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Beneath the violence: a performance as a research inquiry into the use of performance as a rite of passage to better understand black masculinity

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University of the Witwatersrand

MADT Research Report

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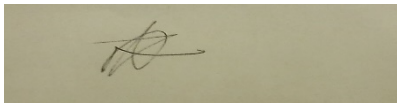
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Beneath the Violence: A performance as a research inquiry into the use of performance as a rite of passage to better understand black masculinity.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this research report is my own original work and that it has not previously, whether in its entirety or in part, been submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand or any other for the purposes of a degree.

Name: Jermain Johnson_____

Signature: _____

Date: 05/03/2021 _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank God for all the opportunities given to me to learn during this process and the life-long lessons that have been gifted to me through this process.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this Performance as Research project was to gain a better understanding of black masculinity in urban Johannesburg, and the underlying different narratives of young black men in contemporary South Africa. This Performance as Research project made use of Applied Theatre techniques, Drama Therapy techniques and auto-ethnography as methods of inquiry to facilitate data collection and the creation of performances. It also included, specifically, autobiographical work, Invisible Theatre, and Self-Revelatory performance. The research locates itself within the Creative Research framework, as the dialogue on black masculinity was largely articulated through a creative process (a series of applied drama social inquiries) and a performance (pre, during and post). The researcher made use of movement as the medium to argue for the use of performance as a rite of passage to potentially transform held narratives on black masculinity, and to question the extent of the transformation.

Keywords: black masculinity, performance, rite of passage, drama therapy, invisible theatre, self-revelatory performance, auto-ethnographic work, performance as research and movement.

RATIONALE

The Creative Research used in this study began with the desire to explore how performance, could investigate the relationship between the black male body and violence.

The study was motivated by a deep need to better understand black masculinity in urban Johannesburg and the different narratives of young black men living in contemporary South Africa. I wanted to look for and understand the narratives which stereotype young black males as violent and which differ from the ones I hold about my own and others' blackness and maleness.

I live in Johannesburg and as a commuter I use the public transport system and have been a victim of muggings at the hands of young black men on more than one occasion. After speaking to several people who have had similar experiences, I felt the need to find out if there was a different story waiting to be told.

As a student in Drama Therapy I learnt about alternative methods such as Performance as Research and so, with the tools that exist within that practice, I searched for new perspectives, first by looking at my own experience and then at the stories of young black men.

The Creative Research consisted of several stages, namely:

- A research proposal
- A framing document
- A solo drama therapy autobiographical performance
- A social gendered inquiry through Invisible Theatre
- An initial Performance as Research project
- A reworking of the Performance as Research project and its final performance
- An installation as a response to the Performance as Research
- A research photo essay

The research report takes into account all of the above stages and consists of:

- Chapter One: The Framing document
- Chapter Two: The Separation: A multifaceted performance process
- Chapter Three: The Liminal Space: An invitation to empathetic listening
- Chapter Four: The Incorporation: A public ceremonious sharing through performance
- Chapter Five: Post Process Reflection
- Appendix A: A Photographic Essay representation
- Appendix B: A Video representation
- Appendix C: A Video representation

CHAPTER ONE

THE FRAMING DOCUMENT

1.1 The journey to a better understanding of black masculinity

My journey has been nothing short of transformative on a very personal level. The questions initially were largely directed at looking at behaviour in our society, and specifically at that of the young black man. My assumption on entering this process was that this group were primarily violent, and I looked for a way to use performance as a rite of passage to discover an alternative narrative to that which is typically associated with the young black man.

The process, by its very nature, forced me to investigate and understand my personal experiences and the way I express my maleness and blackness. As the process unfolded I found that the discussion shifted from just treating the black young male as an anthropological subject to understanding the interconnections of my story with the stories of those who had somehow been affected by damaging stereotypes. This shift in approach highlighted for me the aptness of Lila Watson's comment: “If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together” (Watson, 1985).

I soon found that the process of creative research and the use of inquiry mirrored the different stages that I had envisioned and which I wanted to highlight on stage. It is still to be argued to what extent the music and the performance, outlined below, helped me to constructively relate and connect all the stories and points of view on black masculinity which I encountered during my research.

1.2 The Performance Contextualized, Music and Movement choices

Part One - Discovering the places of brokenness

Music by: Max Richter,

Song Title: War Anthem

The first part of the performance explored the places of vulnerability that are sometimes masked by aggression or violent behaviour. The music and movement invited the performer to mourn or grieve over the places of brokenness that are often not recognized or acknowledged. This point of departure came from my having become aware of my own vulnerability during an autobiographical performance entitled “One Black Man”. That performance revealed my unprocessed stories related to trauma. It also raised questions about the lack of “safe spaces” or support for men, young black men in particular.

Part Two - The Calling, The place of Contention

Music by: Thandiswa Mazwai

Song Tile: Iyeza (Thongo Lam)

The second part of the performance, invited thinking and discussion round the understanding of blackness in relation to cultural rites of passage and the asserting of one’s identity in relation to an ancestral calling and rituals. This part of the performance led me, as a researcher, to give considerable thought to the connection between “blackness as a political statement” and “blackness as consciousness”. The role played by the performance process and by Performance as Research in the unpacking of these specific themes is still debatable.

