

https://dspace.org/

To stand somewhere: performing complicity

Hollmann, Ter

2016

http://hdl.handle.net/10539/21954

Hollmann, Ter (2016) To stand somewhere: performing complicity, University of the Witwatersrand, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/21954>

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Research Report

Name: Ter Hollmann

Student Number: 331921

Course: MADA

Supervisor: Warren Nebe

Due Date: 20 March 2015

Plagiarism Declaration

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and to pretend it is one's own.
2. I have used the author date convention for citation and referencing. Each significant contribution to and quotation in this essay from the work or works of other people has been acknowledged through citation and reference.
3. This essay is my own work.
4. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my own work with the intention of passing it off as their own work.
5. I have done the word processing and formatting of this assignment myself. I understand that the correct formatting is part of the mark for this assignment and that it is therefore wrong for another person to do it for me.

Date: 20/03/2015

Signed: Ter Hollmann

To Stand Somewhere: Performing Complicity

Content

Abstract

To Stand Somewhere: Performing Complicity

Appendix 1: To Stand Somewhere: A play

Appendix 2: The Nigga Speech and other monologues

Abstract

This report is the final piece of a performance as research project exploring what it means to be white and English-speaking at the southern tip of Africa. The report is coupled with an autobiographical one man play about myself. The play explores, through a series of monologues, what it means for me to be a white South African. It moves from the specifics of my life to more general assumptions about whiteness and back again. This report runs parallel to the play almost as an extension of it working in dialogue to explore complicity and identity.

As an extension of the creative project I have chosen to negate traditional chapters and style for more poetic language intertwined with analytical thinking, which links into the style of the play. The idea behind this is that every world, be it, performance onstage or analytical report writing is merely a part of the continuum called life and by blurring the lines between these it is easier to fuse the learning and the living into a cohesive whole.

The creative research shows how the rehearsal and performance process of theatre-making helps to strip away the deceptions that people tell themselves making them complicit in the injustice of post-apartheid white privilege but in doing this it also creates a space where people can feel safe to dialogue about this complicity.

To Stand Somewhere: Performing Complicity

> Memory plays an ambiguous role in contemporary social life, serving both to fuel conflict and to support co-operation. Collective memory has a part to play in constructing historical knowledge, in determining values and creating a shared sense of identity. What is included as history and whose memories are contentious and highly problematic. Acts of remembrance may be institutionally shaped in ways that reproduce the prevailing social and political order, resulting in the closing of boundaries and the fixing of attitudes. On the other hand, the process of embodying and sharing memories can create conditions for new ways of thinking and feeling. (Prentki, 2009, p.269)

How do we share memories when they are fallible? How do we create a collective memory when nobody wants to remember? In post-apartheid South Africa some white people have chosen to embrace a selective amnesia rather than confront their complicity in past atrocities and the current privileges they enjoy as a result of those horrors.

At the same time many of these whites long to be free of the burden of guilt that the legacy of apartheid has placed on them. The tragedy and indeed the great irony of this is that the only way to relieve the burden is to confront it, acknowledge it and try in some way to make amends.

A number of artists and cultural critics including people like Michele Booth, an artist who had a photographic exhibition, *'Seeing White',* exploring white complicity and privilege much to the ire of many whites in South Africa and Gillian Schutte, an academic and cultural critic who regularly assails white privilege in the media with pieces like *A New Year's Epistle to Whiteness* amongst others, have employed the tactic of directly confronting and attacking white people about their inherent racism. Whilst there is nothing wrong with this

tactic I don't believe it is the most effective way of getting someone who does not want to admit that they did anything wrong to accept that they might be responsible. Telling white people that they are racist is unlikely to get them to admit this fact, especially if they are unaware of it in the first place.

> The staging of complicity has developed into one of the most prevalent trends in recent South Africa theatre. The audience may become aware of their own complicity in injustice, or complicity may feature as a subject to be explored in the play. (Flockemann, 2012, p. 131)

When a play or piece of theatre demands of the audience that they connect the dots or fill in the missing pieces it draws the audience into the debate or idea being explored whilst at the same time allowing them some distance to reflect. The backwards and forwards trajectory of making the audience complicit was a tactic that I deliberately chose to employ in the writing of my performance piece.

Theatre allows a way for people to explore their complicity in a crime without directly being attacked for the acts that they are complicit in. It is not the only way but it is the way that I as a theatre-maker understand. I would argue that for a large portion of the white population of South Africa this is a necessary part of their evolution and their move towards acknowledging their shameful history, their dark memory. It should be noted that there are many white South Africans that are bravely confronting their past and owning their present privilege whilst attempting to redress the imbalances they have benefited from but the majority of White South Africans are still in a state of denial. Flockemann describes it as such:

> There are marked distinctions in how complicities are staged. The first and most complex manifestation of complicity is produced when it is the audience who become aware of their own complicity as a result of experiencing what Sanders refers to as the shared 'foldedness of

> human-being' (2002, p. 9), which is made visible through the performance event. This is a consequence of the aesthetic engagement generated by performance, which enables a shift in audience perception. The re-cognition of complicity is described as an acknowledgement of (often tacit or unwilling) complicity in injustice (as suggested by the reference earlier to the 'frisson of white guilt'), and leads to an acknowledgement of 'responsibility-in-complicity.' This, acknowledgement, according to Sanders, is a necessary stage before one can grapple with, or 'resist' complicity. In other words, Sanders insists that before complicity can be resisted, it has to be recognised and acknowledged. (Flockemann, 2012, p. 131)

To explore this idea of complicity that we as white people share I created an autobiographical play called *'To Stand Somewhere'*. It was a series of monologues exploring what is like to be white and English speaking at the Southern tip of Africa. The piece holds race at its centre and explores the truth, my truth about being white. I was deliberate in not pointing the finger of blame at the audience but rather explored my privilege, my own embedded racism, my own personal experience. It was my hope that the audience would move from the specifics of my story to the more general truths about being white and vice versa from my general assumptions they would explore the specifics of their own lives.

Accidental Explosions: Ways of Knowing

I wanted to explore how the creative process of rehearsing and performing a play could help myself and others to acknowledge our complicity. How do my memories shape who I am and how much common ground is there between me and other white people and beyond that other South Africans. I journalled throughout the creative process documenting what it meant for me to be white. What was our culture? How did my memory shape who I was? How did I deal with my own complicity?

