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Playing the race game: a performance-as-research project investigating our complicity in performing race

Neill, Hamish Mabala Mapoma

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MA (Dramatic Arts) Research Report

TITLE:

PLAYING THE RACE GAME: A PERFORMANCE-AS-RESEARCH PROJECT INVESTIGATING OUR COMPLICITY IN PERFORMING RACE.

Student Name:
Hamish Mabala Mapoma Neill

Student Number:
333602

Supervisor:
Warren Nebe

School:
Arts (Dramatic)

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ABSTRACT

Key Words: Race, Complicity, Performance as Research, Auto-ethnography, Culture

This research report consists of a performance-as-research project, titled *T for Tea*, accompanied by a written report. This document serves as fulfilment of the written requirement.

The document is written within a Performance-as-Research paradigm, and includes a performance style of writing that reaffirms the intention, ethos and creative performativity established from the onset of the research project. Hence, the document presents an enhanced dialogue about the complexities of race as a social phenomenon, with specific reference to South Africa. The study sought to unravel the inherent complicity that reinforces the on-going notions of 'race', 'racialisation' and the performance thereof, as essentialist truths.

The written document is constructed as a dialogue using the researcher/performer as the vehicle to grapple with the study's intention of using an auto-ethnographic performance methodology as a critical tool of enquiry into the phenomenon of race in the South African context. This performative writing style is a characteristic of this methodology and is used to express argument while constructively disrupting norms, with the intention of inspiring analysis, reflection and new expression in academia of social phenomena.

The reader is introduced to the dilemma of 'race' through this dialogue between researcher/ performer as an 'essentialist performance' in the prologue. This leads to an interrogation of why the study focuses on the choice of 'complicity' as a key to understanding the social performance of race within the South African context. The study then turns its attention to the notion of research and researches the evolution of the researcher from ethnographer to auto-ethnographer. This sets the stage for an interrogation of the making of the play *T for Tea*. Here the role of the performer as ethnographer is explored. The writer attempts to demonstrate the move from a representational form of performance to a performance landscape of construction, agency and interpretation.

The study concludes, through the performed dialogue, that there is a critical need to find ways to unearth complicit practices of 'race' and 'racialisation'. Performance that embodies race can be both essentialist and complicit in the on-going culture of racism in South Africa. An auto-ethnographic approach, within a larger Performance Studies paradigm to performance, allows the researcher/performer an opportunity to examine, expose and perform race in ways that can help liberate and move away from a historical paradigm that undermines our greater humanity.

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PROLOGUE:

How did you start your play?

Is it not your play too?

Not really. I merely watched it. From the inside and outside; but a very close outside.

Where it was safe to be. Away from the dirty work.

If that is your opinion, so be it. We will address this 'dirty work' later but I ask again, how did you start the play?

You know this.

But the reader does not and will not unless you say.

Why must I tell them? Why do you, reader, want to know?

They need to know because it forms the frame for this report.

Your report.

Yes, which you initiated by deciding to start this whole journey. You created me. Now stop this internal conflict and answer yourself. How did the play begin?

With a court case, borrowing from Brecht's idea of having a trial in his epic theatre work, as a means of inviting the audience to engage critically with the content (Leach, 2004: 117).

And who was on trial?

The Authority.

Who is the Authority?

This is not going to work.

Why not?

Because your reader will not get a sense of the play, the performance, with you always interrupting.

Then what do you suggest?

I will try to tell them. You can then decide what you take from it.

Why are you telling the reader that?

Because it is true.

That is an essentialist statement.

So is 'race'.

Hey reader, don't you think so?

Just tell them about the play.

The performance took place in a black-box theatre, arranged in an end-on configuration, with a seating capacity for around one hundred people. The set was composed of a white bathtub, supported in a metal frame that was slightly raised on a rostrum. At the head of the bathtub, upstage from the audience, was a fractured mirror.

From the rostrum five, nearly parallel lines, extended out to stage-right.These came to an end at another single line which ran perpendicular to the five. These lines formed what appeared to be a racing track, further signified by the letters, S-T-A-R-T, laid out on the other side of this perpendicular line.

Behind this set was a bare, white wall, upon which various images were projected. These images were selected to offer a commentary on what was being uttered on stage. These images would support, refute or simply be present as juxtapositions to the thoughts being shared, or stories being told. The pictures would never be referred to directly during the live performance by the performer.

The plot is complicated. It became complicated because I attempted to show my three perspectives on the research subject of ‘race’; these perspectives being: (1) my own opinion and interpretation of ‘race’ as a social game in which the players, through trying to win, perform an identity, (2) a projection of my rebellion against ‘race’ as a ‘social truth’ and the resulting phenomenon from this ‘truth’, and (3) a fictional application, of ‘race-as-experience’, to my own history, here, in the form of a character who finds himself presenting a legal-case that he hopes will take him out of this game. In the script, (see Appendix), the corresponding characters are: (1) Hamish, (2) Joker, and (3) Lawyer.

The Lawyer is a sheepish, fumbling, character who is intimidated by an ‘Authority’ figure that only he can see and by whom he is governed. The Joker is irreverent. It plays, mocks and entices. It is meant to represent freedom and rebellion, but in a sinister manner. The Lawyer and the Joker are foils for one another. The third character is, me, and thus was called Hamish in the written performance script. He, or I, is meant to represent an outside perspective; outside of the game that the Lawyer is trapped in and which the Joker mocks and ridicules. The design on the floor (the race-track leading to the bathtub) becomes important as it is this game that all three characters hold a particular relation to. The Lawyer (trapped) follows the race-lanes, the Joker (rebelling) cuts across them and performs over them, and Hamish (reporting as an outsider) stands away from them.

Thematically, this choice is made as a subtle challenge to the essential notion of ‘race’ being an omnipresent ‘truth’ that applies to all it supposedly encompasses.

How exactly?

Imagine it like this: Take ‘race’ as a game with players and spectators, all who know the rules perfectly and understand the complex stakes at play; this detailed understanding serves to create their ardent investment in the game. Now imagine that as the game is being played, a person, who has been neither a spectator nor player, but who has a vague idea of the game‘s workings, suddenly finds himself at the stadium. As play happens and calls are made, this visitor tries to make sense of the cheers, complaints and moves being made. Some spectators and players question his loyalty and position in relation to the game but are confused, even annoyed, when he cannot give an answer. This game is all encompassing, and they cannot imagine it not being so for anyone else. Now, imagine this visitor slips out. Not physically, but mentally, to try and make sense of the game: this is Hamish, the constructed role, in the play.

So in this example, what about the Lawyer and the Joker?

The Lawyer is a player, whose narrative in the performance demonstrates the way in which the Authority, through the game, has moderated his history and his identity. The Joker is an offer from the playwright; something to question that assumed power of the game over the Lawyer.

So it is about the game. About winning or completing it?

No. The game, as a symbol, is a subversive tool used to suggest a trivialising ‘race’ and to thus confront the assumed power it holds. It aims to show that while the game (‘race’) exists and is played, more options exist than those of mere spectator and player.. In the performance, the game is visibly suggested by markings on the floor but is only activated in the speeches and actions of the characters. Take these away, empty the stadium, and the game ends. This thought is portrayed primarily through the Lawyer who goes from fully submissive to independent, as he leaves the game under his own volition.

So that is your artistic statement: that 'race' should just stop being played, or performed rather?

It was, until I began to do research for the performance script and my understanding began to shift.

In what way?

When a game has been played for so long, sometimes the players cannot live without it. They no longer know it as a game. It is their way of life. I performed the shift.

The shift?

The performance. Let me try to talk you and the reader through it.

> Standing backstage, I was filled with an unusual shot of 'performers anxiety': that rush of swirling thoughts, emotions, recapping of lines, double-checking directing notes, spatial plotting and other final checks that seem to all want to speak at once. The stage was set and washed in simple crafted lighting, with a large projector displaying a "keep calm and carry on" pop-culture image as the backdrop. On the floor was a race-track laid out in masking tape with S T A R T written out on the end in the same tape, and the track lanes leading up to a raised bathtub, at what seemed to be the end point, or finish line, for the race.
> I waited in the stand-by position, hands shaking and twitching from all the adrenalin coursing through me at this time. Deep breath. I glance through a small gap in the flats that enclose the black-box theatre space. The audience is larger than I expected with a number of familiar faces sitting in clusters around the small auditorium. Time seems to be dragging its feet painfully slowly as we wait for the examiner to arrive.
> An hour later, the show begins. My mind, having to be brought back to the place of readiness, focused on the task at hand: "tell the story." I weave in and out of the moments that comprise the script. Shifting tone, thought and character, I begin to paint this complicated picture of meaning and narrative. I step outside of the narrative for a moment to check if the audience is with me, enjoying the comfort of being in this role: the actor, craftsman of space and time on this

stage. I am aware of what is coming next, which story is about to revealed. The song ends.

The Lawyer struggles to walk up to his starting point. A large sign stretched across the back wall reads, ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’, white text on a deep red background. His feet are bound with bandages and hands wring with trepidation. “Your honour. I-I-I” He struggles to speak, his vocal pitch rising sharply with fear. “I am suing you,” he blurts out. An uncomfortable twist shoots across his face, “for all that you have placed on me.”
The lights change and the Joker melts out of the Lawyers body, moving across the lines. Once in place, his lithesome body gestures a cup and saucer from which a loud, imaginary sip is taken. “Tea. Nothing more dignified.” He relishes. “Contained so perfectly in a delicate cup. Black or milky. Sugary or bland. Hot or iced. All you have to do is add boiling water to draw out the colour. Boiling water.” His body, never still, is framed with a sly smile. Another sip.
“One of the more refined legacies of colonialism. And how we enjoy it. Or not. Tea.”
In a gasp of mild horror, the imaginary tea cup is flung away, arms flailing.
“But you don’t know me!” he exclaims, dripping with concern and apology. “How about a song? Yes? It’s always a good way to break the ice. Come, I’ll teach you.”
His sly smile hinting at a plan.
He sweetly sings a simple tune, with equally simple lyrics: “I’m gonna teach you a song.”
It is inviting.
“And it goes on and on. And on and on.”
As he sings, he interjects, encouraging the audience to join him. They respond, and join in.
“Yes, there you go. It is easy you see?”
They play the call-and-response game of the song with him, until he reaches the final line, “I’ll get you to play along. You’ll never know what is wrong. As it goes on and on.”
He never tells them who he is.
The lights change. Hamish is seen standing well in front of the laid out track. His brow furrowed.

“I once watched a game,” he explains to the audience, “where players were tasked with simply crossing the finish line first by providing ‘better’ offerings to the referee.” His tone is a blend of exposition and curiosity, tinged with a caution to ensure all the details are conveyed.

Lights change.

The Lawyer presents his first piece of evidence. It is a story of a boy listening to a story told by his father. This story is of his journey that saw him leave his home in search of work. The Lawyer tells of how the boy is torn between enchantment and scrutiny, unable to passively listen as the boy’s intellect, informed by the game, forces the questions. The Lawyer’s emotions rise with those of the boy. The hurt of the boy is seen on the Lawyer’s face.

“He listened to his father, he listened to his history.”

Lights change.

Hamish tells more of the game he saw. Still trying to understand.

Lights change.

A stuttered breath.

The Lawyer prepares his second story. A lump grows in his throat, his eyes get watery, “I wonder what would have happened if they had met. If they had met me.” A tear seeps out. “Would they have been disappointed?”

The pace drops. He fights the tears back then goes on. Images of different women are projected on the wall behind him. These women are of ‘white’ and ‘black’ demographics. He still fights the tears.

“The thought of my grandmothers’ meeting fills me with fear. An inexplicable yet fully known, undoubtedly understood, fear. One that is informed not by my personal experience, but by what the world has offered me.”

The tears are now fuelled by anger. His hands clenched in defiant fists. He describes the possible nature of the meeting, as through the lens the world offers him. It has tainted this vision, this dream. The game has stolen its joy.

“I long for this dream. You took this away.”

Snap! Lights change.

