in performance on stage...

OH: Exactly. I think it's also important to note that no design is fully planned.

WM: No,

OH: No one... yes, you've got a full idea of how you want to structure everything but other ideas come into play when you get into the space and the rig is up and running and your focus is done and now it comes to tweaking intensities and seeing what different colours look like at different intensities you. Then different ideas start to emerge and...

WM: ...it's being open to that...uh...

OH: Exactly.

WM: Yeah, and its not that...

OH: Dance, is very much that experimental process which I personally love that process. Where I can bring up a single fixture that I didn't think could do that work that it's physically doing when I brought it up in that moment and I'm like "holy [ \_shit\_ ] I can use it for that",

WM: Mmhmm...

OH: ...which is something that I didn't plan for but it's just working so nicely, and that's something I think is very important for a lot of youngsters that are coming into the industry. I think it's so important to understand that a design cannot be fully planned out to the nth degree to every single...

WM: ... And that's what it is, something happens in the space, yeah.

OH: Exactly, and that's what... that's the magic of theatre and that's the magic of lighting in the space, that's the magic of theatrical lighting, and that's the magic of contemporary dance and lighting for contemporary dance, in my opinion. That's the real joy for me...

WM: No... that is. It is. And I think it's why we, those of us who can get to do it, are very lucky because it's something... it doesn't happe... it doesn't happen in the other spheres in the same way...

OH: No it doesn't...

WM: Yeah.

OH: There are obviously moments where you can experience that in an opera or a... but you restricted in many ways and that's the beauty of lighting contemporary dance. It's just this incredible freedom to experiment.

WM: Yeah. Um... Okay let me bring up one of mine just so that... I'm going to do from my side...

OH: I am... Wesley, I don't know how... I mean, I'm gonna stay for another session but I think we can go to half past...

WM: 100 percent. That's why I'm trying to wrap it up as well.

OH: Okay...

WM: Yeah we are speaking very... it's lovely chatting...

OH: ...we nerding out man, we're nerding out. It's nice to nerd out.

WM: We don't get to do this often and I mean...

OH: No we don't.

WM: ...the ones I've had is to really talk about a practice and to talk, because I don't think it is, well you said, I mean... I never thought of it as a career. It's something that goes so unnoticed often when theatre and shows are happening so to be able to talk about it and hopefully be able to document it and I think is an important process right now.

OH: I think so too and I think that's why I really wanted to, I when I saw you I was just like...

WM: ..."no, we must do it" and yours is a voice that I, ja. I mean I've been really interested to hear and... Because I mean, there are there are many lighting designers. I don't think there's that many working in contemporary dance

OH: Sure.

WM: ...and that is why in particular I wanted to include you in the set of interviews.

OH: Cool man.

WM: Cool. So ja, here you can see the picture.



*Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* (2021) Flatfoot Dance Company, performed at the Playhouse Drama Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson.

OH: Yup.

WM: Ja. This is one of mine... it's from a work I did last year called *Seven ways to say Goodbye*. and so it's to get your kind of, what you see in the picture. Again, I'm always looking particularly at the senses. Yes, we can talk the technicalities, but kind of the mood and the atmosphere when you look at a picture like this that it evokes for you. (Pause) Without any context (laughs)

OH: No, no but this is this is quite a striking photo and it's and for me this is quite a strong image and it's interesting because it's got a nice mixture of a functional lighting versus, what I call emotional lighting versus, I don't want to say the word, but almost when I say effect lighting I mean there is a light in the space that is creating something that's not lighting a body.

WM: Yes.

OH: Which in my mind is what we call, what I call effect lighting and it's not effect lighting as in as a concert when you're at a concert and lights are flashing in your face, not that kind of difficult...

WM: ...so we're talking purposes of lighting and what... It's a good term to use, ja.

OH: So this is quite interesting because it's quite dynamic because you've got a black background and most dance, especially in South Africa, don't have a lot of budgets, so it's often performed in a black surround. So the only element of visual information is light and the performers themselves and what you've done here is quite interesting because it's... it almost... it showcases... it doesn't fill the space per se but it fills what's happening on stage but it... how can I put this into words? It's almost like you've created a space that needs no set, there's a good mixture of haze<sup>163</sup> in the air which gives us a little bit of beam work but the beam work is not important. The beam work is not, it's not about showing that there's a light there. I think the beam work here is far more deeper than that. It's more we want to create a shaft of light rather than going "oh there's a light there and we need to make sure that everyone sees my rig" ...

WM: Mmmm...and I guess what we do is, it's ja. When we use lights they're their purpose behind it, it's everything...

OH: I've got... I've got a saying, like I can see in this photo that every light has got its specific purpose and for me that's the most important thing as a lighting designer to achieve. Don't put a light there because you think you might need it. Put a light there because you need it.

WM: Yeah.

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<sup>163</sup> Haze is an atmospheric that hangs somewhat evenly in the air. Haze essentially disperses tiny particles into the air which reflect light. <http://thtr382.weebly.com/atmospherics.html> [Accessed 15 December 2022]

OH: One light and... so one light in the right place at the right time is worth a thousand lights...

WM: That's it. And if you can understand that concept you can then use a thousand lights because you will know how one can work and I think that's a big divide that a lot of people don't underst-...

OH: ...working with smaller rigs is so important to start on because it makes you use, and it goes back to what I said in the beginning of our conversation, is it makes you use your rig to, but it also makes you think about how you're going to use each light because you're so limited in terms of what you can use.

WM: Ja.

OH: You have to think about how you... how efficient you're going to use, how efficient you're going to be in terms of using every single fixture because that...

WM: ...makes it important. Ja... and it's and it's important concepts to understand...

OH: Exactly.

WM: ...because that's ja.

OH: You know what's really nice about this photo? Is it's interesting that the light is not directly top light, it's almost like almost 15 degrees slightly forward so you can still see faces but you've got deep shadows under the eyes, so you can still see what the performer is expressing, obviously you can't see their eyes you don't need to but in this moment you don't need to because it's strong it's a moment where... I mean I don't know what the piece is about...

WM: ...it was the closing moment of the work.

OH: I was like, it's engaging the audience and it's engaging, the performers are in that moment where they're trying to show that there's an engagement of some sort

between, it's a moment that the audience and them are having at that specific time and space. And that that top light works really nicely because, backlight and direct top light sometimes do not work for a scene like this. Whereas this scene looks like it's not direct, direct top light, it's just slightly further forward...

WM: ...where you can still see... Yeah.

OH: Where you can still see faces and you can still see the form of the body but it's mysterious you know what I mean?

WM: Ja.

OH: Like... that moment, the haze...

WM: That's it... ... as I was saying it's the closing moment of a work it probably went to blackout a couple of seconds after this but and so it's that, just staring at the audience technically, actually that light behind is a projector light and that there was a cyc in for the whole work and it was flown out at the end.

OH: Okay...

WM: I was just manipulating that from back from using projection and then also this idea of that's...

OH: ...but it isn't that, doesn't that go back to what we spoke about just before we brought up your picture is that that experimental vibe you know where you go "[\_fuck\_] you fly at the cyc" and you can just see the projector and you're like "oh my god that's [\_fucking\_] awesome"

WM: ...and we can use it in a way and it creates the mood, it works for them...

OH: Ja, absolutely you know, because this image is incredibly strong and thought-provoking as well and it's and it's only light that's doing that.

WM: Yeah... It's very much heightened by the music... and obviously you can't...

OH: Of course...

WM: Yeah it's just and as I said as a closing moment of the work, you wanted to be strong, you wanted to be, I mean particularly for this work which was one of the first works made post Covid, and we were still playing to 50 capacity audience at this point and the projection light also lit up the audience. It was just this moment of the performers and the audience connecting which...

OH: That's great man. Ja you see, that's great man.

WM: Ja.

OH: That's great. And obviously because I'm not seeing the recording of the piece because I'm just seeing the visual on its own the image is super strong and super like it has high contrast and another thing about lighting is about creating depth of field. So, like say for instance if you have too much front light, you lose your depth of field and depth of field is normally used in the film industry, I do a lot of work for TV as well, so depth of field is super important and contrast is super important but we can also do that for the eye and looking at that photo you've got that mixture perfectly right. It's beautiful contrast, but you've also got depth.

WM: Yeah.

OH: You've got deep depth even though you've got a black background and that's the beauty of also haze,

WM: The tools we have...

OH: haze helps you fill the space man, it really helps you fill the space and that and like a lot of people go, actually not a lot of people, a lot of people just use haze, for haze you know so we can see the beam and yes seeing the beams is important because it helps fill the space, yes but it's not a tool for entertainment...

WM: No.

OH: ...if that makes sense...

WM: Yeah.

OH: you know, but if you lighting and it blacks surround having haze especially for dance performance is really useful because it just helps fill that black space,

WM: And it's a texture...

OH: It's texture... it just, creates... (pause) I think these people have not stopped calling me...

WM: We're almost done. I think if you finish your thought there of the...

OH: Ja... I think it's been good to have this chat and I think that last image was a good one to finish on because it's also nice, for me, I think one of the most important things is also going to watch work...

WM: That's it.

OH: ...going to watch different work, going to see what other people are doing...

WM: I think we have a good community, as well that, where we talk to each other and we... there's not so much competition I think it's a close... it's because it's a small enough that we're, you know, we learn from each other and we share and we see and we... I think...

OH: Exactly, you know. You're not going there to slate someone's design...

WM: No.

OH: ...going there to question... question things, and maybe speak to them after the show and say "dude like I really love that" or actually "like how did you achieve that?", "how did you do that?" because for me that's what I really lacked during Covid was, and what really pulled me into deep dark depression was the fact that I couldn't watch work.

WM: Hmmmm...

OH: And you know, we gain inspiration and we take ideas, let's not fool...

WM: No. But it's inspired...

OH: ...let's not pretend... we take ideas from different designers but we make it our own and that's also what makes everything unique.

WM: Yeah.

OH: That's what makes a design unique , you can... it takes a very special person like Mozart to create something from absolute scratch but even but even Mozart himself...

WM: Yeah...

OH: ...was inspired by someone.

WM: And I think we live in a world where the post-modern condition, where everything has been done in certain ways. So it's how we do it and how it is appropriate to the work that we're creating.

OH: Exactly.

WM: Yeah.

OH: Exactly. Cool Wesley!

WM: Cool, thank you very much Oliver that was a whole lot more than I thought we would chat about but thank you it was an excellent conversation and I just wanted to say thank you very much..

OH: Ja, it was good. It's a pleasure, only a pleasure, only a pleasure. Say hi to Tina for me I see her walking back and forth there.

WM: I will do (laughs) and we'll chat hopefully soon.

OH: Cool man. Good luck with the masters all right?

WM: and good luck on tour and your degree.

OH: Cool man, alrighty.

WM: Cheers, bye.

OH: Take it easy, bye.

**APPENDIX G**  
**Self-interview with Wesley Maherry (WM)**  
**13 January 2023**

Where were you born?

Where do you live now?

WM: I was born in Durban, educated in Durban and still live in Durban. Durban is not only where my family and friends base are, but I have been very fortunate to establish good working relationships with several entities that keep me here. These include not only my full-time employment at the UKZN based Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, which offers me an opportunity to work on and with a variety of productions, but in particular FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, have become a company that offered me many exciting opportunities to work with them locally, nationally and internationally as well as the JOMBA! Contemporary Dance which is annual festival that I have worked on for almost 20 years and for which I have a passion for ensuring that the festival is the success it has become.