> Performing onstage, performing in special social situations (public ceremonies, for example), and performing in everyday life are a continuum. (Schechner, 2002, p. 143)

Schechner suggests that one is learning and living no matter what world one is working in. This idea appeals to me because it allowed me to see the theatre-making process as both a separate world as well just another moment in my life indistinct from any other. My research would be about being white and going through the process of creating a play about being white in South Africa, the writing, the rehearsal, the performance. The methodology unique to evolving a piece of theatre could speak to everyday life. I would study how the rehearsal and performance process helped to examine race as an issue in post-apartheid South Africa.

> It is said that we tell stories so that we do not die of the truth. But we also tell stories to know who we are and to make sense of the world. We constitute our social identities through narrative and, although life is much more than stories, stories also try to create order in the chaos of our lives. (Ratele, Krog, Mpolweni, 2009, p. 19)

We all share stories as a way of understanding our realities. They help us to empathise with other groups of people and they teach us about the world at large. This was my attempt to make sense of the world. To share my world with others and hopefully in return learn something about theirs. I wanted to use the entire process from the concept to the writing from the rehearsal to the performance as a way of learning, of knowing. The stories we tell don't always reveal the whole of who we are. We often keep parts of ourselves hidden afraid that we might be judged for thinking a certain way. I wanted to see inside myself and to see inside others. I wanted to show them a part of me that is not often displayed in public and hoped in return they would reveal a little of themselves to me.

> A number of performance studies–allied scholars create performances as a supplement to, not substitute for, their written research. These performance pieces stand alongside and in metonymic tension with

> published research. The creative works are developed for multiple professional reasons: they deepen experiential and participatory engagement with materials both for the researcher and her audience; they provide a dynamic and rhetorically compelling alternative to conference papers; they offer a more accessible and engaging format for sharing research and reaching communities outside academia; they are a strategy for staging interventions. To borrow Amanda Kemp's apt phrase, they use "performance both as a way of knowing and as a way of showing (Conquergood, 2003, p. 152)

As Conquergood suggests I intended to use the creative process to help deepen the understanding of a given problem, in this case race, in the performance as research model or PaR. I have an idea of what I might find or perhaps of what I'm looking for but I'm not sure where to look or how to get there. The PaR model allows the researcher this space to explore, to repeat an action again and again looking for some small piece of knowledge or insight that might lead the performer in a new direction. This I feel is important when dealing with the race and racism from a white perspective. I know that I and, I suspect, many others have been coded with a number of unspoken or hidden prejudices about other race groups. Through the rehearsal process I want to explore and reveal these subconscious thoughts and place them at the forefront of the discussion. It is through the doing, to write, to act, to rehearse, to perform that I hope to find answers. The rehearsal space in particular challenges the participants to examine the meaning of the text they are working on from a number of different angles, to reassess the motivations of the characters, in this case me in order to come up with a believable and multifaceted story. Fleishman describes the PaR process thus:

> I would argue that the PaR project is a process of creative evolution. It is not progressivist, building towards a finality; nor is it mechanistic in the sense that it knows what it is searching for before it begins searching. It begins with energy (an impulse, an idea, an intuition, a hunch) that is then channelled, durationally, through repetition, in variable and indeterminable directions; a series of unexpected and often accidental explosions that in turn lead to further explosions. It expresses itself

> through a repeated, though flexible and open-ended, process of ontogenesis. (Fleishman, 2012, p. 35)

It is this process of repetition and movement in multiple directions that I wanted to explore, to ask the same questions over and over again, and to perform the same scene again and again in order to confront the things I was hiding from myself, to face my demons and reflect upon them. Through the repetition we begin to see patterns and new questions coupled with brief insights about how we understand the world.

So with the foregrounding of race I started with the question who am I? What does it mean to be white and English speaking in South Africa? What do we mean by white culture? It was my intention to explore these questions through the creative process of making theatre, the writing of an autobiographical play, the rehearsal and the performance coupled with a post-performance dialogue between myself and the audience. It was my hope that in framing these questions over and over again, examining them from every aspect and then journaling about the process I would find an answer or an insight as to how white people can make positive change and be part of the project of nation building.

As part of this creative project I wanted to extend Schnechner's contention of the continuum of performance onstage to performance in life into this research report. This report is an extension of my life, it is part of the biography I started writing in the play 'To Stand Somewhere'. As such I want this report to be a dialogue running parallel to the play infusing poetic language with analytical understanding.

Crazy White Folk

> My upbringing was, White, English speaking, middle class, northern suburbs of Johannesburg with a mix of government and private school educations. From this one can get a fairly complete picture of my childhood. There are no surprises I had a happy, carefree idyll filled with holidays on the garden route, domestic servants, cricket and rugby, and football (my dad is German), and nigger balls (anybody remember those? They were these giant spherical sweets that would start out black, hence the name, and then as you sucked them they would reveal different colours and flavours until there was nothing left.) We sucked nigger balls and thought nothing of it, we also used to do the whole eeny meeny miny mo catch nigger by his toe. We said this, six year olds on the playground with no idea of what we were talking about. I can't even remember if I wondered what a nigger was. I think I must have known at some stage but it is nothing I can remember. As a kid I guess you accept whatever is given to you by the world around you. I recall furtive conversations between adults when they thought we couldn't hear about the National government, knowing that something was bad without really understanding what that thing was. I remember endless states of emergency, passbooks but no idea what they were about, I remember thinking that PW Botha, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were great figures off authority who we should listen to as they would protect us from the barbarians at the gate, (I was 6). These were my authority figures, scary stuff. (Hollmann, 2013, p. 01)

This is a part of who I am. This is a part of who I think others are. This is my story. This is part of our story.

