

Group psychology and the mobilisatory spectacle

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Summary

Theatrical and cinematic texts produced specifically for the purpose of furthering particular political ends are often dismissed as propagandistic: morally reprehensible and not worthy of academic enquiry. It is, however, only when moral attitudes towards propaganda are put aside that the sophisticated aesthetic mechanisms and the political power of propagandistic theatre and film can be fully explored. This paper contends that Freud's account of group psychology provides a useful and revelatory means of understanding the way in which film and theatre can function via suggestion and hypnosis, rather than rational instruction, to produce conviction in the viewer.

Through an application of Freud's group psychology model to the poetry/performances of Mzwakhe Mbuli, the South African "Peoples' Poet", and Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the will*, a film commissioned by the Nazis, this paper hopes to demonstrate how theatre and film can function to mobilise audiences.

Opsomming

Teater- en filmtekste wat spesifiek met die oog op die bevordering van politieke doelwitte geproduseer word, word dikwels afgeskryf as propagandisties: moreel afkeurenswaardig en nie akademiese ondersoek waardig nie. Dit is egter slegs wanneer morele houdings teenoor propaganda tersyde gestel word dat die gesofistikeerde estetiese meganismes en die politiese mag van propagandistiese teater en film ten volle ondersoek kan word. Hierdie artikel voer aan dat Freud se weergawe van groepspsigologie 'n bruikbare en openbare begrip verskaf van die wyse waarop film en teater via suggestie en hipnose, eerder as rasionele instruksie, kan funksioneer ten einde die toeskouer te oortuig.

Deur 'n toepassing van Freud se model van groepspsigologie op die poësie/opvoerings van Mzwakhe Mbuli (Suid-Afrika se "Peoples' Poet") en Leni Riefenstahl se *Triumph of the will* ('n film vervaardig in opdrag van die Nazis) hoop hierdie artikel om te demonstreer hoe teater en film kan funksioneer om die gehore te mobiliseer.

Introduction

Any aesthetic revolutionary programme, as part of a broader revolutionary process, has many and often contradictory strategic imperatives at any particular moment. The revolutionary effectivity of any artwork is in the last instance determined by the material struggles of which the artwork is a part. Many of the strategies and tactics employed in the process of struggle will not inherently be revolutionary or transformative. Nevertheless, they can contribute to a revolutionary programme designed to achieve transformation. The mass democratic movement in South Africa needs simultaneously to maintain and affirm the ideological dominance it achieved so potently in the 84-86 period, strengthen and deepen its structures, train and educate as many people as possible to assume leadership positions, and continue to mobilise and harness the spontaneous energies of the masses. Each of these political processes invoke different forms of political organisations and different

mechanisms to achieving these ends. It is precisely in this conjuncture that it can clearly be argued that "culture is a weapon" and that cultural workers need to be rigorous in developing progressive cultural strategies which acknowledge the different external political processes of which their work might be a part and be conscious of its political effectivity.

Freud's contribution to the notion of the political function of the aesthetic is, in our view, the delineation of the psychic conditions of possibility for producing different forms of political action. The aesthetic corollary to this is the different "textual" mechanisms which can operate for the production of different political effects in relation to the viewer/reader.

Freud's contribution to an understanding of political function in the theatre has crystallised into two major aspects. The first is an aesthetic model which functions to produce rational and critical judgement in the viewer/reader via the formal principle of distanciation. This is epitomised in the theatre by the work of Berthold Brecht. The second is a "regressive" aesthetic, epitomised in the theatre conceived of by Antonin Artaud, which functions to subvert rationality and celebrate the anarchic drives of the pre-Oedipal. Whereas texts that aim for sublimation effect the production of knowledge via distanciation, "regressive" texts induce a regression in the viewer to a position prior to the experience of the gap between culture and nature, consciousness and desire, signifier and signified, form and content. While the "sublimatory" text proceeds via rational demonstration to reveal these gaps, a "regressive" text functions in a mode which precludes these gaps and thereby acts directly upon the body of the viewer, persuading it to act.

This paper is concerned to outline the formal conditions which enable theatre and cinema to function for the production of conviction and readiness for action and to create thereby the necessary, though not sufficient, conditions for the mobilisation of the audience members.¹

An assumption which underlies the arguments which follow is that mass mobilisation involves groups of people performing activities which do not directly serve their interests in any immediate way and which are irrational in as much as they may contradict the self-preservation impulses of the individuals involved. An example of this would be the masses of unarmed youth who march forward to confront fully-armed police in the townships. The psychology of individuals in the moment of performing these actions, is based on the model of "conviction" (or "de-individualisation") which overrides the processes of individual rational judgement.

1 The psychoanalysis of the group

Freud's account of groups and the process of mass mobilisation is of course not the last word on how groups function and what causes them to come about. These supplementary questions, those concerning particular groups, can be answered only by historical and material analysis alongside the model offered by psychoanalysis. What psychoanalysis does offer, is a formal model of what the necessary psychological conditions are that make the formation of groups possible, that is, situations in which individuals are capable of

conformity in action on the basis of conviction and persuasion rather than rational or individual judgement.