Part Three - It can be neither Yin nor Yang

Music by: Sally Nyolo

Song Title: Tam Tam

The third section of this performance related strongly to defining the difference between the socially expected roles of men and the dehumanizing of the black male. The black man has to confront the perceived differences between religious perspectives and cultural values. Can these two opposing ideas, co-exist? Can they

exist as in the eastern philosophy of the yin and yang? What role can performance possibly play in marrying what seem to be very conflicting ideas?

Part Four - Where can she be found?

Music by: Max Richter

Song Tile: She remembers

The discovery of “the other” in this section relates to a social inquiry conducted by the researcher as the character of 'Celeste', using Invisible Theatre techniques. The purpose of this part of the research was to look at ideas relating to 'toxic masculinities' and what might emerge out of the experience of presenting myself as 'the other' in a social context. It also stimulated dialogue about the femininity within masculinity, and what is the role of delicacy and vulnerability.

The Conclusion - What happens now?

Music by: Coldplay

Song Title: O (Fly On)

The final part of this performance attempted to find the link between the different parts of the experiment, the processes and the shapes of 'the young black men'. It looked at the question of how masculinity can be defined. Obviously it is not singular but has multiple expressions. There is a solid foundation or connection between each of these different parts, because, like the performance process, it is a container that holds together each part uniquely and collectively.

1.3 INTRODUCTION

My identity in the South African context has always been contentious especially when it comes to having to define myself. Am I 'coloured', 'black' or 'other'? This constant negotiation of the self, and my narrative of self-identification, is affected by the immediate environment in which I am operating, the liminal space, and is

dependent on the social context. Goffman suggests that the performance of our identity is dramaturgical in that we are all just actors trying to control and manage our public image; our actions are based on how others might see us (Goffman, 1959).

My constant awareness of my identity within a particular social context is hyper-sensitized when I am experiencing myself as 'the young black man' as there is an unspoken negative stereotype which is projected onto this group of people. The stereotyping which I use is informed by my past lived experiences, and by how I see young black men being represented in the media, not only in our South African context but also in other contexts, such as the United States of America.

Leigh Donaldson, a Mail and Guardian journalist, explains how the media plays a critical role in the negative associations attached to the young black male. His explanation includes a study conducted by The Opportunity Agenda in 2011 which found that:

> *"… Negative mass media portrayals were strongly linked with lower life expectations among black men. These portrayals, constantly reinforced in print media, on television, the internet, fiction shows, print advertising, and video games, shape public views of and attitudes toward men of colour. They not only help create barriers to advancement within our society but also "make these positions seem natural and inevitable" (Donaldson 2015).*

The media influences the way society sees the young black male body with reports of police brutality and the innocent killing of young black men. The result of this misrepresentation is that only in a few instances are black males put forward as positive role models. The Opportunity Agenda further shows that:

> *"There is an overall under-representation of black men as 'talking head' experts, users of luxury items in print ads and as reliable and relatable characters with fully developed backgrounds in fiction shows and films" (Donaldson, 2015).*

This continual reinforcing of negative images together with very little positive representation of black men has a further impact in that: *black boys and men internalize biases and stereotypes and, through their behaviour, reinforce and even*

perpetuate the misrepresentations. They become victims of perception (Donaldson, 2015).

There seems to be little interrogation of the other aspects of black masculinity, whether it be in an American or South African context. And so, in view of all the injustices that exist in social conditioning and in the portrayal of black men, and regardless of whether or not the information is factual, as a researcher, and a black male, I wanted to use performance and self-revelatory processes to discover if there are other aspects worth considering.

1.4 Through the South African lens

In order to increase my understanding of the young black male in the workplace, and in the social contexts in which I constantly move I decided to create a performance to be used as a research process. I set about recording conversations and interviews with other young black men between the ages of 24 and 29. I invited them to share their lived experiences as young black men. This was an important part of the process. I needed their stories to serve as data for the performance which would be part of the research process and I also hoped that the telling of their personal stories would be therapeutic. Michael White says:

> *"The stories we tell ourselves about our own lives determine which events we consider important. Our self-narrative determines how we interpret our experiences. It is the stories that persons have about their lives that determines both the ascription of meaning to experiences and the selection of those aspects of experience that are to be given expression. It follows therefore that these stories are constitutive of shaping persons lives" (White 1989, p 6-7).*

The next part of the process involved the embodying and performing of the stories which I had collected. I picked out three different stories and chose a public space (outside Wits Theatre) to play-out these narratives. The post-performance experience increased my understanding of performance.



Performance as Research examination, performed by Jermain Johnson at Wits Theatre

Ervin Goffman says that there is,

> *"…a relationship between performance and life… an actor performs on a setting which is constructed of a stage and a backstage; the props in both settings direct his action; he is being watched by an audience, but at the same time he may be an audience for his viewers' play…(According to Goffman) the social actor in many areas of life will take on an already established role, with preexisting front and props as well as the costume he would wear in front of a specific audience. The actor's main goal is to keep coherent and adjust to the different settings offered him. This is done mainly through interaction with other actors" (Goffman, 1959).*

The roles we perform, that are parts of ourselves, made me question how the young black man's narrative came to be scripted and dominated, even directed, by the stereotyping that exists in most social contexts. Is it possible that some underlying factors have contributed to those statistics which reveal, in the main, that young black males are the perpetrators of violent crime?

