

Death of a dream



WITH THE LID OFF

John Matshikiza

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I had heard nothing about this. It was doubly, triply shocking to receive the news over a meal and a glass of wine in West Berlin, so many thousands of miles away.

For days I refused to believe it. And there is this syndrome where you are inclined to slaughter the bearer of the news rather than seeing it for what it is — just more bad tidings out of South Africa.

The ironies were just piled too high on top of each other. Schmitz, you see, has taken up residence in Berlin because, after years of struggling, he has decided that staying in the country that nurtured him and which most needs his talents as a film-storyteller (you would assume) would be an act of folly.

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The irony lies in being told of a fatal hijacking by the director of *Hijack Stories*, who had tried to make a point about a ghastly aspect of our life through the telling of that

movie and had been condemned to flee into exile for his pains.

You just don't talk straight about South Africa in South African movies. People don't like it. The rainbow is what everybody says the people at home, and the rest of the world, especially, want to hear about — even if there is no such thing.

Like I say, it was hard to know where the source of my grief and anger at hearing the news really lay. People get killed all the time in senseless crimes in South Africa.

The fact is that Jackie was a friend of mine who I had seen not four weeks before his death, in the streets of Grahamstown during festival time, handing out leaflets for his latest

show with the Soweto Dance Theatre, which he had founded in 1989.

I don't know if he was aware of it, but Jackie was one of the voices that persuaded me that there was a creative life to come home to in South Africa, a set of fresh voices beaming out from a video that someone gave me called *We Jive Like This*, telling it how it was in a refreshing sector of the performing arts, notably dance. I thought there was something to arrive to, after all.

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So his random death, revealed to me by chance so many weeks after it had happened, is a source of deep grief and anger. He was young — barely 40 years old — with a whole creative life in front of him. He was independently minded, intelligent, honest, modest, committed. And he had just begun to make a family — his two-year-old daughter was with him when he was hijacked and shot dead, and will surely never forget those moments for as long as she lives. She herself barely got away with her life.

It is all very well to pour out the helpless anger. But what is to be done?

Jackie Semela is one of many victims of the impossibly horrific social conditions we have inherited from apartheid and all the stuff that came before it.

What separates him from all those other nameless victims is that I know his face, I know his name, I still feel the breath of his inspiration on my cheek, as if we were still having a casual conversation on the wintry streets of Grahamstown in mid-July.

What, I ask again, is to be done? Somewhere the buck must come to rest in this chaotic society we have inherited.

Jackie, and the rest of us, tended to look over his shoulder at the past.

I think it is time we started to acknowledge the need to blame the present as well. In so carelessly losing Jackie Semela in the course of a senseless car hijacking, 10 years after we have finally won the privilege to stand up for ourselves, our revolution has surely suffered a dismal, unacknowledged failure.

Wagging the digital dog



LOOSE CANNON

Robert Kirby

*The robots have taken the city,
From altars computers revoke;
Dr Frankenstein's monster
has risen,
All humans are fled from
the smoke.*

You cannot pick up a paper or a magazine these days without reading about how technology of one kind or another continues to improve our lives, to invest every mortal occasion with increased profit or ease. There's little we need to do in our brave new global world that hasn't been electronically refined or digitally enhanced, is more environmentally offensive, more user-friendly.

In a fashionable catchphrase, it is always time to move on; in our headlong rush forward there is no moment allowed for pause, for reflection, for taking stock. Like the technology that

pervades our lives, we must continually seek betterment, offer more options and features to each other: be more like our cellphones?

I am writing this column using a sort of super-electric typewriter called a word processor. This gives me the facility to chop and change, to re-voice the clumsy phrase, to tinker to my heart's delight. When I have finished, I will press a few keys and, in an instant, the column will be reproduced at the other end of the country.

There's nothing to complain about when it comes to that sort of facility. The only penalty is when the technology so fascinates the human that the human loses control. Endless tinkering often displaces the enthusiasms of the mind. At the University of Cape Town college of music the invaluable musicologist, Gunther Pulvermacher, told a story about how Mendelssohn studied an original Beethoven orchestral score. In Beethoven's day blank scorepaper was expensive and so, when he wanted to change something, Beethoven would take little strips of score, make the alterations and then paste these over the originals. Examining one of the scores, Mendelssohn found that in a passage for the cellos, Beethoven had changed and pasted about 10 times. So he

patiently steamed off the alterations, numbering them, hoping for some insight into the workings of the genius mind.

