

Touching on the Untouchable: contesting contemporary Black south african masculinity and cultural identity through performance.

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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To never erasing past selves.

Abstract

As a moment of slipping in, turning away and recovering from; the thinking for this project is focused on understanding through and from within culture. With this the paper begins to weave itself through a guided journey of my own personal accounts and the theorists that align and/or challenge such accounts. It moves between investigating my relationship with my father, to interrogating the ways in which men have spoken specific violence's into existence. This thesis does not look to be the reason of, nor the answer to, the way in which men 'act'; but it does employ a keen eye into understanding the way in which meanings are produced. The paper then embeds itself in interrogating each of these instances through four different performances that were created by Mlondi Dubazane. These performances should be understood as thinking through and with/in representation and the different mediums that representing takes shape. It is vital to understand that even in its attempt at the poetics, the paper expresses itself through, within, around and beside language. This is but the first attempt of finding a language in speaking about my own maleness, a maleness that is not universal, a maleness that is moving forward in advance of nowhere, a maleness that seeks to dare touch on the untouchable. This, then serves as a written explication of research that seeks to engage the meanings and limitations of contemporary Black south african cultural identity (and in particular, the gendered dimensions of this experience) through the careful and nuanced crafting of public performances that draw on both public and intimate experiences.

How?

In *Representation*, Stuart Hall begins with the question: “how does language construct meanings?” (Hall, 1997: 1). The consideration of the role of language in the construction of meaning, produced an awareness that the point with which I began my research needed to shift. It’s shifting point being, the questioning of the ways in which language (imagery, speech, music, cadences and rhythms), have lent a helping hand in enabling the built and well understood shared meanings between men, in the construction and representation of their own particular maleness (Hall, 1997). Shifting away and looking beyond emotions of anger, I look to guide *you* into a space, that speaks specifically to the objects that have influenced the production of my own maleness. I do not make the attempt of speaking for every Black south african male, but I do make the attempt of dialoguing with my own particular maleness, through the specific culture/s in which I participate. In as much as it doesn’t position itself to speak to and for maleness, it does call up and make use of specific moments, memories, cadences and rhythms; that serve as communicate to the way in which I have orientated myself towards my own particular maleness. A pursuit that is more of a reckoning *with* self, that tiptoes back and forth in avoiding to be understood as the voice of reason to south african men; whilst being aware of the stutter in its own voicing. The project positions itself within and beyond the *softer-kinder-sadder* boy aesthetic; whilst deliberately turning away from the setting up of new criterion within the understanding of my own maleness. Reflective in its essence, I ask *you* to journey through what I now understand to be, a recognition of my own ambiguities in relation to maleness. Seated ~~(un)~~comfortably in uncertainty, and particularly devoid of ego, I slowly unfold from the expectation of, *what* I can and *how* I can, be. Understanding expectation as following the pathways of unwanted gifts. I sift through my younger years, by deliberately oscillating between memories of said unwanted gifts and ‘prescribed’ pathways. Journeying my way out of this, and continuing in my own search for a *particular* self; I recognize my own grappling with the *how?*, of my formation. Struggling to find breath in the stringent measure of my own past understanding of self; I write through a present learning of self. I search in, not away from, but along my own learning.

Devon Carbado begins the chapter *Male Privileges* by articulating Simone de Beauvoir's idea that women are not born women but *become* women. The stripping away of such a category grants access to investigate the self that is not bound to patriarchal trappings (Carbado, 2005: 155). Men come into understanding their position in society by following a script and adhering to clear moments of when the character must speak, walk, and follow a certain direction – a production *so* manufactured and stripped away from its own raw material: the self. A questioning/searching/finding of a pre-patriarchal self. Free from and not bound to understanding and positioning itself, through what Carbado (2005) states as a manhood that is re-enacted and perpetuated in our everyday social encounters. Its re-en(act)ment has been a performance, that for most of my life has never been 'well-made', but has positioned itself as necessary and natural. Feeling typecast in the understanding of my maleness, Carbado proposes that an analyses into privilege might "provide a methodology for men to interrogate gender" (Carbado, 2005: 156), this suggesting, that men need to place their privileges at the forefront of challenging social constructions of gender (Carbado, 2005: 156).