A journal article using available data on the relationship between race, class and violent crime showed that, *'African and coloured men are disproportionately affected by deaths by assault' (Silber & Geffen, 2016)*. The implication is that the black male is more likely to die violently.

The Global Study on Homicide underlines the high homicide rate in the country and offers the following explanation: "*South Africa, a country with a high homicide rate, displays a pattern of lethal male violence similar to the Americas, with (the) highest shares of homicide victims in the age groups between 20 and 39. This is a pattern of male violence that owes much to the types of risk-seeking behaviour in which certain disadvantaged groups in South African society routinely engage*" *(UNODC 2011).* These statistics are alarming and need to be understood as an issue that is related to hegemonic masculinity and its relationship to men and their leaning to violence.

This leads me to ask if the prescribed roles of these black young men are not only re-enforced by their socioeconomic position but are also communicated to them on several levels. Perhaps their violence provides them with a way to process or find meaning in the different kinds of pressure.

I believe that we need to look at how to address some of the prescribed roles arising out of the unequal social, political and economic systems in which the young men find themselves. We also need to look at how performance, as a rite of passage, can become a means to finding a better understanding of what informs the violent behavior.

1.5 The Conceptual Framework

The following terms will be used in the post-performance process to adequately name the experience or the changes in my understanding of the particular concepts and also to describe the use of Performance as Research as the tool with which I will look for hidden meanings.

Key definitions

Black: “…rooted in the school of thought referred to as black consciousness, which defines blacks as those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realization of their aspirations. This definition illustrates to us; being black is not a matter of pigmentation - being black is a reflection of a mental attitude” (Biko, 1971).

Masculinity: "Masculinity refers to the behaviors, social roles, and relations of men within a given society as well as the meanings attributed to them. The term 'masculinity' stresses gender, unlike the term 'male', which stresses biological sex. Thus studies of masculinities need not be confined to biological males” (Kimmel & Bridges, 2014).

Rites of passage: “A rite of passage is a ceremony and marks the transition from one phase of life to another. Although it is often used to describe the tumultuous transition from adolescence to adulthood, it does refer to any of life’s transitions. There are many passages in our lives if we choose to mark and celebrate them…including rituals and ceremonies that help adults transition to new life roles along the path of adulthood - into meaningful elder hood” (Stages of a Rite of Passage · Rites of Passage · Leading Vision Quests Since 1977, 2015).

Invisible Theatre: “…seeks never to be recognized as theatre, performed in a public place. The goal is to make the intervention as realistic as possible so that it provokes spontaneous responses. The scene must be loud enough to be heard and noticed by people, but not so loud or conspicuous that it appears staged. Invisible theatre can thus achieve things that most other theatre cannot, removing barriers between performer and spectator and creating very accessible conflictual situations in which people can rethink their assumptions and engage with sensitive issues they might otherwise avoid” (beautifultrouble.org).

Performance: “Performance is a genre in which art is presented 'live' usually by the artist but sometimes with collaborators or performers” (Butler, 2018).

Performance as Research: "A research approach that canters performance as a primary mode of knowing, experiencing and radically intervening in the world" (Donkor, 2007).

Also to quote Chapman and Sawchuck, who Lewis cites: "… a form of cultural analysis, research-creation partakes of the spectacle of the work of art and its demonstration of alternative frameworks for understanding, communicating, and disseminating knowledge" (Lewis & Tulk, 2016).

Dance (Movement): "Dance, as a topic of scientific study, is ultimately about action and conscious human intentions. The processes of moving and giving meaning to movement are the source of dance experience, of which the dance product is but the visible sign" (Blacking, 1983).

Self-Revelatory Performance: "Self-Revelatory performance, considered both a form of drama therapy and a unique type of theatre, is defined as a form in which a performer creates an original piece of theatre based on existing life issues in need of therapeutic exploration" (Emunah, 2015).

Autobiographical Performance: "…is a promissory act. Not because it can only promise possible change but because it catches its participants - often by surprise - in a contract with possibility: with imagining what might be, could be, should be" (Heddon, 2007).

Auto ethnography: "...seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

1.6 Performance as a Research Process

This research was located within the Performance as Research paradigm. The nature of this research is embodied. It values physical and emotional intelligence as part of a holistic approach which can lead to a better understanding of our humanity. I hoped that, with the use of this approach, the praxis would be seen as credible. Lewis and Tulk speak to this, saying, "...*knowledge formed through the material process of performance can be valued as equivalent to knowledge produced through*

speculative and analytical modes"(Lewis & Tulk, 2016). Over and above the veracity of the approach, I hoped that all of the embodied and performance process driven techniques would contribute to the body of knowledge that exists in Performance Studies, and also to the subject matter. The research passed through the following four stages.

Stage One

This initial stage, in which I looked at the underlying assumptions surrounding the violence associated with a young black male, was a critical review of my 2017 autobiographical performance entitled One Black Man. It was performed as part of a research project entitled Chapter 27 and focused on understanding the held narratives of young black men. The narratives were a useful source of data and were used to find which elements of performance could be used as a rite of passage to transform held narratives. The main focus was to understand the collective, social identity of the young black male. Distressingly, what was mostly revealed through the embodying of the stories was that there is a great sense of being disposable. This then led me to question, what might be revealed through a rite of passage performance focusing on my own black masculinity.