What he did find was that Beethoven had explored nine variations of the original passage, taken a circular inventive tour, which brought him back to what he'd first written. The first and last versions of passage were exactly the same. That there was a lesson in Pulvermacher's lecture about the dangers of tampering too much with artistic inspiration, is in no doubt. Pasting strips of revised passages on to scores was Beethoven's technology, his music processor. And it got in the way.

All of which is a long introduction to some reflections on how a particular branch of current technology has quite overwhelmed, seems actually to have turned viciously on its practitioners. This is what has happened to today's visual arts, film and television — most particularly the

latter — where the advent of digital editing technology has become an electronic brute out of control.

To watch the television coverage of last Friday's imaginative opening ceremony of the World Cup Rugby tournament was to witness an almost terrifying display of gimmicky televisual busy-ness. The entire ceremony was hostage to the vision mixers, a restless flaunting of every trick in the book. One of the featured items in the ceremony was the playing, with breathtaking virtuosity, of Australian folk themes, arranged for violin and button accordion. All this required was that a camera dwelt on the two musicians, with perhaps a close-up here and there. The music and its thrilling performance were what should have been paramount. Not so for the television director, who instead used the two minutes for his own fuss of visual pyrotechnics. He had cameras swirling and swooping, bouncing and circling the players, zooming and shifting, seemingly intent on distraction, interference.

Why? Is brilliantly performed music no longer considered capable of holding its own? Must everything be adorned with trickery? Or is it that the availability of "instant" technology

has supervened, become of primary importance? Today's "editing boxes", the Flames and the Avids plus all the rest of them, are to their users like a new box of paints to a child. They are there, so let's splash them around.

Of today's broadcasters, the BBC is among the worst offenders. Over weekends the international service, BBC World, broadcasts some interesting documentaries, many of them offering insights into the sciences. In most cases these are so distorted, so corkscrewed by visual fiddle-faddle as to be unwatchable. When an expert explains some fact or phenomenon he is bathed in violet light, superimposed on a background of antic luminous images — in fact everything possible is done to distract the viewer from absorbing what's being said. To the visual add the contingent intrusions of sound effects and synthesised music, and the whole thing is unpalatable. It's like being forced to ingest soup, the fish, the meat, the trifle and the wine all from one spoon.

I am sure I will be deemed a fogley for making these comments. I'm more than happy to be told that insists that, like television's visual trappings, it trespasses on the choice.

There's little we need to do in our brave new global world that hasn't been electronically refined

Please SCAN & send



Judge Joos Hefer, whose inquiry could become little more than a sideshow. Photo: Nadine Hutton

under attack from within the ANC for his support of Ngcuka, are just his most recent reasons.

The manner in which he chose to make the move, announcing it to the media rather than formally informing the ANC, has resulted in the organisation ganging up on him — something that will most likely bring his political career to a dead end, never mind what the Hefer commission does or doesn't turn up.

"The national working committee took a dim view of the fact that it had to read about Maduna's decision in the media," it said in one of the few recorded examples of understatement by the committee responsible for the day-to-day operations of the ANC.

Whatever the findings of the Hefer commission, it cannot be good for the ANC: either a senior member of the organisation turns out to have been an apartheid spy; or the stars of its former intelligence network, like Mac Maharaj and Mo Sheik, got it wrong when they identified Ngcuka as a

The ANC has always been riven by ideological factions and coped with the departure of some of its most senior leaders

possible informer. Both are scheduled to testify at the commission.

But the consolation for the organisation is that the outcome of the commission is unlikely to have an effect on the results of the next big political story in South Africa, the coming election.

Even if the ANC is not able to shake off the popular perceptions of divisions and corruption, many opinion pollsters point out that ANC supporters who become disillusioned with the organisation simply stay away from the polls, they do not switch their support to other parties.

And while corruption and the allegations against Zuma have dominated headlines — it is not a top election issue.

Says the director of market research agency Markinor, Mari Harris: "Unless the opposition and the media make it one, I don't think the commission and the perceptions of corruption will be an election issue."