Allowing the steady uptake of the above and seeing the importance and necessity of such work, I employ the use of personal accounts as a possible way into the interrogation of my own particular maleness. The ways in which I contest, question, affirm, turn toward and away from understanding my maleness within the criterion of patriarchy; which is being interrogated and realised through performance. By performance, I don't *just* refer to the production that has been rehearsed and realised under precise technical guidance, but in many ways, I gaze into the culture that we (men) have built for and within ourselves, to serve our (act)ment of maleness. A culture that I inhabit, whether comfortable in it or not. I revolved (in), involved (in) and evolved (in)-and-through its said criterion. Understanding myself to be way left of the *wanting-to-be* 'right' side of maleness, I make use of performance as an interrogation and appropriation of the everyday ordinariness of my own particular maleness. Speaking, writing and thinking through particular rhythms, idioms, teachings and modes of navigation that are prescribed in adopting a particular maleness, I note the importance of not universalizing the lived experience of maleness; *but*, I do articulate my intimate relationship with said maleness. The hopes for this being not to

present a concise and/or concrete solution into the *why?* of men's action; but rather, to pursue an understanding of uMlondi (this being a narration of my journey towards the construction and performance of my own particular maleness). I begin, as stated above, by investigating the role of language in the construction of meanings, and the worlds that I have built from such said meanings (Hall, 1997)

Patriarchy:(noun)

1. a system of society or government in which the father or eldest male is head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line.
-

Patriarchy in its essence jumps to the assumption that men are born with masculinity. This, therefore, asserts masculinity as natural rather than gendered socialisation. hooks (2004) states that, 'patriarchy', is not a word that men use in everyday conversation but lean on its use when questioned about whether or not they are aware of its effects on those who are seen as outside of its criteria. The refusal of its use in the everyday has led to a denial (between men), and a lack of acceptance (in men) to the violence's that a patriarchal system inflicts on those who gain from said system, and those who don't. My coming into relationship with patriarchal thinking happened from a young age, whereby, the assignment of roles *thought-itself* to be giving "continual guidance about the ways we can best fulfil these roles" (hooks, 2004: 26). These 'set' roles take form in teaching boys that they are *meant* to be dominant figures over all those that are deemed as 'weak'. Growing up, under, and in a patriarchal world, you learn that this dominance must take place through "various forms of psychological terrorism and violence"

(hooks, 2004: 26), which programs a software in men that operates through an algorithm which asserts “domination as beneficial when it is not” (hooks, 2004: 31).

Looking to my father as a role model, and him being the closest male contact that I was granted access to (outside of my friends); I ponder on his teachings. Growing up, my dad was extremely committed to the teachings of *umsebenzi wendoda*. The work being to usher his son into understanding that, as a man you need to constantly be on your toes. At that age, not understanding what the danger might be, he began carefully laying the pathway that he wanted me to follow. A pathway that presented itself as a gift that would eventually need to pay-itself back to him, or the family; but mainly to him. Because, he was the one who ‘put in the work’ of crafting *his* boy. One of the tasks set in achieving this crafting, was to litter the household with traps that he expected me to be on my toes for and bring my awareness to. If I didn’t, that would result in punishment.

This is where domination enters.

Domination as not a monster-like, bigger-than-life, fire spitting specimen. Domination was inflicted on me by the person I share a household with, a person I have an intimate relationship with, a person I endearingly call to and say: ‘thank you’ and ‘I love you’ to (*on some nights*). Well versed in the language of traps and entrapment, I reckon with my father’s, (through my eyes), enormity. His lurking over my shoulder readiness to strike at any moment.

This was how we communicated:

He would smack away at the ailments that he found to need smacking away and, therefore, use my very essence as a tool for my own shaming. This form of domination is not only intimate, but to a then boy-child, it was a transferral of information into the ways in which I *will* have to survive ‘out there’. The household requiring a specific performativity aligning with this

transferral of information; I note that my father's intentions were to prepare me for this so called 'outside.' Either forgetting its importance or not seeing a problem with it, I sit firmly in the investigation of the world that created our home. Reflecting on this I think of my then friends who I believe must have grown up and through experiencing either a domineering fatherhood, or an absent one. I say this, because, Primary School in its chief importance was *just* another field of traps whereby, boys would be on the 'look out' for the very signs that would communicate a 'lack' in manhood from other *boys*. Each father/father figure, I assume, had their own take on these teachings, pathways, lessons and smacking of us into shape. And by being children, we then, took that very domination and re-en (act)ed it onto those who would *dare* come into our direction. Looking out for the signs of those way out of line, we found solace in each other and connected over being the masters of trapping others into our holistic collaged execution of domination.

Dominator culture then insists that "there is a biological connection between having a penis and the will to do violence" (hooks, 2004: 119). With this in mind I realise that "the crisis facing men is not the crisis of masculinity" (hooks, 2004: 34) but rather, that of patriarchal thinking/maleness. This assumes the position of there being a 'preferred maleness' and that different expressions of maleness are seen as null and void in comparison to patriarchal maleness.