How were you introduced to lighting design?

WM: I have been involved in dance since the age of 6 when I first started Spanish dancing/Flamenco, and which I performed professional since 1998 and still continue today, even though in less frequent capacity. In 2001 as a student studying Drama and Performance Studies at the then University of Natal, I joined the FLATFOOT Training Company, with after-hours classes and rehearsals and performed with the company. As a student, I started helping out behind the scenes on departmental productions and having to put on productions as part of my Honour's degree I started to learn how to do lighting so that I could more successfully stage these productions. I completed my Honour's degree in Drama and Performance Studies with a major in Dance and Choreography in 2002 and in 2003 was invited by Liane Loots to join FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY as it registered to become a professional company. I performed with the company for a year, but continued to do backstage work on various productions in the city and also started to learn from my mentor, Julian August who

was a lighting designer working at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, during this time. Julian lit FLATFOOT's work at the time and when I stopped dancing in 2004 and he could not make a tour of the work to Johannesburg, I assisted the company in mounting the work we had performed the year before, now at the Wits Theatre in Johannesburg which involved setting up and recreating the lighting, I would then come back in 2007 to light my first show with the company, having learn more whilst freelancing during that period.

Did you have any formal lighting design training?

WM: As mentioned above, I do not have any formal training in lighting design, or technical matters, I learnt the practice in action by working on the job. I did work for a production company Black Coffee Design, and learnt a lot of the technical aspects of the job from this company. When it came to my first design in 2007 with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, it was very much being thrown in the deep-end, I had done small lighting work and had a basic idea of how to do things, but there was a lot of trial and error and I have definitely grown and learnt a lot more since then.

Did you learn from a mentor? [And do you mentor younger designers?]

WM: As mentioned above, I was fortunate to learn under Julian August, who did work a lot in dance as well as other styles, and opened up the practice for me. I did not think about lighting growing up and although I had been on the stage it wasn't something I thought of doing, although ironically my father is an Electrician, but I think I had a certain aptitude for it, and combined with my performance history, allowed me to step into it quite naturally.

What is your lighting design process?

WM: I don't really think about my process that much, and part of this research is starting to understand and unpack this. When it comes to a design, it does begin with speaking to the choreographer, and them sharing their ideas, sometimes this is specific and sometimes it is more open. They will mention ideas and themes that piece revolves around, and if they want anything specific like corridors of specials that they

envisage for the work. However most of the design work is done during/after watching rehearsals. This is usually done quite late in the rehearsal process, once the work is complete, and I sit in on a rehearsal and make notes about use of space and moods and tones, as well hear the music for the first time and understand practical elements such as set (if any) and costumes that will affect the lighting. It is physically being in the rehearsal room and experiencing the work, that most of the ideas come from, I will look at my notes after the rehearsal and come up with ideas of how to realise it in action. Sometimes those are in the rehearsal room where you think that idea will work for that moment, and sometimes it is afterwards as I process watching the rehearsal. I then go away for a bit, and draw up plans, which are often based on what equipment is available at the venue, as there are generally not budgets to hire additional equipment, so I have to work with what there is. When it comes to the theatre, I often do have to work within generic rigs, but the placement of fixtures is usually sufficient to create a base to work from, and then add on top of that the requirements specific to the piece. Time is always limited in the theatre, so it is about as working efficiently as possible, and focussing and colouring the work as it is needed. As I have gotten better at the process I often find I can work quite quickly and often in conjunction with the dancers placing on stage (maybe this is a consequence of also working on festivals where time is even less available) and so I will often go with gut instincts that I reacted to in the rehearsal room and execute them and mostly they are successful. I think I translate ideas into physical action quite easily and quickly and this has made me quite amenable to working in dance with a variety of people.

What inspires your ideas?

WM: First and foremost I have a love of dance, it is something I have been involved with most of my life and there is something about it that 'feeds my soul' I have been fortunate to work with a variety of people and exposed to a variety of ideas and styles, and being able to work in this field definitely fulfils a creativity in me that I know I am fortunate to experience. I am a visual person, I have always been fascinated by art, although never studied in, I do like looking at and experiencing paintings, when I was fortunate to travel through Europe a couple years back, I went to 11 major Art Galleries and got to see some of the most influential art of humanity. Film and video, are often inspirations for use of colour and how they translate tone into palettes used in film. I

am also a rhythical person, as Spanish dance/flamenco is very rooted in its association to different rhythms and styles and the moods and thus understanding how music and dance correlate. I am also inspired by other lighting designers, I watch a fair amount of live performance and am always inspired by how other people do things, getting to work on the JOMBA! festival has definitely exposed me to other ways of working and have made my practice better. I am also first and foremost always inspired by the work of the company, especially with a company like FLATFOOT where we have built a long relationship with and I understand the choreographers aims and styles and am able to realise those in performance often without discussion as I understand the way in which the company works. I often feel I have an intuitiveness when it comes to lighting, that is more than likely based on my history and how I came into the practice and those instincts, which are based on my past knowledge, come into action as I work out what is required for the work and then am able to execute.

How do you collaborate with creative team in this process?

I do find that I am often having to wear many hats when it comes to a production: lighting designer, productions manager, rigger, programmer, operators, assist with sound editing, sound operation, video editing and also operation. One this leaves me with less people to collaborate with, other than the choreographer, but it does help with the design of the overall multisensorial act that is performance, and specifically dance. I do work closely with the choreographers, many of whom I have long working relationships with and there is mutual understanding and respect (and often friendship) that informs the collaboration. I do find communication is key, but some of these relationships have moved to the stage beyond too much communication where ideas are discussed and then am left to come up with ideas and trusted that they will work for the piece. This even moves down to the level of the dancers where we have long standing working relationships and they can say there isn't enough light in a scene, and I will adjust, and they are used to me lighting almost around them as the place and fix the work to the stage.

One of the focusses of this research is on "Sensory Knowledge" so I am particularly interested in the senses, how we have learnt our practice from sensory experience

and how we use, specifically, the sense of sight to impact on a performance and how it is received. What are your thoughts on this?

The more I research around senses the more I think about it, and I think it is this idea of Multi-sensoriality that particularly I find interesting. If I think of the rehearsal room when I am watching a work in progress for the first time, and how it is everything at the same time that inspires me, the movement of the dancers, the rhythm of the music, the smell of sweat on hot day in the studio, visually how they are using the space all impact on how I react to the work. This also moves to the edge of our sensorial experience – Susan Kozel calls it ‘affect’, or Solso’s ‘Level 3’ where senses combine and work together with memory and emotion in order to be able to create art. A lifetime of experience, that is done through the lived body, that is experienced by all the senses and processed by the brain, also come into play. These are daily experiences of the world and how I see light in a sunset or at dawn, how I watch a movie and appreciate the colour palette they use to enhance the story line or affect mood. How I see other people lighting a production and use the fixtures they have available to light a production how they use colour and I suppose I create these memory banks (Solso’s schemata) whereby you can draw on them when you need them which leads to that notion of instinct again, which is based on my life experience, but then pulling to the front what I think will be most appropriate for that moment in a work.

Discuss a picture of an example of one of my lighting designs used in the research? Again paying particular attention to the senses, what mood/atmosphere does it evoke for you?



*Days like These* (2015) by Flatfoot Dance Company. Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson.

*Days like these:*

When I look at this I am particularly excited by the way the dancers look, the way they float in space and the way in particular the girls dress glow. There is an elegance to picture, despite the ominous covering of the faces referencing Magritte's *The Lovers* painting, it also calls to mind the music which I remember explicitly as it was Leonard Cohen's *Dance Me to the End of Love* which is also has this melancholic beauty to it. The dancers were performing a Viennese Waltz, which is not typically of this contemporary dance company, but were whirling around the stage again in elegant ballroom dancing manner, however still with a sense of unease about it. I can see the glow of a deep purple light in the top of the frame, and this is something for me, which indicates regal-ness or royalty in my association of colours – the piece was quite stark for the rest of it, and there is still quite a stark white light coming from the booms on the side that maintain that harshness but ultimately then you come to this ending, that carries you to another place, musically, costume, and the lighting followed suite.



*Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* (2021) Flatfoot Dance Company, performed at the Playhouse Drama Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson.

### *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye Image 1:*

I really love the atmosphere in this picture, the way in which the haze and smoke really captures the beams of light. The overhead isolation of each of the dancers just standing still and staring at the audience. The way in which it gives harsh shadows to their faces and bodies there is a haunting to breaking the forth wall and actually look at the audience, in a piece that has dealt with loss and sorrow. It is for me the back light that creates this incredible effect; it is actually the projector light which was used with a back scrim for most of the piece with videos projected and then at the end for this last section the screen was flown out and the light of the projector used (it was actually clouds being projects but you couldn't really make it out) but it back lit the dancers in this moving patterned way, that has echoes of the light at the end of tunnel – maybe when we die, but what it also did do was light the audience, which at this point during the Covid pandemic was still only 50%, so the audience became very aware of the emptiness of the auditorium and themselves in the process of watching the work. Again I am also clearly reminded of the music which was this hauntingly beautiful Max Richter track, which was also used to open the piece. I wanted a strong ending to the work and I could not have been happier with how all the elements came together for this moment, it was only an idea I had and it was not until we were in the theatre with the equipment could I realise it and see if would work; we do this often as

lighting designers as it is all ideas, based on what you know, and have watched in rehearsals, but only once everything is setup in the theatre do you know whether an idea will work or not.



*Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* (2021) Flatfoot Dance Company, performed at the Playhouse Drama Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson.

### *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye Image 2:*

This picture is near the begging of the piece and involves two overhead horizontal corridors, the two dancers at the front are in one and the dancer at the end in second (there would be two more added later to create four corridors). The starkness of the white light is what stands out the most for me. Corridors which are a common use in dance lighting, are about defining and cutting the space, creating isolation, and this was part of what the work was dealing with, post Covid. Again I like how the dancers float in space (the black surround helps with this) and the isolated lighting, but they are still bright enough to have their faces visible as they engage with duets. I like the placing of the three figures in relation to each other and in particular the back figure, hits his placement perfect at the cross point of the four lights overhead used to create the corridor.



*SoliiDad* (2019) Choreographed by Vincent Mantsoe. JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience, Sneddon Theatre. Photo by Val Adamson

### *SoliiDad:*

I don't often work with sets in dance, and although a simple set made of ropes, it really does change the landscape that the dance takes place, for instance here there is a depth of two layers of hanging ropes that adds to the piece. Lighting the ropes in a side red light also gives it a slightly ominous feel (blood, death and those kinds of connotations). This then with the dancer in the foreground with his arms wide open, head and chest, facing up towards the sky, does also indicate a hopelessness in this ominous background. The dancer is lit in strong sidelight that really does give the three dimension/plasticity that side lighting is attributed to contributing to dance lighting, and why it is used so frequently. But it is the solo journey of this dancer in the piece that I associate most with, working with Vincent Mantsoe, is an unlikely meeting of two creatives, and our paths crossed whilst working on the JOMBA! Festival, and unlike Flatfoot which I have had a long history with, working with Vincent comes very instinctively and he is not prescriptive in what he is looking for, and allows me a creative freedom to create the lighting as I think he has faith in my ability (which comes

from having worked with him previously). I think this piece is one that resonated me, especially with me at a time in my life that I was beginning a new journey, and so lighting this piece also reflects my own interior journey that matched the journey of the work, and I cannot ignore that correlation even now in reflection back on the work.

