OUTSIDE SHAKESPEARE / INSIDE QUÉBEC: 
PAULA DE VASCONCELOS’S METONYMIC PERFORMANCE TEXT LE MAKING OF DE MACBETH

Denis Salter

“We don’t ‘do’ plays, we ‘(re)make’ them”
Paula de Vasconcelos.1

The Current Status of the Shakespearean Performance Text

In 1996, I ended my essay, “Acting Shakespeare in Postcolonial Space,” with the modest proposal / obnoxious polemic that Shakespeare should no longer be produced in postcolonial cultures. Reason: doing so places the autonomy of the postcolonial actor in jeopardy —within a network of discursive relations over which and through which he or she has no substantive control—and nothing can be done to minimise that risk. I implied, moreover, that Shakespeare’s worldwide cultural capital is so large, so widely dispersed, and yet so discursively centralised that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, not only for the postcolonial actor but for the postcolonial spectator to experience Shakespeare otherwise.2 It seems that all the interpretive possibilities have already been pitched and optioned and that taking ownership of an imaginative space to call y/our own either costs too much or is unthinkable since there is, in effect, precious little Shakespearean cultural capital actually available for purchase in the discursive marketplace. What else can the postcolonial actor and spectator do, I speculated, except refuse to let themselves be coopted by Shakespeare through the strategies of withholding their labour, their money, and

1 Quoted in Denis Salter, “Blood ... Sex ... Death ... Birth: Paula de Vasconcelos’s Le Making of de Macbeth: an interview,” Australasian Drama Studies 29 (October 1996): 75.


their perceptual and imaginative resources and indeed their acquiescence to his (capitalistic) authority?

I suspected then, however, and I think even more urgently now, that this is a defeatist position, perhaps even a cop-out, and I have often wondered if my cultural diagnosis were not overstated, if alternative models for theorising and performing Shakespeare might be possible, if a return to the rehearsal hall might lead to practical discoveries about how to overcome the alienated condition of the postcolonial actor, a condition that likewise afflicts the spectator, and if it might be worth trying to conceptualise a performance text in which Shakespeare—as originating authority and as producer of primary cultural capital—could be effectively disabled, allowed to function as nothing more than a, admittedly legitimating, pretext that can ultimately be subjected to erasure. The question was / is: how? especially without setting up a situation in which Shakespeare continues to exercise his authority as a spectral trace within the system of imperialising textual representation.

I myself have no answers —and I can’t get answers from directors, actors, playwrights, audiences, even critics and colleagues when I buttonhole them at parties— and, worst of all, I have discovered that, for many people, the problem I have tried to diagnose isn’t a real problem anyway. “So what’s wrong with Branagh?” is often the slightly hostile, if misprized and tangential, response as the person edges towards the canapes. I, too, have lapsed into uneasy silence, as I watch Baz Luhrmann’s film Romeo + Juliet, which I love for all the wrong, postcolonially-incorrect reasons, and as I listen to the audio CD—which I bought at a store with the fitting name of Phantasmagoria—over and over again with my prepubescent daughter. (Luhrmann’s film Strictly Ballroom, however, is a pathos-driven investigation of the punishing ways in which traditional aesthetic protocols school, contain, destroy / and give birth in the struggle to rewrite postcolonial identities.) Meanwhile, intellectually speaking, I have moved on —or so I thought— to other matters. One of them, as it turns out, is that hoary trope, metaphor, the other is that other hoary trope, metonymy, both aptly described by Gérard Genette as “the irreplaceable bookends of our own modern rhetoric.”3

As I studied both of them against the backdrop of a self-set course of reading in the politics of inter- / intra-cultural performance, I discovered that the paradoxes of how to enact / interpret Shakespeare from embattled postcolonial subject-positions insistently reasserted

themselves while they led me to a reconsideration of some of the problematics of Shakespearean performance-textuality not just anywhere / everywhere but specifically in my own time, my own place. Last April [1996], when I went to see Paul de Vasconcelos’s production of Le Making de Macbeth at the Musée d’art contemporain, it turned out that I had lucked in to an unusually intelligent rendering of a highly aestheticised, almost art-for-art’s sake, postcolonial and postmodern(ised), inter- and intra-cultural, meta-performative agen between these two foundational tropes. I think, in the end, that it was metaphor —and not, alas, metonymy—that emerged victorious, a result that confirms my suspicion that Shakespeare, fundamentally, is not contestable, at least not from a fraught postcolonial condition. (It also gave rise to wisecracks from colleagues who reminded me that that is what ‘meta is for.’) None the less, because of the incommensurability of metaphor, on the one hand, and metonymy, on the other, not only as literary tropes, but, even more important, as ways of being in the world—as phenomenological mediators—I have come to recognise that metonymy is indeed a part(ial) solution—an emergent performative strategy—if not for subverting and traducing Shakespeare, then at least for interrogating his place within the (sub)cultures of Québec / Canada and, in turn, our place outside / within his canonical authority. Note: a part(ial) solution but not, I am in fact happy to report, a definitive answer.