> …There is a need to show white people that something went wrong in the way they saw themselves. (Ratele, Krog, Mpolweni, 2009, p. 35)

> What does it mean to be white? What does it mean to be white in South Africa? This was the first question that I truly wrestled with. There have been numerous attempts by various South Africans to answer or address this question. For instance, Vice suggests that …To be morally successful, a certain restraint on our parts is required, which I now suggest we think about in terms of humility and silence. This restraint is, I think, appropriate to the South African context in a way it might not be elsewhere. White invisibility sustains white privilege, but in South Africa, where at least some aspects of whiteness are highly visible and explicitly acknowledged, reducing one's presence through silence and humility seems right. (Vice, 2010, p. 33)

Being white in South Africa is both extremely easy and agonizingly difficult. We come from so much privilege and have been offered so many advantages. Apartheid has allowed whites as a race to have superior education, higher self-esteem, access to better jobs and health care and greater economic freedom.

> A curious form of collective amnesia exists with regards to South Africa's 'poor whites'. This amnesia is deliberate and has been constructed over years with the unspoken agreement of South Africa's ruling classes. Whites are specifically depicted as never having been poor, or certainly not poor in large number. (Bottomley, 2013, p. 131)

We have in fact been so advantaged and white poverty has either been hidden or eradicated that when we see failed whites, those who have floundered into poverty it is often difficult for us to feel sympathy. Instead we are filled with a kind of disbelief. Poverty is not something that happens to white South Africans. But increasingly it does. White people intuit both consciously and unconsciously that their privilege is ending.

White people in South Africa are no longer subjected to the protection of the state. For the first time we are living in a world without guarantees. And in fact the state is trying to load the dice in favour of other, disadvantaged, race groups. Through projects like Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), whites sense an attack on this privilege and in many instances it frightens them as they bandy about phrases like reverse racism, what Melissa Steyn would call White Talk, "The complex discursive practices...used to manage the postionality of white South Africans to their (perceived) greatest competitive advantage in the African context," (Steyn and Foster, 2007, p.26) in an attempt to stave off the inevitable economic equalisation of society. In the future there will be many more poor whites.

> It has become a standing joke that since democracy in South Africa one cannot find anyone who supported apartheid. Increasingly some white South Africans claim that they did not know what was

> happening during apartheid; that it was not their generation that was responsible for apartheid, but that of their parents; and even that it was not as bad for black people during apartheid as it is for white South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa. (Steyn, 2012, p. 8)

This erosion of privilege is scary not only because there is now no one looking after the interests of whites as a group, at least from the perspective of political power, but also because these advantages were earned in the worst possible way, oppression and subjugation of others through violence and fear, and now that they are at an end we are required to take ownership of them. Whites do not want to do this. In South Africa now you will be hard pressed to find a white person who would call themselves a racist. Whites refuse to accept their complicity in the problem of contemporary race relations looking to blame it on past generations amongst other things.

Whites in South Africa are divided into two broad groups, English and Afrikaans speaking. I come from the former and it is from this view point that I make my argument. The white, English speaking South African or WESSA for short is perhaps the strangest of creatures that exists in the South African geographical and social landscape. As cultural group there is very little that truly unites us:

> Theorists are in agreement that the Wessas have little or no sense of nationalistic group consciousness, expressed not only through minimal self-conscious literature, but also through a dearth of community, of cultural and political organisations established in the interest of 'white' English speaking South Africans. (Distiller and Steyn, 2008, p. 93)

Who are we? One of the few things that we have in common is that we are not Afrikaaners. Apartheid was primarily about white versus black but within the white community there was also a division of English and Afrikaans. One of the primary drivers behind Afrikaanerdom is self-determination. It was for this reason that they left the Cape when the

English came and moved into the hinterland. When gold was discovered in Johannesburg the English again came and took away their freedom in two brutal wars that has left a lasting legacy of division that still exists, albeit in a lesser form to this day.

> While I am not an Afrikaner and so have escaped the taint that identity brings with it I am a white South African, undeniably a product of the Apartheid system and undeniably still benefiting from it. (S. Vice, 2010, p. 323)

Although English speaking people benefitted greatly from Apartheid as a group we have always separated ourselves from it. In our heads we say it was the Afrikaaner who instilled this horror and we are free from blame.

This mind trick has allowed us to see ourselves as better than the Afrikaaner, which is obviously not true, it has also allowed us to abdicate our responsibility as the architects and wardens of Apartheid. This then is the first point of commonality between WESSAs, we are not Afrikaans and in not being Afrikaans we are in some way less responsible for apartheid. This is what defines us to some degree.

To understand what it means to be white and English speaking in South Africa I thus need to explore my relationship not only to black people but also to the Afrikaner as well. Holding all these ideas in my head I sat down to write the first draft of what would become *To Stand Somewhere.*

I am Better than You

It is a personal belief of mine that white people do not speak honestly on many aspects of being white sometimes because it seems to me that we are unaware of the truth; and

sometimes because we do not like the alternative, admitting some kind of complicity in the crime of racism. This is a sentiment echoed by a number of cultural critics:

> The greatest challenge to us as white people, and especially to those who believe that they have transcended racism, is admitting to our own racist indoctrination and the very real possibility that we carry and practice unconscious racism. (Schutte, 2014, thoughtleader.co.za)

What I have noticed on social media forums like Facebook, Twitter and in the comment sections websites is that a large portion of white people don't want to be attacked or provoked into thinking about the past. I think of Samantha Vice's paper *How Do I Live in this Strange Place*, which suggested that white's should feel a degree of shame for what had gone before, Gillian Schutte's regular assaults on the state of whiteness in the Mail and Guardian and Michelle Booth's photographic exhibition as examples that have incited a degree of offence and anger in the white community for suggesting that we have not taken ownership of our privilege.

Whilst I think that provocation is a necessary tactic at times it is not the road that I wanted to walk down. For this reason I chose to create a performance piece that was entirely about me.

> Writing about one's self is difficult especially when one chooses to point the finger of blame at one's self. There is courage in saying I am human but it is scary thinking that I will have to perform this and be judged by it. Writing something and then walking away is completely different to standing in front of people and speaking the words. This must be about me. No one can say my story is wrong. They can hate it but it is mine, Saying things publicly is to admit to the crime and this is part of the healing process. (Hollmann, Journal 1, 2013.09.12, p.02)

By revealing myself I hoped that others would see that it was allowed and slowly reveal something of themselves in the spaces I had left in my own story myself. The writing was

surprisingly easy. The words flowed out of me and I did not flinch in putting down what I thought were some hard truths onto the page. At this stage these stories were just for me although I was beginning to reflect on what it would be like to perform them in public.