The Joker, mocking the Lawyer’s tears, sits on the raised bathtub’s rim. This is the place of the Authority, as signalled by the Lawyer. Nonchalant, the Joker slips into the tub. Lights change.

The Lawyer, lost deep in memory, sends a splash up in the air as he plays in the bathtub. He tells two childhood memories; one of his father and the other

with his siblings. They are happy memories. He is lost in the bliss of their time, their freedom. But as he tells more, he remembers the game.

“The problem is, while I tried to taste the soap, I would remember, I forgot to scrub.”

The Lawyer is brought back to the game. Another memory tainted. He removes his shirt to expose his torso riddled with racial terms that have been etched on and into his skin. The memory has disappeared, and his awareness of his present is clear. He inspects the markings in the fractured mirror.

“These are the marks you left on me. Like the scars of lashings from the slave masters, they marked my skin. Violent strikes from history, society, enforced policy that you all watched happen.”

His tone is attacking.

The shift is here.

“You sat there and watched!” He shouts at the audience, as he uses his top to scrub off the words.

“These marks come off. These marks are NOT MINE. ARE NOT ME. IT’S UP TO YOU TO WEAR YOURS. I WON’T. NOT ANYMORE.”

He throws the top into the tub and stops. A realisation has been born. The Lawyer steps out of the tub, and walks across the lines, disregarding them. He leaves the stage.

Some time passes.

Lights go down.

INTRODUCTION: "THE SOURCE OF WORD CHOICES"

How would you like to do this?
You tell me, it is your paper.
No need to be cheeky. How about I ask you some questions then?
(Nods)

Before the play, the script, and even before me, you had to compose a research proposal. So in the interest of helping the reader and myself to have a better grounding in your work let me ask you this: You titled this research project, Playing the race game: A performance-as-research project investigating our complicity in performing race. What informed this whole process of articulation and thus led to the title?

To answer that, I will offer three quotations that I came across during the formation of my proposal. Each of these extracts, and their respective texts of origin, helped articulate, locate and craft my position both academically and from a phenomenological perspective.

Are you saying that a certain theory does not translate accurately to its social phenomenon, or rather, to that of your own experience?

Not always, and that is because social phenomena are in constant flux, but before getting to all of this first these three quotations. Looking at these will help frame the exploration in relation to this flux and my research focus.

The first was a line from a TED Talk presentation entitled, *The Danger of a Single Story* (2009) presented by Chimamanda Adichie, and the specific line was: "The danger of a single story is that it is incomplete." This resonated with me as a researcher because at the time of its hearing, I was still grappling with the notion of 'race' in South Africa as a single and complete story on its own, namely, how its manifestation in social performance was articulated from an embodied place. For my embodied, or lived, experience of 'race' is somewhat different to the hegemonic norm.

In what way?

I grew up outside of South Africa, in Botswana, and came from what hegemonically is classified as a ‘bi-racial’ couple of Scottish and Zambian decent.

So how does that factor in the context of this research as a whole?

It is relevant in that I, as researcher, lived (and will live) a different story from that of the South African hegemony. This is a position which, for a researcher, holds both political and ideological concerns in relation to how the research might be conducted particularly around the notions of ‘Othering’ and being an ‘outsider looking in’ wanting to give comment. To address this concern, I chose auto-ethnographic performance as my research methodology using the ‘*auto’* quality as a means of challenging this research dynamic (my position as outsider) while interrogating the subject matter in context (race in South Africa). It required me to test and unpack my own understanding and experience in relation to set theory and socially accepted norms. It was also from within this methodology’s discourse that I encountered the writings of Rahul Mitra and Tami Spry, whose articles, *Doing ethnography, being an ethnographer: The autoethnographic research process and I* (Mitra, 2010), and *Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis* (Spry, 2001), helped articulate my practical processes and shaped this paper’s writing style.

From Spry, who quotes Linda Park Fuller, I took the following argument:

> In autobiographical narrative performances, the performer often speaks about acts of social transgression. In doing so, the telling of the story itself becomes a transgressive act—a revealing of what has been kept hidden, a speaking of what has been silenced—an act of reverse discourse that struggles with the preconceptions borne in the air of dominant politics (Linda Park-Fuller in Spry, 2001: 706).

This motivated my choice to use personal narrative in my enquiry and attempt to challenge the set norms. While her experimental and expressive writing style helped motivate...

My voice.

Exactly.

By unpacking Mitra's summary of the efficacy of performative writing in reporting on auto-ethnographical research this methodological choice was further enforced as a critical tool that also possesses a unique aesthetic quality:

> Methodologically speaking, there are several ways to refer to this--performative writing, interpretive ethnography, writing culture, reflexive coperformance--though the intention is similar: re-centering [sic] incoherence and fragmentation to foster questioning among readers and encourage further dialogue on one's personal experiences and outlooks (Alexander, 2003; Conquergood, 1991; Denzin, 2000, 2003; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Markham, 2005; Pelias, 2008; Warren & Fassett, 2002). Thus, the juxtaposition of academic form ("I examine the role of Theory and Scholarship...") with free-style introspection is not meant to be a seamless smooth transition, but, rather, a JARring JOlt (DISjuncture!) that is meant to take you (me) through various layers of interpretation accorded by the context you (me) find yourself (myself) in (Mitra, 2010: 2-3).

I found this process also replicates itself in the writing of the performance script that formed the first part of this research output.

How effective was this as a choice?

We, including you, reader, will have to access that once this paper is done. To comment now will pre-empt and exclude the analysis that is still to be done.

Noted. The second quote?

The second quote was from sociology, specifically from a text produced by two South African sociologists, Natasha Distiller and Melissa Steyn, who analyse the contemporary landscape. The quote, which references Judith Butler, is: "…constructs such as 'race' and 'gender' have no existence prior to our performances of them…." (Distiller & Steyn, 2004: 3). I chose to look into sociology primarily because social performance may only be read in context, and sociology is a field which studies culture in context (Albrow, 1999).

Upon reflection, I came to realise that this quote introduced the notion of complicity to my research by virtue of the very direct and blatant claim here presented. In effect, my playful (if not reductive) hypothesis was: If one stops performing ‘race’ it should go away. As such, it then meant that ‘race’ and all other social derivatives, such as racism and racialism, were therefore ‘our’ constructs and our responsibility. It also worth noting, that this playful license, afforded by the dramatic element in the methodology, further substantiated its selection.

The final quote was from a field I had not previously encountered before embarking on this research project; that being the field of Critical Race Theory. This provocative and disruptive field’s stance stirred my interest, particularly as it aimed to advance discourse in a radical and accelerating way through witnessing and analysing the narrative of social phenomena.

> Critical Race Theory’s challenge to racial oppression and the status quo sometimes takes the form of storytelling in which writers analyze [sic] the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000: xvii).

I also discovered that Critical Race Theory bolsters auto-ethnographic performance methodology as a critical tool, enhancing the performance critique. Thus, in drawing together the notion of storytelling as a source of cultural references laden with meaning and power dynamics, auto-ethnography, as a means of performing transgressions, challenges and unpacks these dynamics and the need to juxtapose stories to avoid dangerous singularities, I had located my research proposal and methodology.

In moving on from this place then, and into your hypothesis, I shall begin with this question: Why did you choose the word complicity?

I chose complicity because I considered ‘race’ to be something one engaged in by choice. To return to the game idea; one becomes complicit in a game by playing it. Now, the nature of this choice is highly complex given that ‘race’ within a South African context is an intrinsic, if not *undesirable*, part of culture. The legacy of apartheid is well documented academically, historically and personally, and its implications are far reaching both

economically and interpersonally. It is from this given, and from my own experiences in South Africa, that I say ‘race’ is a part of culture – culture here, being understood as a set of learnt behaviours, attitudes, utterances and gestures within a specific context (Albrow, 1999; Chang, 2008; Geertz, 1975; Tulloch, 1999). In one offering from Geertz, he says:

> ...culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors [sic], institutions or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly–that is, thickly–described (1975: 14).

I am particularly drawn to this offering because it articulates how the power, or the effect, of culture is epistemological. A culture offers a way of understanding the world, events, people, but is not necessarily definitive. This means that, should an alternative exist, it comes down to the choice of the individual or collective which purview to hold onto.

What if an alternative is not known though?

Then I would not be permitted to critique that choice. This is a loaded philosophical question however, one which, in the context of this section, I shall avoid. What I will address for you and the reader is the reason as to why I include the value judgement term *undesirable* in this cultural purview of ‘race’.

At the start of the project, the undesirability of ‘race’ was interpreted from my own, highly subjective, somewhat arrogant (by virtue of my different upbringing and experience: culture) perspective of what ‘race’ was as a system of social practice – comprising of ‘racialization and racism’ as agents within this system. The thought was that ‘race’ is something evil, hurtful, and laden with oppression of the other and of self. This notion is not untrue, but is not all true. Indeed, ‘race’, from an academic perspective, is grounded in the imbalance of power over identity and access (Du Bois, in Zuckerman, 2004; Mayor, 2012), and in American and European contexts these specific dynamics play out in a particular way. In South Africa, however, there are some variations that make it somewhat different. To adhere for a moment to a ‘mainstream’ narrative of ‘racism’ (one that is governed predominantly by global media narratives) is to cast the two characters in the great tragedy – the ‘racist’ and the ‘victim’. Each specific context can match a name to the corresponding character, but for the purposes of this paper, this shall not be necessary, particularly as it is from just such an endeavour that my motivation for the use of the word *complicity* arose.

Are you saying that not naming deems you innocent?

A couple of years ago, I would have said yes, but not now. I chose not to name as a means of standing by my findings. There is no need to perpetuate the cycle in any way. Now, where was I?

The media casting.

The media, again, not without some accuracy, usually pitches one ‘race’ group in the ‘racist’ role, and documents the plight of victims (either in the singular or the multiple ‘race’ alternatives) at the hands of these oppressors. Here, I acknowledge the severe simplification of ‘racism’ as a phenomenon. I do so only as a means of entry into what shall be a more detailed and considered interrogation. It serves now, performatively speaking, to advance the plot. In the South African context, however, the key difference to the experience of ‘race’ and ‘racist’ practices is whether the ‘victims’ happen to be in the majority.

I must interject here; you have not yet explained why you elected the word complicity as the descriptive noun for our performing race.

Well, to respond directly to this question, I would suggest that performance is inherently complicit. For as Richard Schechner proposes: “...performing isn’t free and easy: it is behavior [sic] that is ‘put on.’ This is what gives theater a bad name. Theater [sic] is that art where the master says, ‘Truth is what acting is all about; once you can fake truth you’ve got it made’” (Schechner, 1985: p.121). But this shall be addressed at a later point in this report.

Why not now?

First we need to track back, to contextualise the thought that shaped this research project. This tracing back is crucial for it charts the difference in knowledge I hold, and held, both now and at the start of this project; my being an outsider, a foreigner, requires me to do so. After all, you did decide to use my stories and family in your research, it would be wise to get to know my thinking a little better.

Now, as I was saying, the dynamics of the oppressive relationship in the South African context meant that the majority ‘race’ group (determined by the internal system’s classification) were cast as the victims; which they undoubtedly were. Thankfully, this regime was removed from power and the system collapsed: theoretically. I will again furiously wave a flag at this point, for the discussion that follows this last sentence is the study of many, varied fields of academia, politics, public opinion and even the odd playground scuffle. I however, will depart from this conversation for the moment. The thrust of this unpacking is about my choice, as informed by my belief structures, not the legacy of apartheid in the current South African climate. This point however, will be broached, for it is unavoidable when considering the South African context.

I did ask you to explain your choice after all, not outright theory.

So, the system changed, and the victims were no longer the ‘victims’. The tragedy was over, the villain vanquished, and the people (a certain group of people) free. This was the story done. Now, it was from this simplistic, highly reductive stance that I then made the choice. After all, according to the logic that could be derived from this equation, thin as it may be, it could be proposed that any act of ‘racism’ or ‘race’ would be a regressive, utterly nonsensical step to take.

That logic seems sound. Why do you now seem to be critical of it?