Before I discuss some key scenes in which Vasconcelos’s Making played out the metaphor / metonymy dyad and its complications in relation to a much-revised written text, acting style, mise-en-scène, and the critical, social, ideological surround, I want to make a brief excursion into some of the traditional literature about, first, metaphor, and second, metonymy, and then I want to glance at a few issues in current debates about inter- and intra-cultural performance as they bear upon these particular tropological compass points.

What is Metaphor? Then. Now

Historically, metaphor has usually been deployed, I think, to establish a resemblance or similarity between one thing, idea, or action and another; a process articulated by its etymological origins in the ancient Greek word for “transfer” (OED). Metaphor has been designed to articulate shared qualities and traits; to reify a common ground; to colonise and then to aggrandise a common/wealth of cultural, ideological, and figurative knowledge. As Roman Jakobson observes, metaphor tends to be preoccupied with symbolical identifications and with the careful ordering, perhaps the ranking, of cognitive and imaginative categories of value. Jakobson’s intellectual heir is partly Aristotle who argues, in the Poetics, that “metaphor is the transfer of a name that belongs to something else either from the genus to the species, or from the species to the genus, or from one species to another, or according to analogy.” Further, Aristotle insists that “to use metaphors well is to see resemblance.” As Genette explains, in examining the historical evolution of metaphor, “we know that the term metaphor tends increasingly to cover the whole of the analogical field; whereas the classical ethos saw in metaphor an implicit comparison, modern thinking would tend to treat comparison as an explicit or motivated metaphor.” It seems to me, to generalise, that from antiquity to modern and contemporary times, metaphor has functioned as a trope that (perhaps inevitably) seeks to yoke together, often with epistemic violence, marked differences; the final object has been to create what Northrop Frye calls, in the Anatomy, “the concrete universal,” one that is meant to bring about “a unity of various things.” Thus, as a transfer-mechanism—i.e. as an instrument by which to circulate and affirm (traditional?) values—metaphor, especially in modern and contemporary times, has had inseparable and perhaps irreducible tropological and ideological functions.

In the writing of Western(ised) theatre history, metaphor’s unifying power, classically-privileged genealogy, and protocols of surveillance and visibility have legitimised its use-value in supporting a totalising, Euro-inflected, teleological, relentlessly developmental, progress-narrative of macro-history in which the objective, wittingly or otherwise, has been the effacement of cultural difference to position all of us in the narrative register of the One and the Same. As Bert O. States reminds us, quoting James L. Calderwood on Shakespeare, although a metaphor is initially a source of “creative insight and for a time gives off a spark of aesthetic pleasure,” it eventually wears out, “collapses into an inert name — or more familiarly ‘dies.’” In writing

6 Figures, p. 110.


between the performance of culture and the culture of performance; with one or two exceptions, the emphasis is resolutely on theatre within conventional, metaphorically-sanctioned, temporal and spatial categories.

Reading these works, you could be forgiven for thinking that Russian formalism, structuralism, semiotics, poststructuralism, deconstruction, hermeneutics, phenomenology, cultural critique, Marxist criticism, feminist criticism, gender theory, and postcolonial theory and practice were all waiting to be invented; you could also be forgiven for thinking that most of the world, apart from Britain, selected parts of Europe, and the U.S., does not exist except as occasional sightings on a CNN-manipulated global teleprompter. On the evidence of these books, where is metaphor? Alive and well, apparently, flourishing in the groves of academe, in the editorial practices at Cambridge and Oxford, and, if these books are to be believed, in the ways that certain (select) directors, designers, actors, critics and audiences have constructed / authorised Shakespeare by means of (reductive) concept-driven productions. It is not surprising that States should end up describing metaphor as “work[ing] like a secret password or handshake known only to insiders.”

The Recuperation of Metonymy. Now

As nearly as I can tell, apart from the thinking of a small number of scholars — among them, Hayden White, Homi K. Bhabha, Paul Ricoeur, Paul De Man, Jacques Derrida, Kenneth Burke, David Lodge, Genette of course, and, most famously, Jakobson — metonymy has been neglected, perhaps even suppressed, as an historiographic strategy.