These reflections of performing mirror the expectations I had when I was writing. Revealing one's self to strangers is never easy, unmasking one's prejudices about race as a white male in contemporary South Africa is terrifying. The only way that I could continue to write and be rigorous and honest with myself was to not think about the future. I dared not consider that I would one day have to stand up in front of people and say the things that I was typing. Could I really look a black audience member in the face and say I am better than you? And if I did how would they take it? Having made a list of different essays and monologues that I wanted to write I just sat down and wrote each one as if it were a separate thing, which once complete would never be spoken of again. In this way I wrote a dozen monologues about myself and race.

When I was finished I walked away and left them to sit there unread and neglected. Things that I didn't want to think about like most white people in this country. Except now they did exist separate from myself but very much a part of me. Existing on top of this was also this "meta-commitment" to perform them and write a research report about it in order to achieve a MA in drama and maybe change the world along the way.

Aside on a Director

It was now time to get down to the real work, the rehearsal process, but first I needed a director. This was the most important choice I needed to make. I need someone I felt safe working with as this was all about exposing myself. I didn't want to be judged in the rehearsal space where I needed to feel safe. At the same time the director needed to be comfortable enough with me that they could speak out and criticize the script, my performance and the process otherwise the interrogation would not work and the final product would also suffer. The play and the research all depended on this singular choice.

I decided that my director would also have to be black as this would allow me to in some way to fracture the notion of white people continuing to dominate the political and social narrative, and I could get the reverse perspective. Tragically, ironically or not unexpectedly as a white man I have access to few black working professionals with whom I feel comfortable engaging in the level of intimacy required for my project. It is the reinforcing of these stereotypes that is half the problem of the race issue in South Africa. "I have black friends," is a refrain that can be heard from a number of whites in defence of their liberal credentials. The truth is I know lots of black people but not one who hangs out at my house on a Sunday morning playing with my kids and sharing breakfast.

Fortunately I did know someone who met most of the criteria I needed to direct my play. He was black, we were close and he was his own man with his own vision. His name was Moses Rasekele and he said yes.

> My role in this project was different to what I normally do in a play. I'm usually an actor or director and for this one I was none of those. I was more of a facilitator. Acting was out as this was a one man show with Ter performing as himself. Now the role left was that of directing which I was not also. I saw myself more as a facilitator. To facilitate rehearsals and make sure the play is staged without taking a director's role which is that which one comes with an objective to have the play go into a certain direction. I was more into seeing that rehearsals takes place and the play become whatever it becomes as opposed to having a preferred outcome and look. My role was to make sure Ter tells his life story how he sees and knows it in his own way. I refrained from having a dominant voice but acted as a guideline and to ask question in my quest for the story to be told in the most genuine 'Ter way'. (Rasekele, 2013.10.30, p.21)

Our understanding of what was important was unified from the start, which is vital in the rehearsal process as much of the important work is predicated on respect and in a show like this almost all of it is about trust. If we could not share information and be critical there would be no point. When one is rehearsing one needs to be honest especially in the realm of race issues in South Africa.

This was particularly important when I as exploring my own complicity. I was performing a play in which I said that I was brought up to believe that I was better than the man standing in front of me telling me what to do. There is a kind of dissonance in this. Rasekele acted as my guide keeping me safe and allowing me to sound off ideas of theory around race as well as performance issues. We were ready to work.

My Truth

> Across this very wide spectrum of performing are varying degrees of self-consciousness and consciousness of the others with whom and for whom we play. The more self-conscious a person is the more one constructs behaviour for those watching and/or listening, the more such behaviour is performing. (Schechner, 2002, p. 146)

The rehearsal space is a place where you do things over and over and over again. The same discussions, the same interrogations, speak the same line again and again. These minor repetitions or tiny performances become the research. There is great room for learning in this process.

We asked many questions: What do we mean when we say white culture? And what then is black culture? And what is it to be white and English speaking?

> What do we mean by being white and English speaking? Is the fact that this is not apparent possibly the first problem? Whiteness is indeed invisible. Then perhaps the function of this project is to in some way increase the visibility of whiteness. Let's not over think it to begin with. Let's just do it over and over again and in so doing perhaps I will learn about whiteness, its dominant themes, its crafty hiding places, its heart both good and bad. (Hollmann, Journal 1, 2013.09.21, p.12)

I had written each of the monologues as an individual thought but as we read through them for the first time we began to look for links, for similarities, for a flow. Some of these came from the more technical considerations. This piece is an introductory piece so it should go first. This one is funny lets place it after this more serious piece to give the audience some relief. But there were also thematic ties, obviously each one had been written with the overarching theme of what whiteness meant to me and my experiences of being white so the monologues addressed concerns that dominate the white conversation, crime, race, deciding whether to stay or go but there were other themes, how does one deal with the burden of guilt? How does one find forgiveness and help in the project of nation building? Can I have a legitimate voice in the national conversation or should I remain silent? These ideas are all part of the white experience in South Africa or at least part of my experience of being white. This move from the general to the specific or vice versa was a pervading

technique through the piece. This is the truth, well this is my truth. I hoped that the audience would be complicit in my truth, my awareness of the injustices I perpetrate on a daily basis and then use it to help shape their own truth.

Whilst many of these ideas were common place in my own frame of reference they were new and exciting for my director and so in turn became new and exciting for me. In the play I wrote:

> Two passports every White English speaking South African carries two passports. Well not everyone only the lucky ones. This is a hangover from the days of Apartheid when every White English speaking South African had an exit plan. If things go bad then I've always got my British passport. If the blacks takeover. If the revolution comes. If the whole thing goes south... (Hollmann, 2013, p.06)

This process of keeping two passports was surprising to Rasekele and gave him new insight into the different ways of being white in South Africa.