Stage Two

The next stage of the process involved a series of social inquiries through the use of both Invisible Theatre and gender performativity. This embodied experiential knowledge enlarged my understanding of the behaviour of the young black male within the social setting. These social inquiries were carried out using a different character to test my assumption that the young black male has, inherently, a violent or aggressive attitude when in the presence of the 'other'.

Stage three

This stage involved taking the data collected through the autobiographical performance, the performance as research, and the social inquiry data collection process, and using it to develop a self-revelatory performance within the field of Drama Therapy. This self-revelatory performance was viewed by an invited external

group of people and explored the themes that had emerged in the research process. The purpose of the self-revelatory performance was to create a living moment that could not be pre-determined. The conditions inherent in this kind of performance allow for new knowledge and understandings to emerge. I documented this process carefully to enable me draw further conclusions. Emunah believes that in a self-revelatory process one experiences a level of change. She says, "....*part of the purpose of the self-revelatory performance is that it is not just a telling of one's story or life struggles, it is also about transformation*" (Emunah, 2015).

Stage Four

This stage involved performing the underlying or overlapping narratives which had been collected, and also reviewing through the different processes and social inquiries my attempt to answer my question: in what ways had performance as a rite of passage possibly transformed or helped me to a better understanding of black masculinity? The performance was to be followed by a report detailing the findings, and also a media journal of pictures and recordings (audio and video) to aid with the critical reviewing of the entire process.

I used Performance as Research to see if the processes of self-revelatory drama, social inquiry, and autobiographical work could positively influence black young males. The themes or findings could not be anticipated, as I was required as the researcher, performer and auto ethnographer to fully engage with the process, and to retrospectively review some of my findings objectively. I hoped that the performances would reveal what is behind the assumption that the young black male is inherently violent and possibly allow for other narratives to emerge about black masculinity.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SEPARATION, A MULITIFACETED PERFORMANCE PROCESS

"*The usual hero adventure begins with someone from whom something has been taken…the person then takes off on a series of adventures beyond the ordinary, either to recover what has been lost or to discover some life-giving elixir. It's usually a cycle, a coming and a returning***"** Joseph Campbell.

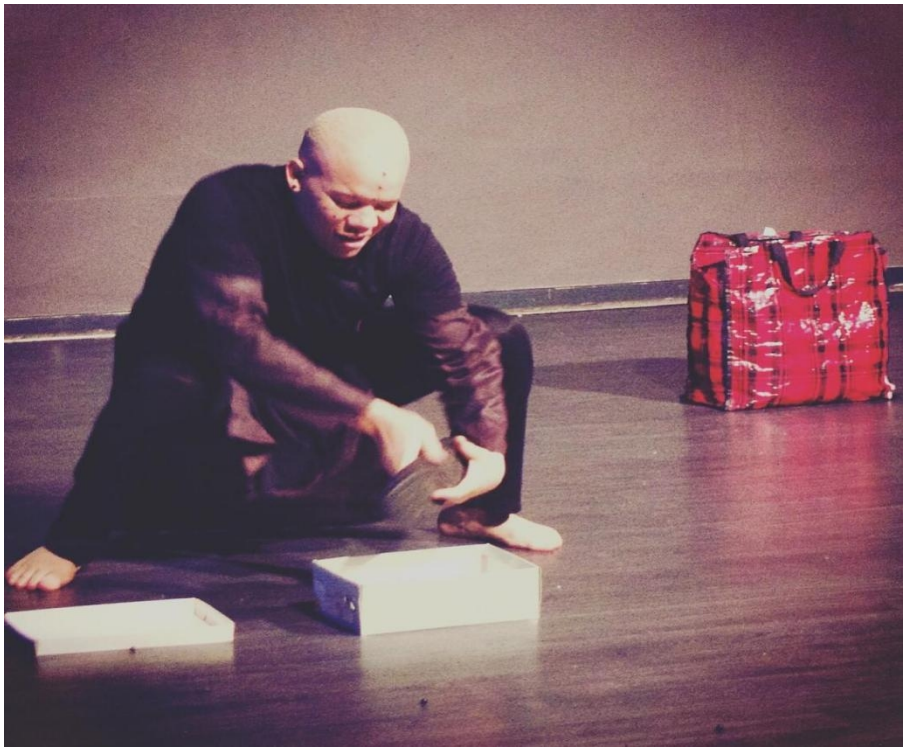
2.1 The First Stage of the Passage

Every rite of passage is characterized by different stages which an initiate must pass through in order to achieve their final state of change; in most instances the change relates to their social status. There are different ways in which rites of passage are observed in society. Whether they are of a religious (baptism of a child), physiological (bodily changes during puberty) or spiritual in nature, they mostly follow a similar process. The first stage of the process is identified as the separation. This is where the initiate is separated from their familiar environment and in most instances some form of physical act or action signifies their entry into this new phase. An example of this kind of signifier is the enrolling of new soldiers into the Defence Force and is the climax of their journey to becoming a soldier. It is a rite of passage, and on most occasions they are required to mark this new stage by shaving their hair.

My investigation into which element of performance would give me a deeper understanding of black masculinity led me to look at my own and others' narratives on maleness and blackness. I saw that I first needed to use the stories within my ethnography to start me on my rite of passage. I believed that this would lead me to my goal which was to shift perspectives on black masculinity.

2.1.1 The Autobiographical Performance - One Black Man

Towards the end of the Honor's program in Drama Therapy (November 2017) I had to share stories from my life's journey through a performance.