In traditional classical models going at least as far back as Aristotle, and developed over the centuries of the Western rhetorical and tropological tradition by eighteenth-century French grammarians like Nicolas Bezaude, metonymy has tended to be designated as literary trope that is always subservient to the longstanding authority of metaphor. It is mainly Jakobson’s seminal 1956 essay, “The metaphoric and metonymic poles” (published in his Fundamentals of Language with Morris Halle) that has been responsible for modernist preoccupations with their bookend status, to gloss Genette, in contemporary rhetorical theory and practice. Despite the widespread influence of Jakobson’s essay, however, metonymy’s form, function, and value, and its possibilities for revised historiographic and interpretive methods in theatrical, cultural, and literary studies, remain largely unexplored. Indeed in many quarters of the Anglo-American academy, metonymy is still regarded with suspicion, not as a bookend or polarising opposite, but rather as a perhaps inferior subspecies of metaphor, and as a cognitive / tropological mode that only has use-value for feminist theorists indebted to Lacan (for example, Kaja Silverman, Jane Gallop, Naomi Schor, and Peggy Phelan) and for postcolonial provocateurs (for example, Bhabha and, more recently, Salman Rushdie who, in The Moor’s Last Sigh, simultaneously parodies, subverts, contains, and celebrates Bhabha especially in relation to metonymic narrative configurations).

16 Great Reckonings in Little Rooms, p. 114.
18 Grammaire generale; ou, Exposition raisonne des elements necessaires du langage, pour servir de fondement a l’etude de toutes les langues (Paris: J. Barbou, 1767).
20 Bhabha, The Location of Culture and Salman Rushdie, The Moor’s Last Sigh (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1996): the Bhabha ‘connection’ is literalised / parodied on p. 329; I would propose that the entire novel is an exploration of the metonymically-configured subject- and narrative-position. I am grateful to Proma Tagore and Priya Kumar for helping me to understand the connection between Bhabha, Rushdie, and metonymy.
Metonymy has good reason to be in bad odour, for it does have a shit-disturbing agenda. It is not merely a polar opposite, but is frankly antagonistic towards the high, class-conscious status of metaphor. Hence the inherent attraction of metonymy for postcolonial theory as that theory seeks to develop an anti-hegemonic critical vocabulary to oppose, and perhaps eventually to supplant, metaphor, and as it works to interrogate and dismantle a variety of ontological impasses regulated by metaphorical appropriation and containment. Historically, metonymy has been instrumental in establishing not uni- but rather poly-valent relationships based on the principle of contiguity between one thing, idea, action, or another; as David Lodge succinctly puts it, it functions in such a way that “an attribute or cause or effect of a thing signifies the thing,”21 a process of part / whole substitution that rhetoricians often call metalepsis. Unlike the unifying, wholesale, transfer strategies of metaphor, however, metonymy foregrounds inter-related dissimilar properties, to open up not a common/wealth but an uncommon ground, one in which the geography of part(s) / whole, margins / centre is radically problematised, placed on a discontinuous differential continuum, and in which correspondences, connections, affiliations, and attributes in-between things, ideas, actions, and indeed people are exposed not simply as causal or linear, but rather as multifactorial and synchronous, perhaps marked by the (dissident) potential for condensing, disrupting, and eventually displacing the sign-systems that are totalised by metaphorical domination.

Metonymy, as its etymological origin in the ancient Greek for “change of name” demonstrates, is indeed dedicated, first, to the un- and, second, to the re-naming of the linguistic register and the epistemological world-view that the linguistic order has sought to shape and legitimise. As an act of tropological resistance, metonymy is a device that allows us to see or resee what has been sublimated by the dead hand of cultural — ideological traditions and of ontological habits. As States concisely puts it, apropos the avant-garde potential of nineteenth-century realism, both metonymy and its cognate form, synecdoche, can be used as “devices for reducing states, or qualities, or attributes, or whole entities like societies to visible things in which they somehow inhere.”22 Metonymy, in this sense, is a poetics of (material) perception, one in which the gaze is turned back upon itself in an act of (self)-refreshment, readied to see what it could not see before; it is not, however, a colonising gaze, moving outward, seeking to imperialise worlds elsewhere, for that form and function are of course reserved for metaphor and its coercive protocols.

Although the metonymic yearns for autonomy, in the final analysis it is often denied the right to possess itself fully to achieve self-determination, a phenomenon that incites frequent bouts of existential trauma inside the reiterative sites of enunciation. Indeed, I would argue, following not only Ricoeur but also Pierre Fontanier’s work on tropes early in the nineteenth century, that metonymy, paradoxically, is not only a matter of contiguity —an idea that tends to reduce it to its materialising or refying function— but also a matter of correspondence, connection, and contingency in which “two objects [or more] form an ensemble, a physical or metaphysical whole, the existence or idea of one being included in the existence of the other”23 [emphasis in original]; and that as a result of the kind of horizontal symbiosis that this ensemble produces, “a relationship that brings together two objects each of which constitutes ‘an absolutely separate whole’” comes into (fragile) existence.23 In this mutually reinforcing ensemble, this conflicted hybrid of interdependent or contingent, metaphysical relationships, coloniser and colonised, original and copy, whole and part, centre and margins, same and different, in brief, metaphor and metonymy, not only encounter but, ontologically and tropologically speaking, require each other to form an imbricated, anxiety-provoking, historical continuum in which every kind and category of value is called, perhaps permanently, into question.