In order to investigate this said crisis, I move to the narration of my time at Rhodes University. It begins at a well-known, but not for the right reason's residence, where I lived with, plus minus 140 men. I was thrust into the full view of, and embedded in, patriarchal thinking and maleness.

Having steered clear from mid-2013 arguments with my father – reassuring him that my time 'out of the house' would not result in my (anticipated) falling 'out of line'. I must be upfront *with-it* – my father put in an extensive amount of effort into training me to follow the line, the

line being his rule. Understanding and having grown up under that philosophy, I had concluded (to myself), that my growth was heavily reliant on my leaving.

I understand my time at Rhodes University to be a staple point for the idiom ‘a first of many’. Rhodes University signified ‘my first time in 5 years since I had left KwaZulu-Natal’, that was not death related. Rhodes University handed, to me, a moment with my parents that I am only learning to treasure now. My parents drove that (786 point 1 km) via N2, for me. They did *that*, for me. In the ‘doing *that* for me moment’, I notice that my dad capes himself in an expression that I am glad to have (for now), wiped from his face. Saying miniature prayers underneath his breath; I assume that his son not becoming the (anticipated) alcoholic, brings him an ease in spirit. Rhodes University was the reason my dad sobbed as they were driving away from their now ‘grown up son’. At Rhodes University I was taught to pull on a cigarette and not cough. At Rhodes University I played my first rugby game and didn’t fuck it up, but, in the second game I was flattened. Embarrassingly, at the Jan Smuts Residence I became a cheater on my then girlfriend of 3 years. At *that* residence, every Sunday night, after a wicked weekend of *you-hoo’ziz* and drinking above the body’s limits; my 2 best friends and I would lean onto one another in room *two-oh-six*, whilst perving over Zuckerberg’s stalking device. In room *two-oh-six*, were three awkward boys who were trying to live up to the legendary status of being a Smuts boy. Thinking that conquest would bring us affirmation. The conquest, simply being to acquire in abundance the control over those who, supposedly tripped over our charm.

The conquest: a feeling of being medalled in ‘bragging rights’.

Feeling rear-ended by this and needing an immediate response, I proceeded to seat myself comfortably at the table of hyper masculinity. Feasting on that side of me, I choke on the memory of my ‘buggahs and bints’ rounding of mouth, and wagging of thumb stage. Now, (this-then), side of me finds itself being worked at. The pursuit being to change, but never erase the parts of myself that no longer serve me. A, me that is wayside of the pathways of those who

‘have walked it before’, a me that is focused on reckoning with the little moments that wrote this script.

Picture this.

We're smuts boys

We're smuts boys

We're so far from

home

We're so fucking

horny So leave us

alone

We drink to get drunk and we smoke to get high

So if you don't like us then fuck off and die

If the ocean were whiskey and I was a duck

I'd swim to the bottom and drink my way up.

But the oceans not whiskey and I'm not a

duck, So let's go to Athies and have us a

fuck!

Standing at the top of the 1820 Settlers Monument, looking down on the streets that cut through the whole of Makhanda, ‘fuck’ rings over the city of saints as the new inductees of the ‘smuts boy’ culture are being initiated through the novel practice: ‘Bomb Squad’. Bomb squad is an initiation process that for many years the Rhodes University management has denied having any knowledge of. Bomb squad, at that time, took (its) place on a Friday afternoon whilst the sunset blankets over the city of saints. The process being led by the Smuts old boys. Throughout the

whole of orientation week, they would impose themselves onto our frail mentalities that without going through the process of bomb squad, one would not be ‘taken in’ by the residence (read Jan Smuts culture). This threat to my 18 year old ears communicated ‘you have no choice’. Only a handful of us decided to go through with the process of bomb squad and spent the next three years harassing those who didn’t – quoting: ‘you’re not a real smuts boy if you haven’t down downed’ the infamous Rhodes juice – a 1.5 litre of red acidic cheap wine, famously known as ‘Crackling’.

On our way to monument:

A sense of pride creeps in between me and my yet-to-be-regarded as Smuts Boys, boys.

Once we arrived:

The old boys would duct tape the bottle to our hands and then scream ‘CAPS OFF!’ – which basically just meant GO! without thee ‘on your mark, get set’. With each chug of the acidic wine that tore through one’s gut, there was a sense of settling into this new-found brotherhood. The ending of the initiation is ushered by sounds and sights of projectile vomiting; then the Smuts song (cited above) rings loudly and proudly over the City of Saints. The singing, symbolised our belonging to, and recognition from the Smuts old boys to us ‘new’ boys. Understanding ourselves as these ‘new boys in town’, we threw on the belief that *just* because we happened to have been placed in the Jan Smuts residence, that we were the special of the lot; the ‘men amongst men’.