"In any event, at this stage the ANC is still seen as a liberation movement and it's not the done thing to vote against it on an issue like this," she explains.

Markinor regularly conducts opinion polls on levels of public support for political parties and popular attitudes on social and economic issues. So the Hefer commission will not put an end to

the fire in the ranks of the ANC, but neither will it significantly affect the national political strength of the organisation. It is sound and fury signifying nothing.

This is not to dismiss the commission — one of the most politically significant events of the year. It is simply an attempt to place it in the context of what is set to be a long-running battle in the ranks of the ANC, and South African political life, in the coming year.

If Ngcuka is cleared, his investigation into Zuma will not be tainted by allegations that the charges against the deputy president are simply a plot by old apartheid forces against the new government. They can then be dealt with on their own merit.

There is little doubt that public attention will be gripped by the inquiry and public perceptions of the ANC influenced by the experience of seeing its leaders besmirch each other with allegations of treachery, corruption and abuse of power.

But for now Mbeki and the ANC will have to ride out the Hefer commission hearings and the start of the Shaik trial. It is only after the next election, when Mbeki will be able to reshuffle the Cabinet, that he will have a chance to decisively intervene to try to sort out the debacle.

That is the political moment to watch, as only then will Zuma's and Ngcuka's fate be decided.

it's not speaking clearly

The Democratic Alliance was long thought to be the voice of business. Boasting a former editor Nigel Bruce of the *Financial Mail*, from the days when it was seen as the voice of corporate South Africa, it should, one supposes, represent the Inanda faction of business. Yet the DA has inexplicably come out in support of the basic income grant, a conservative economist's idea of a joke.

So perhaps the African National Congress represents business interests? Wrong again. Like Star's Borg, the ANC assimilates potential opposition interests. The areas of opposition the DA has neutralised is business, growth, employment policy, an economic policy.

business would clearly like in labour law.

The question as to who really represents business is urgent. Clearly, government pressure has led to the latest business body marriage of convenience because it wants to liaise with one non-racial body.

How can the government be sure that domestic business in general buys into its broad-based black economic empowerment strategy, or any other policy, if there is no business body that will honestly reflect the views of its members?

A sign that even the flimsy business consensus of the past is gone is that the government's apparent backtracking on privatisation has been greeted with near silence. On vital issues such as employment equity law, society has had to do with vocal comment from odd quarters such as the South African Institute for Race

Relations. Whoever Race Relations represents, it is not organised business.

Black business, on the other hand, had to form a completely new body, the Black Economic Empowerment Commission, to come up with recommendations on black empowerment. Nafcoc has been notable for internal faction fighting rather than positions on the economy. What has Fabcos said recently, at all?

If individual white and black business organisations have had difficulty voicing their collective opinions, there is little chance the unified body will make its presence felt on important economic and political issues. The new business bodies may each speak with one voice, but will they say anything sensible?

Reg Rumney is executive director of Businessmap Foundation

SA business is no longer black and white

Big business shifts gears

COMMENT

Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya

On the one side of the parking lot white and red buses have fallen silent. On the other a BMW, Mercedes-Benz and a couple of 4x4s wait.

Their occupants, especially the bus passengers, are in the Sun City Conference Centre debating the future of black business — one that means being united with other race-based business organisations.

Inside the hall a tall man with white hair, wearing a faded Blue Ribbon Bakery T-shirt and unpolished, side-buckled shoes, is trying to appease members of his delegation, who are unhappy about some logistical problems.

He speaks in Sesotho uncontaminated by a sprinkling of English words. A few minutes later Patrice Motsepe arrives, surrounded by bodyguards. Motsepe is tall, urbane, articulate and relatively young. One does not need to see the label on his shiny, black suit to tell that it is from the top drawer.

Later that evening President Thabo Mbeki, in a celebratory mood, tells the gathering at a gala dinner to launch the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of South Africa (Chamsa) and Business Unity South Africa (Busa) that the night deserves something stronger than the red wine on the menu.

The president could not have known that some journalists had complained on hearing that a half-litre of bottled water cost R15 and that the wine, the kind I gather is relatively cheap, would set one back R95. One doubts whether the man in a bakery T-shirt and those who have been sleeping in their minibuses would have been able to afford the water, let alone the wine.