To put it another way, once metonymy, through its attributive, ensemble functions, manages to contaminate and estrange metaphorical authority, it is no longer a simple matter of the coloniser seeking to take absolute control over the colonised. In their conflicted will to power, each of them is reconfigured: the original is disrupted by the copy, the whole is fragmented by the partial, the dystopian is found wanting in the presence of the utopian, and the metaphorical is written (over) —to a degree— by the metonymic. From these polarising phenomena, and others like them, emerge not only the condition of hybridity but also the figure of the double who turns up, with uncanny frequency, as a spectre within a whole range of postcolonial texts. This figure of the double is the character who lives to inhabit two or more spaces (especially outside / inside) simultaneously, who is and is not him- / herself, who occupies both the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary,’ who acts out, and is marked by, both roles of coloniser / colonised in a series of endlessly reconstituting significations of thwarted physically- and metaphysically-inflected forms of desire. The central metaphorical /

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22Great Reckonings, p. 65.
23Fontanier is quoted in Ricoeur, The Rule of Metaphor, p. 56.
metonymic text in these cases is the palimpsestic multi-performance-
text of the suffering, seemingly deformed, postcolonised body, inscribed
by, through, and in-between the interstitial values of the seen / not
seen, the visible / invisible, the normative / grotesque, and the here /
elsewhere.

**Metaphor / Metonymy & Inter- Intra-Cultural Performance**

For a short period in the late eighties, early nineties, the critical, the-
etorical, and historical literature on inter- and intra-cultural perfor-
ance practices provided a way of thinking about the ways in which
hitherto delegitimated and suppressed differences might serve to dis-
rupt authorised and repressive hegemonies. The chief difficulty, how-
ever, is that most (perhaps all) of this work has been produced by
metropolitan authorities, including Patrice Pavis, Erika Fischer-
Lichte, and Bonnie Marranca (and Gautam Dasgupta); the work of Rus-
tom Bharucha has been perversely positioned both without and within
these discursive formations. In all cases, without exception I would
argue, differences of various types have been constructed as relational
phenomena, marked by their positionality towards dominant Western
theatrical practices. This, I believe, is itself a strategy for containment
—inadvertent perhaps but none the less coercive and producing an unre-
solved tension between macro and micro models of cognition and reaf-
firming the reducting dangers of the centre and margins model. As has
often been remarked, but not remarked often enough, heated debates
about the death of the subject brought about by various postmodern,
metropolitan-controlled doubts about the desireability, status, and on-
tological truth-claims of autonomy have had the effect, in postcolonial
sites of contestation, of robbing them of their epistemological quest for
the stabilisation of identity; for finding a way out of the dilemma of
being always already post.

Much of the critical literature on both inter- and intra-cultural per-
formance seems to believe, whatever the ontological evidence to the
contrary, that despite the death of the sovereign subject, identity-posi-
tions are recuperable, realizable, and knowable; and that performance
itself—in the sense of enabling restored behaviour, of (re)presenting
the actualising experience of being different, of perhaps overcoming the
dangerous paradoxes of double-agency and of licensing cultural promis-
cuity, and of resisting dominant modes of inscription and codes of repres-
entation—is the instrument of choice for those people who none the
less remain disenfranchised. But for the postcolonial subject, articu-
lated through the differential protocols of metonymy, none of these
things are in fact assured. Practically, postcolonial subjects might not
have, or might not be able to create for themselves, actual theatres
where the performance of their identity-politics is in fact welcome and
productive. Theoretically, postcolonial subjects are rightly wary of the
phenomenological uncertainty of performance itself. It is seductive to
imagine that you might be able to perform your invisible self into visi-
bility by taking over the instruments of the master’s / father’s
house. But how confident do you feel, surrendering yourself to this pos-
sibility, when you know from real-life, hard-won experiences, that
metaphorical entrapment awaits you, that the codes of metaphorical
representation all/ways seem to have pre-emptive authority, and that
your own subject-position is tenuous in the extreme? To be a permanently
postcolonialised metonymic subject, after all, is to be subject to a world
of shifting and slippery differential relations in which nothing, abso-
lutely nothing,—your self as self-authorising performance-text least
of all—is guaranteed as being yours. What, then, can the postcolonial
director/actor actually do, especially when face to face / mask to mask
with the single BIGGEST metaphor of them all: Shakespeare....?