The Jan Smuts residence with its hyper-masculine culture, clothed itself in competitive struggles on a Saturday afternoon whilst playing touch rugby, to physical gestures that articulated tallies of who was fucking the most; and then awarding the *buggas* who fell in line with and spoke this

very culture into their everyday. We were in dialogue with the very problematics of our maleness and, our orientation towards that expression served to “create a ground upon which we can gather” (Ahmed, 2006: 1). Looking to find our way not only through the new environments of being in a University town, we arrived at ourselves by turning towards *this* culture. Expressing ourselves and being fashioned in it; we would scream the Smuts anthem at the top of our lungs whilst seeking a wandering eye affirmation from our fellow *real* Smuts brother. With this in mind, I find it impossible to completely dissociate with being a part of that moment; and perhaps, erasure is not the point. It is of importance though, that I begin from a place that interrogates the manner in which I began tailoring an obnoxious, violent and egotistical version of myself. The telling of and in this narrative, marks an entry into understanding the ways in which the Jan Smuts residence had built a culture and tradition for itself that for many boys resulted in a ‘way of life’, for most of, if not their whole Rhodes University experience (Hall, 1997).

Plural noun

Patriarchies.

"We live in a patriarchy".

Mwenda running and circling through space, finds play. He identifies a familiar door, he stops and acknowledges it. Feeling and opening the door. He moves his feet as though he is feeling the texture of this carpet floor. As he walks he begins turns to his right, he knocks but gets taken in by the event that is the living room. He stands next to the visitors in a respectful manner. He proceeds to the door and opens it. He continues his pursuit. He goes into the next room and identifies shoes, he jumps on top of them. The shoes now sit on his hands. Beginning to play out the actions of his father, his voice deepens. The pursuit continues. He greets the visitors and he exchanges a hearty laugh; he stands next to the visitors in a respectful manner. He proceeds to the door laughing, he opens the door. He calls out searching for him. He walks towards him, opens the door and leaves through it. He is outside experiencing himself as a cow. He laughs at himself. He stands right – but gets reminded of the happening in the next room. Addressing the visitors. He deepens his voice but finds his way back to his own.

lights fade out over 7 seconds.

'You disgust me'

Blackout.

Lapha, kephi?

What you are bearing witness to is the stripping away of a script to its core directional element. The production entitled *Lapha*, was a collaboration between Mwenda Gitonga and I. Sharing stories and wishes of our childhood experiences whilst grappling with the specificities of our growing up; the work positions itself into pondering on the ‘how?’ of our arrival. *Lapha*, in its directive and/or authoritative instruction; translates to ‘here’. The navigation of the ‘here’ in our arrival. Interrogating the possibility of finding our way through *this*, the production reflects on being able to ‘find your bearings’ whilst in pursuit. The script is a transposition of the ‘here’ in Mwenda’s navigation. Understanding that the process depended on the direction that we chose as collaborators, the above quoted script expresses Mwenda’s world, as he knows it. Playing host to a number of possibilities which depended on the direction with which we turned toward (Ahmed, 2006: 1), *Lapha*; was looking to use performance as a method of knowledge production that is “lived far more than it is written about” (Kelly, 2002: 158) and performed. Furthermore and within living lived experience, the production engaged with the possibilities of UkuLapha nomaUk’Lashwa, meaning to heal or to be healed. Existing beyond its stringent spatial orientation, the production served as a confession – a confession to a pain around reconciling feelings of childhood. Acting as an encyclopaedia of revisiting moments, the theatre space served as a stage of inner drama, or better yet, of an inner world that spoke to the navigation of traumas, dislikes, cries, laughs, contradictions and a love that could almost be missed. We went through many versions, many trials, many missteps, many false props, many speculations and at times ‘tried to’ present the work as a concrete, fully realised idea. We created a world that we kept going to and threw ourselves at day after day. Imagining ourselves through the combination of physical theatre, text, and sound; the performance derives of itself from and within the performer’s unfolding reflections on childhood, to observations of men in his private life; observations of men in the public sphere, and observations of himself within the entanglements of manhood. Committing myself to the work of uncovering truths *within*; my pursuit continues

itself in the contradicting expression, performance and understanding of my own Black south african maleness.