This is the National African Federated Chamber of Commerce (Nafcoc) 39 years after David Pooe, Enos Mabuza and Richard Maponya founded it in Orlando.

It is still a black organisation trying to find its feet in a white-dominated economy. But the chasm within it and other organised business bodies is no longer as much about colour as it is about the bottom line.

Its merging with the Federated African Business and Consumer Services, the white South African Chamber of Business and Afrikaans Handelsinstituut to form Chamsa nailed that point home.

Thanks to the unity process, white business is now closer than ever to having the political credibility it historically lacks.

Mbeki and his senior Cabinet ministers have given their blessings to the new organisations.

None of the top four leaders in the chamber movement are white. The top four at Chamsa are Motsepe, Mac Mia, Franklin Sonn and Simon Buthelezi.

This left no room for Busa head Attie du Plessis, whom Motsepe addressed as "my broer" when he paid homage (in *suiwer* Afrikaans *nogal*) to Du Plessis's part in the unification process. Du Plessis was elected deputy president of Busa behind his "broer" Motsepe.

The black middle class, with its

sophistication and finesse (opposed to the rugged features epitomised by the man in a bakery T-shirt) is set to grow, as it will benefit from the deals that will inevitably follow from the merger.

The much-loved Motsepe will become the Nelson Mandela of business if the white-haired man and his constituency see the benefits of black economic empowerment (BEE) trickling down to them.

Motsepe himself acknowledged as much when he said at the end of the two-day conference: "We would fail and create divisions among ourselves if we do not assist emerging and small business."

As matters stand, the main labour grouping, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the workers' vanguard party, the South African Communist Party (SACP), had very little to say about the issues at hand, choosing to comment on the largely uncontested ideas terrain.

"Unless we create jobs and a sustainable momentum towards poverty eradication, our progress as a country will be severely retarded. That is the challenge [for] us all, and this should be the fundamental point of departure and the main content of BEE," said SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande.

Motsepe will not disagree with that. It will take a bit more than his personal charm and the obvious warmth he displayed when he told delegates who could not make it to the gala dinner that Nafcoc will do "everything in its power" to ensure that they are fed.

It has taken about six years for business unity to prevail. But the "misguided" skeptics, whom Minister of Public Enterprises Jeff Radebe lambasted for pronouncing Nafcoc's demise, have not gone away.

True, Nafcoc went on a roadshow selling the idea of a united business front to its members.

Also true, there remain pockets of dissent among some members, who believe they were not properly consulted on or invited to the Sun City process.

Nafcoc will have to deal with that, too, and not simply dismiss it as the rantings of a discredited and disgruntled minority.

The new business leaders are black. It is a fact that will not be lost to the business sector that has taken almost a decade longer than the political one to speak in one voice, and whose patriotism to the new order is still suspect.

Organised business representative at Nedlac Professor Raymond Parsons says time and practice will tell whether the new business model works.

"Some critics will look at the new models Busa and Chamsa [as they would] motor cars from the pavement and point out all sorts of features they think are less than ideal. But they may lack the courage to get into them and drive away. If they do so, they will not want to return to the old models," says Parsons.

Organised business has hopped into the new car. It is still in first gear and it will have to prove itself when it gets to the gravel and bumpy road leading to the spaza shop in Thembisa or the general dealer in Pofadder.