General thoughts around lighting design in South Africa and how practice may or may not be different from other contexts?

This will be explored when unpacking all the interviews.

Any other comments on lighting Design practice?

Also explored later.

## APPENDIX H

### Questions for Interviews with Choreographers: <sup>164</sup>

\*Understanding that it is a contested term, how would you define South African contemporary dance?

When did you become aware of the importance of lighting design as choreographer?

\*What do you believe is the role of lighting in a dance production?

How do you understand the collaborative nature of working with a lighting designer?

Having travelled do you think we work differently in South Africa to other contexts?

When you create a work, how much do you think about lighting as part of the initial conception of the work?

\*Looking at specifically the case studies, do you remember how we came up with the ideas that are evident in the work?

\*Reflecting back on the case study examples, what are some of the emotions and moods you believe are evocated in the lighting in the work?

One of the focusses of this research is on “Sensory Knowledge” so I am particularly interested in the senses, how we have learnt our practice from sensory experience and how we use, and how we impact on the senses when we make a multi-sensorial performance. What are your thoughts on this?

\*As a performer / choreographer, how does the lighting feel when you are onstage / watching a performance?

Any other thoughts on lighting design and choreography in general?

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<sup>164</sup> This is the full list of questions ethically cleared to ask in the interviews with the choreographers. Only the questions marked with an asterisk before were explicitly asked in the interviews (owing to requiring less information from the choreographers within the established research), although many of the other questions were answered indirectly by the interviewee’s answers.

## APPENDIX I

### Transcript of interview with Liane Loots (LL) via Zoom

3 October 2023

Interviewed by Wesley Maherry (WM)

WM: Okay. Good evening and thank you for joining me, Liane, and making the time to discuss lighting and contemporary dance. And I also would like to just acknowledge the presence of Clare Craighead from Durban University of Technology, who is sitting in on this interview as an external moderator as part of the process because Liane is my supervisor, as well as my interviewee for this discussion around lighting for contemporary dance.

So the title of my Masters again is 'Lifting the Veil on Lighting: Investigating how stage lighting design can become an embodied practice within South African contemporary dance making'... is the broad idea. And I'm not going to keep you too long, but I do have five essential questions that I'd like to go through regarding lighting and our collaborations and in this case it's particularly the work *Days like these* in 2015 and *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* in 2021<sup>165</sup>. So my first question is not really lighting related, but it came up in the writing of the dissertation and it's around this contested term called South African contemporary dance, and I'm interested to what that means to you and your work with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY...in a broad sense?

LL: Hi Wes, thank you for this and thank you also Clare for being here. I'm just acknowledging her presence in the room as well. Look, this is the million dollar question, the question of how do we talk about or negotiate the idea of contemporary dance. So, I think that the way that I would like to answer it is a kind of slight narrative. But I think that we often conflate the idea of contemporary dance with a historical kind of modern dance, and I think that the two are kind of separate because I think, and particularly in South Africa, I'm going to talk about that in a bit, but I think, often when

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<sup>165</sup> Originally this research intended to have two case studies by FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, as can be noted by the interview questions with lighting designers and choreographers. The second work which was going to be explored was *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* (2019) which would have further explored the relationship between my lighting design practice and work FLATFOOT, but owing to limitations on the scope of this research it was decided to leave it out of the final dissertation. Images from the work are still used in the interviews as the work does reflect a more recent example of my lighting design work.

we talk about contemporary dance, there is a kind of common understanding that it's anything that's not ballet. So already there's a dichotomy that's been set up, which is not always, I think, appropriate. So obviously with the modernist the shifts in modernism in Europe and America and Martha Graham and Eric Hawkins and José Limón and... Doris Humphrey, that kind of, that moment of shifting the paradigm and these choreographers really beginning, or innovators in a way beginning to create a new way of thinking about the body and about moving is often kind of, it's been solidified as that kind of moment of modern dance. But I think the word contemporary is quite interesting because the contemporary means of the now... And for me, I think contemporary dance is almost an instruction to the audience, to the choreographer, to the dancer that you are engaging or working with the body in, in a way that speaks to the context in which you are living. And that's the now. And the now can be an eternal, endless now. But, so in that way, for me, contemporary dance can be a response to things like classical dance. It can be a response to cultural and indigenous traditional dance forms. It can be a response to anything that is located in the now. And so it's a kind of, and with that also for me it means it's quite political because anything that engages with the kind of zeitgeist of the moment is, is political because it's engaging with the context in which we find ourselves. In terms of the air we breathe... the thoughts we have... the confluence of ideas that are flowing through us. So for me, if I have to think about FLATFOOT, and the ongoing journey, because it's been a long journey of many years. If I look back a little bit, and this was also partly due to you, Wesley, when you made those small videos of all the work that FLATFOOT's done over the last 20 years, I realise that there is a thread that lies through the work. It's the same as if you read Alice Walker or you read Margaret Atwood. There's something that is 'Atwoody' and there's something that... So I think that there is something that also you can see a kind of pattern of style and consciousness and an interest in certain kinds of narratives that come through the work, that I did notice that there's some of the things that I spoke about in earlier work that I wouldn't make about now. I wouldn't tell those stories now because I feel like those stories happened in the moment. And that's the contemporary for me. That idea of how does the work you make respond, both personally and politically, to the context in which you find yourself.

WM: Ah... Thank you, Lliane, that's a really, really great response. And I'm glad to have been part of that journey, to see the shifts along the way. So then, when it comes to

lighting, it's again a very broad question, but kind of what would you believe is the role of lighting... in dance production performances? And I'm also particularly looking at theatre dance... in proscenium arch conventional theatre spaces?

LL: Yeah...So...I mean, I'm going to answer that question in two ways. One is personally and one is more sort of politically, I suppose. But I think personally, when I started off as a choreographer, I knew nothing about lighting at all. And I remember the first time I put a work on stage - actually also the Elizabeth Sneddon stage and I sort of came to the theatre and I sort of expected the light... I didn't know what it was. I expected the lighting designer to make magic and make the work look beautiful, but because I had no language to speak about what I wanted or, or to explain what I might need, or any knowledge of the technology... the lighting designer just did what they wanted and the work looked terrible: it looked flat and I didn't, I didn't and didn't know what to say. And I remember that time thinking that this is something that I have to learn about, and that's when I got hold of Julian August, who was there, and Julian started to speak a little bit and start to show me and began my journey of thinking about light. And it's been a long journey.

So, the personal journey is that often now when I make work. I actually sometimes when I'm making work, I actually think about the lights, the lights become one of the choreographic principles in the work. So I'm just going to take the example of *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye*. The last scene of the work was choreographed absolutely with an understanding that there would be square lights for the dancers at the end. The idea of the corridors was also something that I had a very clear idea for at the beginning and through certain sections. How they manifest again in the moment of working can change. But I think, so for me, it's evolved very personally from a situation of knowing absolutely nothing about light to getting to the point of learning not a lot, but a little bit about light, a little bit about what I know things can look like, a little bit around colour and the colour of light, and a little bit about where the sources of the light might come from and what that might do to the body. To really often choreographically with an understanding that the light will do this and the light would be... so in a way, an understanding that the light is that really an integral layer of the choreographic practice. And so it's always a privilege to work with someone like you who will come into rehearsals, not just when the work is done, and you'll sit and you'll

watch and you'll make suggestions and we'll talk and sometimes I come to you with an idea and you go, "ooh yes", and sometimes you go, "not possible". But it's that understanding that... the choreographic work can't sit outside of, particularly in a proscenium arch theatre where you're making work with the full shebang of the lights and the sound and whatever. So for me, I always think about lighting as another choreographic layer, actually.

WM: Ja, and I think that's an important, especially for new choreographers coming in, to really understand that as a principle of thinking about work, that it is not just something that somebody else does, it is either something you have to consider as a choreographer or you have to work collaboratively with somebody. And this idea of collaboration I think is probably very paramount to how most of us actually get to work these days... of finding people that we can collaborate with... and becomes a give and take both ways.

LL: Ja. And I think also that it's the difference between thinking of a lighting technician and a lighting designer. So I mean, I think a lighting designer is a technician, but a technician is always, not always a designer. So the idea that the designer is actually an artist that is working in the medium of light and particularly for dancers, looking at how light... touches or doesn't touch the body and... what you make present or absent in terms of the light. So I think that it's also the understanding that you're not just going into a theatre and the technicians turning lights on for you and then you go, but that you're actually working with someone who's layering your artwork if it's understood correctly and that understanding. And I think, as I said, ja... I think for dance it's really about how that light cuts, touches, evades, is absent or present on the body.

WM: Thank you very much. I obviously like that idea of it being a physical presence on the stage. So then if we look at specifically you started to mention *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* but perhaps we can go back to *days like these*... I know it's a little while in 2015 but I think it was an important work for FLATFOOT and was an important work for me to be a part of and I'm just thinking about how we came up with ideas that were evident in the work...If you can think back to *days like these*?

LL: Ja. I mean, so for me, *days like these*, I think is still... it's still, for me, one of the most important... I won't say it's my favourite work, but I think it's one of the most important works that I made because it also signified a complete and utter collaboration with the artists involved from the dancers through to the light design through to the videographer as well. So it was one of those... it was that moment where I kind of learned really significantly to kind of give a lot over because I think I'd got to that point... where at in 2015, where I wasn't so interested in making steps anymore and interested more in... how I could bring all the artists involved into a space to tell stories - quite literally. So the piece was... the piece kind of evolved into many things, we did a whole lot of workshops, I thought I would have two days of chatting and it landed up being almost two weeks of discussions. I asked the dancers to bring very personal stories and now we focused it around I think it was food... it was, I can't remem... I mean I'll go back and check so that you can add it in but it was food, it was politics and I think it was relationships, family relationships<sup>166</sup>. And we, I asked everyone in the company to kind of remember two or three stories around those. And so what landed up... and we made the deal amongst ourselves that there were some stories for telling and some stories that were... for telling only and some stories that we could eventually work into the choreography. So it was a piece of art storytelling ,and it was a piece of art very personal story, so as the structure of the work evolved. It landed up that each dancer in the company had their own section although they weren't only in their own section and their section wasn't only their work so there was, like the grannies, which was really Julia's story but everyone else had granny stories as well. But that became... for example. So there was, for me, the... the lighting then was the idea of how do we create some kind of lighting that allows each story to have its own look, but that it would thread the work as one work, so it wouldn't just be an episodic piece, but it would be threaded. And then the other huge conundrum, of course with light is that we also had video projection. So, for a lot of the work, [there] were very close ups on hanging fabric, on very translucent fabric, of the faces of the dancer's video, speaking into the stage, talking, telling their stories, so that became the kind of voice over soundtrack of the work, as well. And of course video is light... and so it was also the case of what layer, how much of the video do we need to see

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<sup>166</sup> The piece used the dancer's memories around three specific topics of "food, politics and love/loss" (Programme Note, 2015, Appendix K).

clearly? Or how much could be veiled and how could the light actually work around that. So there were... there were the narrative issues around the work and then there were also the kind of... problematics of how to light the work where there's video projection fabric, whatever. So, I remember very much with that piece... because it was quite an intense rehearsal process with the dancers that I think... that you didn't come in right... you didn't come in... in the middle, I think you came in towards the end... not when it was finished though, I think before it was finished. And I think that the idea of also when you came and watched, it was a big moment for us because we had to kind of reveal it to somebody else, even though that somebody else was a collaborator. Then I think it was also you sat, as you always do, with your notes and drawings and video cameras and whatever... what you do. And then the idea started to come. And then also, I think from you as well, the idea of how to connect. So I know, I remember very clearly the idea of where do, how do we use light to connect these narratives? So that I didn't feel like one piece after the other. And also I think at the time that you came into the rehearsal, I hadn't really, decided on the...on the order of the sections. I had some idea, but I wasn't that clear about it. So it also helped to talk to you in terms of also structuring the ordering of the stories. I mean, I knew it was ... last, and the rest became part of the story... I don't know if I'm... if there's... if I've... not leaving anything out?

