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Nicholas Weeks holds an MA in English Literature from the University of Geneva, as well as a CAS in dramaturgy and textual performance from the University of Lausanne. His master's thesis focused on kinesics, i.e. the expressive dynamics of gesture, in the early critical work and fiction of Samuel Beckett. His current PhD project, while pursuing a critical assessment of the Beckett canon, also engages the transmission of embodied knowledge in the practice and performance of contemporary plays by authors/directors from the postcolonial world. Nicholas also directs the workshops of the English Department Theatre Group at Geneva University.

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A Poetics of Minutiae: Metaphorical Transformations in the Theatre of the Apartheid Era New Scholars' Forum

Based on a dynamic contemporary understanding of the role of metaphors as complex entities triggering sophisticated embodied and imaginative cognitive processes, this paper seeks to articulate a poetics of minutiae valid both for the page and the stage focusing on the way stage actions (enacted stage directions) may operate radical contextual re-orientation of scenes. It is my contention that at the core of the multifaceted layers constituting a theatrical event (historical, socio-political, aesthetic) lie swift and subtle changes within interpersonal behaviour that might only be properly accounted for and explained through a particular attention to significant minimal gestures. Methodologically, I will recourse to fine-grained textual analyses based on close readings giving due respect to the mobility of the referent, expanding the borders of literature to broach broader interdisciplinary aspects of human action through notions such as kinesic intelligence and sensorimotricity. To limit the scope of this presentation however, my argument will focus on a set of five key scenes representative of such metaphorical transformations effected through gestures in works by individual playwrights, directors and small companies working as collectives in South Africa of the apartheid era (Athol Fugard, Matselma Manaka, Zakes Mda, Barney Simon, William Kentridge and the Handspring Puppet Company). The historical survey of the material and the textual analysis will expose the ways in which South African theatre has evolved a corporeal practice singularly predicated on the bare means of traditional narration and metaphorical transformation, achieving international success while retaining politically subversive dimensions.