This kind of performance is referred to as an autobiographical performance and is also known as Theatre of the Self. The telling and sharing of the stories served to mark a transition in my training as a Drama Therapist. It acknowledged the completion of one phase of my training and my entrance into the next phase. It was similar to a rite of passage.

As part of the transition from one phase of my training into the next, Autobiographical Theatre as described by Shapiro (2016) required me to dramatize and tell my personal story. Although the intention of an autobiographical performance is never to achieve or resolve a particular personal issue often the experience of performing a piece of autobiographical theatre has healing benefits because this type of performance still involves the therapeutic components of a Self-Rev (Shapiro, 2016). I chose movement as the creative expression by which to share parts of my personal story. The reason for choosing movement was that it requires the body to be fully present and involved, and often the essence of our history/stories is held in the body.

The performance was carefully crafted, with a lecturer helping me to identify the parts of my personal story that I wanted to share with an audience. A red and black travel bag, acted as a specific metaphor, and different kinds of shoes wrapped in boxes acted as symbols and were an important part of my performance. These metaphors and symbols were used to give some aesthetic distance between myself as the performer and the personal material being shared in the performance. They were there to help me tell the story without feeling overwhelmed by its content. The three pairs of shoes were symbolic of three different parts of my story. It was anticipated that these objects/symbols would enable me to share my story with ease and that they would also carry the themes and messages present in the story.

I made very specific choices, as far as things like costume, music and choreography were concerned as I was relying on them to help me tell the story and to open up new meanings for me as a performer. The rehearsal process evoked conscious thought and even the performance required me to be very self-investigative as each part of the performance forced me to look into my own story through a creative lens. Unexpectedly the process of creating the performance showed that I had leaned towards a particular structure. The performance, as it emerged, was divided into three distinct parts, almost mirroring the different stages of any rite of passage, preliminal, liminal and postliminal (Van Gennep, 1987). This way of approaching my creative work or a performance has now become the ritualistic frame work for all my research.

Each section of the story was symbolically represented, the shoes carrying the message in the story. There was a pair of black converse All-Stars, a pair of red high heel shoes, and a pair of black and white ballet shoes. The black converse All-Stars represented where, for me, dance began... in a community arts group called Urban Stage. The style of dance used was very much freestyle and modern, and reflected, through movement, what was happening in our social climate. At that time the trending moves were a lot like Pantsula which is “a syncopated, quick-stepping, and low to the ground form of dance”. As each chapter of the story unfolded I became aware of how much of my forgotten journey I was traversing and how the stories which I had chosen, were all associated with themes of vulnerability, and unprocessed emotional childhood trauma, mostly related to physical violence, and sexual assault.

I choreographed and rehearsed each part of the story in my own time, and found the correct props, the costume and the music to help me in the telling of the story. All the creative elements, the space, the lighting, the costume, the props, the music and even the choreography came together in the performance and I believe they not only provided an artistic, aesthetic performance but they also created a safety net for myself as the performer.

2.2 What Happened

The time finally arrived to perform the story in the presence of an invited audience who would witness the sharing of a very personal story. A performance with an audience present shifts the meaning of the created work for the performer. I would like to believe that this is somehow connected to the act of witnessing which is taking place during the process.

There was a moment during the performance, in which the lyrics which I had chosen seemed to take on a deeper meaning and relevance than before. The lyrics were from a song titled “Starry Starry night”, written by Don McClean - also known as Vincent. At that moment I found myself completely overwhelmed by a rush of emotion. All the memories of childhood trauma that had never been processed, seemed to surface. It was as though unconscious, suppressed feelings were finally finding expression through the performance. For a brief moment all I did, or could do, was to weep as the memories rushed through my mind and over my body. It was almost as though the 'performance' no longer mattered, yet, in retrospect, I can now see that the moment of weeping and showing my vulnerability was an important and integral part of the performance.

There was a sense of relief, which came, I believe, from having had the opportunity to share my story through a creative lens. Drama Therapy refers to experiences such as mine as being cathartic. It is defined as “a process of releasing and thereby providing relief from, strong, or repressed emotions.” The process of creating, and of performing, all contributed to that one cathartic moment. The embodied experience which was also a therapeutic and discovery moment was part of what made me want to better understand black masculinity, using performance as the lens.

2.3 What I learnt

The biggest lesson which came from reviewing that particular performance was to find that of all the tools which were used to investigate the particular topic the most important was structure: the formulating, step by step, of a process plus the presence of a supportive audience to witness a sensitive topic. All of these made a contribution to my learning process.

When I refer to structure, I think of all the creative elements that make up a performance. It includes things like the rehearsal, the costumes, the music, choreography, the space and props. All of these are important because they provided a secure and safe space for vulnerable or overwhelming material that may surface during, before or after the process. The body has memory, both emotional and physical memories which are related to unprocessed trauma, abuse and emotional wounding. A clear structure or a step by step process provides support and allows room for the discovery of new things. It also provides room for the processing and exploring of suppressed feelings.

The contribution of the audience is valuable as it enables the performer to get a different perspective or insight into a particular aspect of the performance. The witnessing of the audience adds another dimension to the process and experience. Also, the audience can validate and affirm one's story which further expands the validity of the self. I believe that there is therapeutic value in a witnessing presence.