WM: No, no. That's amazing, thank you, yes... I mean, I think again it was that idea of bringing me into the collaboration that was existing already... I think the video definitely formed a large part of how the visual landscape of the work...and working alongside that, it became a challenge to thread and find difference and connection... with the different pieces...

LL: And also because of the video projection, I mean there were those soft, gauzy fabrics, but also the faces were huge. So it was also... we... and also once you'd seen one or two, the convention had been set up. But I know that we couldn't use a lot of front of house lighting and so there were those kinds of issues as well...

WM: ...kind of see as well as then trying to find how you can actually light the work.

LL: Ja...

WM: And then if we think a little bit more recently about *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye*, I mean again, this one you came with some very clear ideas of things that you wanted at certain points, but again, as you said, you leave it up to... you kind of got the idea, but it's not definitive of how you want to use it.

LL: No. So, I mean the only really... and as I said, it's also my journey, as I've worked more and more with you, I also, I think also we pre-empt each other a little bit... that sometimes I kind of have a sense of how you might think about the lights and also I... that's also from years of working, of understanding how you think about colour and where you put the lights. But I was very clear with *Seven Ways*... It was also an episodic work, which is the nature of more or less, the nature of how I'm working at the moment. And again that idea of how do we create sections that then are... can sit by themselves but then also thread into one longer work. So I was very clear about certain things and one of them was a music choices which was also about layering, the lighting choice, which was the beginning and the end. So I was very clear about... cutting the stage with light. So that idea of *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* was really about relationships and about relationships set against ... the wake of Covid and the wake of the riots in Durban and the isolation and what it meant to kind of find each other again.

And it was a journey back to childhood. And I was very clear at the end that I wanted video projections of photographs of the dancers as young babies and children and with mothers and with their own children. And I was very clear that against that I would have wanted to isolate them... in a square light, not a round light, but very much a square light, working with squares and very much that box... The idea of cutting... and then, I do remember in rehearsals for some of the other sections where we, we had one or two corridors and then we started to put the corridors into other sections and it kind of evolved as you start, as you... there, there's that idea of square lights, of cutting stage, of cutting bodies. And then suddenly in other sections you start to say, "well bring the corridor up here", "try this". And so, also *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* was at the Drama Theatre when it was... its first performance at the Playhouse. And it has a very huge... it's got a very high... I don't know what you call it, roof? I don't know, it's a big... it is higher than the Sneddon...

WM: Yes...

LL ...So it also had the potential to kind of be... to make the dances quite small in a very big space. And that was very much through your suggestions of those incredible beams that just kind of come like almost, I kind of call them god like beams, but the beams that come down... so with the haze, so that there's a sense of these... this light focusing in on these small bodies who are being... who are trying very hard to make it through whatever is happening. The piece also used a video projection on the cyclorama, so it was an easier thing to do because it wasn't on gauze and in the front of the stage.

But still it becomes a conundrum of how to deal with the lighting around that, but possible to use side lighting for that. So... ja. I mean, those were... so I think with that as well, I mean, because you do understand the episodic nature of the work. There is that sense of... I know that you're going to link it through colour, through... what do you put on the stands... how do you use the side lighting... the... also, increasingly the inclusion of what I call the rock star lighting, but that back lighting which is also really interesting the way it... it gives the body... a look and it, also it depends on the piece. So this piece... it was about bodies being isolated and cut. So those... the emergence of those corridors and those squares and those isolated spaces that the dancers were on, on this big enormous stage felt like the right thing.

WM: Ah...Thank you. And ja, as you said, I think that idea of having worked a long time together with somebody, you learn how they like to work choreographically. You know how I like to work lighting wise and we kind of, we start to find... similar language in similar ways without expressing it most of the time. And that...

LL: ...I mean, exactly, I mean, it's also like, I'm always amazed at how quick you are, but I think... it's the quickness is, okay obviously you're a very skilled technician as well, but also because as a designer, because you know the work and you know the kind of... you've worked with FLATFOOT and you know the bodies of the dancers very well as well. That there's an instinct, there's an instinct, a sensory instinct that... that goes with it.

WM: And I think, ja. which leads me on to that, as I said, more than the technicalities of the lighting, it's kind of starting to think of what are the emotions and what are the moods that kind of lighting pulls out of the work or enhances it in your opinion as a choreographer... Starting with *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* as you've just...

LL: ...I mean, it goes back to what I said earlier... it's a thing of doing that first choreography and not knowing anything about... how to say to the lighting designer, "this needs to look warm", "it needs to be cold", it needs to be... And then getting to the point where you can say like, "bring up the ambers"... because and... and you'll go, "oh yes!", or... or you'll go "no, no, no blue here" and I'll go "but why? I thought that..." so... but it's the idea, of course, of understanding that... because the lighting is... is exactly... it's illuminating, it's... it's illuminating the choreography, it's doing that, then in what capacity is that lighting allowing you to see? Because what the lighting design is doing is kind of giving your eyes a frame to which to look at the work. So it's not just like we've put lights onstage, watch the dancers, it's saying we've put cold light and we've put light that only is half... across half the stage. So the dancers are coming in and out of light and that becomes part of the narrative of the work. So it's the idea that the lighting becomes part of the narrative of the work... and really thinking about that, thinking about what does it mean when dancers are coming in and out of the light in South Africa, it's a very poignant thing.

And what happens when you put people in small squares on the stage? Small squares of light. But light is that... it's almost like the stage light. If it's most subtle and most beautiful it's really the... it's helping the audience to read the work and it should be so subtle that the audience probably doesn't know why are they suddenly feeling sad or they suddenly feeling they want to get off their chairs. But it's... and it's about colour, it's about intensity, it's about what is lit and how.

WM: And that's the experience of it. And it all becomes this layered experience. And of course, no one thing works in isolation... it is all part of the different layering of the work. It becomes the experience... the full experience of watching, experiencing a production. Which then leads me onto... kind of the idea of then when you sit as a choreographer... watching these performances, And I know you're one of the few

choreographers who will watch every performance. How do you experience the lighting as you are watching it... with the dancers onstage?

LL: Gosh, I mean, it's quite hard to answer that because you're looking at so much, you know you're looking, you know, you've got the... the sound, whether it's music or voice or whatever. You've got sound, you've got the bodies, you've got the light, which is giving you a mood and a feeling. You've got the atmosphere in the theatre. So... ja. I think it's sort of, for me as a choreographer, I think it all sort of... starts to wash, it sort of washes over me like I'm, I suppose, I'm meditation because at some point and for me, and it's something that I've learned but once the piece has been lit and once, for example, we've had that first lighting plot and the work is... or I mean we will tweak it we carry on tweaking it but once it's been done I very, very consciously in my head and heart, I let the work go - that's the moment that I let the work go. That's the moment where I say "Okay, now the dancers, Wesley, lighting, backstage people"... I will sit in the back of the auditorium and because the work is so known to me I go into a kind of meditation and... I kind of like a... a reverie, a kind of thinking about the work and that's... it can be many things... it can be about that particularly that night, the lights and the sound are the thing that I feel or the next it's the performers and sometimes dancers have a particularly good performance where they all find the light they're supposed to be in and then it all starts to work.

But I do know for me that once that first lighting plot is done and even though we do come back with each other and we tweak and we change and we make other suggestions, I know for me consciously that's the point where I go, "this is not mine anymore" and I walk away so that I can sit at the back and watch critically, of course, always. Because you're always thinking about where you could have done better, what you don't like and what's too late to change...and what is really beautiful.

WM: Ja, I think it's an interesting one because I often find as a lighting designer, even watching or watching other work, I'm always kind of experiencing performance with that framework. It's very difficult for me to sit back and watch something else because that's...that's... that's my framework that I look at it.

LL: No, no, absolutely. And I mean, I know if I go and watch work and suddenly there's a very interesting lighting design so I could feel myself looking to see where the source of light is coming from and what they're doing. Ja... of course because you're an art maker yourself, so you watch work, just to see how it's been done, because that's what we do. We're in the business of crafting in a way, ja

WM: ...And the more we can experience, the more it opens up... our own experiences.

LL: Yeah, yeah!

WM: Which then brings us almost kind of just the final idea of any kind of, further thoughts of lighting design and choreography in general. If you were going to maybe give an example to new people coming into choreography, how... what would you offer them as an idea to think about? I mean, you spoke a little bit at the beginning about your own journey, but... as a more experienced choreographer now. What things would you offer to somebody to think about?

LL: Ah... I mean definitely get your technical knowledge up... you can't... Even though there are people that you can collaborate with, it's not useful when you walk into a theatre and you just... This thing that you spend six weeks working on has to be then handed over. So really, find the partnerships, work with people who are prepared to come to rehearsal so that they see the work... before it goes anywhere or even sometimes right at the beginning. There's wonderful stories of choreographers who've got funding and space and whatever to have lighting designers and musicians right at the beginning, from the beginning process. But certainly... I feel like my experiences of theatre have got better because I have made it my business to learn more technically, but also because I've learned to understand the power of collaboration. I've learned to understand what it means to have a lighting designer or a videographer who works and understands and... ja, I think it's about knowledge, it's about... we kind of think that these things are mystical arts, like "I'm going to be a choreographer", but actually it's just a lot of practice of what's right and wrong, instinct... and also... kind of learning to trust that soft voice that says "no!" or "yes" or whatever and the risk. But it helps, it helps to just get the knowledge, to just really learn.

WM: And I think a very important part for me of that is language, is the language because often, as lighting designers, technicians there's a lot of jargon and that comes into that and as choreographers there's a different language of how you're creating the steps and finding...

LL: ... Ja...Ja...

WM: ...between the two is very important.

LL: No, and I mean also, it's like a weird thing, but also it's a... I think it's also like a re-conceptualisation of the notion of being an artist. Because we have the sense that an artist is a person who sits in isolation, makes work and the thing about dance is it's absolutely, unless you're doing your own solos for the rest of your life, which is really, would be terribly boring, unless you've Vincent Mantsoe of course... but even then there's an understanding that you never are alone when you do this work, that there are always... someone has to take charge.

Yes, but there are always multiple voices, there's voices of the dancers, there's voices of the lighting designers, the musicians, the videographers, whoever's in the room and in the... poets... collaboration. So it's also understanding that it is actually a very collaborative art form. Even though you might be the person in charge of the overall look and the overall story or narrative, but it becomes everyone else's work as well.