I am now critical because I am aware of its narrowness. You see, on the research journey I heard the stories told by Dr. John Kani, and read the writings of Prof. Jonathan Jansen’s ‘bloody’ knowledge (I take some license here for performance effect). Both offerings, each part of a wider collective, have helped me understand things from a more immediate-to-the-human-being perspective and what has happened since the system-change.

You paused, and seem saddened by this. Why?

I am. For after encountering the stories, writings, everyday occurrences, I discovered how layered and dangerous the choice was – both to the research and to myself as an outsider.

Anyone who employed ‘race’ was *complicit* – ‘involved with others in an illegal activity or wrongdoing’ (New Oxford American Dictionary) – for it was the great ‘wrongdoing’ of a past. That was the thinking; it was in the past. After all, that is what the media broadcast to my foreign living room (Botswana), and what my high-school textbooks told. Surely then, in a further application of that simple logic, anyone who still subscribed to the system of ‘racialization’, accepting the ‘race’ labels, for whatever reason, was resurrecting a slain monster.

The term was chosen with an accusatory tone, subtle, but present; underhandedly othering, but disguised with the use of a clever pronoun, ‘our’, to make it less obvious. There was a moment of relish in being an outsider; able to stand on the outside and speak ‘innocently’ about the events I witnessed. To be outside of the pain, resentment and, most perplexingly, identification drawn from this past shaped by ‘race’.

And now? What is your take on the choice you made?

Oh, I stand by my choice. I still believe that we (society), in whatever dynamic one wishes to utilise, become complicit once we ‘go racial’, as I heard one young radio host joke in an on-air broadcast.

By ‘going racial’, do you mean ‘performing ‘race”, as your title suggests?

Yes, and I use *perform* here in connection with the notion of the defined roles in the tragedy. It goes far deeper than this though, because while this tragedy was running, while the game was played, something happened to the players and spectators. It is best understood, performatively, through an articulation made by Schechner on the transportive and transformative potential of performance, for both performers and spectators. In his chapter entitled, *Performers and Spectators Transported and Transformed* (1985: p. 117-150), Schechner explores how, through and in performance the individuals present are moved from the ‘ordinary reality’ to a ‘performance reality’, and how, in the act of performance, depending on the circumstances of that event, these shifts can be considered to be ‘transportations’ or ‘transformations’ (1985: p. 125-126). Schechner put it in the most direct and functional way: “I [Schechner] call performances where performers are changed ‘transformations’ and those where performers return to their starting places ‘transportations’” (1985: p. 125-126). The reason I cite Schechner here is because, in the South African context, to carry on the ‘tragedy’ metaphor, it appears that despite the

‘performance’ (apartheid) having concluded, the performers have not been released or ‘cooled down’ (Schechner, 1985: 125) from the roles dictated by the given circumstances of the particular performance.

But there was no ‘performance reality’ that was differentiated from the ‘ordinary reality’ in the everyday experience of apartheid. So how can you relate the theory to the real-life experience?

Only by considering ‘race’ as a character-list from a play – a play called, say, *apartheid*. On this list there are families, or individuals, each with a name, specific history, characteristic, role in a narrative, agenda, prescribed relationship, and purpose. For example, in this play, one might find the following character-list:

APARTHEID

Cast

Whites - two feuding families, English and Afrikaners

Blacks - The threat to the two families, kept safely in homelands

Indians - From India or Durban, passive group

Coloureds - The ‘Not-Quites’

Some roles are larger and, if the play is well known, a mere glance over the names would reveal all to the performer as to what to expect of the role: e.g. most would know that Romeo will kiss Juliet in the end. Other roles, say something like ‘kinsmen’, apart from promising few (if any) lines, hold fewer articulations and particulars, but still play some part in the world of the play. This was the extrapolation I utilised and is the point from which I chose to use performance as my tool of inquiry.

I see that, but I still struggle to accept your notion of apartheid being analogous to a theatrical play. It was a violation of human rights on a number of levels. Surely you cannot be so reductive and blasé about it? It borders on being offensive and insensitive.

If it is, I am glad, for as Chimamanda Adichie said, “racism should never have happened and so you don’t get a cookie for reducing it.” This statement would, I assume, also draw some distaste for its tongue-in-cheek treatment of such a painful and scarring phenomenon. It is, however, with the same tongue-in-cheek that I employ the theatrical

comparison. Blasé, I am not, but disempowering of ‘race’ I intend to be. My focus is on ‘race’, not apartheid, though they are inseparable, and on how ‘race’ functions, today, as a social construct that is performed. The interest here is on how post-apartheid ‘race’ is still active and present, largely unchanged in its impact upon the identity of the social performer. The use of theatre here is merely the tool with which I may acquire some distance, emotionally largely but also dynamically, in interrogating a subject that, as you rightly have cited, bears so much baggage. As Boal would say, we can make use of theatre’s “telemicroscopic” quality (Boal, 1995: 27). I am not capable of containing, counselling nor of holding all of the trauma associated with ‘race’ in South Africa, but it does exist, and to go directly at it would undoubtedly be unwise. I have experience with performance, both academically and practically, and for this reason I chose a tool I already knew how to wield.

Why ‘race’ though?

To answer that, I will refer back to something we wrote nearly a year and a half ago, in our research proposal document:

> In the last four and a half years, while living in Johannesburg, more and more, ‘race’ has seemed to stand for something much more than how dark or light a person might be–it had transcended the (supposed) biological markers. Indeed, the historical legacy that *apartheid* scarred upon the nation’s psyche is undeniable, and I do not intend to suggest that this major element be negated nor solely accredited with having engendered this *modus operandi.* Much has been written about the psychological impact of race, *apartheid* and the legislation that enforced the system, and even around the economic imbalance which can be traced along ‘racial’ lines, yet there seems to have been little around the human ‘experience’ of race.
> [...]
> The challenge for this project is how to realise this; how to capture, present, analyse and interpret an experience...It is at this point that I refer to a John Tulloch quote, and in particular, how within a South African context, one sees the activation of his thesis.
>
> > In so far as the words we use are always (and already) uttered elsewhere, our identity as writers is inevitably both fragmented and yet also (in the very process of that dialogic exchange) our own project, or own theoretical narrative. This is how I (we) ‘perform’ cultural studies (Tulloch,1999: 20).

> The implication coming out of Tulloch's statement displays a duality from which I believe theatre, in performance, activates in a lucid manner. In a traditional, Western, theatrical performance, no matter how innovative and complex the word play might be, each word (and sometimes the occasional phrase) has already been uttered; offered up by a pre-existing system of communication that ascribed it with meaning. And, it is in the acknowledgement of this system and interplay and with these shared meanings and understandings that the performance is constructed and presented.
> In regards to 'race' then, the utterances were already in practice and enforced within society, and as a result, were entrenched into culture. An interesting twist to Tulloch's thesis in this instance, however, is the missing element of the author's agency to write this narrative. 'Race' was imposed upon one's narrative, over one's entire being, and measures were taken to ensure that each story was clearly labelled and placed.
> However, in the 'New South Africa' there is the offering of *transformation*; a word whose very existence is itself fluid and unresolved. Transforming to what, from what, with what vessel, and on what scale? (H. Neill, 2012).

I did not fully understand all that took place in the performance of 'race' in the day-to-day. I had second-hand accounts, some more detailed, about the politics and economics associated with 'race' (something W.E.B. Du Bois alludes to as part of the construct of 'race' as well (Zuckerman, 2004)) but I still could not fathom why someone would draw some kind of identity from 'race' – "I am [insert 'race' group here]."

I wanted to interrogate why it is perceived as normal to do so, considering that such an effort had been put in to 'free all' (as in part of the constitution) from 'race'. Herein lay one of the greatest challenges though: despite all of this it was *normal*, part of the accepted practice. I did not find it so – well, not from my own experience. I am foreign. To refer back to Tulloch's quote, it meant that I only understood a part of the utterances that went before. I was not fluent in the language of 'South African race' and I needed to get conversational in order to bridge this gap.

> Victor Turner would say, "A performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures. We will know one another better by entering one another's performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies." (cited in Schechner, 2006: 19)

Exactly. Thus I performed.

So to learn the whole language you would become 'raced' or 'racialised', thus becoming complicit? To use your own hypothesis.

Ultimately, I did. It was not something I had predicted but it happened.

So then what was different about your experience? Why is it not merely mimesis or simple replication?

Because, for one, I did not transform. To return to Schechner's system, my performance piece was 'transportive' but not 'transformative', for the performer. While I experienced every bit of emotion in the event, and even post the play, I ultimately returned to myself, admittedly with deeper understanding, but not having adopted it in place of my own.

Secondly, it was a once off performance. This point is contentious because I was the author of the performance script. I rehearsed it and thus engaged with the material repeatedly. To this though, I counter with the argument that the framing of this interaction (this interview) hindered the effect of the subject. Here, a 'foreignness' to the text was maintained by my research interest.

By my research interest?

Your constant questioning, although critically advantageous, sometimes held-up the creative flow. Needless to say, this was noted by numerous audience members post-production who questioned the absence of a closed-narrative, or whole narrative, in the received performance.

So as a comment, what does that mean?

It means that as a potential amendment to the process of writing a performance-script in a performance-as-research based project, there must be a greater awareness of the importance of allowing the artistic process to run unabated by a nagging critical lens. Critique may happen in the reflexive moment post-writing, but not during.

Noted. And now, you are getting too critical yourself. Let us wrap this up. So you chose to use complicity because you felt that adhering to 'race' was a self-motivated choice on the part of an individual or collective.

Yes, that is where I was ideologically at the start, but then I met people.

RESEARCHING RESEARCH

So to get conversational, as you put it in the previous chapter, you met people?

Yes, in effect, that is what happened.

You performed ethnography?

If that is what it is called, then yes. I must stress though that this process occurred in a far less structured manner. Much like learning a language at a sports game.

Why are you so tentative to take on the role of ethnographer here?

My reason is two-fold. When I first started gathering the data for the performance script treatment I had not formally considered a strategy. This part of the process I conducted in the artistic manner I have developed over the years of training and observing. I listened to people share their stories, sometime directly with me, and other times through the television or over the radio. I simply listened.

That sounds, according to some, a lot like ethnography though.

In part, and this leads to the second reason. My ethnography was haphazard in its execution. This is not to say that the information I encountered was altered, interpreted or re-contextualised, but rather my intention was biased towards performatively learning of a particular aspect of culture. Clifford Geertz (1975) and, Victor and Edie Turner (Turner & Turner in Bial, 2007) would say that this process, of studying performance in culture, is indeed ethnographic. For it is in these performances where, for Geertz, behaviour is enacted and cultural forms articulated (1975: 17) and for the Turners, 'feeling, will and thought' are experienced (Turner & Turner, 2007: 323), which are informed by culture.

Heewon Chang sources a beautiful definition for culture that I think supports your interpretation of it. His is borrowed from Kroeber and Kluckhohn's 'classic' definition, which says:

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior, acquired and transmitted by symbols constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, *including their embodiment in artifacts*; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; *culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action,* on the other as conditioning elements of further action (italics added by Chang, 2008: 18).

What I am drawn to in this definition is the notion of an exchange of symbols, which contain specific knowledge, and that these symbols hold value which ultimately shape action, both present and future. In effect, it reinforces my use of the word complicity, in that, traditional ideas (here 'race' as defined by apartheid) have and still are conditioning elements of action, or behaviour.

And you found this to be true in the ethnography you carried out?

I would say yes, but it came as a result of learning in process, as opposed to planning it beforehand.

So what was the initial plan? Reader, please feel free to question whenever you want.

The strategy I initially opted for mirrored the inside-outside circumstance of my profile as researcher. One element of the strategy was to use pre-existing literature to establish a possible epistemological foundation. I selected the field of sociology as my academic source for this element. Another element would be the capture of data from testimonies of individuals. With my focus being on the lived-experience, this would be (I thought) a natural and interesting foil to the data collected from the academy. The third source, and final piece of the strategy, would be to use my own stories, my first-hand experience of 'race' as an outsider i.e. that of the stadium visitor. In this combination was an insider-outsider dynamic that I thought would enable the most effective form for interrogating, challenging and eventually deconstructing the South African 'race' phenomenon.