The final lesson to be taken away from that process and performance was that which came out of my experience of vulnerability. I think one cannot predict when that moment of complete vulnerability (catharsis) will happen, or if it will happen in the same way with a different performance and a different audience. In essence, it cannot be controlled by any external factors.

2.4 The Performance as Research - Chapter 27



The process used to construct a performance around the stories of the three young black men that I had interviewed was slightly different as I had to portray and perform three different stories. I had asked a series of questions relating to their understanding of what it means to be a young black man in the South African context. Using their material, in audio format, I found themes and focal points in each of the interviews and used these to put together a performance. The choice of performance as the mode for show casing what had come out of the interviews was purely the result of my having experienced the significant value which the telling of my own story had added to my experience of black masculinity. I chose a site specific space outside Wits Theatre, three different costumes and props, music and the actual audio of the people that I had interviewed. The stories of the young black men represented a group who, according to statistics, are seen to be a threat in our South African context. Immersing myself in their personal stories gave me another opportunity to get further insights, on how the performance of stories can reveal different things.

What happened?

The first story I told through movement and performance was that of a young man who works in a very labour intensive industry. His sharing of what it means for him to be young and black, was highlighted by his use of language which he used to assert his identity in the world. In articulating his message, I was drawn toward one of the authentic dance forms in South Africa, known as “pantsula”. I used the actual dance moves to draw attention to what is often seen as a voiceless, or silenced group. The young black man in the lower income working class - what is he saying?

The dance and the verbatim dialogue challenged the status quo and the stereotypes associated with people like that young black man. Gregory Maqoma said, ““Pantsula reflected the changing landscape of the township itself,” so the choice of dance style and music was a way to create a moment when the thoughts of those in the townships, and their understanding of maleness and blackness could be reflected back to me. The costume was a red overall pointing to the majority of the workforce who are engaged in manual labour.

The second story was that of a young man who finds himself working in a white-collar industry... the financial services industry. His story was slightly different in that his experience of what it means to be black and male came from a politicized idea. He felt demeaned by being placed in a position merely to meet regulatory requirements as they relate to BEE (Black Economic Empowerment). It almost seemed that he had been rendered mute and silent by the organizational structure, and that his presence was of no consequence. In his sharing I noted how politics can relate to feelings.

The costume represented upper class corporate males, and the music also fleshed out his narrative.

The third and final story, within the same performance, shared the sentiments of another young black man. The telling of his story was slightly different in that he had a very optimistic view of what it means to be young and black. He acknowledged the differences in culture, and the disparities that sometime exist within each culture, and the sub-cultures as experienced by the black young male, yet, in the face of these very difficult conditions, the story he carried was one of resilience.

The costume chosen for the telling of this story was very different, and represented that of an athlete that had to compete in a particular race. The music also expressed the sentiments of the young man.

What I learnt

The process of finding different narratives, and then retelling them through a performance invited me, as the researcher, to look at the question of black masculinity from several different angles. It gave me the opportunity to hear some of the common ideas that are shared among young black men. If there is a common theme, then I think it is that each of these storytellers expressed the need to be acknowledged or seen.

The process of stepping out of my own story and stepping into another's story in a performance, made me aware of my deep need, as a researcher, not only to understand my own story, but also the stories of the young black men who have had similar experiences to mine.

This process also invited me to listen with more empathy, and to develop a different kind of thinking around black masculinity. Up to that point my perspectives had been very limited.

The final lesson is very similar to the "embodied" experience that happened during "One Black Man". During the telling of the second story (the man who works in the white collar industry) I felt a very strong reaction to the word OBJECT, which he used to express how he felt in the work place. That moment for me was visceral.

I believe that the word held such deep meaning for me because of the performative elements used in the telling of this story. It spoke to some level of my being which had either been disregarded or rendered invisible as a young black man. In that moment I experienced an embodied learning from what seemed to be the theme of all their stories, that of not being acknowledged, or of being rendered invisible and reduced to the level of an object.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LIMINAL SPACE: AN INVITATION TO EMPATHETIC LISTENING

“It became a time to walk in the shoes of another to better understand myself and the other.”

3.1 The Second Stage of the Passage

The stage that follows the separation stage in a rite of a passage is referred to as the liminal or transitional stage. This is when initiates are between two different stages and is a rather Grey and difficult part of the process. I see the social inquiries which I conducted through the use of gender performativity and Invisible Theatre in this light. In my search for more insights into black masculinity, I posed the question - how would I experience males if I presented myself differently within a social context and did not present myself as male?

3.2 What Happened

I decided to create a persona named 'Celeste' and that she would be 'the other' that I would use to find out about men and the popular stories around toxic masculinity. The purpose of this exercise was to learn as much as I could, through an embodied experience, as the body records all of our visceral experiences. In fact Drama Therapy, as a field of practice, advocates for and invites clients to move from positional thinking, to a space of doing.

On three different occasions, with breaks in between, I presented 'Celeste' within a social context. Two were in the academic space, and the third was within a less controlled environment.

3.2.1 The first episode with 'Celeste'

I remember feeling slightly anxious and also vulnerable. I didn't know what I would be met with the day I stepped into a public place as a female or even a trans-

gendered person. I wondered how I would handle social aggression from a society that has drawn up clear lines for what is appropriate, acceptable and welcomed. The make-up, heels and skirt would offer no protection from the anticipated onslaught of insults, or ridicule. It was extremely uncomfortable learning to walk in shoes that were not my own!