Psychoanalysis can explain how the forms of mobilisation are delimited and why the theatre in particular, and film to a lesser extent, are privileged media in this regard. Artworks hold this privileged relation to the field of mobilisation in as much as they firstly, are received by an audience constituted as a group for that particular event, and secondly, may combine sound (linguistic and non-linguistic), visual image and movement. The artworks which most successfully function on the model of the group are those that mimic the mechanisms of "spectacle".

While theatre and film are privileged in relation to this particular political function, written literature, fine art and canned music for example, are formally limited in their ability to take on this particular, or directly political, function of the aesthetic.

Freud's understanding of group psychology will form the theoretical basis for the arguments which follow. The relationship between "the group" and the aesthetic will be considered through an investigation of Artaud's *Theatre and its double* (1977) as well as readings of Mzwakhe Mbuli's oral poetry and Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the will* (1935).

In "Group psychology and the analysis of the ego" (1985: 95-178), Freud attempts to explain why individuals act and think (behave/function) differently when they are inside a group. In refining Le Bon's description of the behaviour of the group, Freud characterises the group mind as follows: There are similarities between the group mind and the mental life of historically primitive people and young children. There are also many parallels between group behaviour and the unconscious. Group action often involves a paralysis of the critical faculties like that achieved by "fascination" and hypnosis. Premeditation, a sense of impossibility, doubt or uncertainty fall away. Contradiction is unnoticed and there is no toleration of delay between desire and its fulfilment. The individual's inhibitions fall away, and his/her instincts seek immediate gratification. The function of reality testing falls into the background once more (as in dreams and hypnosis) and wishful impulses with their affective cathexis are foregrounded.

Furthermore, as with hypnosis, Freud argues that members of the group are very susceptible to persuasion and under the influence of suggestion, are capable of high achievements of self-abnegation and great devotion to an ideal (1985: 105-8).

The effects of the group on the individual may be summarised as follows: firstly as the intensification of affects and secondly as the inhibition of the intellect. The former suggests that the ties within a group are libidinal, that is, those instincts which fall under the heading "love". The latter refers to the suggestibility of individuals in groups (to their state as hypnotised).

Freud explains the formal psychic mechanisms whereby an individual comes to be in the position of a group member via an exposition of the relationship between being in love and hypnosis. The modern group resembles the primal horde ruled over by a despotic father. A horde is constituted by "an individual of superior strength among a group of equal companions"

(1985: 154). The father/leader is independent and narcissistic, and is the only individual whose sexual drives may be freely satisfied. Because of the enforced abstinence of the sons/members from the direct satisfaction of their sexual impulses, their instincts are inhibited in their aim. Through the sons'/members' shared love of and persecution by the father, they come to form emotional ties with each other on the basis of their common position, that is, through an identification based on common fear and love.

In historical societies these relationships are dominated by the Oedipal complex. The male infant's necessary identification with his father is accompanied by ambivalent feelings towards him which include fear and anger for depriving him of the immediate satisfaction of the drives, that is, for depriving him of his mother. This unfulfilled desire in relation to the mother produces the effect of a primal group in the family in that the inaccessibility of the mother forcibly transforms sibling rivalry into an identification between the siblings. The siblings/members of the group come to identify on the level of the ego because of their common love relation to a person outside the group. The father/leader in the modern group reinvokes the primal father who represents the group ideal which governs the ego in the place of the ego-ideal. Group members then are in a position resembling that of siblings in relation to a leader parent who, through the mechanism of identification, takes the position of depriver/despot or nurturer/provider in the form of the ego-ideal.

Relationships between members of the oppressed within struggle can at a certain level be understood to resemble the relations between siblings identifying with each other in their shared deprivation of nurturance (of food, shelter, education, rights, etc.); in their common fear and anger towards the state/depriver and their shared love of the leaders/representations of the idea of nurturance and satisfaction.

The production of post-Oedipal subjects in the position of group members requires the effecting of a regression in the subjects to a mental state prior to the acquisition of language, that is, a regression to the free and continuous signification used by the infant prior to the acquisition of "learned language". Infantile signification is a transparent language in as much as the signifiers relate directly to the object of the drive and the source of the drive: the body.

The mechanism by which this regression is effected and the leader (or leading idea) comes to stand in the place of the ego-ideal and the consequent suppression of rational judgement, resembles the process of hypnosis and provides the necessary formal conditions for persuasion, suggestibility and action on the basis of conviction rather than judgement.

In the hypnotic process the hypnotist, by occupying the subject's consciousness with monotonous perceptions, effects the withdrawal of all conscious interest in the world, and re-animates the subject's relation to his father (in this case the hypnotist) in the form of the relationship between a primal son and father. In the same way as a result of the replacement of the ego-ideal by the leader, the members of the group suspend their own faculties of critical judgement and become subject to the persuasion or suggestion of the leader. Freud defines suggestion as a "conviction which is not based on perception and reasoning but on an erotic tie . . . suggestion is a partial manifestation of

the state of hypnosis ... hypnosis is solidly founded upon a predisposition which has survived in the unconscious from the early history of the human family" (1985: 169). Furthermore where the model of hypnosis is transposed onto a collective of individuals, the individuals identify with each other in their subjugation to the suggestion of the hypnotist/leader. The familiar phenomenon of "contagion" in the group can now be understood as the result of these identifications. Furthermore, the suggestions of the leader map themselves directly onto the bodies of the members, causing them to act. That is, the members' actions are a direct response to suggestion by the leader and are not mediated by thought or subjected to reality testing.