> Here one also gets to see the thoughts and fears of white people. To understand the situation during apartheid even more. Carrying two passports as contingency and mitigation strategy for white South Africans to deal with whatever might surprise them. To be ready for the tide that might take charge. The two passport are not only to enjoy the dual benefits that each possesses but to be able to use in case of emergency, in case the country turns into a mess, in case people get killed and in case it is more of a life threatening moment for whites to continue staying in South Africa at that time. (Rasekele, 2016.10.21, p.13)

> Rasekele had no idea that many white English speaking South Africans had this kind of a mental strategy for staying, the get out of jail free card if you like. I want to stay but I can always go somewhere else if need be. This is not an option for most of the back population of South Africa and illustrates another feature of being white, it is an aspect of lingering white privilege to be able to afford this luxury and it shows a divided commitment to staying. We have to ask the question how committed is one to this idea of nation building if one has one foot on the aeroplane out of here?

> When I wrote the monologue for 'Two Passports' I did not think of its implications about white privilege. I thought of it only in terms of hedging one's bets. The problem was a lack of commitment to being involved in the process. I did not acknowledge that this was a luxury that only white people can afford. It was Moses who highlighted this fact for me. There are so many things that we as whites take for granted that we are not aware of until they are under threat. (Hollmann, Journal 1, 2013.10.21, p.33)

The rehearsal process had caused me to reflect about how honest I was being with myself. I had two passports and I truly had no desire to leave but I still had the privilege of choosing to hold two passports for both convenience and security. I wasn't acknowledging the privilege internally. It is easy to write about but much harder to accept as real. It was only in Rasekele's surprise that I came to see the way in which I took it for granted. This privilege extends into many aspects of being white. It is a part of White South African culture that we are privileged by history. Understanding these subtle nuances and deceptions was important in creating a work that allowed the audience the chance to be complicit in the performance. As Flockemann writes:

> When audiences are willing to 'fill in the blanks' and to risk becoming participants in making meaning as a response to the performative structures of address employed, an awareness of what Sanders refers to as 'responsibility in complicity' is made possible. Such responses are enabled by performance devices that have come to characterise a significant body of South African theatre, simultaneously distancing and engaging, drawing the audience into a distinctive push-pull aesthetic. (Flockemann, 2012, p. 139)

And the idea of two passports is something that for the most part is unique to white English speaking South Africans. It is not true of all of us but many of us have this privilege and those who don't in my experience have often expressed how lucky those of us who do are. It is part of the conversation. Conveying this privilege makes those who are aware of this complicit in its truth.

The question that arose from this deceit was where else had I lied to myself or the audience and was it okay to make the audience complicit in these fictions? In the above case the lie was to myself and in acknowledging it it gave more to my performance and I rewrote what did not sit well with me in my new awareness but was it fine to deliberately lie to the audience especially if my mandate was to be as honest as possible?

I immediately had one instance in mind where I had knowingly been less than honest for dramatic purposes. At the end of the first monologue I had led the audience to believe that when I was spray painting free Mandela on the wall and we had been disturbed all I had written was Free Man. I knew that this would get an ironic laugh from one or two or possibly more of the audience but the truth was I can't remember how far I got and I didn't drive past it on the way to school.

We debated this issue on and off for most of the rehearsal time. Both Rasekele and I liked the dramatic nature of the deceit and didn't want to lose it but at the same time was it permissible. The conclusion we reached was that it was a calculated lie that did not alter the way I was perceived in the context of the piece and went towards the idea of nation building in a positive way so we left it in. We also figured that our audience was smart and would see this for what it was a nice moment of storytelling that may or may not be coloured with rose coloured spectacles.

As we rehearsed we tried to be conscious of any moment that might be untrue. We had made the choice that to deceive deliberately for narrative excellence was acceptable as long

as it did not alter the way people understood my way of seeing the world but what of those places where we were not seeing the fiction or deception? How relevant were these within the context of the project? Since they were unknowns we pressed on but with the idea sitting at the back of our minds.

> English speaking white South Africans of a liberal bent often say that they don't see race. Would this then make them unaware of their own privilege? It is often said the whiteness is invisible, the norm? I think we need to see race. The only way for it to ever become meaningless is to see it because in seeing the distinction between white and black we can see the contrast in our lives? White culture is distinct from black culture we need cultural crossover to happen in order for colour to cease to matter. (Hollmann, Journal 1, 2013.10.13, p.20)

I continued to ask the question what do we mean by white culture, especially white English speaking culture over and over? This was the core idea to who I was as a white person. And as a corollary of this what do we understand by black culture? How do the two differ?

> The only difference between black people and white people is the colour of our skin. If this is true then what do we mean by the terms black culture and white culture? If there is some "club" that can only be accessed or understood by being a certain racial group then the difference run deeper than just the colour of our skin. Is the opening statement of this paragraph true or is just a pat expression used to make everyone feel all warm and fuzzy? (Hollmann, Journal 1, 2013.09.15, p.05)

In a physiological sense the idea that the colour of our skin is our only difference is true, much like the colour of our eyes but with the each moment we exist in the world we are treated differently because of the way we look and this makes us more different with each passing moment. Woman are treated differently to men, hetrosexual people are viewed differently to homosexual people and white people are treated differently to black people. But the idea of a single unified black or white culture is more difficult to define.

> Black culture seems to me to be a less problematic phrase. We seem to take it for granted that there is a universal black culture.

> Something that is true of all black people alive right now. What unifies Barack Obama and a homeless black man living on the streets of Soweto? Off the top of my head I can think of two things that fit this criteria most if not all black people have been subjected to some kind of oppression based on the colour of their skin even if they are unaware that it is happening and they all have the same type of hair. I'm sure there are more but everything else that springs to mind has a regional bias. By way of example just because a black Americans invented Hip-hop that doesn't mean that hip-hop belongs to all black people it is an African American invention in the same way that white people invented kilts but kilts cannot culturally be said to belong to all whites only the Scottish. And yet when black South Africans appropriate hip-hop and make it their own there is seen to be some cultural kinship. This act is permissible, whereas with a white person this is problematic. Does this happen with some aspects of white culture? Is there some cultural spill over? (Hollmann, Journal 1, 2013.09.16, p.07)

I had written a play that reflected the truth of my life and I'm certain of others like me but I know for sure that it does not represent all white English speaking South Africans. What then is the point? What do we learn? How could I answer this question of what is white English speaking South African culture? Who was I? Surely I was part of a culture that is more than not Afrikaans?