I spent most of the first day within the confines of the University. I went to my scheduled classes for the day as the persona of 'Celeste' and, to my surprise, the social aggression or hostility I had anticipated never materialized. I realized that I had an exaggerated idea of what it would be like to be a victim of toxic masculinity. This embodiment of an 'other' challenged my assumption and I felt that I needed to put it to the test a few more times.

3.2.2 The second episode with 'Celeste'

I made another attempt to find, through an embodied experience and the use of Invisible Theatre what the young black man would do in a social setting to an 'other'. I believe that students who are arts focused are a lot more open and less critical of 'other' presenting genders so in this second attempt I took the social inquiry to a different part of Campus. I moved away from the Humanities space to the Commerce space. In this second episode I was both the researcher and at the same time the subject. It was a very different experience, as there was a lot more staring and from what I could tell questioning. On a couple of occasions I was able to enter into a dialogue as some were willing to share their experience as a 'Celeste' within a social context.

A large part of the awkwardness arose out of the fact that a character like 'Celeste' was unfamiliar to some of them, and they could not help staring. I had initially interpreted the stares as judgmental or a form of social aggression especially if the person was a young black man. The misunderstandings were cleared up though when I engaged in dialogue on what had been their lived experiences.

One unexpected challenge during this episode was that, on the same Campus, the organizers of an event were inviting people to come forward to perform, as a way to give away prizes. I did not participate, as I had this contradictory position of being a

male who was presenting himself as another gender through dress and hair style. Has made me reflect on the ugliness of not being allowed to do what comes naturally. I was not welcome in the embodiment of 'Celeste'.

In retrospect, I believe that the discomfort had something to do with having to decide between my masculine and feminine personae, and at that stage I hadn't decided which would be dominant if I heeded the call to participate in a public dance activity. I wondered if my embodied reality at that moment was similar to that which challenges the young black man who is straddling two world views and could their discomfort possibly lead to a cognitive dissonance which is then articulated through violence?

3.2.3 The third episode as 'Celeste'

I had to make one final attempt to gather information through social inquiry and I decided to choose a completely different setting, the public streets of Braamfontein during the evening. I remember that I had an unexplained sense of fear while preparing for that evening's social inquiry. The sense of fear came from not knowing what I would be exposed to when I conducted a social inquiry outside of the walls of the University. Within the walls of the University there are policies and procedures that are set in place that largely govern how people should behave.

The time finally arrived and I set out for Braamfontein, with a friend. The first thing I experienced as 'Celeste' was unwanted and unwelcomed catcalling and sexual comments. I realized then that the objectifying of the female body is firmly embedded in a patriarchal society that accepts male dominance, and even violence, as some entitlement which comes with that position in society.

I then became aware of the male privileges I have, as a cisgender male in my social contexts and that kind of unwarranted harassment is not something that I am privy to.

3.3 What I Learnt

There were several valuable lessons that this stage of the journey brought home to me; some of them relate to the approach and others to what I discovered as I

continued to look for “what’s beneath the violence”. Some of these valuable insights, I believe, served as useful information for the development and creation of a performance that would speak to the issues I felt it necessary to address.

3.3.1 The use of ritual as a means to safeguard the performer

I had two very visceral experiences during the social inquiries; the first followed the first episode with 'Celeste'. I remember my body having a physical reaction when I was changing from that which Celeste was wearing, into my own clothes. The action of stepping in and out of character, requires certain ritualistic practices to ensure that I as performer, researcher and auto-ethnographer do not walk away with any residue of what I experienced when in character, especially given the fact that it was an embodied exercise.

I then made a habit of physically speaking, every time I stepped in and out of thee embodied character. This ritual helped me to recognize the shift in characters. The ritual was simple like repeating the phrase “I am no longer Celeste, but myself…” as I removed make-up, clothing or other embellishments associated with the character.

3.3.2 The use of dialogue with the anima

I also became extremely conscious that there is a feminine side to every person that is often overlooked or suppressed. The experience with Celeste challenged my ideological position which held a very rigid definition of masculinity. The process invited me to allow place and room for the co-existence of the anima; to see the femininity in oneself and also to understand that it is not something to be suppressed but something to be welcomed and celebrated.

The final lesson that this process also gifted me with, was the truth about how social systems give privileges to some and not to others. I was not always aware of what that means in everyday life till I challenged myself, through performative means, to gain a different perspective on other people's lives.

With this embodied learning, I can now recognize very quickly when I am perpetuating thee system of oppression. There are times when I think that the story

of another is insignificant because I’m not directly impacted by it and there are times when I believe myself to be an expert in all fields of learning.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INCORPORATION: A PUBLIC CEREMONIOUS SHARING THROUGH PERFORMANCE

"...although a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation), in specific instances these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated." - Van Gennep

The Final Stage of the Passage

4.1 The First Performance

The room was decorated to welcome a group of invited guests. The guidelines for a self-revelatory performance advise that the performer who is sharing intimate stories should be witnessed by people with whom he has a personal relationship.

4.1.1 What Happened?

The guests arrived to witness a performance that was informed by my desire, as a researcher, to find out what else I could learn about black masculinity besides that which I had been fed through social conditioning.