Against this background it is possible to demonstrate how theatre and film can function along the model of hypnosis to produce audience members in the position of group members and thereby contribute to the process of "mobilisation".

2 Artaud: Cruelty and regression

We will begin by considering the aesthetic devices proposed by Antonin Artaud for the Theatre of Cruelty. Although he does not explicitly use Freudian concepts, Artaud provides, it will be argued, the basis for outlining how the aesthetic might function in relation to hypnosis, love, the group and the body. The specific working of these operations in the theatre will then be demonstrated through an investigation of the oral performance poetry of Mzwakhe Mbuli. The subsequent consideration of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the will* is intended to demonstrate the potential for these same operations to be effected through the cinema.

In psychoanalytic terms Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty is one which induces a regression in its audience members to an historically and developmentally earlier stage, to the position of a member of a primal group or horde, a position prior to the acquisition of the capacity to reality test, a position in which members of the group are not individuated and rational, but rather identify with each other in their shared object of love and/or fear and are open to suggestion and persuasion and hence to mobilisation. It is a position prior to the post-Oedipal experience of the gap between culture and nature, consciousness and desire, signifier and signified, form and content.

It is the ritual of the primal horde with its mechanisms of hypnosis, suggestion, contagion and fascination that Artaud endeavours to recapture in his Theatre of Cruelty. The physical language he seeks is the language of ritual – a language that in the absence (or suspension) of the critical faculties of the ego ideal, is mapped directly onto action or behaviour.

Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty is "infused with the idea that the masses think with their senses first and foremost and that it is ridiculous to appeal primarily to their understanding" (Artaud, 1977: 65). He posits a theatre that may be compared to the "bringing together (of) two bodies in short-lived debauchery" (1977: 60).

Artaud recognises the volatile and emotional nature of the group (audience) for whom the Theatre of Cruelty – a "mass theatre" – is intended:

“agitated crowds hurled against one another” (1977: 65). His theatrical stipulations, particularly those that privilege physical language and image over word, promote the conditions in the theatre for the hypnosis of the audience and for the transformation of the psychology of the audience to that of the group.

As Sontag suggests, Artaud strives to reduce the separation between actor and audience. Artaud stipulates that the audience be seated in the centre of the performance in an attempt to stop it from disassociating itself from its own experience. The players are hypnotisers in their execution of theatrical gestures and action which induce a hypnotic state in the audience. Visiting the theatre must be like visiting the dentist, Artaud suggests. The experience is not fatal, but “serious”, and the audience should not be able to leave “intact” – morally or emotionally (Sontag, 1983: 36).

The magic and terror of the Theatre of Cruelty are that of the hypnotist/primal father. The actors as hypnotists rob the audience of their will. The repetitious and mechanical movements of the actors occupy the audience’s consciousness while the audience’s unconscious attention is directed towards the leading idea. This is a sleep-like state in which the interest of the audience is withdrawn from the external world. The actors awaken an archaic heritage – they re-animate the relationship of the sons to the primal father (and the threatening father of the Oedipal complex) to whose will or suggestion (in the form of ideas) they must submit.

Artaud hopes that his audience will be:

seized with a kind of terror when ... (they see) ... these mechanical beings whose happiness and pain seem not to be their own, but to obey tried and tested rituals as if governed by higher intellects. In the last analysis, the impression is of a higher, controlled life ... a profane ritual. (1977: 40)

Artaud raises many questions regarding the difficulties of constituting post-Oedipal subjects in the position of group members. It is in his struggle to effect the conditions for regression amongst the audience members that he provides insight into the ways in which theatre might function for “mobilisation”.

Artaud’s manifesto expresses a simultaneous nostalgia for a mythical time/state of being that is dominated purely by the drives and their need for immediate satisfaction, and a reluctant recognition that such a time can only be evoked through representation and cannot be actually relived. Freud expresses just this ambivalence when he writes: “If civilisation demands a massive instinctual sacrifice, what it offers in return is not so much security of pleasure as the absence of suffering” (1985: 225).

The theatre and its double is a cry for the satisfaction of the primordial drives, and a cry of acknowledgement that this satisfaction can never be attained, since it was lost in the moment of repression and the entry into signification:

Theatre, like the plague, is made in the image of this slaughter, this essential division. It unravels conflicts, liberates powers, releases potential and if these and

the powers are dark, this is not the fault of the plague or theatre, but life. (Artaud, 1977: 21)