WM: Hmm.. Thank you Lliane, I think that's probably the most salient point to come out, is that idea of collaboration because, nobody does it alone and lighting wouldn't be anything without dance... and we all work together and that's the great joy of it... is also extending our work and reach, and of our family and friendship and understanding of humanity with each other.

LL: Ja, and also because I think sometimes the work is quite dangerous, like I think of *Seven*, I mean of *days like these*, I think that work was dangerous. It was personally very dangerous... because people were revealing quite hard stories, and it felt very dangerous on a very cellular level. And so you have to then work in an environment where people are respectful of the level of personal danger that is going on. And I think

that you can only do that if you are working in an environment of collaboration, of trust and of participation.

WM: Cool... thank you very much Lliane. I think that's an excellent point to end our little discussion. We've had a great round of experiencing and talking about, and I can acknowledge that it's a great privilege to be able to work with you for these many years. So thank you for the opportunities and I hope we're able to do many more.

LL: Yep, they're coming! (Laughs) Yes, no, thank you so much Wes. It's nice also to reflect sometimes things go so quickly that you don't have a chance to sit back and go "Oh okay, this is it"... I'm interested why you chose those two works?

WM: ... again. I think it was *days like these*, for me was a turning point of really becoming part of the team, of creating the work... with Karen as a videographer... with the dancers. Ja, it really, it really felt... although I had been working for a couple years with you already... 2007... ja, that *days like these* felt like another step in the collaborative nature of how we got to work and you trusting me with things...

LL ...Ja...Ja...

WM: ...And yes, it really felt like a step...

LL: ...I think you're right. I think it was a turning point for all of us. I think for the company. Cool. Thanks, Wes.

WM: And for *Seven ways...*, like it was a more recent one, I think we've got an opportunity to really do something extraordinary, also outside of the usual Sneddon. But we've got to be able to, as I said, it was a combination of your ideas and my ideas... of finding quite a strong lighting design. I think *days like these* I find very subtle...and layering, whereas... *Seven Ways to Say Goodbye* was more striking and kind of had more and I suppose the work was as well in a different way. It was a different way of hitting and then the lighting kind of stepped on side.

LL: And... The Playhouse have invited me next year again to make a piece for their festival in May, so we'll be doing it again Wes.

WM: We'll make a plan (laughs). Cool, so I want to say thank you, Lliane, and I want to thank Clare for sitting in and... moderating the session. And ja, At that point, let me stop the recording. Thank you very much.

## APPENDIX J

### Transcript of interview with Vincent Mantsoe (VM) via Zoom

19 October 2023

Interviewed by Wesley Maherry (WM)

WM: So first welcome Vincent, thank you so much for agreeing to doing this and we're going to have a little discussion around lighting for contemporary dance and specifically our collaborations and in this case looking very much specifically at *SoliiDad* in 2019...

VM ... ja...

WM: ...which we did here in Durban at the JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Experience and that is one of the case studies for my Masters... and the title, just to put it on record, is 'Lifting the veil on lighting: Investigating how stage lighting design can become an embodied practice within South Africa contemporary dance making'.

VM: Sure.

WM: But before we get onto lighting and there's one question that's kind of come up and have been grappling with it a little bit, it's just around this contested term of South African contemporary dance.

VM: Oh, Lord! (Laughs)

WM: ... Maybe what that means to you? And the kind of work that you make... contemporary dance, ja?

VM: Look, I mean contemporary dance in South Africa...(laughs) I mean, look, you know... I think in general, South African dance have, has shifted in so many different directions. Whether we're looking at a landscape of somehow maybe more evolved into, like kind of like European aesthetics and also somehow may... more of a, the younger generation are also trying to look at what is happening especially in terms of

who they are and what's happening around this South Africa, especially today and for me personally it's been an ongoing, not, yeah... If I want to say... investigation, truly about the tradition of where I grew up and then, also, the spirituality of where I come from as well. And that has been embedded into my work for more than three decades. And of course it has, it has also evolved with time, because I definitely, I'm not creating the same way when I was creating 30 years ago, when I started with Moving Into Dance. I look at things a little more differently now with the maturity and South African dance today of course you know it, it's got so many different layers, where you have the younger generation kind of like looking much more deeper into the intellectualisation of the creating of the work and questioning of course, the different elements of the society and then who they are as individuals - I think also gender equality. And then of course having to look at what's happening today in terms of war. This is a war, this is war against the women as well. So in... and there are so many different aspects into looking at that and to be very honest, I think South African dance is got a very strong essence of who we are as a nation, as people, because yes, we are very complex, because yes, we have eleven of, or maybe twelve now, twelve official languages. So it is that complexity where beauty also comes in. I can... I think the artistic, development it has, it has grown so much, that you of course... even the likes of Pantsula, having to integrate themselves into the contemporary sense as well... and also, working overseas, with the different choreographers where obviously, the European aesthetic is very different from the South African one. And in terms of the energy part of it, we've always been very... the leading in South African way of how to express the body and then how to, really engage into who we are and how we try to put forward the this notion of the... our society and then in general. So, and I think, South African dance has really evolved so much, over the years. But then of course, there has been a little bit of blockages somewhere, somehow, where people, somehow, I think they've been... got stuck into the same norm. And... you have so many different, different choreographers who are doing amazing stuff. You're looking at... Gregory [Maqoma], where he's still doing his amazing work and then you still have people like the younger generation, Thamsanqa [Majela]<sup>167</sup>, he's doing his own work as well. So you've got a variety of a younger generation. You've got Mamela

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<sup>167</sup> 2023 Standard Bank Young Artist for Dance, for more information: [https://sponsorships.standardbank.com/sbgs/sponsorship/arts-and-culture/young-artist-award/Sylvester-Thamsanqa-\(Thami\),Majela](https://sponsorships.standardbank.com/sbgs/sponsorship/arts-and-culture/young-artist-award/Sylvester-Thamsanqa-(Thami),Majela) [Accessed 15 November 2023]

[Nyamza]<sup>168</sup> as well, creating their own voices. So you now have this, this a big arena where different artists, they want to say something (laughs) and... So, but then personally, I've been, always been, very, consistent with what I am trying to achieve into my work, which is very much to do with, the reflection of the tradition and the cultural aspect of where I come from and then in reflecting to the society: the South African traditional forms and how to manipulate them to make them universal as well at the same time.

WM: No, thank you Vincent, I know it's not an easy question to answer and it's... and then that's... I think the, ultimately it is that idea that it is not one thing and it's constantly shifting and it's...

VM ...Yes.

WM ...it's personal and it's political and it's social and it's contemporary and it's all these things that make it exciting and make it interesting...

VM: Ja, no...

WM...and we get to be a part of it.

VM: Exactly.

(Both laugh)

WM: Inside and out, witnessing and making.

VM: Ja.

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<sup>168</sup> 2023 JOMBA! Legacy Artist, for more information: <https://jomba.ukzn.ac.za/jomba-2023-legacy-artist-mamela-nyamza/>  
[Accessed 15 November 2023]

WM: Then coming specifically to looking at lighting and the question is kind of, what do you believe the role of lighting to be in dance? And especially the kind of work that you make?

VM: Look, I mean, I think, over the years especially like, starting from maybe *SoliiDad*... the lighting, it has become very important aspect of the creation itself. Because, if I have to go back, in the early 90's or even before, in terms of when you're talking about the contemporary dance, especially in South Africa, lighting, it has been a little bit more, I don't want to say dull (laughs) But a little bit more stuck in a sense where the creativity of the lighting designers, maybe somehow they didn't really understand, what the choreographer was looking for. And also maybe somehow the choreographer didn't really care that much about the lighting (laughs), it was just for them...

WM: ...Or not able to explain their ideas. They didn't have, yes, yes...

VM: ... Exactly...

WM: ...what they were looking for.

VM: You know what it is that you know they are trying to achieve and I think, since you know, we have created this thing called Crossings, a couple of... many, many years ago, which was quite, very instrumental into how both, the choreography and lighting and of course the music, they play an important role into how the three of them or even more... they can actually work together. Having to understanding that the choreographer, of course, he or she has to explain the ideas behind their creation, so that, it will be much more easier for the lighting designer to understand how to look at the work in a different way. But then, of course, at the same time to be able to marry, both, the ideas of the choreography and the lighting aspect of that. So, and having worked with you on *SoliiDad*, which was an absolute pleasure for me (laughs) to have a lighting designer, live, on stage, like, really creating the work, understanding the journey that I was trying to explore during the choreographic process. But then of course, unfortunately, you were not there with me from the beginning, but then you understood the importance of what *SoliiDad* was about from having to work within

what, two days into the theatre and I think, it's quite, very important to highlight the ideas that lighting, sometimes it can be a supporting act to the choreography. And then sometimes it can be vice a versa, depending on the ideas that... what we're trying to achieve and to marry both the choreography and the lighting, of course, both, artists, they need to understand. They have to have a mutual understanding of what it is that they're trying to achieve and the respect and the patience of, to say, like, "look, you know, this is not going to work because ABC three", and then, "this is going to work because of the ideas are aligned with that". But then sometimes, yes, we can have a bit of a contradiction to say, "Oh, I'm going out of the way"... because as, as a lighting designer, you feel like this is what's happening, in terms of, at that particular moment. Maybe I go against that choreography or that particular moment of dancing and it maybe it makes everything even much more interesting. The tension between the choreography and the lighting, the shades that are... when I'm moving on stage, into different positions, it can have a big impact. But if, of course, the lighting designer also understand the philosophy behind the choreographer's journey as well.

WM: And how much do you conceive of lighting in the beginning stages of the process of making a choreography? Because I'm sure that's also shifted over the years?

VM...oh ja!

WM: ...as you've had more experience.

VM: Oh no, definitely. I mean, look, I... before I mean, during, I think it is for me, it will be during the, the creation itself, when I'm creating in my own studio. I'll have ideas, "oh, I like... I like of this one to be here because I'm thinking of this effect" based on, what I am feeling at that particular moment or where I'm going with a particular, movement or the idea. So, and I do have the tendency sometimes to think of the lights even before, to say "I like to have this." And one of the things that, I always like to have is the haze, you know, is the haze (laughs) on stage. Not because of, you know, it brings a certain dynamic into the work. But then it also created the spirituality because of, if we thinking much more on the quality... the quality or the quantity of it

is like the Impepho<sup>169</sup>. Because Impepho, it comes from the traditional forms and that it creates that as well... that spiritual path that we are trying to achieve. So I always try, to think along those lines, to say "Okay, on this part I don't need the haze" or "on this particular work, I don't need, because it, it talks about the... something totally different." But then, in particularly with me, I always like to have the haze because it brings a certain... a dynamic... certain spirituality into the work. Which is obviously connected to the traditional Impepho.

WM: Hmmm..

VM: And...for me to work with the lights before, it gives me the freedom to say when I arrive in a place I know (laughs) what I'm looking for, but there's always, of course, the possibility of negotiating with the lighting designer. Because sometimes, as a dancer, because I am not a lighting designer, I have only ideas. But then as a lighting designer, you have a much more broader sense of where things are going and what are they looking at. Because you can see in front of you and me, as when I'm on stage, I don't necessarily see everything. I can only feel the texture of the light but then when you are in front as a lighting designer, you see exactly the whole scope of the opera, what's happening in front of you. And then you can now try to highlight a few things that maybe I proposed, and then give it a little bit even more, power into it. Having to work on *SoliiDad* of course, that for me, it was very clear for that moment that, it is very imperative for me to work with yourself, for all my creations, it doesn't matter whether it's a group work or it's my solo work because it makes a lot of sense that as a lighting designer you have an acute sense of, especially in my work. I know you've got so many, many different kinds of way, but then in my work, you've got a sense, a very clear sense of what's happening, at that particular moment or whatever the work is about, of what needs to be done and for me it's like a blessing. (Laughs)

WM: No, thank you for the compliment and it's such a pleasure to work with people and ja... and you get to explore those things. We don't always, as you say, get the opportunity...