Even though it is clear that there are many ways that one *can* express their maleness, the ideologies of hegemonic masculinity have led to the silencing of varied expressions of maleness. Patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity work hand-in-hand. The latter sets up the criteria of what it means to be a 'real man' and how one must behave as a man. This criteria not only silences other masculinities, but also strips them of legitimacy. This criterion shapes the way in which men understand themselves and how they *must* relate to their world. Its prescription being: to speak, act, present, believe, think and move within this criteria; therefore, giving it meaning through its use.

Masculinity is a collective gender identity and not a natural attribute. It is socially constructed and fluid. There is not one universal masculinity, but many masculinities. These are 'not fixed' character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships (Morrell,1998).

Language is but the form with which participants in a specific culture can have shared and/or collective understandings which prescribe the way in which they will experience and/or interpret their world. Language should be understood beyond its linguistic capabilities. In this paper, language refers to the use of signs and symbols; of sounds, musical notes, electronically edited imagery and objects (Hall, 1997: 1). Furthermore, language stands in for, and is an agent of, representing concepts, ideals, feelings and desires. Language also serves as a representation of a culture, and each culture has its own specific rhythm, form and modes of communication that are understood by its participants. My coming into contact with the above extends from my own process as a human being trying to lay claim to their own becoming. I utter myself and move in a rhythm of understanding the production and circulation of language as central to the

“process by which meaning is produced” (Hall, 1997: 1). My father and many representations of ‘preferred manhood’ shaped my ideas around the type of man that I thought I had to be: a loud, powerful and non-emotional man. I grew up being surrounded by images of my father playing soccer, or of him as a successful teacher KwaNongoma. He is regarded as a ‘*mans-man*’ by many of his peers, and I, falling directly into this trap; understood him as a man that was able to *hold* his own. As an only child I get the ‘you’re our only hope’ speech from my father often. This being a reminder that failure and mistakes are not an option. When it comes to the ways in which my father and I communicate it mainly comes in the form of a lecture whereby I am told of what I am doing wrong and how I need to fix that immediately. This of course is no healthy set up for any relationship. I was extremely afraid of my father because, on the one hand he represented this ‘ideal’ masculinity that I should be aspiring to, but he also represented domination over me. A couple of years later and I reflect on how our modes of communication were more of talking past each other, rather than with each other. My father insists on relaying information’s around what it ‘means’ to be a man, and confirms that I am forever his only hope. My father is not a bad man, but he is a product of the destruction that is patriarchal maleness. I find myself reflecting on the tensions of not wanting to paint ‘fathering’ in a bad light. The image of the not there, abusive dad, is but an image that is projected too often and too easily. The projection of this image is not where any of my interests lie.

Culture is not just about the ideas, cadences, and behaviour of a particular people or society. Culture is undefinable, but relies on the context within its shifting of and with time (Hall,1997). For the sake of this thesis, I begin, *again*, with ‘culture’s’ traditional definitions in order to try and weave the ‘how?’ of my arrival into conversation and/or alignment with it. Culture was understood as being the embodiment of the “best that has been thought and said in a society” (Hall, 1997: 2). Its representation came in the form of literature, painting, sculpture, music and philosophy. This in many ways still rings true in the now, especially with regards to popular culture. Hall (1997) states that popular cultures aligns with and expresses the everyday lives of ordinary people. I, being one of those ordinary people, have looked to use not only the thesis but

mainly the performances as a means to express the conversations, worries, anxieties, and desires of ordinary maleness in its everyday mundanity.

I employ an analytical eye to the specialized, particular and concise stutters of culture. These stutters are seen through its language(in'). Language, as a necessary part of culture that isn't obsessed with *things* but, rather, with a repetition of *practices* (Hall, 1997). Primarily, culture is interested in the continuation and/or lengthening of meaning, "the 'giving and taking of meaning'- between the members of a society or group" (Hall, 1997: 2). Aligning this with my own understanding, I search for the meaning of my maleness as a said member of its society. Looking beyond and within its ways, I make and give use to particular cadences that have informed on the marrying of language with culture, in constructing and performing meaning into my own maleness. Furthermore, 'maleness as a repetition of set practices', I look in/to my own maleness as a 'making use of' particular repetitions that organise conduct, and that "consequently have real, practical effects" (Hall, 1997: 3).

I refer to and draw inspiration from my 'circles'. By circles, I mean the culture and language I involve myself in, the circles that further and challenge certain teachings. I don't demonise nor separate myself from the problematics that are imbued in this culture, rather I place myself within *them* and question the "practices which are not simply genetically programmed into us" (Hall, 1997: 3). Hence, its insistence into everyday life, as, carrying and depending on meaning for its effective value.