Artaud's famous analogy between the theatre and the plague may be fruitfully interpreted via psychoanalysis. His description of the effects of the plague may be likened to Freud's exposition of the etiology of the death drive. Freud argues that the instincts, rather than compelling us towards change and development, are conservative – they are “the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life . . . an urge to . . . restore an earlier state of things . . . the aim of all life is death” (1977: 311). Artaud's plague victim is “seized with a terrible fatigue, a focal, magnetic, exhausting tiredness, his molecules are split in two and drawn towards their annihilation . . . the anatomy discharges . . . life itself” (1977: 11). Artaud is here expressing a nostalgia for a state which psychoanalysis understands as an extremely primitive one in the history of the psychic apparatus: life before consciousness, the social and language. The splitting of the subject from the primary process in its entry into consciousness, language and civilisation is for Artaud a “slaughter”, an “essential division”:

Thus all great Myths are dark and one cannot imagine all the great Fables aside from a mood of slaughter, torture and bloodshed, telling the masses about the original division of the sexes and the slaughter of essences that came with creation. (1977: 21)

This is one of the themes to which the Theatre of Cruelty attempts to give expression. Crucially however, theatre can only be “made in the image of this slaughter” (1977: 21). Theatre can only represent the primary processes and the violence of the splitting of the subject and repression. The theatre can only ever effect a regression, it cannot actually reinstate that which has been lost: “True beauty never strikes us directly and the setting sun is beautiful because of everything we lose by it” (1977: 53).

Artaud harks back to a time prior to the “dualistic” (split) subject and the imperative of representation. But he is painfully aware that he, the players and the audience are post-Oedipal subjects with egos and positions within the chain of signification. The theatre is “a powerful appeal through *illustration* to those powers which *return* the mind to the origins of its inner struggles” (1977: 21), it can only affect a “*potential* rebellion” (1977: 19). Unlike the real murderer's anger, the tragic actor's anger “remains enclosed with a circle” (1977: 16). The forever virtual and potential nature of the theatre is for Artaud a necessity for subjects in a state of loss, and the potential for transcendence, a “heroic stand in the face of destiny” (1977: 22).

Artaud's compromise in the face of the impossibility of regression is a “metaphysics” of the unconscious. “The imagery of poetry in the theatre is a mental power which begins its trajectory in the tangible and gets along without reality . . . The actor's (anger) has assumed a form that denies itself progressively as it is released, merging with universality” (1977: 16). This compromised representation of the infantile scene (the time of the language of the unconscious) corresponds to the function attributed to dreams in psychoanalysis: “The infantile scene is unable to bring about its own revival

and has to be content with returning as a dream" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973: 390). Images of the infantile scenes which want expression impose themselves on thoughts which in our adult lives also want expression, therefore "a dream might be described as a substitute for the infantile scene modified by being transferred onto a recent experience" (Freud, 1977: 390). Artaud must settle for a theatre which acts as dream. The Theatre of Cruelty represents and thereby evokes the experience of a regression into early infancy in which the love-object of each infant is the mother. However, because the subjects involved are post-Oedipal, the mother is of necessity already lost and absent and can be re-evoked only as the shared absent love-object of the members of the group. Hence Artaud writes that "the audience will believe in the illusion of theatres on condition they really take it for a dream" (1977: 65).

Artaud strives towards a spatial language in the theatre which he observes in the Oriental theatre he so admires. Such theatre privileges "staging" – "this solid, material language . . . those expressive means usable on the stage such as music, dance, plastic art, mimicry, mime, gesture, voice inflection, architecture, lighting and decor" (1977: 27–8) – over the spoken word.

Artaud's notion of a "spatial language" in the theatre, one which privileges image and sound over word and meaning, is reminiscent of the spatial language of the unconscious as described by psychoanalysis. According to Freud, the mechanisms operating in the primary process (the unconscious) are condensation and displacement. These mechanisms are based on the economic principle whereby energy is most efficiently distributed and discharged. With displacement, "an idea's emphasis, interest or intensity is liable to be detached from it and to pass onto other ideas, which were originally of little intensity but which are related to the first idea by a chain of associations" (Freud, 1973: 121). Displacement facilitates condensation where condensation is "a sole idea (that) represents several associative chains at whose point of intersection it is located" (1973: 82). The power invested in images functioning within this realm is immense: "Images . . . acquire a truly exceptional intensity . . . by virtue of the fact that, being products of condensation, they are highly cathected" (1973: 83).

Artaud's theatre simulates the conditions for the production of hypnosis, as well as the forms of action of the hypnotised groups. The spoken language of the Theatre of Cruelty is one which privileges sound over meaning like that of primal ritual: it is language in the form of *Incantation* (1977: 45).

Similarly, the sounds that Artaud prescribes for his theatre are the rhythms of the ritual: the hollow drum sounds, the primal cries and gyrations, "childish yelping and heels striking the ground in time with the very automatism of the unleashed subconscious" (1977: 37). The movement, mime and gesture of the Artaudian ritual "teach(es) us the metaphysical identity of abstract and concrete" (1977: 41). The jerky, angular movement and the stilted and epitomised gesture recapture the "spectres and phantoms of the Other World" (1977: 39), the age-old traditions and myths. The actor as "double" is both human and superhuman, tangible and metaphysical, and as such performs the ancient gnostic practices of the transsubstantiation of matter in

which a "real organic and physical transformation of the human body" is affected (Sontag, 1983: 57). The nightmarish qualities that Artaud admires in Flemish painting "originate in those same dream states which cause clumsy gestures and ridiculous slips of the tongue" (Artaud, 1977: 53). The signifiers of the primary processes do persist, but they are "only ever able to be articulated across [despite] the symbolic relations . . . They appear in the stumbling of the logical discourse of consciousness" (Coward & Ellis, 1977: 107).