I chose specific music, and costumes and put together different kinds of choreography which I felt would help articulate the different stages of the research that I had already been through. The performance was the final piece in the research project and would bring together all I had learnt and would also mirror my personal journey as a rite of passage.

As soon as the guests were seated, the lights were dimmed, the stage lights came on, and the music began. I entered from the stairs of the Emakhaya Theatre, and began to chant an ode for the many boys, men and teenagers that I had encountered on my journey and who were being held hostage to an ideology that is devoid of humanity, and assumes that male bodies are disposable. The idea was

based on the poem “Who will cry for the little boy?” a piece written by Antwone Fisher. In the poem the writer expresses the notion that boys who do not weep or express deep emotion remain silenced and grow into adult men who are unable to cry. The question still perplexes me: “Who will cry for all those little boys, who are still within these grown men?”

I wanted to cry, to weep throughout my creative process and performance, as the first part of the performance was a re-enactment of all the personal wounding that I had been too fearful to confront. But, through the performing of those stories, I was able to come to terms and make peace with some of the painful memories of my childhood.

The next part of the performance focused on my experiences as a 'black' man. This was yet another layer of my personality which I used when asserting my identity. I have always found myself drawn to the people or things associated with one of the Nguni groups in South Africa, the Xhosa people. Little did I expect that an Ancestry Test done in 2017 would reveal that my paternal heritage shows that I am of Xhosa descent.

I have not been to an initiation school like many of the Xhosa men I know who go through that rite of passage to mark their entry into adulthood, neither have I participated in any of the cultural rituals that are unique to that culture. Yet in my brief lived experience, I have noticed that ,I gravitate towards things that are of a cultural nature, and through movement and music I attempt to pay homage to the bloodline of all the Xhosa black men who have gone before me. To acknowledge that I am of the Madiba clan I speak their Isiduko by saying “O Yem Yem, Ngqolomsila, Vela bambhentsele".

The performance contained several other themes and messages that I believed were of significance and eventually concluded with the performance of a praise dance and song which spoke about acknowledging your history and your heritage.

4.1.2 What I learnt

The initial performance was significant in a way that I’m not able to articulate. The experience was particularly visceral in that my body went through a singular process

which made me feel as though there was a disconnect between my mind and my body. I wasn't able to put into words what I was experiencing in my body, nor can I describe that sensation. It was something that I could not have anticipated or prepared for; the outcome or experience of a self-revelatory performance cannot be predicted.

The biggest take away from that first experience, in retrospect, is the learning that the entry into a self-revelatory performance needs to be carefully prepared and one should not anticipate or look for the self-revelatory moment, as the nature of the work is such that it cannot be evaluated or explained.

4.2 The Second Performance

Three months after the first performance was staged I had another opportunity to learn more about black masculinity and performance as a rite of passage.

4.2 .1 What Happened?

One of the biggest differences between the initial performance and this second performance was that more people were invited to come and witness the performance. There were also changes in music and lighting and I added projection.

The performance began slightly differently in how the opening song was used, the Ode for the boys began onstage. The stage was also set up differently; the items of clothing, which were used as symbols and metaphors for specific parts of the story, were distributed around the stage.

The performance was articulated by the use of music and specific symbolic items. The changes came about because I had more time to reflect on the previous performance and also on the themes and meanings associated with each of the symbols.

The performance held a lot more meaning and depth for me as a performer, as the messages and the meaning that each section of the performance held were clearer. There was also a deeper sense of freedom and expression in the sense of consciously sharing my experience through performance. In self-revelatory

performance it is recommended that the performance is shared more than once, as this enables the storyteller to experience more deeply the different aspects of the story.

4.2.2 What I learnt

The moment came at the least expected time during the performance. I hadn't anticipated or predicted that there would be a self-revelatory moment. During the final song, and the final part of the performance I gathered together all the items of clothing that were symbolic and which reflected the journey that I, as the researcher had just travelled.

I picked up the black formal jacket that represented systematic repression and I recall having an automatic body response to the closing or dismantling of that chapter and system of power. In my own story, the restrictive system came out of a religious system that perpetuated ideas of "hegemonic masculinity" and reinforced stereotypes by policing the behaviour of men in a very strict sense.

I sensed a complete shift in that moment of surrender, and embraced what the revelation invited me to do. It released me from the deeply ingrained rhetoric that is founded on damaging ideas, damaging not only to men themselves - but also for the rest of society.

That moment of self-revelation showed me what can be done to get different perspectives on any matter. In my case it was the notion of what black masculinity is and what it can be. It helped me see how much there is to discover about 'blackness' and masculinity and that the process and form that allows for that exploration or discovery can happen through the systematic process of performance. The beauty of this approach is that it is specific to the person needing to discover something new or unknown.

CHAPTER FIVE

POST PROCESS REFLECTION

The process began with me wanting to find and change the narrative of what black masculinity means, particularly in my own context. I had grown tired of the negative connotations attached to that group of people, as I was included in that grouping. This process and personal journey gave me far more than I could have anticipated. As a drama therapist in training and also as a performer, I've become aware of the intentional use of creative performance processes and the tools to work with to find new meanings on a particular issue.

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APPENDIX A

Please refer to PDF file title Rite Of Passage.

APPENDIX B

Please select the link below to view the video:

https://youtu.be/XFjtZa7ik7M

APPENDIX C

Please select the link below to view the video:

Jermain Johnson - Black Rage