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<sup>169</sup> Impepho is an indigenous African plant that, once dried, is burnt in order to communicate with one's ancestors

VM: Yes...

WM: ...and everything we do and being able to work with you is an extraordinary experience of working...

VM: Ja...

WM: ... and like working with anybody else, different to working with FLATFOOT and Liane and the company works and just it's, ja, it's all different experiences...

VM: Ja. Definitely, exactly.

WM: And then just looking specifically at *SoliiDad* because again there was a complicated thing. We're working as part of the JOMBA festival so...

VM: Yes...

WM: ....you were restricted by time and equipment and things like that. You came with very clear ideas. I remember you sent me the plan of one of the shows...

VM: Ja...

WM....that you wanted to work with and those similar kind of lighting things and fixtures.

VM: Yes.

WM: Ja, and it just kind of how we came about with some of those ideas... that were kind of, ja, evident in the work at the end.

VM: Yeah, look, I mean, I think you know what is important is to know that, even if you have complications of working within the festival scope. That yes, you are going to have limitations. And for that particular reason why, it was quite, very important for me to say "look Wesley, I, this is... these are the ideas that I have in mind," in terms

of, I like to have the lights at the back, things like on the floor, things like that. And then, is it possible or if it's not possible? And then can we find a way, of, obviously, in terms of time, because that's another factor that, you've got a lot of... such a limited time frame that you need to work on the lighting design. And for me, it was clear from the beginning, even though I said "this is what I'm looking for", it was clear for me to say, look, "I know what's going to happen", that, I'm not going to get everything. But there is a possibility of manipulating the lights accordingly, so that the work, it stays within the boundaries of the integrity. And then also, It can be highlighted with the simplicity of the lighting and which is something that you know I always bear in mind. I know that is going to happen and with the kind of ideas that you know I have sometimes. I look at just like, for example, when I was in Cape Town, a couple of weeks ago and I was living in a place where I could literally see the sunset every evening in the sea (laughs), so that it gives me a different ideas, just by looking at the stroke of the light, I have ideas in my mind. But then I sometimes say "is it going to work when I get to a theatre?" (laughs). Is it possible? Having to understand that, remember I'm working within the festival scope; so I may not have everything, so what if I don't have everything, what's going to happen? Is there an possibility of maybe, negotiating with, with Wesley or a lighting designer to say, look can we have a few things that resembles what I imagined or what I saw from different pictures? Is it possible? So all of these things is all about negotiation, because you cannot necessarily impose a lot of things and then expect one hundred percent things to work and... the minimum I think where you know especially with *SoliiDad*, if I remember quite very well I mean, I think I had many ideas, I had many ideas... and at least the minimum that required was obviously a few things, especially like those important things that you know were needed, which was of course the, the light at the back and then of course, I think I .... Yes, I had...

WM: Yes...

VM: ....the, what is it? The mics?

WM: ...the yes,

VM: Yes...

WM:... *Solidad* was the ropes...

VM: : ...oh, the ropes, yeah...

WM: ...that was uh... yes, yes...

VM: Yeah, sorry, I had...

WM: ...you're thinking of the first<sup>170</sup>.

VM: Yeah, I had the robes I needed, of course, the ropes, and how to give them a different energy and a different perspective altogether, Those were the few things that at least if I could achieve that. And the rest, of course, would be just to get your perspective, just to say, okay, this is what we have, and then with the limitation of, what we have in the theatre, can we do this? ABC, three and four, As I said before, it's impossible to have everything. That if I planned everything and then to have them all day, it's impossible. But then as long as we will have, and we achieved it, we achieved it, in the sense that the simplicity, but then effective at the same time. And, I still remember one person, a couple of people, they said to me: "Yes, but then, how did you manage to light all the..." the tennis balls basically. And the ropes, no, the ropes, who were going stripes and going down. Yes, and then later on I think I use something different after that. So, but then that, those kind of like, the simplicity, I think they have much more effect. And yet again, to have the haze/smoke, which gives a different dimension as well, at the same time.

WM: Yeah. No, and I think that's it, you're finding the essences of what you're looking for in the work. And it said, even I might not be able to recreate it exactly...

VM: Exactly...

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<sup>170</sup> Our first collaboration – *Konkoriti* (2016) also at the JOMBA festival, for more information view the 2016 brochure: <https://jomba.ukzn.ac.za/jomba-2016/> [Accessed 15 November 2023]

WM: ...If you can get the understanding of what the mood is, of what the intention is, we really then try and recreate that to the best of our abilities.

VM: Definitely. Ja.

WM: ....ja, and then I mean, I think if we think of it specifically again, *SoliiDad*, and we thinking of moods and emotions, I remember that kind of underlying quality of desolation, of openness of space was something that you really wanted?

VM: Ja...

WML...Ja, can you remember, kind of like that, just anything of that. We were trying to come up with the emotionally and moods and atmospheres and from your perspective.

VM: Ja. Look, you know, I mean, I think again in terms of space and I wanted to, I mean, if I had that in mind, in for me, for *SoliiDad*, that if it was also possible to open the wings... (laughs)

WM: Ja... yes.

VM: .... Completely open them; because that will give a sense of really, someone traveling in the desert: being alone, being isolated and that was the idea. And then of course, at the same time, if you have all these ropes, it's just a strings of kind of like the distance sometimes when we say silk, silk energy, which is kind of like, when you're looking from a distance, especially when you are in the Kalahari desert or in the Sahara... you do see that, like, the lines, that are being created from distance. So that was like what I was looking for and to be able to achieve that, I thinking we could not go complicated in terms of the lights themselves and I guess that's also why we couldn't necessarily open the wings, to that extent because maybe it will have somehow distracted [from] the confinement of this particular person going to his own journey and really about capturing the different essences of the movements with the light, itself, that was very important. Because *SoliiDad*... is about solitude, it's about

really bringing this particular person and how he deals with this different emotions. The light had to be simple again, but effective.

WM: And I find, especially when I look back at *SoliiDad*, I find I'm very much following you both physically in the space as you're moving, but also emotionally, really trying to follow the, the choreography...

VM: Yeah.

WM: ... Ja, I found that really, and it's not an easy thing to do because you're obviously dealing with complex shifts... and big shifts.

VM: Ja, ja...

WM: Ja...

VM: No but I mean that's why, ja, sorry, that's why I'm saying like, I'm sometimes I think the contradiction, it was necessary. Even though because I was moving quite, quite often, of course and the light will catch a certain energy of movement and the body itself, on the different space. And then you have sometimes, like as I said, if you're looking at from a distance, you can see that there is, there is a shadow. You don't know exactly what is the shadow, is it a human or is it an animal figure, or is just a stump of a tree. You don't know exactly. So you know, having to try to do that, having to shift from one place to the other place, the lights, of course they will do what they need to do and trying to catch a dancer who's moving so many times, with the exceptions, when they or when I'm staying still, then you have a different element of a bit of a surprise and then a different energy, a different atmosphere all together. So I think with *SoliiDad* is one of... that's why I say, like, it was my, one of the first works that, I think, I believe that it needed a lighting designer who will understand, who will actually come with me in the journey. Because it's not only just about the lighting designer being there on the top and then punching the numbers and then changing the dynamics of the lights and so on, but is to really be able to say, okay, here we are, both of us. We are trying to create these images and then can we go together rather than be separate? And that's also, I think very important.

WM: And that I mean, I wrote that little piece afterwards, I mean, especially when I'm following you. Dealing with the trance and things where you almost slightly in and out and slightly different in things, but you're having to be there really with you. I mean, that's still one of the most extraordinary experiences of being able to.

VM: Yes... yeah.

WM: It's not just about setting things and leaving it...

VM: Of course...

WM:...I was really having to watch and follow and go, okay, no, he's not going... He's shifting that way and that's... and that doesn't happen. And I mean, that's the joy of live performance...

VM: Yes.

WM: ... and the joy of working with somebody like you in the work is that it's dynamic. It's shifting and it moves in different ways...

VM: Mmm... mmm... Most definitely, I mean, it is so fulfilling and exciting at the same time. Because you are here, you are as a lighting designer, I'm sure you know, you're sitting there and then you don't know, I mean, you know the work, but you don't know exactly what's going to happen in terms of the transformation of the body and what's going to happen. Of course I will be there. I'll be there on that particular moment.

WM: Always... always (laughs)

VM: I'll be there in a particular moment. But then because I believe that the performer can be able to say: "Okay, today the performance was like this. Tomorrow it has to be very different in terms of the energy" and the, and also the feeling of the work, it has to be very different because the body shifts, like the light shifts sometimes and the meanwhile, of course keeping the integrity and the concept only in one place and to

really achieve that again, I'm going to stress this again, to really achieve that, both the choreographer and the performer, at the same time, yes, and the lighting designer, they have to move together as one. It's the same as a drummer playing for the dancer in front, they have to go together. And otherwise if there is a, yes, contradiction, sometimes it happens, you go your own way, you miss a beat or two beats and then, the dancer goes in a different direction - it's fine. But then if you are able to, if you know each other very well, that you can really go together, within in the scope. And then, as you said earlier on, sometimes you are following, what's happening in front of you. That's fine as well and that's very exciting and that's very exciting. Because for me personally, I think, I remember that as I was dancing, I knew sometimes that, no, I don't have a light but something is going to happen there. It was for that particular reason maybe the light was not there. Either I was, maybe 2 seconds or 3 seconds early or late, it doesn't matter, but the magic at that particular moment is something that one cannot replace. And, again it's really about really having to work together as a team, as a... because I believe that, a lighting designer is also performing (laughs). The tensions of what's happening and because you have to understand that, it's not only just about the movement itself, but then it's about something greater than that.

WM: That's, that's, I look forward to be able to explore that more one day in the future, even as I think now of ideas of...

VM: You will. You will...

WM: ...of how we would work. I mean of almost having different states that we could choose to find rather than setting it so much. Almost becomes an improvised choreography between the lighting design and the dance.

VM: Yes, I yeah, yes I am hoping, truly hoping, hundred percent hoping to do that with *IZILO*<sup>171</sup> because I am going to be in touch my dear friend (laughs) our dear friend. To say that I need to bring is *IZILO*, to JOMBA! next year, and it is one of the other works that even much more better I think in terms of the conceptualisation of it as well. But

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<sup>171</sup> *IZILO(2023)* was choreographed and performed as part of the Kucheza Festival in April 2023 for the programme go to <https://www.studocu.com/en-za/document/walter-sisulu-university/business-ethics/kucheza-programme-2023/69612039> [Accessed 16 November 2023]

then spiritually even much more stronger, better than even *KOMA*<sup>172</sup>, if I may say so... even better than *Koma*. But unfortunately, when I did in Pretoria, of course, there were so many... Anyway, that's another story from another time. (Laughs) I am hoping that if there is that opportunity, so that you can work on it, because you have, you have the material, because you really get into it, because it's really, really something that it needs that, that extra special touch (laughs). Ja, it definitely needs.