> ...Our identities arise out of interactions with other people and are based on language. We can now say that our identity is constructed out of the discourses culturally available to us, and which we draw upon in our communications with other people. (Burr, 1995, p. 51)

What I learned was more about my own personal identity and that there were others with a similar cultural outlook or to put it another way there is no singular white English speaking culture in South Africa but we do have some common ground. I couldn't answer this question of white culture but that wasn't the point of the project anyway the point was the process. And the process had brought me into a deeper state of understanding with Rasekele. Our daily interactions had revealed a great deal of commonality and so Rasekele and I began to talk about the things we had in common.

> I had a good conversation with Moses today about voting. We were working on the election monologue and we discussed who we had voted for in the past. We both voted for the ANC in the first three elections and then with the advent of Zuma neither of us felt comfortable with voting for the ANC. We both voted for Cope and lamented at our wasted votes. In the most recent election we were even more certain about not voting for the ANC but felt like there was no party that represented our interests. In the end he voted for the EFF and I went for the DA. The ANC was the unifying point for us but when it split we voted along racial lines. This was both tragic and funny (Hollmann, Journal 1, 2013.09.28, p.17)

Here was something we had in common. Our voting patterns were identical and informed largely by a similarity in our outlook of the world. Tragically the thing that had once given common ground the ANC was now also the thing that had divided us according to our race. We appreciated the irony in this and both chuckled. This conversation had brought about a kinship between us, which we both commented on at a later stage. The rehearsal process, the sharing of a story, my monologue *X marks the spot,* and the willingness to dialogue openly and freely without judgment had brought us closer to each other.

The process was to take us to a place where something inappropriate would be seen as permissible.

We were rehearsing a monologue called *The Nigga Speech,* which was cut from the final play, in it I talk about how the word nigger has no negative connotation for me, my primary points of reference being gangster movies and hip-hop songs, and as a result I have found myself on occasion using the word inappropriately and unexpectedly much to my shame and embarrassment. It was a humorous look at a difficult situation.

After about three weeks of rehearsal we found ourselves working through some troubling blocking aspects of this monologue. We weren't getting anywhere so we decided to take a break and talk things through. I spoke about what happened next in my journal.

> A peculiar thing happened in rehearsal today. We were working on the Nigga Speech and Moses said, "You know its fine. You can say nigger with us. (By us he was indicating black people) I mean we know you." (I'm paraphrasing him but it was close to this if not exact.) I contradicted him and said that no it wasn't. It would never be. We had a bit of a back and forth but in the end he relented accepting my view of what was cool for me to say. I must say that I was terribly flattered though. (Hollmann, Journal 1, 2013.11.02, p.35)

Rasekele and I had a pre-existing relationship before this project but we were not close it was more professional and comfortable than intimate. Through the rehearsal process we had engaged on some heavy topics around race and had become quite comfortable with each other's standpoints on a range of issues. This particular issue of whether it was acceptable for a white person to say the word nigger was not the place where I thought we would disagree especially in the manner in which we did. I think I should highlight that the incident wasn't big or marked. It lasted about two minutes and then we moved on without ever coming back to it. It stuck with me though. The rehearsal space had put us in a place of temporary intimacy, which is its purpose. We found ourselves in a place where race was not invisible but it was familiar, comfortable. We had dissected issues and feelings on race for long enough that our relationship was allowing something not allowed in the larger world.

> Why did Moses think that it would be acceptable for me to say the word nigger? I wonder if the content of the monologue, that the word has been imported from the USA in a largely positive cultural light more recently, meant it was easier to sanction. Moses understood that I wouldn't be able to use the word Kaffir instead. This would never be acceptable in the local context. At the same time though we must acknowledge that the word kaffir has never been re-appropriated in anyway unlike the word nigger. ((Hollmann, Journal 1, 2013.11.02, p.36)

Was this act seen as acceptable by Rasekele because of the exact issues explored in the monologue itself? Was this cultural relativism where he could feel empathy and understanding for African-Americans but at the same time the manner in which their culture had been imported, in this instance who and how one used the word nigger, had led to an

unacceptable cultural appropriation? The historical weight of the word was not the same for him as it was for an African-American.

This intimacy we enjoyed during the rehearsal period has been transferred into our relationship beyond the theatre world and has allowed me to feel a sense of comfort around him regarding issues of race that I feel only with people of my own race. This comfort had in a way allowed Rasekele to be complicit in my crime by sanctioning me to be racist in his presence because he thought that I wasn't

Your Truth

The lights go down the music starts to play and I get that nervous tickle at the back of my throat that I always get before I walk out onto stage. It is the night of the first performance.[1]

> We have just done our last dress rehearsal and I am about 3 hours away from my first performance. Aside from the usual nerves that one has when presenting a new work I am doubly stressed. I am about to proclaim myself a racist in front of a room full of people in South Africa. How will I be judged? Favourably I hope. As the creator of the piece I have stacked the cards in my favour but will that be enough? That's important I think. I am making the audience complicit in my own view of myself. Their view will be shaped by my view both of me and themselves. (Hollmann, Journal 2, 2013.11.04, p.08)

There are a couple of things worth exploring in the above statement. The first is this idea of performing whiteness in South Africa in a public fashion, to say look I am white. The second is making the audience complicit in my performance, the presentation of myself.

---

[1] The first performance of the play is for the express purpose of being examined for my MA. There is a full audience present but they are mainly invited friends and other academics and interested parties. At a later date I will do a five night run for members of the public.

> Whites are unaware of their privileges...They may quite conversely believe they are disadvantaged... (McKinney, 2006, p. 14)

The performance as a public declaration of what it is like to be white seeks to overturn this idea that whiteness is invisible or accepted. I was about to stand up in front of a group of strangers and friends and say this is what it is like in one instance to be white. Being white is a thing, it is neither good nor bad but like everything else it just is. You can now impose your world view upon it and make up your own mind.

And people did. I performed the play six times and the response was overwhelmingly positive from both sides of the racial divide. On a personal level this was a great relief to me. After each performance I invited people to come and chat with me about anything. This dialogue has been the source of great learning for me both about myself and about the people of South Africa.

The thing that struck me was that people want to talk about this issue, it is the kind of people who would make time to come and see a play like this, so a very targeted audience but they do want to talk.