It is through the mechanisms of simulating infantile signification that Artaud's theatre functions for the production of hypnosis as well as the forms of action of the hypnotised group. It is surely to pre-linguistic signification that Artaud refers when he evokes a "speech prior to words" that is "a secret psychic impulse" from which "all creativity stems" (1977: 42). Like the infant's signifiers that act directly on the body, Artaud's proposed "gesticulations" have "an immediate goal (which) . . . (the audience) is able to experience in direct effectiveness . . . The states of minds it attempts to create . . . are motivated and reached without delay . . . instinctive things . . . seems physically to supply us with some of the mind's most secret perceptions" (1977: 42-3).

We can now see that Artaud's privileging of image over word is comparable to dream-work in the face of the impossibility of an actual revival of the "physical language" of the infantile scene. Freud shows that a

requirement imposed on the dream thoughts (is that) they undergo selection and transformation such as to make them capable of being represented by images – particularly visual images. Speech and words . . . enjoy no special privileges in this respect: their role in dreams is limited to that of meaningful elements and has no relation to the sense they might have in spoken language. (1973: 31)

Theatre for Artaud, like the plague, takes dormant images, latent disorder and suddenly carries them to the point of the most extreme gesture. It rediscovers the idea of figures and archetypal symbols. It restores all our dormant conflicts and their powers, giving these powers names we acknowledge as signs. These symbols are symbols of full-blown powers held in bondage until that moment, exploding in the guise of incredible images giving existence and the freedom of the city to acts naturally opposed to social life (1977: 18-29).

Artaud's theatre of metaphysical signs as compromised dream images representing the infantile scene, is "that momentary pointlessness which drives them (the scum of the populace) to useless acts without immediate profit" (1977: 5). Freud describes dreams as "the guardians of sleep" (Freud, 1973: 74) since if the unconscious or infantile wish did not express itself in the disguise of the dream, it would disturb sleep. Dreams, like the Theatre of Cruelty, do not directly disturb or subvert civilisation (being part and parcel of it), but neither do they contribute to progress and work for civilisation, and in both these regards they are "pointless". Hence there is "something both victorious and vengeful in theatre just as in the plague" (Artaud, 1977: 18), for "society's barriers became fluid with the effects of the scourge" (Artaud,

1977: 7). Hence Julia Kristeva sees in Artaud's writing "a pleasure in subverting the processes by which signification imposes order on chaos" (Hayman, 1977: 161). Artaud's theatre is "anarchic . . . leading us nearer to chaos" (Artaud, 1977: 32-3) and it embraces "Danger".

Artaud offers us a potential theatre which functions on the model of group psychology to suggest and persuade, and by acting directly on the body, to mobilise members of the group, in the interests of the political field, in a specific moment in history, which may require and be served by the effects of mass mobilisation. Artaudian theatre functions to diminish the field of ego and rationality. It is precisely in doing so that it can function for the production of conviction and action among audience members. The players, functioning as hypnotists/leaders induce a regression amongst audience members to the position of group members. The audience as group members come, via suggestion and their shared relation to the hypnotists, to identify with each other in their common attachment to or conviction for an idea or ideas which form the central focus of the play's content (presuming the play has such ideas) which now take the place of the ego-ideal. Furthermore, given that the mechanism of suggestion maps itself directly onto the body of the audience/group members, the group members may be induced to action on the basis of this suggestion rather than on the basis of individual judgement.

Artaud's heritage is a provocative and innovative body of ideas about the theatre towards which he aspired. Artaud did not succeed in affecting the conscience of the modern theatre by himself being a great director. Sontag writes:

In the domain of the theatre, where Artaud's presence can be decanted into a program and a theory, the work of those directors who have most benefitted from his ideas shows there is no way to use Artaud that stays true to him. Not even Artaud himself found the way; by all accounts, his own stage productions were far from being up to the level of his ideas. (Sontag, 1983: 68)

What Artaud has left behind is work that cancels itself, thought that outbids thought, recommendations that cannot be enacted. (Sontag, 1983: 67)

3 Mzwakhe as mobiliser

It is perhaps more fruitful to identify Artaudian principles operative in plays and theatrical events and to understand the effect they have upon their audiences, rather than to attempt to hunt down a pure form of Artaudian theatre. The specific interest of this essay is to isolate in theatre the principles of group psychology that, it has been argued, are fundamental to Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, and are powerful mechanisms of audience mobilisation. To this end, the performances of the people's poet Mzwakhe Mbuli constitute a useful and interesting example in that he is a South African artist whose performances demonstrate the Artaudian elements as elaborated above.

An event which clearly manifests the characteristics of group psychology is the political mass rally in which singing, chanting, toyi-toyi-ing and poetry reading has become a vital component. The purpose of the mass rally is multifold: to convey information, to consult, to celebrate, to mourn, to

express outrage. But perhaps the unifying purpose underlying all of these is that of mobilisation – encouraging the audience to take action with regard to the particular issue at hand.