Why include this third aspect when you were supposedly engaged in ethnography and 'listening', as you put it? It seems conflicting.

I did so because I have to acknowledge my own experience and culture. Any attempt to translate my findings into a performance script would be filtered through my lens; to ignore this could have created yet another essentialist cycle of assumption. I too had to address my own perceptions, rejections and assumptions.

Did you really achieve this? I do not know about you reader, but it seems quite an idealist view.

I cannot say I did. In theory, the addressing of these views could have been offered with an objectivity, a kind of neutrality to the artistic formulations in the performance script. I am sure that the reader raised a sceptical eyebrow at the words 'artist' and 'objectivity' being used in such a manner, and it is this same scepticism that I eventually had to address in the writing stage. In practice, it was a struggle, and one that came to a climax on the performance night.

We will work to this point; for now take us through the process of researching the subject.

Almost immediately, I noted the contention with the material and data gathered from sociology. While the theory held a universal (perhaps 'Western-global') truth, it did not capture the on-the-ground detail I sought. The majority of the material encountered addressed the historical establishment and evolution of 'racial discourse' in society (Dalal, 2002; Du Bois, 2004; Healy, 2009; Judaken, 2009; Knowles, 2003). This was because, for the most part, I was searching for 'origins of racism' or 'race discourse readers'. The data gathered however was not all unsuited, and in particular Judaken's, *Naming Race, Naming Racism* (2009) provided some material which supported some of my original hypothesis, namely that the notion of the employing of 'race' within the South African context was regressive. In the book, in his introductory essay, he writes:

> ...we might consider it in light of what Friedrich Nietzsche said about truth: 'It is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms–in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished...and which, after long use seem fixed, cannonical, and binding to a people.' Races are 'illusions which we have forgotten are illusions. They are metaphors which have become worn out and no longer have the power to carry meaning' (Judaken, 2009: p. 1).

While Nietzsche was, I would assume, not writing of a uniquely South African phenomenon, I nevertheless sided with the final remarks of this thought: ‘metaphors which have become worn out and no longer have the power to carry meaning.’ The irony in my contextual scope was that this statement was redundant. Many individuals were, and are, still using ‘race’ as a source of identification, description and prejudice. The ‘races’ here still held both meaning and power. I imagined the struggle Judaken would have trying to convince the government or large institutions that the ‘race classification’ section on their employee or person-related documents was irrelevant–an ‘illusion’. Or, in relating it to a later found account of him telling Advocate Gcina Malindi that what brought him to tears (Malala, 2012: TimesLIVE) in court, supposedly, no longer has the power to carry meaning. I make this reference as a precursory indicator to a substantial intersection in the research as a whole: a supposed powerless illusion bringing a man to tears in front of an audience.

Wait, that is a huge and under treated statement. Wouldn’t you agree reader? Elaborate for us.

Take it in this way, if ‘race’ and ‘performance’ were powerless, why did they bring Malindi and myself to tears? That is all I will say for now, after all, I cannot give all the details right up front, that is poor theatrical performative writing. Let us return to the knowledge development.

I am critical of Judaken’s, quote, not because I now disagree with the statement. Ideologically, I share this sentiment and thought. However, here I find myself in a context that directly and continually challenges it. A dilemma, similar to that which inspired my own research proposal, was drawn. It must be considered though, to be fair to Judaken, that the aforementioned cited quote is not wholly reflective of Judaken’s introduction. He goes on to say:

> ...the volume is distinguished by the attention it pays to the ongoing power of racial discourse and the institutionalization of racism (Judaken, 2009: p. 1).

And he later comes to elaborate that:

> Most importantly, this collection of essays shows this slippage of meaning [of race] can be historicized...'Race' and 'racism' are therefore useful as vectors of historical change that help to trace the effects of racial discourse and relations played out in the body politic. The forensic exercise is ultimately undertaken in order to demythologize, destabilize and deconstruct the mutations of racism in modernity (Judaken, 2009: p. 4).

Once again, I found myself nodding in agreement with the thrust of this theoretical endeavour, but it did not satiate my desire to interrogate the on-going practice I had come to address.

I hear your artistic voice coming through there, "satiate my desire", and I know this voice. Reader, he helped write the play description in the prologue, but we do not need artistic renderings just yet.

So what do you suggest, researcher?

Keep taking on the research journey. And I will offer this to get us back on track: You seem to be dismissive of the literature that you encountered, but do acknowledge that it was your own search for 'origins of racism' or 'race discourse readers' that could be to blame for this happening. Were there any literary texts that you did find insightful or beneficial?

The one text which springs to mind is Mark Zuckerman's *The Social Theory of W.E.B. Du Bois* (2004). His Du Bois' writings captured a tone that spoke more immediately to the nature of the data I sought. It was a more experiential commentary on 'race' and 'racial practice' that ultimately drew on theoretical statements and insightful observations. Also, it was written from the perspective of what the 'race' discourse would label as an 'oppressed' voice. This notion I am strongly against, but here I make use of it only for the means of the discourse in which I am operating. For me, Du Bios' voice is anything but 'oppressed'.

His tone is direct, articulate and at times poetic, and conveys his message critically and at times with carefully placed emotion. It was inspiring in the light of many of these writings being published at a time when 'race' discourse was far less open. It drew even more inspiration. While some would dispute this statement; taking this contextual factor into

account, I would venture to say that this was some of the boldest counter-discourse produced. Here is one such quote that I feel captures this spirit of defiance:

> It has been left, however, to Europe and to modern days to discover the eternal world-wide mark of meanness–colour! (Du Bois in Zuckerman, 2004: 35).

This seems more about tone and less about content though.

In hindsight, I would have to agree. There were however a number of comments made that did offer a new perspective on the construction of 'race', which Du Bois says is 'the interspecies hatred built on economic greed and self-condemnation through performing the role of an ascribed group' In reality though, even this work still lacked the contextual specificity I required for the performance piece. What it did offer though, was an injection of courage.

That seems out of place, don't you think? A tad emotional and less critical, perhaps?

It had some bearing on the tone used in my work. In performance, tone is a vital element. I had to acknowledge Du Bois here.

And now, what about these other sources you mentioned?

The internet provided a wide source of data, as one would expect, and numerous articles and presentations were gathered here. One of the more influential texts I engaged with was Chimamanda Adichie's TED talk presentation, *The Danger of a Single Story*, which was referred to me a number of months before the inception of the project. In her presentation, Adichie speaks about the need for alternative perspectives and voices in literature's context, content and character. This does not merely mean changing the location or names of characters who, inevitably, inhabit all the ideology of the author's cultural identity. In effect, Adichie calls for the need for cultural diversity in literature. Adichie centres her talk around her own experience as an author, and starts from her first literary pieces written at the age of seven. The books she learnt to read from were English and American, and as a result these first writings were, in her words, "...exactly the kinds of stories I was reading." She comments on how these earlier characters of hers were "white and blue-eyed..played in the snow, they ate apples, and they talked a lot about the

weather; how lovely it was that the sun had come out." This was despite the fact that she lived in the tropical climate of Nigeria, in which "we didn't have snow, we ate mangoes and we never talked about the weather because there was no need to." What Adichie portrays through this account is, again to use her words:

> ...how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children. Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify. (Adichie, 2009).

At the first listening, what I immediately connected to was the notion of alternative, normally Western based, cultures having a single (as I considered) distorted view of my life and history; the most significant of these experiences happening at the age of ten with a trip to Minneapolis, USA. Twice during the lengthy trip, I joined a class for a day. The reason for these visits is unknown to me, but nevertheless they happened. At both schools I was shocked to have questions posed to me about how I learnt English and where I got my clothes from. The ten year old Hamish could not understand why these questions were being asked, they seemed ridiculous. My answers were half hearted, only because I was not sure if they were genuine questions. My concerns were confirmed when one caring teacher, who had warmly introduced me to her class of wide-eyed onlookers, attempted to show the class which country I had travelled from. She, unlike the previous teachers, understood that Africa was not a country but a continent; this filled me with some hope. However, as she spun the mounted globe around, searching for Africa, I noticed that she had passed it. I politely looked on, knowing that she would eventually find it. A second time I saw the continent pass under her scrutinising finger. On the third attempt, I looked at the class who were still fixated by either the teacher, or the well-dressed English speaking African boy. On the fourth round I decided to reach out with a, 'There it is!', much to the relief of the teacher. After some encouragement from my mother, this second school day was filled with much more enjoyment than the first. She told me to tell some lies if I wanted to should students ask me about the tree house I lived in or the pet lion or python I owned, or whatever else was asked of me. Looking back now, this did two significant things: the first was a total rupture with the normal. Under my mother's watch, lying would mean a quick and directed smack. This freedom was even more shocking than the questions

asked. Secondly, and more importantly, it taught me the value of being the author of my own identity. Now, this may seem contradictory, for I was lying to the other children, except for the tree house, for we did have one in our yard, I just did not live there day and night as the children were led to believe!

Importantly my mother's encouragement freed me from having to hold the roles and character traits being inscribed upon me by the questions. I knew they were not true, that I was not a naked, mute, elephant riding, tree-dwelling creature who could magically get to America and miraculously learn English in the twelve hour flight over to America (as suggested to my brother on his class visit). I knew my history, my experiences, my ability and most of all my identity, and this license to thrill (okay, lie) meant that I could hold onto it without having to force myself against the prejudice that stood, 24 to 1, against me in the room. I was able to hold onto my own story, something that I did not have at the first school where my attempt to correct the perceptions resulted in greater confusion and further distancing. At the time, the ten year old, could not understand the magnitude of this agency but felt its freedom. For the first time, my father's words erupted with revelation inside me: "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

To return to Adichie; as in the development of my own thought, she continues to unpack her own discovery, to have her own rapture in relation to the stories she was told and the *truth* that she derived from her own experience. This happened when she discovered African books and, for the first time, she discovered "...that girls like me...could also exist in literature." Now, while many may use this as ammunition in the discourse around cultural dominance or cultural imperialism, I will avoid doing so. First, with reference to Adichie's presentation, she acknowledges this cultural influence but equally cites that while American and British literature had opened up her imagination to new worlds "...the unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature." The 'problem' (the experience of her own context's absence) was easily and totally rectified by simply being exposed to an alternative. Granted, in support of advocates against the imbalance, a key factor in the perpetuation of this is the difficulty of access: it is harder to get books from certain contexts.

Secondly, when reflecting on my own experience I realised that, while the selected story occurs in a Western context, it was no different to the kinds of interrogation I experienced in my own, Southern African (Botswana) context. It must also be noted that in an instance where I could have changed the story, have expanded their own narrative vocabulary and

exchanged knowledge, the ten year old me had the agency to do so but instead, I lied, and left that single story unchallenged.

What Adichie cites in her talk, quite critically, is how the danger of a single story is not isolated to a specific political debate or cross-cultural exchange, nor is it constrained by the fixed dynamics of who writes over whom: anyone is at risk of having their perception limited by a single story. She recounts a 'single story' she was told of Fidé, who worked as a houseboy in their home. The only thing she, Adichie, was told by her mother was that Fidé was poor. This statement, being made 'true' by virtue of supporting statements such as: "Finish your food, don't you know people like Fidé's family have nothing?" Adichie, after admiring a beautifully woven basket made by Fidé's brother realised that: "All I had heard of them was how poor they were so that it became impossible for me to see them as anything else but poor. Their poverty was my single story of them." It is this kind of shaping and restricting that makes a single story so dangerous.
Adichie then goes on to talk about her experience in America as a university student where, at the age of nineteen, she experienced that which my ten year old self also found. What Adichie captures, however, is the direct parallel her 'American roommate' drew of her in the way she (the roommate) had "already felt sorry for me even before she saw me." This was because of the single story her roommate held of Africa, and its inhabitants. Rather than lambast and ridicule however, Adichie chose to adopt her 'Africa' identity, one that clumped the continent into one homogenous mass of pre-described characters, and over time came to understand that her roommate's prejudice was not born out of anything but what she was informed by – a single story. One where:

> ...if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals and incomprehensible people fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS. Unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner. I would see Africans in the same way that I, as a child, had seen Fidé's family (Adichie, 2009).