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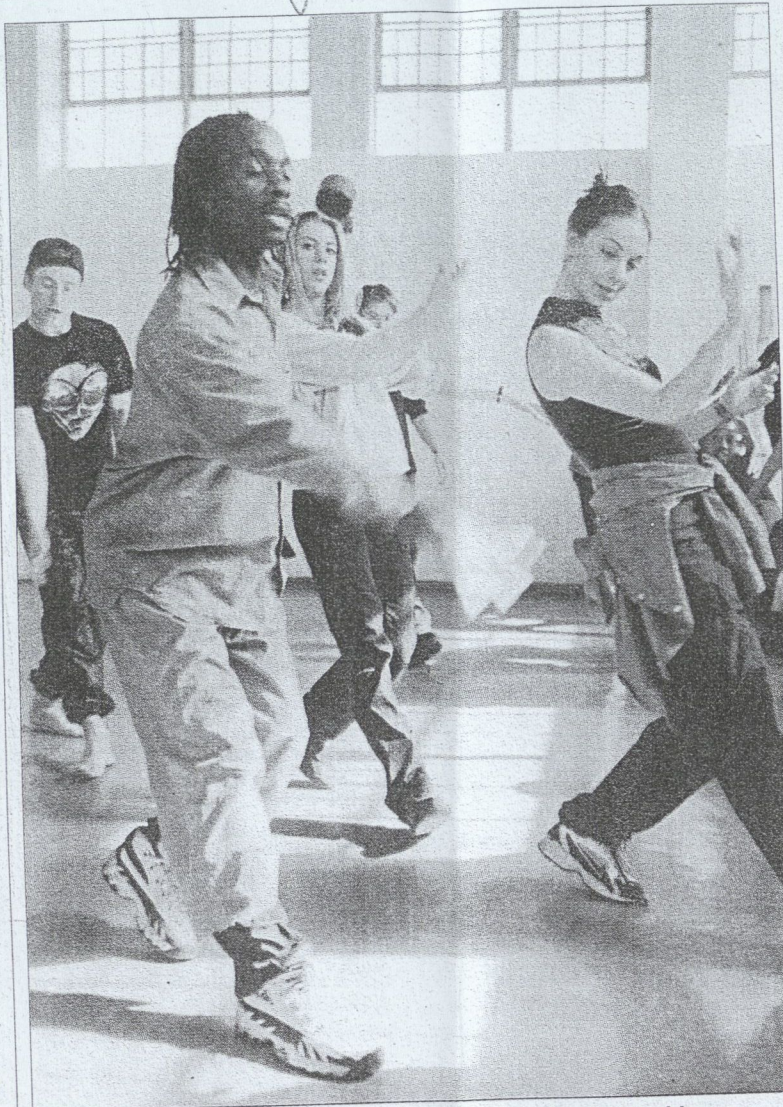
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Handwritten note: *Address@frank.com*

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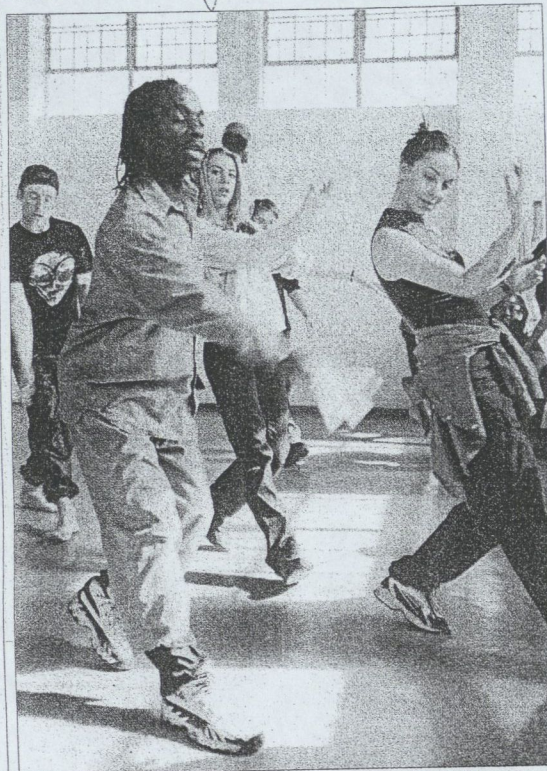
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Jackie, and the rest of us, tended to look over his shoulder at the past.

I think it is time we started to acknowledge the need to blame the present as well. In so carelessly losing Jackie Semela in the course of a senseless car hijacking, 10 years after we have finally won the privilege to stand up for ourselves, our revolution has surely suffered a dismal, unacknowledged failure.

movie and had been condemned to flee into exile for his pains.

You just don't talk straight about South Africa in South African movies. People don't like it. The rainbow is what everybody says the people at home, and the rest of the world, especially, want to hear about — even if there is no such thing.

Like I say, it was hard to know where the source of my grief and anger at hearing the news really lay. People get killed all the time in senseless crimes in South Africa.

The fact is that Jackie was a friend of mine who I had seen not four weeks before his death, in the streets of Grahamstown during festival time, handing out leaflets for his latest