It is in the context of the political mass rally that Mzwakhe's performances take place:

A tall thin man comes onto the stage. Shy. He moves his big eyes from one corner to the other. He raises his hands and begins to speak. His voice is like the sound of thunder and lightning. His long hands fly like birds in the storm. His words are power and beauty.

Maybe you have heard him performing his poetry at a funeral. Or maybe at a worker's cultural day. Or at a union meeting. When the people's poet stands up to speak, everybody gets up with him. And they sing "Re tsamaya le Mzwakhe! Re tsamaya le Mzwakhe! – We are marching with Mzwakhe!" (Anon., 1989: 2).

Mzwakhe believes that "most of [his] poetry consists of a call to action".² On a thematic level, his poems are often a direct plea for immediate action:

Do something
To facilitate change in Africa
Do something
To fling the doors of
Pollsmoor and Robben Island prison wide open
Do something
Favourable for the exiles to return back home
Oh Africa
Let all this be done
Before dawn

If Mzwakhe's poetry functions to call his audiences to action, then this function overrides the educative or knowledge-producing role that is accorded to a theatre which produces sublimation in the viewer. Mzwakhe's poems generally do not tell his audience anything that they do not already know. As he expresses it, "I am the conscience of the people" – the poet who articulates (with great power and beauty) the sentiments of his audience. This is encapsulated in his poem "Crocodiles":

I represent the victims of tyranny
I represent the insulted majority . . .
I recite for the nation
I represent the nation
The nation who never enjoyed freedom

Rather than instructing through rational argument, Mzwakhe's performances act directly on the body – on the emotions and senses of the audience. His words, like the spoken language of the Theatre of Cruelty and that of primal ritual, privilege sound over meaning. As Artaud articulated it, the aim is "to give (spoken language) its full, physical shock potential, to split it up and distribute it actively in space, to treat inflexions in a completely tangible manner and restore their shattering power and really to manifest something; to turn against language and its basely utilitarian . . . sources . . . and finally to consider language in the form of *Incantation*" (1977: 45).

Mzwakhe's poetry is musical rather than literary – each phrase is half sung by the deep smooth voice of the poet who extends his vowel sounds to emphasise the rhythmical cadence of the lines. The musicality of his delivery is extended by the band which sometimes accompanies his performance.

All of Mzwakhe's poems are highly repetitive: the central idea is usually repeated every two or three lines. This serves to accentuate the trance-like effect of the poetic rhythms and eliminates the need for any real cognitive engagement on the part of the audience. This is for Freud an essential component of the hypnotic state, since the rational functioning of the ego is largely suspended due to the mechanisms of group psychology.

The poet on the platform is a lone figure, dressed in ordinary and plain clothes (usually blue), who stands above the crowds before him. Mzwakhe moves very little during his performance. While the audience often gyrates in time to his musical poetry, Mzwakhe's body is generally still and the audience's eyes are focused on his expressive hands and face. His hands gesture and turn in space, complimenting both the flow of the language and emphasising the key themes of the poem. The intense concentration of emotion on his face and the economical and seductive use of gesture draw the audience into his performance. Mzwakhe is a performer of great power, charisma and stature.

It is because Mzwakhe "recites for the nation", because he tells people what they want to hear, that which they know but cannot articulate with the same beauty, and it is because of his charismatic and entrancing delivery, that he becomes a hypnotist with "a voice like the sound of thunder and lightning". By giving powerful expression to the sentiments of his audience, Mzwakhe is, in a psychoanalytic sense, fulfilling its desire and its wish: he becomes the aim of the drive – the love object. Through the audience's libidinal investment in him, Mzwakhe functions as a hypnotist, placing himself as the ego-ideal of the audience.

It is because in the role of hypnotist – Mzwakhe is misrecognised as an image of unity and perfection, that his poetry becomes "a call to action" – a tool for mobilisation. It is only through misrecognition that the ego of an individual audience member comes to take on the characteristics of an individual in a group – characteristics that facilitate effective mobilisation: a paralysis of the critical faculties whereby a sense of doubt, danger and impossibility fall away, whereby there is no toleration of delay between desire and its fulfilment, whereby the function of reality testing falls into the background and wishful impulses and their affective cathexis are foregrounded. It is for these reasons that Freud argues that members of the group are susceptible to persuasion, and under the influence of suggestion, are capable of achievements of self-abnegation and devotion to an ideal. It is no coincidence that the mass rally – be it a formal meeting or an informal ritual of *toyi-toyi* led by an individual – often precedes a group's confrontation with the police and army. The psychology of the group, with its mechanisms of hypnosis, persuasion and suggestion via a leader, prepare an unarmed crowd to face a well armed and brutal military battalion.