'Ve don't 'do' plays, we (re)make them:'

Paula de Vasconcelos

Directors, I think, don't really choose plays to direct; instead, plays
choose them, with the choice a function of the mostly invisible discurs-
ive preoccupations, neuroses, obsessions of a particular historical mo-
ment. In the entire Shakespearean canon, I can't think of a play better
suited than Macbeth to an investigation of the functions, forms, and
values enabled by the conflictual will to power between metaphor, on
the one hand, and metonymy, on the other. Just as these tropes are ef-
effectively about struggles over the ownership of the categories of cogni-
tion, Macbeth is a play about the possession, dispossession, and repos-
session of, pun intended, relentlessly gendered sovereign authority
within a visible / invisible discursive economy of witchcraft and de-

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monology, crime, punishment, and redemption, psychic imbalance and restoration, and blood, purgation, trauma, and healing, in which Shakespeare traces multiple disturbed and disturbing affiliations among the body private, the body public, and the body politic. In the primary, if often glossed over, conflict that the play embodies between England, on the one hand, and Scotland, on the other, questions are implicitly raised not only about the intertwined processes of colonisation and (potential) decolonisation, but also about the kinds of tropes in which these historically-rooted violations of both the body private and the body politic take place.

Questions are also raised, as a consequence of these linguistically-based and ontologically-determined struggles, about the politics of personal and public identity; the play seems to suggest that the cost of (self-) betrayal will either be a descent into the chthonic, into witchery, into bloodshed (Macbeth) and / or a descent into blood and madness (Lady Macbeth). The play, then, maps the recurrent preoccupations of divided (post)colonial subjects, in Quebec as elsewhere, who cannot live within traditional, monologically-(or capitalistically- ) determined, hierarchies of power, but, who, at the same time, cannot live outside those hierarchies except by becoming victims of historical forces that are much more powerful than they can ever be. Denied agency, historically (in)stalled in the victim position, postcolonial subjects, like their exemplars of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, seem to exist for one purpose only: to be excluded, through death and madness, from a renewed, normative, stable, hierarchically-intact social order.

To put this schema into national terms, one could say that just as ‘Scotland’ is effaced / purged by ‘England’, Shakespeare’s Macbeth is a profoundly preservative / conservative affirmation of the need to ensure the stabilisation of an untroubled narrative of monarchical succession. In the Quebec context, the play has therefore tended to function as a complexly received and produced multitext, in which the transgressive, alienated, unstable Other of Quebec (tenuously represented by the Macbeths as perverse couple) itself has to be literally and figuratively demonised, driven mad, and killed off if the fiction of political continuity, at the symbolic level, is to be sustained; and if the trauma inflicted by the Conquest is to be laid to rest or, at the very least, forced underground, rendered invisible. The very decision to perform the play now, in the midst of continuing post-referendum angst, is, in effect, a dangerous move, for it could force one to become complicit with the ongoing, metaphorically-driven project to legitimate the violations of imperialism / federalism: that is, unless (an)Other text, metonymically-positioned and therefore vulnerable, can be tellingly created / performed, at the same time and within the same space of enactment, to contest Shakespeare’s controlling apologia for the inherent naturalness and inalienability of monarchical succession.

Attempting to produce this counter-text is the task that Paula de Vasconcelos, together with the writer, Jean-Frédéric Messier, has set for herself in the aptly named, Le Making of de Macbeth, a title that registers both the continuous process of (re)making Shakespeare —moving outside of his canonical status so as to go inside the politics of Quebec— and the split subject-position, the doubled condition (of / de) that inevitably destabilises the postcolonial (re)writing of identity at its very moment of inception. Saying, as Vasconcelos does, that she doesn’t ‘do’ plays, that she (re)makes them, seems to ensure that the struggle for (textual) autonomy will succeed, to a degree; it will only succeed, however, if a useful way can be found to register difference (away) from the originating, parental text.

I know no one, however —Vasconcelos herself included— who has fully succeeded in doing so; performance (always) seems to lead, as though by means of a hidden ontological trap, to the reinscription of the very value-systems that it seeks to challenge and perhaps subvert: metonymic dis / placement has yet to find a way to resist the seductive power of metaphorical conflation. The making is none the less useful in disclosing why, how, and to what ends, metonymic strategies are invoked, and provides a case study, in microcosm, of the current state of play within one postcolonial condition.

Character and the Lateral Play of Difference

Le Making is preoccupied with character as a polyvalent multitext, in pain, perhaps impotent yet potentially procreative, glimpsed / tableaud in different sites across time, through space. The ever-shifting nominal centre is the director, Elizabeth, whose angst-ridden dilemmas in producing Macbeth form the meto-text out of and on top of which, as in a palimpsest, the text of Le Making is conjured ... In the leaking / bleeding categories of identity that the production envisions, Elizabeth is a function of diversely-situated affiliations. Elizabeth I is her main antecedent, except to say it this way is to suppose that their relationship is linear, when in fact the production is at pains to situate them both as coextensive, their relationship produced by an historical

25All comments on the text, Le Making de Macbeth, come from the photocopied version —Mise en texte de Jean-Frédéric Messier; d’après une idée de Paula de Vasconcelos— kindly lent to me by Paula de Vasconcelos and Pigeons International. Other comments on the production are based on my own observations of it on several occasions during its run.
Fig. 1. Elizabeth in a coma.
Photo courtesy Louis Taillefer.