#KeepTheSameEnergy

On Sunday, 17 April 2016. A list was released by an anonymous account on Facebook that revealed the names of men that studied/study at Rhodes University. The list that was released came with no context, but immediately there was a communal understanding that this was a list of perpetrators of sexual assault. Mobilizations began and for about a week and a half, Rhodes

University had to look at the culture that it had birthed without interrogation and/or investigation. Furthermore, for the next week and a half, men at Rhodes University were ‘on edge’, living in the fear that they would be called out for their predatory behaviour. 20-year-old me, immediately felt the need to distance himself. A distance that was garbed in the name of being ‘different from *those* men’; but such is not *entirely* possible. I was and still form part of that culture, differently now, but still a consuming member of it. As much as patriarchy is imbued in culture, there is a psychology that it invests itself in. This psychology understands not only domination, but also thrives in its utterances of violence into the everyday experience. By violence I don’t just refer to murder and rape, but rather I think of its beginning point – its mundanity. Men in their spaces operate with an air of ‘invincibility’ that allow for problematic, thoughtless chatter of: *‘but is there proof, dou?’*

Quite recently, on Twitter, I was made aware that a UCT student, Uyinene Mrwetyana, was missing. Her friends were pleading to south african celebrities, President Cyril Ramaphosa and the general public to help in finding their friend. After a week of social media mobilisation by every and anyone, Mrwetyana’s body was found. The perpetrator being a 42- year-old man who worked at the Mowbray Post Office. What is unfortunate about this is not only the passing of Mrwetyana, or President Ramaphosa’s loud silence; but, that I can’t find the name of the Perpetrator, and those of many more. Mrwetyana was on the lips of many in south africa, but not this so called ‘42-year-old man who is employed at a post office’. This is how the power of patriarchy works. Whereby the inaccessibility of the name of Mrwetyana’s Perpetrator and many more, in everyday language(in’) leads to a rule of silence/silencing. This rule is supported by words such as ‘accused’ and ‘still to be charged’. The circumstances around Mrwetyana’s death and that of the deeply entrenched gender-based violence war that’s making ground in south africa; is that it expresses a trend in our country that is deeply embedded in our society. This trend and culture, seemingly posing itself as ‘new’ is a sad but well known narrative in the everyday lives of south african Womxn, particularly Black and Brown Womxn.

Culture is/as “the 'shared values' of a group or of society” (Hall, 1997: 2). The culture of silence in men during conversations around gender-based violence, firstly comes from not wanting to hear the names of Perpetrators of violence, for the fear of it ringing true and touching close to home. What is meant by ‘home’, is the shared understanding that we as men have built for ourselves. A shared understanding that has birthed a culture that is void of accountability, that is insecure but presents itself as boastful; a culture obsessed with differentiation and impulsive responses of separating itself from *those* monsters. Furthermore, it is important to note that the way in which we have presented and represented ourselves has prescribed a specific narrative (Hall, 1997). This is why statements such as ‘boys will be boys’ exist; this is why immediately after getting ‘outed’ for assault, one hears statements (from men) along the lines of: ‘I could never do that to *any* Womxn because I was raised by a single mother’. It is important for me to take an in-depth look into “the consequences of our representations and the implications of our message—because they matter” (Soyini, 2005: 24). Furthermore, men need to hold themselves accountable for having spoken these violence’s into existence. Without this critical tuning into speech, cadence, rhythm and codes that men use, we can never fully realise a project that interrogates the perpetuation and organisation of conduct between men.

Following from the above the next chapter begins my probe into the “giving and taking of meanings” (Hall,1997: 2). What is understood by this is that those who inhabit and perform themselves through a specific culture should in many ways have a similar understanding of their world. But much like expressions of my own maleness, culture cannot and should not be understood in unitary identifications. I begin then from challenging the culture of patriarchal thinking by expressing contradicting versions of uMlondi (who is within this culture that I look to probe). This all in the hope of being able to imagine alternative realities that begin from, but move beyond patriarchal ideologies. Still reckoning with how meaning is created, I continue and further this by *weaving* the ways in which I have created worlds that hold meanings that speak to a challenging of, and a moving against patriarchal thinking/maleness.

I begin by weaving this uMlondi character.

Kukhala esam'is'cathulo.

Kukhala esam'is'cathulo, translating to 'you live and are governed by my rules'. This, being the first performance of my research topic; found itself in the Playroom Theatre – I being the play in the room. The piece itself reckons with and expresses the search I find myself invested to. This *search* did not begin, nor did it end with this encounter; but rather, it is a never-ending search of a coming into contact with uMlondi (me). A search that has no destination or promise of reward; but rather, a search that fashions its self within myself; persisting (without determination), to look beyond its own patriarchal upbringing. I have always been *around* myself, but have never been *there* with myself. The work being a much-needed rant, a cry for help, a longing for a sense of me to *see* me. As you arrive, which you might have by now in this playful room, you might find uMlondi circling and calling to himself:

Mlondi. Mlondi.