> ...the recognition of responsibility in complicity is a necessary first step for resisting social injustice (Sanders 2002). It could thus be argued that the shift beyond personal and collective culpability and guilt for past injustices heralds a post-TRC turn by virtue of a deeper recognition of complicity. This can provide the basis of an ethical self-interrogation, as outlined by Kelly Oliver, which is not just backward-looking but also future-directed. As Sanders claims, this requires recognising difference as a prerequisite for acknowledging that 'one's human-being is folded together with ... the stranger' (Sanders 2002, p. 125). However, this does not entail a simple or merely sentimental empathy with the experiences or inner lives of others. Instead, as Dominick LaCapra puts it, the spectator who is positioned as 'attentive secondary witness' to the experiences of others should experience an 'empathetic unsettlement' (1999, p. 696). In other words, empathy is qualified or

> limited by an awareness of one's difference from the other whose experiences we are witnessing. (Flockemann, 2012, p. 139)

There are a number of cultural critics who have said that white people don't want to talk about apartheid but my experience of this play is that this is not entirely the case. The problem for many people is that they don't know how to talk about it, they don't know who to talk with and they don't want to be attacked for doing it.

The comments I received the most from the white members of the audience was that I was A. Brave and B. What they had seen was a reflection of their own life. They were not embarrassed that I had said these things. They thought that they needed to be said but that they could never say them. Having the words publicly spoken and accepted suddenly meant that they were sanctioned into talking about them. Many of them had not thought about their own whiteness or their own racism.

One man talked to me about when every time he saw a black person do anything wrong, speak English badly, steal, drive badly he would think of them in a negative racial light as if there blackness had made them do it. He knew rationally that it was untrue but he could not change the default response in his head. This caused him severe guilt and anxiety. He was worried that one day he might say something offensive, something he did not believe and hurt somebody. He lived his life constantly checking his behaviour always afraid to talk.

This for me was tragic here was someone who had understood that he was a racist despite what he knew to be true but he could not unlearn what he had been taught. This is true of

many white people myself included. Hopefully in being freed to talk about our ingrained prejudices we can slowly unlearn them.

The theatrical space had created a space where someone who felt like he could not speak frankly about his own life for fear of offending could now share his experience and in so doing start to shift the way he sees the world.

Having written a piece in which I explored my own inherent problems whilst still indicating that I was a good person who was willing to change, also spoke to a number of people in the audience who were completely unaware of their privilege and their racism. But we must be careful that this does not become an excuse to act badly.

> This appeal that white people again admit guilt, ask forgiveness and we can simply move on on the basis of "common humanity" is consistent with the post-1994 reconciliation without justice exemplified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's impulse of getting some perpetrators of racism to repent, reveal and ask forgiveness, and thus gain moral vindication for the white race. (Mngxitama, 2015, mg.co.za)

White people are morally compromised, we don't see our privilege, we don't stop to think and when we are challenged or provoked we get defensive. Even when we are aware of our privilege, our embedded racism our learning runs so deep that we have to restrain ourselves from saying or doing the wrong thing. We need a way to break down these defences. I am all for a little provocation. White people have been in denial for too long. The TRC let us off the hook and we haven't been thankful or contrite. We still expect everything without giving anything. This is not true of everyone but certainly of a large majority. Forcing people into critical reflection is good but it is not particularly effective if it closes people down and

makes them deny that they are part of the problem or if not the problem then a part of the society facing the problem. In reflecting on my own privilege and my own racism I was able to highlight for others that which they had been hiding from themselves without them feeling like they were being persecuted.

> So I had an awesome experience in the theatre last night. A white woman told me that I had said things that no white person should say that they were seditious and they were a betrayal of the "clan". She used her fingers to highlight clan. She thanked me for making her squirm. "You forced me to admit things to myself that I don't really want to". She was good natured but serious and clever. We talked about her complete lack of desire to deal or engage with the past in any way. From her point of view it was all entirely negative and so there was little impetus but she could see how this laziness was deeply affecting the present. She said we needed more spaces like the one I had created where people could actively step inside and then again step out when they had had enough. ((Hollmann, Journal 2, 2014.10.10, p.14)

I liked this idea of an active space that certain, in this instance, theatrical spaces could be an invitation to no holds barred discussions. Here was a confessional where I could admit my wrong doing and the others could do the same even if it was quietly to themselves.

The black audience members who I interacted with after the show were delighted for the most part with one simple thing. I had said these things. Everyone I spoke to said that it was great to hear someone white acknowledge what many black people saw as the problem with white people. "For real nation building to occur the only thing we as white people need to do is to be honest," was what one black guy said to me after the show. We need to admit to our complicity.

The audience was now complicit in my truth of what it meant to be white and had hopefully been awakened to their own.

> In the theatre the actor and the audience both know that the actor is not who she is playing. But in real life a person is simultaneously performing herself and being herself. The matter is, of course, nicely

> complicated because in some methods of realistic acting, actors are taught how to use their own selves to construct theatrical roles. (Schechner, 2002, p. 177)

To complicate this idea of Schechner's even further I was playing myself onstage. So I was constructing a role of myself to play back to the audience. As I had discussed earlier I was putting my best foot forward so that I could appear both honest and likeable at the same time. The audience was now a part of this act. Was my performance allowing the audience to feel good about themselves because I wasn't perhaps being as honest as I could about myself? I spoke earlier about trying to be rigorously honest but that in at least one way I had failed. After my fist performance I was to discover a second.

The first performance was for the benefit of an examiner. There was an audience but the primary objective was to be graded and assessed by a single individual. In the debrief session the following day the examiner challenged me about my honesty, suggesting that I was more aware about apartheid than I had let on. In the performance I suggested that the veil of my ignorance had lifted quite late. The examiner relating to her own experience queried why it had happened so late. She told how at the age of twelve she was out handing anti-apartheid pamphlets in the streets with her parents. She could not disassociate her own experiences from mine. I refuted her assertions at the time and I still do. But I questioned why she had drawn those conclusions in the first place and I came to realise that I had been misleading about my parents. In the introductory monologue I say that I had a liberal upbringing, which is true. This though asserts that I had liberal parents, which is not entirely true. This was the disconnect between the examiners parents and my own. My parents were in fact quite conservative, they were liberal in that conservatism in that they believed everyone was equal and we should all be treated as such. At the same time I don't

think that they would have been comfortable with me if I had for example come home with a black girlfriend. Their outlook became more liberal over time but certainly not in the early eighties when I was doing most of my growing up. Here was another example of an untruth that had been told unknowingly. I had constructed a theatrical role of myself. The rehearsal process and now the performative process had helped me to see myself more clearly. The repetition of asking who am I? What does it mean to be white? The constant conscientising of the embodiment of whiteness was slowly evolving my own awareness of myself, almost like therapy. The performance was speaking to the learning in the rehearsal.