Fig. 2. Sylvie Moreau as Lady Macbeth.
Photo courtesy Louis Taillefer.
process of prodigious doubling. Mary, Queen of Scots, is the self-assured, rooted Other against which Elizabeth's own descent into madness is defined through the principle of opposition. Catherine, Elizabeth the I's lady-in-waiting, is played by Sylvie Moreau, the actress who also plays Lady Macbeth, and so in the master/servant relationship, with Catherine as liminoid, as intermediary, Elizabeth the director, Elizabeth the I, Catherine, and Lady Macbeth are experienced as iconic projections within a same/similar time/space continuum. Sylvie Moreau/Lady Macbeth also plays one of the Witches, and so 'witchery'/bedevilment are projected or deflected into the depths of Elizabeth's 'character.' Character here is not centred and centering but dispersed across a discursive field; it is not vertically, but horizontally, positioned; it is not one but many; it is not precise and knowable but diffuse and elusive.

Elizabeth, as director, has reached an impasse which is the osten
dible inciting incident of the entire play. Afraid of blood, of the messy fluidity of procreation, and afraid, without really understanding why, by her art yet so bewitched by it that she has no time for 'life,' Elizabeth none the less wants/needs to become pregnant. At a moment of crisis, brought about the protracted impasse, by her inability to live across the art/life divide, she (like Lady Macbeth, a textual spectre who guides and contra-defines some of her actions) faints and enters into a deep coma. Elizabeth, as a site of multiple identities, embodying but by no means reconciling time past, time present, and time future, is the postcolonialised body in pain, at once outside/inside virtually everything that might confer a fixed identity upon her. Her coma eventually has a therapeutic function, setting her free of her daemons, allowing her to return, purged, to her life, where she now has the courage, as a woman, to abandon the directing of Macbeth — meanwhile allowing her company to decide whether they themselves want to continue with it — and to become pregnant by her lover, Robert. The pregnancy, like her omnidirectional, attributive 'character,' also provides her with a bloodline to Elizabeth I: Robert is named after Robert, Elizabeth I's lover, the first of two Roberts in her life; meanwhile, Paul-Antoine Taillefer, Vasconcelos's husband, plays both Robert and Macbeth, so 'real' life and 'fictional' embodiment are conjoined, in such a way that blood, crime, guilt, and (possibly) liberation are registered through multiple frames of reference.

In the (in)visible moral pattern of both Macbeth and Le Making, good comes from bad, light from dark, life from death; history, however, is not constructed in such a relentlessly linear model, but, by means of the multiple character-affiliations, seems ultimately to exist...
within the paradox of an atemporal, eternal present, one in which, as Vasconcelos herself has put it, she can attempt to situate herself and her company as contemporary artists providing their reading of a mélange of historical source materials, Shakespeare's play being only one of many among them ("What I and our whole company try to do is to experience the play — elaborate it, if necessary, as in The Making of Macbeth — from who we are at any given time in history").

These layered narratives and palimpsestic characterisations are not, I think, (merely) exercises in rapacious postmodernised / (postcolonial) eclecticism in which differences, temporal, spatial, and cultural, are blithely erased. Rather, they are indeed exercises, as Vasconcelos herself acknowledges, in seeking to get a purchase on (historical) locations of meaning; a kind of naive assertion of who you are, where you stand, and what you might become (hence the preoccupation with blood, desire, and impotence / fertility) and, at the same time, a way of making clear, especially through imagistic means, uncontaminated by verbal language, the confluence of forces, myths, legends, narratives, images, and desires that have enabled your existence. The question, however, is what kind(s) of identity can be purchased in this shifting field of (re)presentational possibilities?

Elizabeth does escape from the madness of her art; she does become pregnant and therefore succeeds where both Elizabeth I and Lady Macbeth had failed. She does, then, create the future for herself, in a way that they couldn't, apart, that is, from acquiring what perhaps is even more permanent and powerful than what Vasconcelos's Elizabeth acquires: enduring status as dominant icons in the formation of the Western unconscious. Elizabeth is, ultimately, a paradigmatic metonymically-configured subject: formed not by and for herself but by forces Other than: by a dense conflation of historical and literary figures; by a play, Shakespeare's Macbeth, which she must renounce in order to survive, but by means of which she acquires an oppositional identity; by a clichéd pop culture narrative about madness and the price of going on; and by being situated, situating herself, in an atemporal present which reveals her as the self-in-flux, authorised not so much by and for herself but rather by an inherited network of discursive practices that effectively rob her of a capacity for agency and individuation.