What Adichie displays is an understanding of the repressive nature of the single story over an individual, or collective as may be, as opposed to the firing off a more spirited attack aimed at those who hold, share or express the story. It is into this same trap that I fell at the start of my research - as outlined in the introduction on my selection of the word

complicit. It is something which in hindsight, I now locate as a more progressive stance to take when seeking to address cultural perceptions.
After outlining a couple more stories, Adichie then captures the process behind making a single story which she describes as being to: “...show a people as one thing; as one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.” She then goes on to discuss the element of power in the dynamic of the single story, particularly in terms of the inscribing power this single story plays over the character(s) it contains. Adichie uses an *Igbo* word, *Inkale*, which roughly means ‘to be greater than another’, to describe this inscriptive oppression. She offers that, as contained by the principle of *inkale,* this power dynamic determines: “how they [single stories] are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told...” She goes on to articulate that: “...power is the ability not only to articulate the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person.”

In relating this back to my own journey to the West, it becomes clearer just how significant this point is in the construction of an identity, or rather, in the consolidation of it. At the first school, I was inscribed upon through questions that held *inkale*, that made those offerings definitive of my origin, practice and eventual journey into that classroom. At the second, by being made aware of my own agency to either accept or subvert (although, this not being articulated as such at the time) these stories, I regained my own *inkale* over the choices made in my own story.

Adichie ends with outlining the inherent reductive qualities of a single stories citing how: “The single story creates stereotypes...and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.” This process, undoubtedly, results in people being ‘robbed of their dignity’ and, in cases where the single story is pitying or degrading, “...makes our definition of an equal humanity difficult. It emphasises how we are different, rather than how we are similar.” Adichie quoting Chinua Achebe then stresses the importance of having, “a balance of stories” to fill some of the narrative gaps. Finally, she offers that the solution to the problem is not outside of the medium, and I am greatly challenged by this. Her conclusion is clear, challenging both the authors and readers and avoiding the option of denying responsibility in occupying either role. Her words are simple and direct:

> Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispose and malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanise. Stories can break the dignity of

> a people but stories can also repair that broken dignity...When we reject a single story, when we realise that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise (Adichie, 2009).

This text, as mentioned, was influential for this very reason. At the time of shaping and crafting the research proposal, this sentiment kept surfacing - that of allowing alternative stories of 'race' to be told. This was a story I was familiar with. One that, in my opinion, did not exist in the context I had experienced. A story, I believed, could act as a means of deconstructing the hegemonic presence in South African literature, a literature which also manifested performatively in the 'racialization' of society.

Another text that I feel needs mentioning because of the interesting and insightful perspective it offered was Natasha Distiller and Melissa Steyn's book, *Under Construction: 'Race' and Identity in South Africa Today* (2004), which looks at the construction of identities in the 'New South Africa' through a performative lens (2004: 3). The book is an anthology of essays, poems and satirical art, each offering a comment on contemporary 'race' and identity performances that occur (or have occurred). Motivation for this choice, to look at performance, is derived from an extrapolation of Judith Butlers' study of gender and, in particular, how "constructs such as 'race' and 'gender' have no existence prior to our performances of them…." (Distiller & Steyn, 2004: 3).

Before coming to the use of my own stories, I will speak back to what was the most intriguing yet frustrating element. The testimonies that poured into my well often did so unexpectedly. This process almost happened in a heuristic content, with narratives that provided deeper insight appearing without any indication that the conversation would turn in that direction. One such occurrence happened on a stormy evening after a friend's wedding. On the way home, I made a stop at a friend's home and there was Uncle Wayne. From a slouched-down, sunken, seated position in his armchair, Uncle Wayne proceeded to relay a tale of his own upbringing in what is locally called a *coloured township,* Eldorado Park, south of Johannesburg. The conversation transformed so rapidly from casual, small-talk to an insightful and articulate assessment that I could not scramble to hit record on my cellphone in time. And when I did come to think of doing so, it was too late, as he had wrapped up the thought almost as suddenly. I made some rushed notes later that evening in an attempt to capture all that my fading memory clung to. In the end all I had, at best,

were bits and pieces of statements in phrases closely to those which my mind could recall. His story however, stayed with me. The message was clearly conveyed.

He spoke of how being able to see his children live the way they did, after the collapse of apartheid–after the curtain fell–made him aware of just how the system worked to oppress him mentally. He spoke of how, due to the restrictive legislation on movement, his whole life revolved predominantly around one of the 'race' groupings, as determined by the government. This resulted in his understanding and experience of the other 'races' being made largely through story, myth or speculation. His whole world, according to what he was told, was 'coloured' (here I use the word colloquially and poetically). So much so that a friend of his whom they all believed (and still do) to be of the *coloured 'r*ace' group, should he be looked at by another South African would "almost undoubtedly be considered black." He laughs. "But to us, he was coloured. Because he lived there. So he had to be." "Location," I thought. "This was one of the factors behind the defining of 'race'." Uncle Wayne's next comment though quickly challenged this. His story then shifted back to his children, at which point he commented on how he was able to see for himself how they are able to interact more and *be with* everyone. How for them, the world was that little bit bigger, not restricted to heresy and mystery, even though they still lived in an area predominantly of one 'race' group. His final comment is what struck me most. He said, "They have that freedom now. It's not for me." What struck me was his sense of serenity with this statement. From other conversations and interactions, it was evident that he processed something different to other South Africans. That he knew and understood something more. I say more only because it was not a resigned or defeated statement in any way. It felt assertive and settled.

This interaction impacted upon me in a way that I had not anticipated. More than anything, it forced me to embrace the notion of an individual who had taken the full connotation of the 'race' term ascribed upon him, but who had an alternative view of it through witnessing a different experience and who had generated a new understanding for the term. The implication of this was that, here, I had encountered someone who whole-heartedly, and fully conscious of what I perceived to be the composite of the 'awareness of race', had embraced their 'racial' identity even after witnessing an alternative definition through an experience of it; someone who through his own journey had achieved what I read as an authorial authority over his identity, by hearing a second story and realising that his received story was, in a way, singular. It was an historical story that was written over him, and all other people who inhabited South Africa, casting them in specific roles, in specific

sets, with specific traits, written on paper by the government, and told, and retold, with force.

This meeting, these words, frustrated me no end because it now meant that my initial hypothesis was incomplete, and that my reading and interpretation of Adichie's words were inadequate. My interpretation of the TED presentation had made me assume that the effect of a single story could be deconstructed by the inclusion of an alternative story of the same incident, place, or person. That all one needed to hear was a version of 'my' story, and that they could be raptured from 'race', freed from the identity that was imposed upon them. What I had missed were three crucial words, "Many stories matter."

I had not anticipated that 'race' was also something that I had been informed about through a single story; that, perhaps, I too was unaware of the complexity of this particular 'race' narrative in the South African context; that my experience of it was informed through counter-narratives against the apartheid regime that were captured in the post-independence South African text books. I had to acknowledge that the legacy of my high-school, that was formed as an oppositional response to the apartheid regime, and whose ethos was based in diversity and integration, would instil in me a total rejection of 'race' and its subsequent phenomena. And finally, that my upbringing, which directly challenged the notions of 'separate existence between the 'races', further reified this story in my being.

The thought was frightening, and only fully formed itself in my mind weeks later. The story I knew of 'race' was one that the world knew. It was of the 'rainbow nation' and of change sweeping through a nation. It was of 'the struggle' and eventual victory. It was a political and popular culture, but it missed the very reason why I decided to embark on this project. That while the constitution stated, and leaders declared, 'race' shall no longer hold, it simply continued to exist: to define, to oppress, to cause hurt. This was missing from my single story of 'race'.

Uncle Wayne's story had me questioning more than anything. What did he know that I did not? Other interviews or conversations had simply reinforced the narrative I had already formed in my perception. The stereotypes all checked, and the meanings were consistent, but here I found an example of something different; of someone who had transformed their own understanding, from the inside. I was in awe of the achievement, because the story I held suggested it was impossible.

I referred back to the personal experiences I had had, the ones that had shaped the research proposal, in search of data that might help elucidate this finding. This had me return to the incident that had stirred my fascination, the then infamous Spear Saga. The following section was captured in my research proposal, and describes the experience as I had experienced it then:

> *During the course of this, 2012, year I experienced the most racially tense moment of my life. What was most interesting about this incident was that at no point was I directly addressed, and yet, I distinctly felt a great deal of unease. It was not some comment or critique of my 'race' or any other possible critique of my own being in any way. It was simply a result of being in a specific context, at a specific time in history, occupying an identity that in itself (or selves) sat laden with hegemonic tensions and inconsistencies, and being aware of all these factors.*
>
> *The moment was the release and response to Bret Murray's painting, The Spear, which depicted the current South African president, Jacob Zuma, with his genitals exposed. My personal response to the painting was for the most part subdued, "A touch rude," I thought, as I contently returned to my daily routine. What ensued was a backlash of the kind that I had never before witnessed first-hand. People marched, rioted, debated, sang, defaced, fought, threatened with death, and cried in court. My humble upbringing in peaceful, quiet, Botswana had never offered such an emotionally charged public outcry. An outcry of genuine disapproval and hurt, of past ghosts whose haunting, evidently, still echoed in the chambers of the unresolved moments from the country's history.*
>
> *My 'logic' could not rationale the speed with which the jump that had been made; the escalation from commenting on an art work, to a heated, and painful, national debate on racism. It all seemed too convenient, too easy; the way in which it spiralled up and away so quickly, and collectively. It was as if everyone had been waiting for a moment like this, a chance to spit out a bitter taste that lay in their mouths. Indeed, it was my foreign 'logic', (whose foreignness was made more explicit during the xenophobic attacks a couple years earlier), that could not grasp the flavour of this historical legacy. Yet despite all of this, I was affected by what was going on. It had not changed my perspective towards 'race', nor my relationship to it, but had made me aware of its social power.*

> *Thus I again returned to my question, the one that I had formed well before my arrival in Johannesburg, what exactly is this 'race' thing, and how does it work?*
> *(H. Neill, 2012)*

As I reflect on the above-mentioned again, I find an important link to the position that Uncle Wayne's conversation had left me in: "What exactly is this 'race' thing, and how does it work?" I look back only to find that where I had started is where I now found myself. Or was I? As I took stock of the situation I noted the differences. For one, I had a better understanding, both theoretically and socially of the function and implication of 'race' in the given context. I also had a counter-narrative that stood in contrast to the mainstream, or as I had experienced, discourse around 'race' and 'racial' identity.

WRITING THE SECOND STORY

Ethnography done, what next?

To write.

Write what exactly? The performance script?

Yes, but I did not know how to after all that I had learnt.

The game was too much?

Not the game, but what the game means. I had come to the research project with the understanding that 'race' was bad and that for decades, perhaps even longer, people had fought against it to the death. Simplistic as this may be, it was the perception I held towards 'race' and was the stance from which I launched. In trawling through the literary volumes, I found Christine Mayor's working definition most aligned to my own. She writes:

> Racial identity is produced and performed, embodied and enacted in the encounter of at least two bodies. Bhabha (1994) suggests that theory itself can lead to social change by shifting our understanding. If we view race as something that is created and constantly performed, we may create more space for play and social change in our work (Mayor, 2012: 215).

I locate my understanding in the imbedded notion of performativity associated with 'race'. I assumed 'race' to be a social performance, much like how Judith Butler considers gender to be a performed construction: "an identity instituted through a *stylized* [sic] *repetition of acts"* (Butler, cited in Bial, 2007), as opposed to a given social truth. Surely it would be about understanding this performance role, the associated narrative and the plot of 'race' and then simply change these?

What I did not grasp though was the extent to which 'race', as a South African socio-cultural phenomenon, shapes and defines identity. I knew of the different 'race'

classifications, and what constituted a specific role, but I did not ever come to appreciate the extent to which this system held cultural truth.