Ungangishiyi. (don't leave me)

Ahmed (2006) expresses that in order for one to be orientated, one might suppose that they would need to have experienced disorientation first. The image of circling around one's self to produce a dizzying effect, likening itself to a loss of balance; is my relationship to my own maleness. My maleness, I hold, is better understood within its own rituals, the tales it tells, the music it listens to, the feelings it hides, the thoughts it lingers on, and its suave-bravado; for this suggests, the ways in which it forms, informs and articulates its meanings. Many years went by without a total reckoning with 'how?' I find myself orientated into my sense of self. This performance might then be an expression of my own reckoning with and thinking on its 'point.' 'The point' not being the sharp end of a tool or weapon; 'the point' not being the dot that marks a full stop; rather 'the point' being, a directing attention towards. I begin as the director and attender to 'the point' of my maleness, which articulates itself through and within

embodied action “that produces a heightened moment of communication” (Madison, 2005: 329). The thinking then leans itself onto expressing a rewriting through scripted characteristics, in order to reckon with the character that is, uMlondi (me).

“I know everything
I know everything
know myself.” – Kendrick Lamar, *Momma*.

Knowing that to adopt the stance of ‘not knowing myself’, is an antidote that we (men) dote too often. Knowing that one might start from this point, I find that the absolute denial of knowing *something* about one’s self, a hard ‘one’ to believe. I know that as men, we have fashioned ourselves under sexist and misogynist ideologies; but I hope that we step into a ‘role’ that is beyond merely understanding that we can’t continue saying the things that we have been comfortable saying. I know that we (as men), need to do more than the narrowing down of our upbringing to just mere statements. I know there to be a necessary function that is beyond *this*. The function being that we have to engage ourselves beyond just ‘describing’ how we are and who we are as a collective, and move to employing responsibility in recognising what we have done. Our maleness, and the culture we continue to serve and gain from, has and continues to, have an effect which *does* “something that makes a material, physical, and situational difference” (Madison, 2005: 452). As men, we have to reckon with the world that we have created. Our use of language (gesticulation, voice and demeanour), speaks to a specific context, and a specific thinking; *with-which* a reality has been produced. I know that we (men) find ourselves living in a *something* that reiterates itself through “meaning, intent, and customs” (Madison, 2005: 455) that have been passed down and “repeated through time” (Madison, 2005: 455). I know that as (men), we need to begin from a point of comprehending with the recognisability of our action. Furthermore, my comprehending with my own recognisability, led me into understanding that we (men), are too consumed with responding. Failing to investigate the patriarchal understanding of our

maleness, is not and cannot continue to be cemented as a way of, and fact of life. Rather, our pursuit should be in fashioning a cultural performance that is in “constant creation, definition, and reflection of itself” (Turner, 1985: 203).

Boys brutalized and victimized by patriarchy more often than not become patriarchal, embodying the abusive patriarchal masculinity that they once clearly recognized as evil. Until we can collectively acknowledge the damage patriarchy causes and the suffering it creates, we cannot address male pain. We cannot demand for men the right to be whole
(hooks, 2004: 32).

We (men) need to grapple with an imagining beyond patriarchal thinking, because “without new visions we don’t know what to build, only what to knock down” (Kelly, 2002: xii). With this, my performances then begin expressing the embodiment of the possible, and, necessary task in challenging such a thinking. Through *(i)/his* work, I have picked a site with which I make sure to investigate the ground with which it rests on. Surveying it, I rummage through its said grounding, in order to encourage a possible standing-on ‘new footing’. Hoping that this foundation will not just serve a beginning and an ending; but rather, that the foundation will find its own footing in cured and sealed grounding. I place thought and action as a symbolic location into how we (as men) can begin to orientate ourselves towards a maleness “whose personal identity has not been over-determined” by our gender (Carbado, 2005: 155). With this I speak specifically through the working in and of myself; which has found/is finding a way to bring the person and/or the personal to the centre; as an act of service to the need in speaking with and understanding along the makings that have come from *our-selves*.

Interlude.

Stuttering and haphazardly making my way through finding a somewhat understanding of self, I turn my attention toward the possibility of loving one's self. This interlude being an insertion that exists between the larger composition of this thesis; follows a back and forth between two Black men who are grappling with the necessities of Black men finding a way to love themselves and each other. Looking within; this conversation journey's through and reflects on an envisioning of realities beyond.