There is intense utopian-driven pathos in all of this. Existentially, Elizabeth yearns to be Elizabeth, but her art, and its multiple, culturally-specific, sources thwart this ambition; sovereignty — personal and political — does not, ultimately, belong to her, but rather to Elizabeth I, the primary template in relation to which Elizabeth's own identity can function as nothing more — or less — than a diminished copy of a (barren) power that once was.

Blood

Elizabeth: a body in pain ... undergoing trauma ... seeking to heal herself outside of the gendered / colonised codes of representation ... succeeding in giving birth (to herself) but only by relinquishing art, theatre, Shakespeare and his universalised Queen. Despite her initial rejection of the dominant image of blood, Vasconcelos came to recognise that Shakespeare's Macbeth and therefore her Le Making had to become preoccupied with this image as theme and variation ("you can't get around it: bloodshed, bloodlines, blood images, bloody battles — blood is everywhere"). What kind of blood was / is it? In a conventional reading, it might have (simply) been blood as violation and guilt made manifest. But in this production the symbolic and metaphorical were always being contested by metonymic displacements and reconfigurations of meaning. Thus, in a key scene ("Le Sang 2") — forming a discontinuous correspondence between acts one and two, and providing a kind of visual performance score that shadowed the verbal performance score on the theme of the wounds of battle ("so they / Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe: / Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds" [11]) from earlier in the play — the actors — not as characters but as themselves — playfully and violently — covered themselves and one another in buckets and buckets of red paint. Later in the play, the multiplying images of actors as blood leaked over / seeped through into the (primary) image of Elizabeth, waking from her coma, being helped, as though a marionette, by Robert as she walked slowly across the stage, before gradually pulling a long red ribbon from between her legs — an evocation of death / madness / sleep / destruction; of life / clarity / wakefulness / (re)birth; and of the visceral mess by which Elizabeth was / is both repelled and attracted...

These dispersed images, poeticised embodiments of the umbilical cord, had, in my view, many effects / affects. They imparted poeticised density to both the verbal and visual performance-texts; in the project of interrogative re-naming, they murdered and then recovered the ur-text, Shakespeare's Macbeth, from its status as a metaphorical corpse / corpus, allowing us to see it, as if for the first time, as a source of enabling desire; and they served to underscore the production's primal

26 Quoted in Salter, "Blood," p. 75.

27 Ibid., p. 68.
Utopian yearning to re/vision, to reveal, to tease us with a kind of poetics of in/visibility, to enhance the protocols of perception, and to urge us to reconsider and perhaps reinstall the Feminine as the site of origin — desire embodied here within and beyond the moment of trauma. In particular, this impression of the (bloody) fecundity of the Feminine drew from and inspired multiple affiliations between and among the figures of Elizabeth, one the one hand, and Lady Macbeth, on the other. The production was at pains to present Lady Macbeth, not as a hysterical, PMS-tormented, contemporary woman, not as a semi-divine maenad, not as a Siddonian criminal virago, not as a Terryian cooing dove, but as an empowered hybridisation of personified and empowering Beauty, Strength, and Sexuality, irradiated by the iconic authority of Diana, India, the Orient, and Amazonia. Yet this heightened poetics of hybridisation did not have a homogenising function — collapsing all these sources into a single metaphorical register — but rather insisted on the heterogeneous, the fractured, and the non-referential constitution of being; allowed Lady Macbeth — and therefore Woman for whom she served as a metonym — to exist outside conventional modes of representation; and, most of all, imparted visceral immediacy to Elizabeth’s protean identities (artist / madwoman; wife; mother-to-be).

Of Puppetry and Puppets

In seeking to represent the unspeakable, Macbeth infects its performers with preternatural dread, with premonitions of disaster. It is itself an object lesson in awful renaming: superstition has it that if we call the play by its real name, we court disaster; so we allay our anxieties by renaming it as something different: as the Scottish play. Difference, then, as in metonymy’s proliferating agenda, reduces metaphysical stress, resists trauma; it is the Oneness of metaphor that continues to evoke terror (especially on ‘opening’ night). In the performance of Le Making, fear was indeed pervasive: towards Macbeth, towards art — the source of Elizabeth’s primary trauma — and, perhaps most of all, towards Shakespeare himself as the textual arbiter whose unifying presence could not (ultimately) be resisted even through the metonymic protocols of reinscription. In addition to the displacing functions of renaming, the performance sought in numerous ways to cut Shakespeare down to size, a process that I think of as a metonymic condensation; a way of liberating the postcolonial subject from Shakespeare’s all-encompassing magnitude by deliberately (re)making him partial, not whole, contained, not expansive, ‘provincial,’ not metropolitan.
Vasconcelos’s production worked through this process in the figure of Pierre, the puppet master in a red fool’s cap, who appeared three different times, with his own perambulating mini proscenium arch stage complete with green baize curtain, to retell the story of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as a serio-comic brutal struggle between Punch and Judy. As Vasconcelos has remarked, Pierre intervened in Messier’s text as a blasphemous commentator on Shakespeare, traducing his authority; as a clear way of encapsulating the main story in English for a francophone audience, decoding it, as it were, to make its meaning transparent; and as a device for demythologising and debunking the Macbeths, allowing us to see them as people just like us.28