WM: And then for me, and it's interesting as the performer more than just the choreographer, is that exp... And you spoke a little bit, but that experience of light on stage, of how it feels, of how it affects you as a performer, that maybe I don't know if you could speak about that, because yeah, I... because I perform a little, I understand that, but just like being able to work with my lighting design, how that feels on stage?

VM: Ja, look, I mean, I think having to work with the lights on stage it has definitely influenced the energy of where I am at that particular moment and also sometimes it affected the power of how light it can actually give a booster into the expression of a movement or the expression of the transformation of a movement. So, and I've always, as I said before, I think, if I do feel a certain, not necessarily the white colour, but if I feel a certain colour into, into my skin, it doesn't matter whether it's on the face or on the arms, or on the hand. It triggers a certain element of that extra spirituality. Because now you have to remember, traditionally, especially when we're talking about the Sangomas, they wear white, blue, green, red, and then you know that I love red into my work. So depending of course on that particular whatever situation was happening, if I feel a particular light hitting my body, it definitely transforms the notion of that particular moment, of what's happening, what I should be doing, where my thoughts are, where my spiritual being is at that particular moment. It really, the light at that particular, it really highlights the essences of the work itself. So, as I said, it's not about a lighting designer sitting up there and then punching and then saying "I want this red colour, I want this blue colour", but it's about really trying to understand where this particular performer is and then what they are feeling at that particular moment. And the colours they're very effective, because we have colours everywhere, in the

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<sup>172</sup> Mantsoe and I collaborated once again in 2022 for his work *KOMA*, also performed at the JOMBA! Festival for more information <https://jomba.ukzn.ac.za/jomba-2022-legacy-artist-vincent-sekwati-mantsoe/> [Accessed 15 November 2023]

universe, we have colours. And then depending on what you're looking at, it will affect you, definitely. And then if you're looking at the colour blue: that is about the sky, is about whatever. But then if you're looking at colours like red, it's about rage, is about, blood, it's about, furious, being furious about, so many different elements of that. If you're looking at white, this is about the purity, it's about this, and this, and then that. So the lighting, more especially in the theatre perspective, the lighting, it really gives a sense of the underneath elements of different things that we are seeing every single day. The nature. The animal kingdoms. It gives that highlighting element of it and definitely in *SoliiDad* because if I remember we had, we had especially the red colour... (laughs)

WM: Hmmmm

VM: You know, getting into, even getting into, into the ropes as well, getting into the ropes because that was also very important to try to highlight the veins... the veins that are going through this particular human being.

WM: No, thank you, that's fascinating. And I mean there's no, that's are the things as we don't get just, we don't speak about them...

VM: Yes...

WM: ...and especially when it comes to light. And that's what I've been increasingly trying to do, is where the research is, is been able to speak, to speak about my own practice, speak to other people involved in,

VM: Yes...

WM:...because we don't, the lighting kind of... is... people assume it happens... (Both laugh)

VM: ...It doesn't just... no.

WM:...it doesn't just happen. And it is, I mean, one of the choices of colours. Those are conversations that we have when we're programming and things that it's that you want that at this point...

VM: Yes...

WM: ...and then I work with you to go, "yes, this will work. No, that doesn't. Perhaps maybe this..." offer some alternative and things. And it's conversations and it's collaboration and as I said...

VM: Definitely, ja.

WM:...it doesn't always. We don't always get the opportunities to collaborate and do it and happen. But when it does happen, when it works, it works...

VM: It works... ja, definitely... definitely, ja...

WM:...And it's great to be a part of and it's exciting to be a part of... ja

VM: Beautiful.

WM: It's...

VM:...Beautiful...

WM: it's...

VM: Excellent...

WM: ...so then just one final question of any of the kind of comments or thoughts that you have on lighting and contemporary dance? It's been a fascinating discussion and, and again a lot of the stuff we almost do implicitly without too many conversations. As said, there's a connection that happens...

VM: Yes. Ja...

WM: ...so to be able to unpack this a little bit has been really exciting and interesting to do.

VM: Look, you know, I think if we are talking about today, I think, lighting designing and lighting into a choreography or to a dancer or performers on stage, with the choreography, I think it's quite a very important. Because it gives the work a bit much more breath, if I may say so. Even much more bigger breath into the scope of what we as choreographers, we are trying to achieve. And I think this nowadays, different choreographers that they demand or they're asking for different lightings that are sometimes a little bit more strong (laughs). Because of, they have different ideas of what it is that they're trying to achieve, choreographically, and I think the lighting, aspect of it is quite, very important today because it will... it gives the choreography, a boost to even much more, to even more elevate into a different standard. And some people, I mean, I know personally that I can go away without, the lighting, especially if I perform in a different space. I can go away with it because my body, it will say a lot, but then at the same time, once you get into that, a different element of arena, then yes, lighting, it is quite, very imperative to have because it really gives the freedom to say, "look, yes, this is the choreography, but then to highlight it even much more better so that whatever happens, for different shades, different emotions, different, images on stage". We need to have, of course, the different lights, different colours on, of lights, obviously not too much so that the light is not overstepping the choreography, per se. But then just to really give it a boost so that everything that happens; it happens at once, and there is a mutual marriage between both of them, so that there is no like... one is going too high or one is going too low. I remember one of the things that Adrienne Sichel, went while she used to come to, the JOMBA as well. She said that, as it was, I think for *SoliiDad* as well. I think it was *SoliiDad*. She said that: "Oh, I think... Wesley lit *SoliiDad* so, so beautifully." And I said, "Of course I know yes, I know he did" because I think she also understood that everything that happened, it was a, a collaboration, even though the time frame was very, very sh... limited, but then it was, it was well achieved because of the understanding of each other's way of creating, the lights and the choreography and I think, ja, that the lighting, aspect of it is very important today. Without it, depending on who, I think depending on who you're

working with, without the lighting, a proper lighting designer who can really lead the choreography and the body in a proper way and in a respectful manner. Then there's going to be this unbalanced situation happening and... but then again, I think it today is very important. It's imperative to have a lighting designer working with the choreographer as much as possible.

WM: And I think that's the perfect point to end the conversation. And I can count myself so lucky and so fortunate to have met you and had the privilege to be able to work...

VM: Oh...

WM: ...and hopefully continue to work in the future.

VM: Oh, most definitely, most definitely. We will. We will. Yes.

WM: Thank you so much, Vincent. I'm going to stop the recording there, so let me stop that and thank you again for your time enjoying the conversation.

VM: You are much more welcome you are very welcome and I'm looking forward for the possibility of 2024. (laughs)

**APPENDIX K**  
*days like these Programme Note*

**FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY**

**25 - 28 MARCH @ 7.30PM**  
**29 MARCH @ 2.30PM**

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*FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY* can be found in the heart of the East coast of South Africa in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. It is nestled in the heart of the warm ocean facing city of Durban. Its geographical location is important to *FLATFOOT* as this sense of place is what offers a unique flavour to this African contemporary dance company. Often working with memory and history, *FLATFOOT* has developed a unique identity as a contemporary South African dance company that is known to offer politically and socially charged dance theatre work.

Working from a contemporary based training that includes, Graham, Hawkins, Horton and Release Technique, the company also does ballet class once a week and has a strong pull from the traditional African dance forms and popular performance forms that are located in KwaZulu-Natal. Unique to *FLATFOOT* is the ability of the resident professional dancers to traverse both an African traditional dance idiom and then step into strong contemporary technique and performance.

Liane Loots began *FLATFOOT* 'unofficially' in 1994 as a part-time training programme through the Drama And Performance Programme on the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College Campus) that aimed to offer technical contemporary dance training to any Durban based dancers who was able to make the classes. The company began with no funding and simply the good will and political and artistic impulse to offer dance training to those who has historically and economically been denied access due to the apartheid systems. The company offered small choreographic works at any and all free platforms in Durban until, in 2002, a decision was made to begin applying for funding to secure a more permanent base for some of the exceptional dancers who were coming through. In 2003 the National Arts Council of South Africa gave *FLATFOOT* its first official project based funding and so helped it begin the long and beautiful process of becoming a full registered and now internationally recognised African contemporary dance company.

*FLATFOOT* prides itself on not only offering dance theatre work that has won numerous awards, commissions and invitations from all over the world, but also on the vast amount of dance development and dance education work that they run in both rural and urban areas of KwaZulu-Natal (*FLATFOOT* work with around 1000 KZN based youth and children a year!).

The initial impulse of creating *FLATFOOT* - the idea of growing dance and dancers - is something that the company still remains true to and they take great joy and pride in the dance developmental work that *FLATFOOT* is able to achieve each year.

**2015 celebrates the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY* – 12 years of offering excellent in dance performance, training, development and education, and 12 years of growing African contemporary dance in Durban, South Africa and Africa.**

STAY INFORMED OF *FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY*'s WORK BY FINDING US AT:

- <http://www.flatfootdancecompany.webs.com/>
- <http://www.facebook.com/flatfootdancecompany>
- <https://twitter.com/FlatfootDanceCo>

## ***“days like these”***

**CHOREOGRAPHY** by Lliane Loots (in collaboration with the dancers)

**FILM** by Karen Logan

**LIGHTING** by Wesley Maherry

### **DANCERS:**

**Jabu Siphika, Julia Wilson, Zinhle Nzama,  
Sifiso Khumalo, Sifiso Majola, Tshediso Kabulu**

*“There is not a single person who is not touched by the silent presence of stories. A nation is as healthy and confident as the stories they tell themselves. Great eras are eras in which great stories are lived and told. Without fighting, stories have won over more people than all the great wars put together. The universe began as a story. Only those who have lived, suffered, thought deeply, loved profoundly, know joy and the pain of life, tell truly wonderful stories. Africa breathes stories”. (Ben Okri)*

I began this choreographic investigation by responding to the above words of Nigerian author Ben Okri. *“days like these”* works with multiple projections and light, and as the images, the voices and the dancing bodies begin – in truth and vulnerability - to layer the stage space, so the remarkable magic of dance theatre starts to happen. I am hoping, as you watch *“days like these”*, that you as the audience are reminded of the need for art and dance, to urge us, as audience – as humanity - to unbury our own stories.

I am always looking for new challenges and with *“days like these”* I have begun to delve into the theatre making methodologies of Verbatim Theatre. Verbatim theatre, sometimes referred to as Documentary Theatre, asks the playwright to gather live testimony and the spoken word of real people to construct the dialogue of a drama. With a history going back to the 60s, Verbatim Theatre has a long trajectory in creating edgy political theatre where these methodologies help create social dialogue.

My fascination with Verbatim Theatre sparked an interest to see if there could be a cross-over into contemporary dance. The way that I work is essentially verbatim in that I am constantly asking the dancers to bring their own life experience – through their bodies – into the work we make. As a choreographer I have always thought of myself as a type of ‘collector of stories’; some of them are my own but others come from the dancers who I am working with.

In *“days like these”*, I have asked the six resident FLATFOOT dancers and co-collaborators on this dance work to go even deeper into this physical and spoken word storytelling. We have taken what seem like everyday memories and excavated from these the sacred in the every day. For me, what has resulted is an incredibly tender and beautiful interior dancescape that will (I hope) poignantly remind an audience of what it means to be human; and what it means to be an African.