In Conclusion

> For me, however, performance is also an epistemology, a way of knowing and it is in this sense that I think it intersects most clearly with what we call research particularly, but not exclusively, in the humanities and certainly appropriately here in Africa, it is in this sense that I am most interested here; the ways in which performance articulates a correlation between the world of places and material objects and the world of ideas and sentiments, a correlation that is achieved from the vantage point of the body-subject and through the body-mind in active engagement with the world. (Fleishman, 2012, p. 39)

The rehearsal room is a place of repetition, of interrogation, of practice. It is also a place, as Schechner asserts, of living, of learning, of understanding. Into this room I brought the question of what does it mean to be white and English speaking in South Africa in the first part of the 21st century? I did this with the hope of learning how the room itself could help with this education. The rehearsal is incomplete however without the end point of the performance to speak back to the learning that has occurred during the process. Thus the performance is of great significance to the idea of the rehearsal room as educator.

> I am busy with the truth…my truth. Of course it is quilted together from hundreds of other stories…seen from my perspective, shaped by

> my state of mind at the time and now also by the audience I am telling the story to. (Krog, 1999, p. 259)

The relationships and the dynamics that formed in the rehearsal space were key to my shaping of my own truth. In the first instance my relationship with my director Rasekele helped me to investigate my own deceptions and indeed to see that there were deceits there in the first place that I could not see even though I had done my best to discover them. It was only through repetition, through an overlapping of truths that we were able to discover this. It was as if I was discovering a new part of myself.

> The next frontier of whiteness studies is the racial terrain between black and white - the blurred racial boundaries, both biological and cultural, that are as much responsible for making us alike as tearing us apart. (Berger, 1999, p. 206)

This repetition brought us closer together, something we both felt. We began to explore the many similarities that were contained in our lives. When people speak about these things in general terms we sense a universal truth. Most people will nod their heads when they hear statements like*: "We all want the same thing to be happy, safe and free." (Hollmann, To Stand Somewhere)* It is not until you spend time with another individual and really share your hopes and dreams, your fears and anxieties that you can start to see the massive tracts of common ground that unite us. The rehearsal space is place that not only encourages this but makes it safe to do so. In the repetition we find familiarity and comfort. Something done over and over again carries a different psychological weight.

The performance further interrogated the untruths that I had told myself and others through dialogue and repetition. The shaping of my own truth took on an additional weight when it misled others about who I was. The safe world of the rehearsal room had helped me

to prepare for exposing myself to the wilder, unregulated world of performance where anything could happen. What was most amazing about the performance space was how many people I had common ground with both black and white. The rehearsal space had helped me to understand who I was but the performance space had helped me to be accepted for who I was. We are all complicit in some way. What we took out of the rehearsal and into the world at large helped in some way to break down the prejudices that exist and in this way the rehearsal room is changing the world beyond my own understanding in ways I cannot imagine.

Bibliography

Berger M. 1999: *White lies: race and the myths of whiteness,* New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux

Bottomley E. 2013: *Poor White,* Cape Town: Tafelberg

Burr V. 1995: *An introduction to social constructionism,* New York: Routledge

Conquergood D. 2003: *Performance studies: interventions and radical research* in Bial H. (ed.)*The Performance Studies Reader,* New York: Routledge

Cubitt A. 2007: *History and memory*, Manchester: Manchester University Press

Fleishman M. 2010: *The difference of performance as research,* Unpublished Masters thesis University of Cape Town Drama Department

Flockemann M. 2012: *Facing the Stranger in the Mirror: Staged complicities in Recent South African Performances,* South African Theatre Journal, Vol.25, p.129 - 141

Hollmann T. 2013: *Journal,* Wits University Drama Department

Hollmann T. 2013: *To Stand Somewhere* Unpublished play, Wits University Drama Department

Krog A. 1999: *Country of my skull,* Cape Town: Random House

Krog A., Mpolweni N. and Ratele K. 2009: *There was this goat,* Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press

McKaiser E. 2012: *A bantu in my bathroom,* Cape Town: Pan Macmillan

McKinney K. 2005: *Being white,* London and New York: Routledge

Mngxitama A. 2013: *There is no unlearning whiteness no matter what 'anti-racists' say,*[online], Available: http://mg.co.za/article/2013-01-11-00-theres-no-unlearning-whiteness-despite-what-anti-racists-say [January 11 2013]

Prentki T. and Preston S. 2009: *The applied theatre reader,* New York: Routledge

Rasekele M. 2013: *Journal,* Wits University Drama Department

Salisbury T. and Foster D. 2004: *Rewritting wessa identity, in* Distiller N. and Steyn M. (ed.) *Under construction race and identity in South Africa today,* Johannesburg: Heinemann

Schechner R. 2002: *Performance studies: An introduction 2nd edition,* New York and London: Routledge

Schutte G. 2015: *A New Year's Epistle to Whiteness,* [online] Available: http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/gillianschutte/2015/01/04/an-new-years-epistle-to-whiteness/ [January 4 2015]

Steyn M. 2001: *Whiteness just isn't what it used to be,* New York, State University of New York Press

Steyn M. and Foster D. 2007: *Repertoires for talking white: resistant whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa,* Ethnic and racial studies, Vol.31:1, p.25 - 51

Steyn M. 2012: *The Ignorance contract: recollections of apartheid childhoods and the construction of epistemologies of ignorance, identities,* Global studies in culture and power, Vol.19:1, p.8-25

Vice S. 2010: *How do I live in this strange place,* Journal of social philosophy, Vol.41:3, p.323-342