Uncle Wayne's story, in amongst the many other samples, made me realise that in relation to the South African context I held a single story of 'race'. Yet, simultaneously, I held the same stance towards a South African perspective of 'race'. At that moment, I became aware of my position between two separate and conflicting notions of 'race'. I had come to the exact theoretical point I sought to take the audience to in my performance piece; the intersection of two stories which were each alternative perceptions of 'race'. As Adichie would propose, they were second stories unto each other.

Why does this seem as though it is a problem?

I did not want to accept this second story which I had met. How then could I expect my audience to not do the same? I had witnessed the game, learnt the rules and understood in more detail its nature, but I could not bring myself to accept it: to take it on and perform it.

But this was never your intention, to take it on, so why let it bother you?

Because in performance I **would** have to 'take it on' to get to the place I intended. If my intention was to address 'race' I would have to go into the culture of it. And ultimately, as Kroeber and Kluckhohn said, address the 'value in the culture system' of 'race' (Chang, 2008: 18).

So what choice did you make?

I wrote to what I had planned and played the game in an attempt to subvert it.

That completely contradicts your research agenda.

On the contrary, it met the agenda to the letter. I did not want to compose yet another essentialist script whose fantasy was transformation of the audience but whose reality was more assumption-based essentialism. To again use Butler's words, my aim was to write a critical performance script "in a way that does not distort and reify the very collectivity the

theory is supposed to emancipate" (2007: 197). I knew from the onset that I did not understand this 'race' culture; so how could I expect to write a piece that challenged it critically? If 'subversive performances' (Butler, in Bial 2007: 197) are what Butler suggests hold the emancipatory potential against socially constituted roles then I would have to engage in that performance discourse.

So, you had to become complicit?

Whether I had to or not is debatable, but because I am reporting back now I must acknowledge that I did. Choices had to be made in process, and these opened doors that opened more doors. There is no single, clear path to take. I chose to step into the game in order to walk back out, and in doing so, hopefully catch the attention of a few onlookers who would, at least, acknowledge the path.

So what did you write?

Initially, I wrote a piece that formed the core of the Hamish character's narrative. The piece was based on a reflection from a previous Performance-as-Research (PaR) project I had presented, in which, I explored 'race' through game. It was from this PaR project that I chose to use the game as a symbol for 'race' in society.
The aim of the game was to provide progressively 'better' comments, stories, or descriptions as a means of progressing: a game of one-upmanship. To raise the stakes the game is deemed a race, thus inferring that the person who provided the 'best' offerings would win. The trick of the game, however was that the referee (whom I performed) held all the power, and would subjectively decide whether a comment was 'worthy' of an advance. Then as the game progressed, not only did the task of 'bettering an offer' become more difficult, but the referee also became increasingly abusive along with an abandoning of his initial governing parameters. The result was a tension filled stalemate in which players, still succumbing to the referee's authority in the game, argued with the referee about the injustice they experienced.
The reflection focused on this notion of the players being stuck in a game that they, at any moment, could have left. It was this sense of 'stuck' that formed Hamish's narrative. It was a stuck quality that I perceived as part of the phenomenon of 'race'.

The next piece was called the *History Lesson*, and this formed the first case the Lawyer presented in the play. The actual story was my father's journey from Scotland to South Africa, and then up into the continent; this story being told to me one evening as we discussed my future. I wrote a response to the conversation not for the sake of this research project, but simply for the profound wisdom it gave. The piece lay in one of my notebooks for some time before I considered using it for the play. This choice was one of the major turning points in the creative process.

How so?

It was at this moment that I decided to use my own personal history as a source for material to play the game upon.

As informed by literature you had engaged with?

No, as the most uncomfortable choice I could have made. Auto-ethnographic performance allowed me to apply the second story (South Africa's 'race' culture) that I had learnt about 'race' over the data collection period. It was my walking into the game and starting to play.

But it was still in a performance script, not reality, so why would you struggle with such a choice?

Try and imagine this: Take a memory you hold dear, preferably one from childhood (no, this is not Lee Strasberg's *A dream of passion, (Strasberg, 2007)*. Now, take either the characters or setting of the memory and interchange them for what you perceived to be the absolute opposite of what they are.

Could you even do it? This was the choice I undertook; to take my memories and history, the things I valued and apply a different culture to them. It was also this choice that allowed me, unknowingly at the time, to experience the writings of Tami Spry before I had even come across them.

In speaking about her experience with autoethnographic performance, Spry writes:

> For me, performing autoethnography has been a vehicle of emancipation from cultural and familial identity scripts that have structured my identity personally and professionally. Performing autoethnography has encouraged me to dialogically look back upon my self as other, generating critical agency in the stories of my life, as the polyglot facets of self and other engage, interrogate, and embrace (Spry, 2001: 708).

She goes on to say that:

> In autoethnographic methods, the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns (Spry, 2001: 711).

While this sensation for her, who has vast experience in the medium of autoethnography, is emancipatory, it left me feeling much the opposite. In becoming the 'nexus upon which the research process turns' I experienced betrayal. I understood the research potential for the choice made, but I could not get around the fact that this process was emotionally taxing, and came nowhere close to the Aristotelian notion of catharsis; a supposed by-product of theatrical performance. The tears that showed on stage, referred to in the prologue, were far fewer than those which fell backstage. The person who played the character wept. I wept.

Were you aware of this as you wrote the scenes? Of the emotional weight this shift in cultural application held?

While I wrote the scenes I did feel some of the betrayal but this was far less than in live performance. Even now, it does not make sense why the feeling was so amplified. After all, I wrote the scenes. There is definitely something that happens in performance that cannot be captured anywhere else. As esoteric as that may appear, it is my truest response to the experience I had. Applying the rules of the 'race' game to the imagined scenario of meeting my grandmothers was undoubtedly the most painful of the scenes to perform. I had managed to find a way of transferring the knowledge I had received, verbally and in literary study, into a medium that would embody it. The performance script, eventually called *T for Tea*, was the one side of this transference. The other would be the actor engaging, interpreting and performing this text. It lends itself to a theory proposed by

Dwight Conquergood who, in reviewing de Certeau's own debate, quotes "what the map cuts up, the story cuts across", which Conquergood unpacks as offering:

> [Referring to] two different domains of knowledge: one official, objective, and abstract – "the map"; the other one practical, embodied, and popular – "the story." This promiscuous traffic between different ways of knowing carries the most radical promise of performance studies research. Performance studies struggles to open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice (Conquergood, in Bial, 2007: 311-12).

The pin that was pulled in this instance however, resulted in a violence upon the researcher. The embodiment of such a traumatised knowledge was something I had not anticipated. I had become so focused on finding the details that I forgot to distance myself; to apply Brecht's theory upon which I had based my creative approach. An approach in which:

> [A] Brechtian actor will perform many exercises in observation, watching and imitating others, describing for others to imitate, and so on. But the point will be in *presenting* the observed behaviour (Leach, 2004: 121).

Brecht's approach, as outlined in his style of epic theatre, was focused on keeping the theatre focused on "narrative...rather than one of illusion." (McDowel, 2005: 67) What actually happened in my own process was exactly what happened to Quesalid:

> Quesalid did not become a great shaman because he cured his patients; he cured his patients because he had become a great shaman. Quesalid, like the leopards in Kafka's parable, was absorbed into the field of his own performing (Schechner, 1985: 121).

THE PERFORMANCE NIGHT

I walked off the stage and immediately began to weep. Not cry, not sob, not '*feel a well of joy finally roll out through the eyes in tears.*' It was a deep, hurt and unrelenting weep. One that made my rib-cage expand and contract with such energy that it felt as though it was doubling and halving in size. The audience applauded, with the odd whistle and cheer, but I continued to weep against one of the pillars backstage. The actor took control of the mind for a moment, "The actor must thank the audience" his training instructed. I gathered some breath and walked just onto the edge of the stage, bowed, and immediately moved back to the safety of the darkened wing. The shelter of the backstage was all I wanted: no lights on me.

The weeping continued until I reached the dressing-room, where the out-pouring ensued. It was release, unlike any I have ever experienced in or from performance. The closest comparison was the weeping I experienced at the news of my aunt's passing some years earlier. Come to think of it, that was the last time, of only a very few, that I wept so. I am not one to cry, but on this night the body gave in.

The actor was happily resigned to his chamber within, content with the sound performance he portrayed. The researcher was silent – aware that this had something to do with him. It was his fault in part, but it was me who was left there weeping. The incessant ringing of the words told on stage would not let up in my mind, in my heart. They were an attack on my history, my family, my beliefs, and I had uttered them. Yet it was also 'not me' that had uttered them. Acting indeed was not "free or easy", and Brecht's distancing and focus on portraying the argument had been achieved but was too close to Stanislavski's method as I became a "victim of hypnotic experience" (Mitter, 1992:42). What was left was a complete devastation of me.

The performance was an application of knowledge upon my own story, my own identity. It was a crafted attack informed by the theory I had encountered, the testimonies that had been shared and analysed, and the potent force of my own imagination. They, the stories, were not real, but not-not real; a perfect example of Schechner's, not-I and not not-I, model of the phenomenology of the performer (Schechner, 1985: 123). They were not my own, not of my 'real' history, but inadvertently *were* for I had created them, rehearsed them, and performed them to an audience with the utmost sincerity and to the best of my ability as an

actor. He, the actor, meant it and so he was able to performed it well, for he was free from the implications. His identity is functional, temporary, and utilised for a specific purpose: to act. Now though, I was left with the implication of his words, his actions, his choices.

The weeping had now transformed from being hurt filled, into a purging. An understanding that it was over had come; that the performance was just that, a show. A colleague appeared in the doorway of the changing room, his face opened by his smile. I now wonder as to why it was him of all my colleagues to appear? For he was the one with whom I had engaged the most around trauma and release.

He comforted me in his arms, the embrace helping the release of emotion. My breathing slowed, and steadied. He congratulated me on the show, and assured me it was all right. I knew what he said but did not grasp all of it at the time, and not for a long while after the performance. The paradox was that, as I wept, reliving the story, an alternative thought kept showing up in mind: “But, you wrote the story.” It was true, I had.

A look in the mirror let me see the bloodshot eyes and shining face. “What a mess,” I thought, as the actor began to ready himself for the next performance, rumbling from his chamber. There was a second show to perform in that night, another exam piece; one about the violence in our society, the violent society, and the violence of our society. A change of the shirt, wipe of the face and out the door. The show must go on. The actor was driven by these words:

> The actor who undertakes an act of self-penetration, who reveals himself and sacrifices the innermost part of himself–the most painful, that which is not intended for the eyes of the world.... He must be able to express himself, through sound and movement, those impulses which waver the borderline between dream and reality (Grotowski cited by Schechner, 1985: 9).

In considering the performance theories from Brecht, Grotowski, Stanislavski and autoethnographer, Spry, I was in a melting pot of conflicting but cohabiting philosophy. I was meant to become the nexus (Spry) upon which my argument would be presented (Brecht) all while following the impulses between dream and reality (Grotowski) to affect my audience directly (Stanislavski). This amalgamation was not the problem though, it was the content that I pushed through their methods and techniques; for after it all, the only common denominator was the researcher-performer.

The following day, I wrote in my journal as I waited for the examiner and my supervisor to arrive for the post performance interview:

> [...] I walked backstage, felt a rush come over me, and wept. I am not entirely sure why though. Whether it was about the content of the play; the pain those stories generated and the overcoming/facing it; or whether it was just the release of the pent up tension and anxiety. All in all, something shifted. I need to de-brief and unpack this though. To fully (if possible) grasp what it all means. (H. Neill, November 2013).

The interview was critical and thorough. Questions around choices made, responses to audience, and artistic, research or personal intentions were posed. The examiner spoke to the aesthetic and narrative elements of the piece; citing the gaps and missed moments that my choices resulted in. The interview gave me a fresh perspective on the work as *art*, not merely as a research oriented task that was to be dissected and diagnosed. Listening again to the recording, two questions stand out as conversation-shifters: the first, “What did you feel about the whoops at the end? The ovation?”, and the second, “Why did your experience of racialization in South Africa keep you invested?” The conversation generated by the first question is short: “I was in my own space...didn’t feel excited by them...left stage...and started to cry.” It was almost the exact response I had penned an hour earlier in my journal. It now injected some concern into my conscience: “What about the audience?”