In addition, however, it seems to me that Pierre, as puppet master, managed to reframe the Macbeths, circumscribing their power in the world at large and revealing them as puppets that could be manipulated, not solely by the supernatural force of destiny, as they are in Shakespeare’s Macbeth, but through Pierre’s own (and therefore our) reimagining of them. In this new micro-narrative, the so-called normal order of things was inverted: power was now in the hands of a so-called fool, the ‘witchery’ of his art was demystified as a skilful performance, and he himself was gradually revealed to be, not foolish, but wise. Indeed, within the revisionist moral trajectory of Le Making, Pierre—in contradistinction to Elizabeth—could readily separate his art from life; whereas she was always in danger of being destroyed by her single-minded absorption within the art of (Shakespearean) performance, he knew how to make them divisible, a strategy that protected his sanity and allowed him to present his art not as a tragic infection but as a generous gift to his daughter, yet another of the production’s (in)visible sources of Feminine renewal.

Making Metonymy

The challenge, I would provisionally remark, for Shakespearean performance and for ways of thinking about it, is to de-metaphorise cognitive modes, categories, tropes, and narratives. Yet this is an extraordinary challenge, if for no other reason than because so many of us have had our minds and imaginations conditioned by the protocols of metaphor; they are second nature to us, hence invisible, hence all-powerful. Shakespeare, moreover, as cultural capital—and as pedagogical and performative institution—himself exists largely as a function of metaphorical modes of interpellation. Now, however, that I myself,
partly in response to Vasconcelos's *Le Making*, have at least begun to imagine Shakespeare otherwise through the protocols of metonymy, I am beginning to see traces, incipient formations, resistant sites, of metonymy in all kinds of unexpected places. Could it be that metaphor is reaching a point of exhaustion as the dominant trope of Western rhetoric? I doubt this. But I note, in the autumn 1995 issue of *Brick*, that the U.S. poet Carolyn Forché, who has dedicated much of her career to writing committed, political poetry in self-imposed exile outside of the U.S. in (especially) El Salvador, observes in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel that she is now engaged with a self-conscious “resistance to metaphor.” Forché says that instead she has “been exploring a different tributary of language, which is its tendency toward metonymy... In metonymy you explore all the things associated with a given word, the way in which that word slips and moves around and through the language and back through its history, and picks up meanings along the way and sheds others.” Later, Forché remarks, with reference to Pablo Neruda, that at certain points, “many things can’t be a metaphor for anything, and serve no metaphorical purpose.” Many things, Forché implies, just are themselves—no metaphor is adequate, as a mode of transfer / translation into something other than, in rendering these things exactly as they are.²⁹ Quite apart from a U.S. poet in exile, trying to clear away an imaginative space to call her own, for the postcolonial subject in a state of (tropological) siege, metaphor clearly no longer has any real epistemological validity, except as an unthinking reflex action of the mind / imagination. To be in the world metonymically, however, as I have suggested, is to make oneself vulnerable not only to the continuing authority of metaphor but to the embattled politics of the inter- and the intra-: the very interstitial sites where you might normally expect the postcolonial subject to ‘belong.’ I almost feel compelled to conclude, as I did in “Acting Shakespeare in Postcolonial Space,” that postcolonial cultures should continue to avoid doing Shakespeare at all costs. But, if they none the less feel compelled to remake him, then, as in Vasconcelos’s *Le Making*, it seems to me that perhaps the only way to proceed, however fraught, is through an exploration of what the metonymically-configured subject-position enables. Doing so, however, has many consequences: among them, the recognition that art of this kind requires that the postcolonial spectator, critic, theorist, historian, and historiographer must also learn to exist otherwise, becoming engaged, with Forché and others, in the collective act of “resistance to metaphor.” Frankly, I have difficulty imagining what a completely dé-metaphorised world would be like. But trying to think this way serves to remind me, as does Forché’s observation about the place of metonymy in contemporary poetry, at least from Neruda onwards, that there has indeed been, since the nineteenth century, a mostly hidden modernist tradition of metonymically-driven Shakespearean theorisation, criticism, and performance that has mostly existed outside / in exile from, metropolitan centres. “Shakespeare and Modernism’s Other” — but that is a title for another essay, for another time, another place.