I asked the dancers to dig for memories around three specific topics; food, politics and love/loss. As the process of re-remembering went we sat with each other sometimes laughing till we cried and sometimes growing silent in a shared space of pain and solidarity. I am reminded again that the deeper we dig into the personal, as artists, the more profoundly political our voices become.

In *“days like these”*, I also return to a long time artistic partnership with award winning Durban theatre and filmmaker, Karen Logan. Logan’s videoscape sits at the heart of the work as it was her task to capture, verbatim, the final memories and stories collected. To this end, this work is as much hers as it is mine and the dancers.

*“days like these”* also features the subtle and imaginative lighting design of Wesley Maherry whose challenge was not only to help support the manifold projections, but to also find a way to light the dance that helped the stories unfold.

To be honest, this is probably the most difficult dance work I have made to date, mostly because all of us involved have risked more than usual in letting you into our lives and our deeply personal stories. I hope that you are *“touched by the silent presence of our stories”* in a way that allows you to remember the sacred in the every day.

**Lliane Loots** (choreographer)

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS and THANKS:**

### **SPECIAL THANKS TO:**

Val Adamson – photography  
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Drama and Performance Studies Programme (UKZN College of Humanities)  
BLACK COFFEE for AV equipment  
Ladies and Gentlemen of the Media  
Adrienne Sichel

Mary Ann Salvage – ballet teacher to *FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY*  
Jennifer Chapman – astanga yoga teacher to *FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY*  
Kim McCusker – Pilates teacher to *FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY*

### **FOR THE ELIZABETH SMEDDON THEATRE:**

Jackie Cunniffe (Theatre Director)  
Sue Roberts (Production Manager)  
Wesley Maherry (Production Manager)  
Gareth Nash (Bar/FOH Manager)  
Sharmia Naidoo (Reception)

***FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY* graciously acknowledges the support of its current long term funding partners, SPRING LIGHTS GAS, SIBAYA and the Nedbank Arts Affinity**



**APPENDIX L**  
*days like these* Lighting Notes

DAYS LIKE THESE

① Khumalo

Sound & video together.  
 Southern Cross ambient noise

video is a street scene with  
 Khumalo dancing Greg Squires  
 Then video screen join his face

Khumalo Solo  
 x over to Tebo.  
 Majola Sings

Flashes of video

Sabu D/S of  
 Sabes Sings & then Zinle

- shadow. to start & then out with video.

Girls D/S Boys w/S

Split.

Zinle & Sabu around to boys

Sabia alone D/S

Video ut shadow again.  
 But when she moves.

Girls mid outdoor. Boys D/S then exit.

Zinle & Sabu floor op Khumalo back on. of shadow. to c. or diag?

②

Khumalo exit leaving Zinle on floor & video goes  
 to music fades out gone on light.

shadow test. + sound goes  
 to monitor

Zinle starts in B/W & comes into colour.

Warm houses

Zinle Solo c ish. Red of light C ish.?

Saba Sais.

- playing a game with wires

Saba & Mayo C.

T & Ann D/S.

back line. take out middle

All ut except T. D/S

Turn around & Sain T all over stage Fill stage.

< Sains group - ~~very slow~~ ~~fade~~ ~~of music~~

Group section - music plays out

2 - 3 sec of stillness

③ MANSOLA

video music together

May & S. C.

May'el on bench.

May do solo & join

chess board

middle light

Saba comes D/S & stands under screen.

Maybe wx. as video plays out.

music should play out

④ SABA

B/W in Greeny colored school kids behind.

music & video together.

take out light

Girls running in lines

blue?

Highlights

& then solo moments.

D/S

Arts of under Screens. Epic goes Play with shadow LRS  
Touch screens.

Trio & music starts to fade slowly.

⑤ Looks.

Southern Goes Crazy

No video.

Music Goes with Saher stepping out.

Then all seen all over  
Music plays out takes on light in diagonal  
Start & end shadows.

⑥ Sealed.

Remix & Sumping "hold me"  
awanted.

Video sound together  
as face down.

Septa Video o Sumping s.

Maybe a pool of light DFS PS? when get there play with shadow  
Zimba Hold me breaks it.

Music fades out when  
under screens

Pool of light under screens + shadow of

Learning khumala.

⑦ Gondolas

shift. ~~entry~~ starts  
khum e

As he talks (video goes)

Majda joins

Then Sabri.

Then T. de Sides

"need to tell story from top" shift story"

No back video.

⑧ (Sshod.

Video & sound together

Boys C.  
& all over

Dir. silhouetted

very stark white

Majda under screen.

leaving T.

last play with show C. & out when video back.

Magt stays 2 Men.

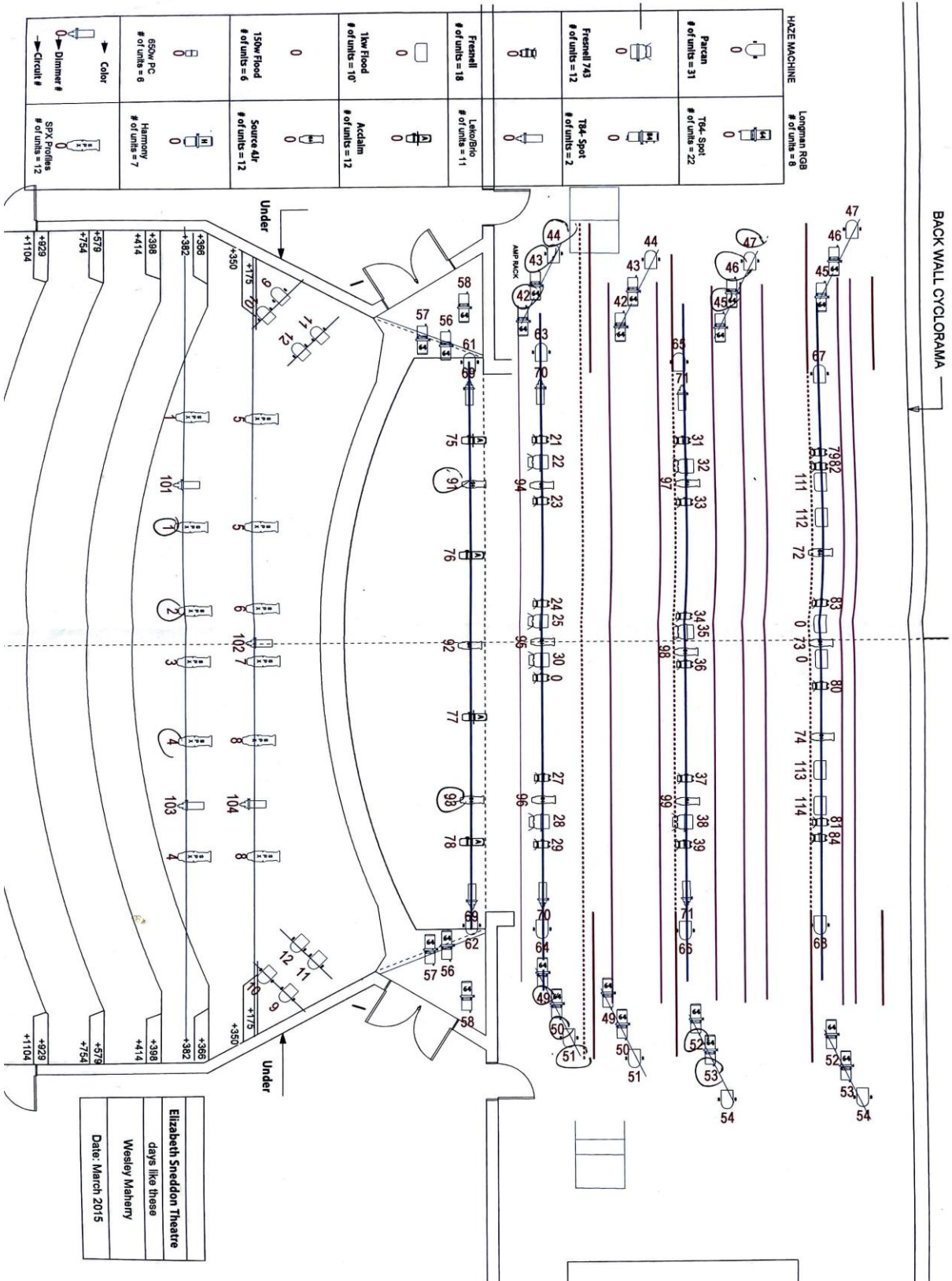
⑨ Start in line of pictures on

All over in big C.

LXS Fade on instrumental section  
& then sound cuts.

# APPENDIX M

## days like these Lighting Plan



# APPENDIX N

## Ethics Approval



16 February 2022

Wesley Phillip Maherry (200277418)  
School Of Arts  
Howard College

Dear WP Maherry,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003732/2021

Project title: Lifting the Veil on Lighting: Investigating how stage lighting design can become an embodied practice within South African contemporary dance making.

Degree: Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 01 December 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 16 February 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

# APPENDIX O

## Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research Letter<sup>173</sup>

### UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL  
For research with human participants

#### Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 3 March 2022

Good day,

My name is Wesley Maherry from the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Email: [maherry@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:maherry@ukzn.ac.za). [REDACTED]

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research into embodied lighting design practice within South African contemporary dance making. The aim and purpose of this research is to to unpack my own lighting design practices, and interrogate what role lighting plays in contemporary theatrical dance and explicitly how lighting design can be an embodied process/practice. The study is expected to engage seven local lighting designers and the two choreographers whom I have worked with in the three case studies I am analyzing. It will involve either an email and/or Zoom recording interview, at a time that is convenient for you. The duration of your participation if you choose to be part of this study is expected to be for the duration of the interview, and maybe follow-up e-mailed questions if the study requires.

The study should not involve any risks and/or discomforts. We hope that the study can be used by other lighting designers who will be able to access this study to add to their own evolving practice as well as choreographers / practitioners also working in contemporary dance, will be able to, hopefully, have a greater understanding of the significance of lighting in the making of their live performance.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number HSSREC/00003732/2021).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at email: [maherry@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:maherry@ukzn.ac.za) Tel: [REDACTED] or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

#### **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Participation in this research is voluntary; participants may withdraw participation at any point. In the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation the participants will not incur penalty or loss of treatment or other benefit to which you are normally entitled. Should you wish to withdraw from this research, please notify me in writing at your earliest convenience. Although all interviews will be conducted, not all the interviews may appear in

---

<sup>173</sup> Telephone number redacted for privacy purposes

If the interview is conducted via zoom, you will need to please ensure that you have the required data for the interview.

If the interview is used in the dissertation, I request permission to be able to quote you by name on any pertinent discussion. Interviews will be attached as appendices to the dissertation, and form part of the referenceable research once this dissertation is published.

-----  
**CONSENT**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed about the study entitled *Lifting the Veil on Lighting: Investigating how stage lighting design can become an embodied practice within South African contemporary dance making* by Wesley Maherry

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at email: [maherry@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:maherry@ukzn.ac.za) Tel: [REDACTED]

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**  
Research Office, Westville Campus  
Govan Mbeki Building  
Private Bag X 54001  
Durban, 4000  
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA  
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609  
Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	/	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Video-record my interview	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	/	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Use of my photographs for research purposes	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	/	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**