Mzwakhe as hypnotist serves another mobilisatory function. Like the

siblings of a family who overcome their competitiveness with each other and forge bonds on the basis of identification through their shared love of the same object, so the audience's libidinal ties with a common object of love (Mzwakhe) facilitate bonds of brotherhood or comradeship between them. The feeling of unity and common purpose is an important component of the mobilisatory process. These concepts are often explored on a thematic level in Mzwakhe's poems:

Yesterday it was Ruth First and Victoria Mxenge
 Today it is Msizi Dube and Matthew Goniwe
 Tomorrow it is you and I
 Africa do something for
 The spear has fallen
 Pick it up and fight for a
 Democratic South Africa

Elsewhere Mzwakhe draws specifically on the notion of the family to express the necessity for unity:

An injury to the brain
 Is an injury to the person
 An injury to the person
 Is an injury to the family
 An injury to the family
 Is an injury to the community
 An injury to the community
 Is an injury to the nation

Mzwakhe's performances simulate the conditions for the production of hypnosis and promote the forms of action of the hypnotised group. The process is a fundamentally irrational one in which the egos of members of the audience are suspended. The movement and sound of the poet act directly upon the audience members' bodies resulting in the non-action of their rationality and in the action of their bodies. Such mobilisation and persuasion directly effect the field of action rather than thought.

Mzwakhe is probably the most popular poet in the country, drawing thousands of people to the political events at which he performs. His performances bear testimony to his belief that "poetry plays a role in the struggle for national liberation". Perhaps Mzwakhe has summed up his own power in the following lines of his poem, "I am accused":

Those who differ with me
 Differ with my people
 I have been accused . . .
 For agitating the mind

4 Cinema and the amorality of persuasion

We proceed now to an examination of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the will*. We have chosen to do so, so as to highlight a series of polemical points.

Firstly, the formal operations of the group model remain constant but the formal aesthetic devices required to produce them are medium specific. Secondly, the formal mechanisms which have been identified as those which affect mobilisation operate in content independent ways. Texts which operate according to the mobilisatory model are at a formal level amoral, or indifferent to political strategies, that is, they are neither essentially progressive nor reactionary. In the same way as mass mobilisation has historically been used in the interests of divergent political movements, so too can texts which function according to the mobilisatory model be used to serve diametrically opposed political programmes. This is contingent on the fact that the formal conditions for procuring mobilisation presume a psychic state which functions on a model of suggestion as opposed to rational or ethical judgement, and that suggestibility is content-indifferent.

Triumph of the will provides a useful counterpoint to Mzwakhe Mbuli and a demonstration of the appropriation of the mobilisatory aesthetic by a fascist movement. Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the will* does not merely document the processes of mobilisation at the Nazi rally in Nuremberg in 1934, but in fact, mimics them. In doing so, the film functions as a tool for mass mobilisation rather than merely a document on mass mobilisation. Riefenstahl, as Sontag (1983: 76–88) notes, was specifically commissioned by the Nazis, to make a film of the rally which could be used to further mobilise people unable to attend the actual event. The film was subsequently used successfully to this end. Although Riefenstahl's political persuasion and cause are diametrically opposed to those of Mzwakhe Mbuli for example, her film provides a model for effecting mobilisation through the cinema, both in terms of the film's overall structure and specific formal devices used.

The structure of *Triumph of the will* mimics the steps of the interpellation of the masses in relation to the leader, along the lines of the group model. The film begins with the establishment of Hitler as the deified leader welcomed by adoring crowds. Significantly almost all of the members of the crowd represented at this point are women. This serves to sexualise the leader and at an unconscious level associates him with the primal father. The film then cuts to young boys (the "sons") and traces the process of their interpellation as members of the group. In the first shots of them, they are waking up, not unlike siblings in a family. They play and eat together and prepare themselves in a care-free manner to meet their "father". Much stylistic attention is paid to achieving a sense of communality and sibling bonds. Next, the boys are in the presence of the leader and have been transformed. Twin shots of Hitler and of individual soldiers are cut alongside each other, showing the transformation of the young boys in the direction of likeness to the leader. They have assumed the leader as their ego-ideal, they have modelled themselves on him via their love for him and they will obey him through their fear. In this very process the fields of boys' egos have diminished and they no longer experience themselves as autonomous subjects. Lukács argues that the promotion of this sort of primitivism which involves the distortion of reality and a "flight" from the rational understanding of it, "leads straight . . . to an undisguised antihumanism" (1979: 400). Yet, it is precisely this anti-humanism

which makes the functioning of the group possible. The individuals identify with each other and will each do as the other does in their shared ego-ideal. As Sontag suggests, *Triumph of the will* is an "epic of achieved community, in which everyday reality is transcended through ecstatic self-control and submission; [it is] about the triumph of power" (1983: 87).

Furthermore, proportional to the depleted rationality and individuality of group members is the group's increased openness to persuasion via suggestion. The string of political speeches in the film occur only at this moment of readiness for the production of conviction. The group is held and solidified then, not only in relation to the leader himself but in relation to the ideas that he puts forward. As Kracauer suggests, "This propaganda is aimed at psychological retrogression to manipulate people at will" (1974: 278). Significantly, the speeches in the film are comprised of a series of requests and instructions, that is, calls to action, rather than merely persuasion at the level of ideas.