The second question stirred a much livelier conversation. I spoke of my emotional response to ‘race’ and of the rejection of ‘race’ that these experiences created. This conversation resulted in the examiner offering that perhaps the ‘race’ was “something that you hoped to change...in a bit of a missionary way...” I felt a thrust of guilt shoot up within me. I nodded in agreement and conceded this fact.

“I did.”

I had managed to gather the information I needed, produced a script that would allow me to perform the new perspective I had articulated, crafted and refined a performance out of the written script, and lived the story.

CONCLUSION

In looking back now, what would you say you have found?

I'm tempted to say *myself*, but is this not your task to complete, Mr Researcher? To locate the new knowledge?

No, it is not that. Rather, I feel that it would be more relevant if you spoke now. I was created for a particular purpose, to ask questions of the question and findings you came across on this journey. And once the final word is approved, I will go into my own recess, alongside the actor. This needs to live in that which will not recline.

And you, Reader? What will you do once this is done?

Let us find out over time. For now, to conclude.

For this, I shall make use of a quote from Jerzy Grotowski, who responds to an interview question posed by Denis Bablet, he says:

> All conscious systems in the field of acting ask the question: "How can this be done?" This is as it should be. A method is the consciousness of this 'how' (Grotowski in Bial, 2007: 223).

In this interview section, Grotowski is asked for his opinion on the acting theories of Stanislavski, Brecht and Artaud, as a means of entering into a dialogue on his own technique. In a brief but highly articulate manner, Grotowski first locates the difference 'between an aesthetic and a method' (Grotowski in Bial, 2007:223) as a means of demystifying and de-cluttering a large part of performance training discourse. In doing so, he suggests that Brecht's 'Verfremdungseffekt', as a theory, is more of an "aesthetic duty demanded of the actor" as opposed to a fully outlined method of how to achieve this (Grotowski in Bial, 2007:223). To this point he says: "Certainly, Brecht did study the techniques of the actor in great detail, but always from the standpoint of the producer observing the actor." (Grotowski in Bial, 2007:223)

For Artaud, Grotowski finds the beginnings of a method emerging, but not the outright development and articulation of one. He calls these theories and writings: "...only visions, a sort of poem about the actor, and no practical conclusions can be drawn from his explanations." (Grotowski in Bial, 2007:223) Grotowski acknowledges an awareness and study of the physical body and process involved with acting, and studies the way in which an actor may "reproduce psychic efforts through his body" (Grotowski in Bial, 2007:223), but is

critical of calling his work a method. This is done because of the 'cliché creating' capacity of such an endeavour. For as Grotowski suggests:

> But if we analyse his principles from a practical point of view, one discovers that they lead to stereotypes: a particular type of movement to exteriorize a particular type of emotion. In the end this leads to clichés (Grotowski in Bial, 2007:223).

It is worth noting here that Grotowski is referring to Artaud's essay, An Affective Athleticism (Artaud, 1958), in which Artaud hypothesises on the acting technique derived from breath control as a means of accessing, activating and releasing emotional energy. In the unpacking of this proposed technique, Artaud writes:

> I have had the idea of employing this knowledge of the kinds of breathing not only in the actor's work but in the actor's preparation for his craft. For if knowledge of breathing makes clear the soul's colour, it can with all the more reason stimulate the soul and encourage its blossoming (Artaud, 1958: 136).

This quote, demonstrates Grotowski's afore cited description of Artaud's writing as 'poetic', as well as perhaps why the word 'cliché' also sprung into his mind. I jest, but what it does literally show is a lack of the practical instruction required to translate this into method. Indeed, having experienced performance training, such a register is not uncommon, however, without a practical instruction or methodical system such a theory becomes, in a way, mythical or remains in the realm of research as is suggested by Grotowski earlier.

What is required is a definite, purposeful answering of the question: "How can this be done?" And it is here where Grotowski makes the distinction between an aesthetic and a technique, or method. (Grotowski in Bial, 2007:224)

I thought you were concluding?

I am, this is just context for it.

How can this be done? That was the question I presented to myself what now seems to be an age ago.

How can I create a piece of theatre that interrogates, challenges and possibly deconstructs 'race'?

That was the question which was born. Immediate answers sprung to mind from South Africa's sizeable theatrical canon but it is not *this* kind of play I am thinking of. For even in those pieces the 'race' game is still being played. The characters are 'black' or 'white' or 'racist'. The play I am looking for is one not bound in these parameters over human

characters. I make this articulation to acknowledge that a character need not be human or a play be set on this planet nor to denounce or discredit the relevance of plays and works of this kind. Some truly magnificent pieces of theatrical literature are held in the canon of ‘race’ plays, but what is equally held in these plays is the performance of ‘race’. And my qualm with this is much like that which I have in everyday performances, that it is never considered as a character trait to be experimented with, challenged, or even disregarded. It simply is or so the story goes.

One of the questions I came across during my rehearsal process was how would I perform ‘race’? As in literally perform it so that it was obvious that it was ‘race’ that I was performing. Accent was the first impulse that came. This was just voice though, not ‘race’. Gesture? I can perform gesture, but what gesture signifies ‘race’? I asked a fellow performer how he would perform ‘race’ and after having to unpack the question further he responded with, “You can’t. It just is there.” He meant it was on the performer, in their skin tone and physical features.

I tried for some time to find the performance element for ‘race’ but could not locate it, could not pin it down. I did so because during the creative process I was asked whether or not I would transform between the characters in my script for: “This would demonstrate the fluidity of ‘race’ and thus its inherent contradiction.” I did not want to ‘race’ my grandmothers though. Nor did I want to ‘race’ myself. The result was to simply tell a story. To perform the thoughts of the characters and, I hoped, get the audience to see something new. My research had revealed that I held a new story within me. So why not perform it?

“Understanding a people’s culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity,” said Geertz (1975: 14). The presentation of my own story would be an exposition of my culture, so why not just play it as it is for me, ordinary.
“Well, what is ordinary and is it universal?” I asked myself.
Guillermo Gómez-Peña provided an interesting answer.

In his musing on the creative trajectory of performance artists in our contemporary, web-accessing and film consuming society he manages to locate three interesting points that challenge my questions. The first is that what was deemed “subculture is now mere pop,” (2007: 345), second is that content (that is the interpreting of thought or commentary into art by an artist) is losing its relevance with the audience (2007: 346) and third that the new audience is expecting to interact with the performance rather than passively observe (2007:347). Gómez-Peña deduces that these evolutions are a result of a combination of internet based performance and performativity, and a proliferation of “extreme sexuality” (ibid., p. 349-350). What is most striking about his conclusion however is that he calls for reflection and not sensation; seemingly counter-acting the energy typically reserved for that of the performance artist. He calls for a reflective space in which the audience can “reflect on their new relationship with cultural, racial, and political Otherness.” (ibid. p. 356) Considering the performance that I created, in relation to both

Gómez-Peña's words and my own afore mentioned question, I would have to say I support this offer. The story of 'race' that I encountered was one I perceived to be extreme, violent and performed. The performance choice I made was to not meet or supersede this performance but to walk in and out calmly. To offer a second, other normal, story. As a point of critique however, I must question the effectiveness of this choice. It may have been too quiet, too subtle, and some would agree so. My response, from the work completed, is yet another question.
Does volume hold the potential to transform culture? In the sense that, were I to aggressively attack the subject matter, to over-perform my rejection of 'race', would this have made any difference? My answer, is like Gómez-Peña's: rather open the space for reflection and let the audience process what they are already used to seeing. Hence the Lawyer simply walked out of the game.

This point, even now, remains contentious. Especially because the audience, as some comments back have indicated, did not go into this reflective space. In seeking to explore this point though, I came back to the notion of culture I had addressed earlier in the text. The content of the performance script was derived from culture, perhaps then, the shift should have been crafted not in a theatrical gesture (leaving the stage) but should have focused more intently on addressing culture with the performance. That is to say, show a new understanding, a new epistemology.

While the likes of Richard Schechner, Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz outline performance as a means of displaying a particular culture and its coding, my experience in this research project has reversed this process. Through performance, I was taught a culture. That is to say, it **created** a culture within me. This may seem to be a subtle difference of inconsequential substance, but in considering the potential it offers, I would argue against this notion.

What the various, multidisciplinary theorists offer is ultimately a passive theatre; one that can only reproduce the prescribed codes of that culture. I say that theatre is not passive. That it can, through the realm of memory and imagination, as offered by Boal, not merely reinvent these codes, for this would merely be cliché, but create totally new meanings, new possibilities, new roles. If, according to Shakespeare, theatre 'holds a mirror to society', then why not flip this around and allow society to catch up to the image that theatre creates. Throw out the mirror, and place a window, one that shatters Du Bois' glass-doored cave and offers something different. One that lets Romeo change his mind and kiss Benvolio, or one that sees Juliet pursue Mercutio in a hilarious comedy akin to 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. In theatre, not just in South Africa, there is a continual attempt to replay and recreate the classics, and so they should. The canon must always be honoured, but this should not stifle the possibility of innovation. In this regard, theatre is indeed holding a mirror to society all too well.

I think back to the ethnographic portion of my research journey and compare my findings to the moment of weeping that happened right after my performance; of the countless stories I heard of painful memories, as shared by Dr John Kani, or statements of acceptance like that of Uncle Wayne. These make me realise that my weeping was because after uttering those words on stage, were I to play the ‘race’ game, I would be stuck with them; they would become my reality, my essential truth, one that is informed by a traumatic past whose impact remains unresolved or fully accepted and true. I wept, because it was not my truth, but this second story was not told. I had indeed discovered the complicity in playing the ‘race’ game.

I then make another connection to the story of the weeping Advocate Malindi, who did so after, as Justice Malala empathetically wrote:

> [...] there is hurt, there is pain, there is anger and there is even hatred... about what happened here. I remembered apartheid (Malala, 2012: 1).

I then consider Jansen, and how, with a similar reading of emotion writes:

> ...it is read as an attack on the last vestiges of...culture and heritage. Nobody feels this sense of loss and emasculation more directly than the future head of the household, the young...man (Jansen, 2009:69).

But now, I apply my performance experience to these stories: betraying the South African ‘race’ game. I change the character details, and, look, there is new meaning.

You do not see it? Let me write it again for you except, as a single statement, as if in a script for an actor to perform.

> “There is hurt, there is pain, there is anger and there is even hatred about what happened here. I remember apartheid. It is read as an attack on the last vestiges of culture and heritage. Nobody feels this sense of loss and emasculation more directly than the future head of the household, the young man.”

How would you describe this statement?

Alright, now does this change if I tell you this?

The statement is reflective of a present truth with only one key ‘essential element’ now removed: ‘race’.

What is that, reader? You do not see it? Impossible? Well, it is not, because I have performed it for you here.

Here are the statements as found in the original texts:

> “There is hurt, there is pain, there is anger and there is even hatred *in my and my fellow black people’s hearts* about what happened here. I remember apartheid.”

> “It is read as an attack on the last vestiges of *Afrikaner* culture and heritage. Nobody feels this sense of loss and emasculation more directly than the future head of the household, the young *white Afrikaner* man.”

The only difference is that they include ‘race’ or ‘racially loaded’ terminology.

And now, a step further, let us now create a single statement from the originals:

> *“*There is hurt, there is pain, there is anger and there is even hatred *in my and my fellow black people’s hearts* about what happened here. I remember apartheid. It is read as an attack on the last vestiges of *Afrikaner* culture and heritage. Nobody feels this sense of loss and emasculation more directly than the future head of the household, the young *white Afrikaner* man.”

Now, reader, how would you describe this statement?