Towards the end of the film, the group is celebrated for its immutable strength and unified beauty. In the final sections of the film, the masses have come to act as one. Crane shots revel in the kaleidoscope effects of masses of people moving in unison. The full show of military order and the beauty of precise design in a unified form (the form of the domination of parts by the whole, the individual by the group) reaches its fullest heights. This aesthetic of "totality" represents the unquestioned unity of the masses in their selfless devotion to a leader and an idea. It is the politics of "one nation, one Führer, one voice". This unified totality is a mass of people mobilised to act on the basis of conviction and sacrifice themselves for their leader and the ideas he represents. On the other level, as Sontag suggests, it represents "an already achieved and radical transformation of reality: history becomes theatre" (1983: 83). It is politics at its most aestheticised and hypostasised. As Benjamin suggests, "to render politics aesthetic culminate(s) in one thing: war" (1973: 243).

But what of the audience? The audience does not merely witness this process of hypnosis and mobilisation but rather, is subjected to it. Various formal strategies employed in the film function to promote the production of the viewer in the position of a group member. Hypnosis is effected in relation to the viewer, through both camera movement and editing. The film operates formally on the principle of holding the viewer's gaze in fascination (or "love"), that is, in an unconsciously driven dependency on the image to satisfy the scopophilic drive. In the early sections of the film, the camera moves constantly from one fragment of the whole to the next. The camera never rests upon an object or scene, and there are no conventional establishing shots. In this way the film minimises the possibility for the viewer either to become distracted from or to critically engage with what is seen. Instead, the viewer is held in voyeuristic suspense (based in the capacity of the scopophilic drive to move from one fragment to another in order eventually to see the whole) which serves to engender hypnotic fascination.

Working in tandem with this visual form of hypnosis is the hypnotic effect of the way in which both the camera movement and the editing follow the

rhythms and pace of the music. This technique formally resembles a lullaby in which the infant is simultaneously rocked and sung to sleep, or the effect in clinical hypnosis, of the patient concentrating only on the movement of an object and the therapist's voice. The effect of actions or images mimicking sound patterns in this way, is to capture the viewer in a ritual-like experience where images and sounds act directly onto the body, unmediated by rational thought. Adorno and Eisler argue that "acoustical perception preserves comparably more traits of long bygone, individualistic collectives than optical perception . . . this direct relationship to collectivity . . . is probably connected with the sensations of depth, inclusiveness, and absorption of individuality" (1979: 378).

The use of music to this end in *Triumph of the will* is complemented by the way in which both space and time, the fundamental categories of rationality, are suspended. There are almost no establishing shots in the film and there is no moment in which an horizon is visible. The camera continuously moves within the confined space of the rally (or later in the film, above the rally) as if that space represented the totality of space, the whole of all possible spaces. Yet, there is simultaneously no sense provided of the relationship between different spaces or parts within that whole. The spatial diegesis of the film is both a total and an undifferentiated world, a world prior to naming, identity and relations. Similarly with time, there is a complete suspension of rational temporal relations.

Besides these purely formal mechanisms of hypnosis, the audience is also interpellated in relation to the leader. Hitler is always shot in close-up which promotes identification, but he is also deified through the use of low angle shots and back-lighting. The constant cutting between these images and images of both the soldiers and the crowds, draws the viewer into a sibling-like identification with the Führer's adoring followers. Together with them the audience is open to persuasion. As Kracauer argues: "While the spectator's instincts and emotions are kept alive, his faculty of reasoning is systematically starved . . . to prepare the audience for the acceptance of their [the Nazi leader's] suggestion" (1974: 293).

The formal techniques employed in *Triumph of the will* demonstrate the means of cinematically producing the conditions of readiness in the viewer for conviction and mobilisation. The cinema can function for mobilisation when it interpellates viewers in relation to a leader, suspends the viewers' ego functions by effecting collusion between images and sounds so that they act directly upon the viewers' bodies, inducing them to act through "suggestion" rather than rational argument or empathy. Riefenstahl's success in producing these effects is a testament to "the unrealised suggestive power of this art form . . . a true genuinely powerful national experience can be kindled through the medium of film" (Kracauer, 1974: 103).

Conclusion

Psychoanalysis contributes greatly to an understanding of the political functions of the aesthetic. Psychoanalysis offers a means of formally delim-

iting different fields of political action and thereby the different aesthetic forms can function for the production of different political effects.

There can be no doubt that the processes of persuasion, suggestion and actions based on conviction form a crucial part of any revolutionary struggle. Aesthetic works which function to produce these processes have traditionally been denounced as propaganda. Through an application of Freud's group psychology model to theatrical and cinematic texts, this paper has attempted to demonstrate that effecting the operation of the group model through a play or film is a highly sophisticated process which involves specific and inventive formal aesthetic operations. It is through a critical engagement with these aesthetic operations that artists and critics can gain insight into both the power and limitations of an aesthetic which functions to effect mobilisation, and thereby consciously shape the political effects of cultural work.

Notes

1. The term "mobilisation" is used broadly in South African politics and the process of "mobilisation" often encompasses many levels and forms of political organisation and education which fall beyond the formal parameters of the group model. For the purposes of this paper the term "mobilisation" is used specifically to refer to those political actions which fall under the heading action on the basis of conviction.
2. All quotations from Mzwakhe, including his poetry, are taken from the Video News Service video, *Mzwakhe: People's Poet*.

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