If you find this one unpleasant or difficult to digest, or even just one aspect of it so, I offer this. One of my research intentions was to locate a means of finding the agency to become authors of our own identity against the given utterances within culture. I chose to look at ‘race’ in this regard because it is one of the identity constitutes employed in contemporary South African socialisation, and it is done so as an assumed, essential truth. It is assumed by individuals and collectives with both pride and immense hurt. This complex dichotomy I came to appreciate through this journey as someone who grew up outside this context. The history books and news broadcasts did not transmit this human quality of ‘race’, it could not. In the same way this paper cannot capture all of my experience and the new knowledge I have received. However, in theatre I have begun to find some of the answers, and with performance experienced them, and through these two mediums seek to challenge the performance that is ‘race’.

> If our literature about race is lacking, then perhaps there is a need to define what race is, how it works...Drawing on critical race theory and performance studies, race is understood as a process rather than something that is fixed. Racial identity is produced and performed, embodied and enacted in the encounter of at least two bodies. Bhabha (1994) suggests that theory itself can lead to social change by shifting our understanding. If we view race as

> something that is created and constantly performed, we may create more space for play and social change in our work (Mayor, 2012: 215).

As this quote, acts as a false ending, I will offer one final comment, a call, from Brecht, as a final denouement.

I see why you created me. You talk too much.

> How can the theatre be both instructive and entertaining? How can it be divorced from spiritual dope traffic and turned from a home of illusions to a home of experiences? How can the unfree, ignorant man of our century, with his thirst for freedom and his hunger for knowledge; how can the tortured and heroic, abused and ingenious, changeable and world-changing man of this great and ghastly century obtain his own theatre which will help him to master the world and himself? (Leacher, 2004: 116).

- APPENDIX I -

‘T for Tea’ performance script.

The script of T for Tea as written and performed on the night of 22 November 2013, at the University of the Witwatersrand Theatre Complex.

The performer was researcher, Hamish Neill.

.....

‘T’ FOR TEA

Intro.

The stage is set-up in the configuration of ‘the game’, with a bath tub in the position of the authority. There is a single light illuminating the bathtub ominously. The LAYWER approaches the ‘start line’ of the game to present his case.

LAWYER: (Fumbling) You’re...honour. I would like to present my case. It is honestly ridiculous, but I have **no choice**. I-I-I (gulp) am suing you. For everything you’ve put on me.

Pulls out a tea cup from his case. Holds it demonstratively.

JOKER: Tea. (*Sip; contented sigh*) Nothing more dignified. Contained so perfectly in a delicate cup. Black or milky. Sugary or bland. Hot or iced. All you have to do is add boiling water to draw out the colour. Boiling water. One of the more refined legacies of colonialism. (*Takes another sip*) And how we enjoy it. Or not. Tea.

The Game.

JOKER: (*Throws cup away, removes jacket)* ~~Haibo~~[1]! But you don't know me! Hai, I apologise. Uhm, ok. How about a song? Yes? It's always a good way to break the ice. Come, I'll teach you.

Starts humming a tune, quietly at first, as if searching for it. It grows into a vocalised melody of "lahs" in a cappella.

I'm gonna teach you a song,
And it goes on and on.
And on and on

This is a simple song.
That goes on and on,
And on and on.

It won't take you too long
Until you sing this song.
That'll go on and on
[Gestures with hands for audience to join in]

Ok. This is where you join in. [Sings] And on and on (*Gestures and leads echo. Carries out process till audience sing echo).* Good. Ok, let's go.

I'm gonna teach you a song,
And it goes on and on,
And on and on (*echo rolls*)

I'll get you to play along,
You'll never know what is wrong,
As it goes on and on.

<u>The Game - You see?</u>

HAMISH: I once watched a game where players were tasked with simply crossing the finish line first by providing 'better' offerings to the referee. The most fascinating aspect of this game was how, in the face of being judged and evaluated as a means of progressing/advancing, all individuals did the same thing...they plan, carefully, what they will say in order to impress. Each tries to

[1] Haibo: South African expression of exacerbation.

develop a strategy which they feel will lead to victory. (*Pauses*)...let me show you.

History Lesson

Images being projected on screen as LAWYER prepares to present case. Taking a step forward from the starting point.

LAWYER: He listened as his father told a golden story he had never heard. A story whose very narrative is woven into his own fibre. Whose next word brought to life a part of his own history. A story that belonged to a man, a European immigrant to the dark continent. A 'settler' coming to find his own fortune in the land 'they' owned. Another 'baas' or 'sir' making his privileged way to the stolen land of plenty. These could be descriptions of part of the boy's history, ones that he does not wish to hold or share. Ones that the boy did not associate with his father. A man who, from his experience, does not perform these roles. Or did he?

The question pierced its way through the narrative fabric that had him suspended in it; *"Was he just another Oppressor?*" The boy's 'enlightened' conscience politely coughed up. His whole being knew that the answer **is** no. His father's story is simply one of a man who embarked on his own journey. Following a thread which seemed to offer an opportunity, but which promised him nothing. There were sections and details that had been omitted–for reasons the boy did not wish to know nor to unveil– but what did get shared was how his father moved through the region in search of his financial security. How he got: lucky breaks, swindled, humbled and persevered, all while life happened around him.

The boy drifted in-and-out of earnest listening and random imagining, both for the images that were conjured up, and for the questions that his own being generated. Each word, each name, each change of location brought the boy closer to life. Each of which developed this great tale, captivating him as it grew, forcing him to accept a part of his history that he had no control over.

Now, as he writes this reflection, he laughs – "*My history that I had no control over."* Ironic, yet true for us all. We are coloured before we are born. He was, in so many more ways than he could imagine, or even begin to, and yet, it was there. A volume of history filled with rises-and-falls, judgements, politics and travel, all of which he is born with. That is given to him, that he inherits without any choice or option to decline, and yet, he wouldn't choose to because he can only be him.

His story is my story is the boy's story, in part, and yet he doesn't hold it, but is informed by it. He listened to his father, he listened to his history.

The Game, you see?

So this game. It is very simple, you see. You have some people, players, or performers, who stand here. Each at their own starting point (*stands behind the roll that was pushed out second).* They're place of origin. This is key, because here they are the same. At the start we're all the same. It's fun at this point. In fact... (*Calls people from the audience*) Come, let's play. Or try. It's still fun now.

(*While positioning them*) You trust me? (*Encourages an answer)* Why? (*Holds eye contact for a moment*)

Over A Cup of Tea - Grandmothers

The actor returns to the box.

LAWYER: I wonder what would have happened if they had met.
If they had met me.
Would they have been disappointed? Because their bloodlines had been, contaminated?

What would they have said to their grandchild; who was different to them? Whose most immediate markings, for one, meant he was 'scientifically' inferior, and the other, that he was.....
I wonder what she would have called me?

Or maybe I am wrong? What if they both embraced me with open arms; both eager to lay claim and shower 'coo-ey-coo-coos' over this bundle of un-inscribed flesh.

The thought of my grandmother's meeting fills me with fear. An inexplicable yet fully known, undoubtedly understood, fear. One that is informed **not** by my personal experience, but by what the world has offered me.

Both of these, from stories shared, remarkable women are long gone now, and yet my fear persists.
Their images, captured in textured oil-paint and smoothed-fading photographic paper, don't display/bare the likeness of maternal sources of identity, love, or the occasional 'grandma' cuddle. These images, now, offer fuel for curiosity and fear. They are images, icons, of a series of stereotypical assumptions. Assumptions of the roles performed by each racial grouping. (work this)

- The quintessential “Big Mama”
- and the stoic, “Mother Hubbard”

My own grandmothers are lost to me behind the veil of race that colour the two black and white images of them.

The poetry of this statement is only as beautiful as the complexity of the metaphor it describes.
A metaphor whose complexity resides oh so comfortably in the.....

I am afraid that my ‘white’ grandmother would have belittled my ‘black’ grandmother, just as the ‘race’ game dictates. That while I would be cuddled-and-cooed in the parlour by the one, the other would be beckoned to come and change my dirty diaper.

I am even afraid that the one would have...

I wonder if they were to have met in a room. Face-to-face. What they would have said to each other. Whether, over a cup of tea, these two women would have found a common ground in their woman-ness, their motherhood, their humanity. I long to dream so, and yet cannot fully appreciate my fantasy for fear that they would have hated each other simply because the world they lived in told them so. (Sounds ridiculous? What about agency? Well, did YOU chose to subscribe to ‘racialism’ at any point?)

Or, perhaps, just for a moment, they could. They would find that recognition in humanity. That somehow, in my fantasy, they might just sit at that table, drinking tea, as they spoke over their grandson. Sharing stories of my parents as they gleefully recollected over the ‘nose I share with my mother’ and ‘the toes I got from my father.’ I long for this dream.

You took this away.

The Game, you see?

JOKER: See, there you are the same. Now the...uhm...let’s call him the **Authority**. He stands here. And the game then begins. **It’s a race, you see**. A race. And you win by being better than the other performers. By impressing the **Authority**, whatever that means.
But then, something, happens.
Those players, performers, start to perform. Start to **really** play. Want to see?

(*Slips into tub)*

Washing my skin

(Recording) Water runs down, never taking more than what is dead/cells no longer living flow in the mix of suds and 99.9% germ killing lather/essential oils and lipids

removed in a chemical attack from the hygiene I need to remove the glistening/skin shines under the new baptism, only film thick/**colour never fading**/

LAWYER: I am still ashamed of it. My mark. I remember being asked by my niece one day, “What’s that on your arm?” I had a witty and convenient answer already prepared, “It’s because I didn’t finish mixing in my mummy’s tummy.” The table came alight with laughter. My father, now a deep rose from laughing, said, “Ah, that’s brilliant.” My mother shook her head, the corners of her mouth upturned, “This boy.” I look across the room and see the monster staring back at me. The laughter keeping it subdued. It’s easier to hide after discovering a monster. Just because there is always the chance that you might lose. And then what?

I still don’t know if my niece ever got that.

This mark never goes away. I know that.

“You must scrub when you bath. It will come out then.”
“I do. But it’s not...”
“No. You must scrub. It’ll go over time.”

As the instructing rages on, I look down, taking in the words. I look up and see the monster staring back. Eyes ever open. Blankly looking at me. Asking. Always asking.

I think back to when I was younger, I would look at my Dad’s skin. Checking for any of the same markings. And patches. Nothing. There were a few spots here and there, and a spiky beard that would make that scarping sound against his razor. His portable radio blaring out BBC news from the bathtub’s rim. These mornings were always my favourite. They were peaceful. Dad’s baths were peaceful.

Build begins

Even when I would bath with my brother or sister. We would play games, splashing and laughing, watching our finger tips crinkle and wrinkle.

I remember my sister, usually in the girliest little dress imaginable, would call from the house, “Boysh. Boysh. It’s time to baf.”

Dusty, grass stain skin, itching with scratches and mild-sunburn, would shoot into the olive green bathroom. The tub only a quarter full, sometimes with bubbles.

I'd watch was the water became stained with the same dusty colour. And then, as my brother was scrubbed clean, how his brown hue returned, glistening.

I would look intently...but not for the marks. I had forgotten. I saw my brother. (*Smiles*) It's my turn now.

I would always try taste the soap. Secretly. To see if it tasted the way it smelt. It never has.

(*Eyes closed*) As the water was splashed onto my body, which would be lifted and twisted, exposing each inch of play-filled skin, I would simply wait. Fighting back the laughter from the tickles I felt.

[PAUSE]

The problem is, while I tried to taste the soap, I would remember, I forgot to scrub. Because I never saw the mark. It isn't there for me. It's not there. (*Head drops*) You're marks are not there!

Removes shirt

LAWYER: These are the marks you left on me. Like the scars of lashings from the slave masters, they marked my skin. Violent strikes from history, society, policy that you all watched happen. *(Lights up on audience)* As you silently sat, passively absorbed the violence that was played upon me. My body. You sat there and watched. Because you played the game. And simply wore your marks. The ones that took away. The ones that got me into this sick game of yours. These marks come off. These marks are **NOT MINE. ARE NOT ME. IT'S UP TO YOU TO WEAR YOURS. I WON'T. NOT ANYMORE.**

I don't care how many you have got playing this game. How many pointlessly running a race in a wheel that gets them nowhere. I will not be coloured by anyone. Let me be me.

Step outside.
Exits

END.

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