Two dudes, dude-ing.

boyM:

so, I guess what I mean by 'reflect on our relationship'. Is uhm... I don't really know. This section is reflecting on what it means for Black men to love one another. I'm interested in the friendships that I have, especially mine and yours, being the most intimate of it all. It's tough because I don't really know how to... frame... what I'm saying to you, but I have this desire to write a section that proposes the need for a love between Black men as an important and vital act; and that we have been conditioned as men, particularly speaking of my experience as a straight man. I,I,I,I was conditioned to understand love as being an act that is saved for my parents or for my partner. But never necessarily – And if I do have love for my friends, I've been more comfortable in showing it to my friends that are Womxn.

But but but the, but then the, but that there was this ambiguous-hyper-anxious sense of loving another boy because of my heteronormative, patriarchal upbringing. I don't want to respond anymore; I want to move through this so that I can get to the essence of what *this* love can be.

boyT:

Uhm. Okay. So. The way I would reflect on... what can I say? it's been a long almost two years now. I think it started from a place of honest-openness and that is the most important thing because that *thing* informed our 'afterwards'. Like we were both really open to finding and to creating an open but intimate relationship with each other as men. If I reflect, as I reflect... hmm. Okay look I am just going to speak, and you will take what you need

boyM:

Yah freestyla boy freestyla.

boyT:

There was an ease to everything, that goes back to the initial openness. And there was a sense of holding, *yah*, an openness to hold, and then once that openness was acknowledged, then followed the holding. Uhm... and being present and sharing. But sharing recklessly. Recklessly not as a bad word, but without inhibition. Of sharing space, of sharing time, our knowledge and our memories. For the most part though, personally, that ease and that openness was generally shared with Womxn, because I thought that there, there was no space for me in relations and in relating to boys and men, it just felt really hard...

boyM:

I mean there must be a burdensome task in loving boys, men, *whatever*

boyT:

I think I've always. I figured out this morning – sorry rough interjection – but I figured out this morning why for the longest time I was always so pressed about bulking up; and it wasn't necessarily because I wanted to look good or feel the things that come with exercise; but rather it was more just wanting to protect myself from other men. And I didn't feel that wehwehwhen (signal cuts).

boyM:

When what?

boyT:

When we were interacting, chatting, living our lives, you know? There was no fear. No fear of hurt. If there is one thing I have realized, is that, *if dudes were just nicer to dudes more dudes would be happy in themselves.*

boyM:

For real dou!

(out breath to soften).

I mean this was practiced love, every single day it was work but, in that work, there was always a sense of security and ease. I don't really know where I am directing this conversation, but I guess, I am trying to reflect on... On basically where all my relationships and relation to love are placed in-between my research; because I have this desire to move in that direction, you know? Yes, I am still dealing with the whole:

this is why, and then I was a child (nehnehneneh) but like now, I'm like yo! I got allota love to give to the boys and men around me, and that's a space that's constant work. Picking up and putting down, but there's comfortability here – which is beautiful.

I think that's the only reason why I made *May be Now* with uMphumzi, which was just an ode to like – *(clears throat awkwardly)*. Whether it was good or not is beside the point, but I do find myself looking back to the show and just wishing I could tell myself to calm down; but there was a huge anxiety to it all, you know? Of like, *I don't want to be destructive to anybody*. And the show was a huge reflection meets a moment of, it really could be now, like now in the moment that we are present in, this love is possible; *it surely, surely is.*

boyT:

And by that time, we were getting much closer

boyM:

And I was like 'huh'.

You're right though, if dudes were just nicer to dudes, they would recognize the magnificence that is to love each other.

The call experiences a bad connection and I wait for boyT to call me back.

boyT:

Sorry my mom called.

I think the doing of the work openly and consistently, was the base of our love for each other. The openness to receive, the openness to share, the openness to stay, to leave, to question, to agree; just all the ways we've come to be with one another.

boyM:

To see and acknowledge you as a man, but to also recognize that very little has to change in the ways in which I interact and friendship with you. I find this chapter really hard to write but it does require a sense of honesty and I just needed to ruminate with someone and do the work of being present. I think we disregard ourselves too much.

boyT:

In what way?

boyM:

Just by not seeing the possibility of how we can relate as men, but mainly I'm speaking in relation to how I once related to the men in my life. It goes back to watching the ways in which my dad and his friends actively decide to not lean onto each other, unless it's like for business or children talk (and even that is a rare occasion). It's just not as intimate as it can be because these are men who have their own struggles, but I saw my dad have all those conversations, not with his friends but with my mother. And that influenced my *ways* in my romantic relationships. As in, well... in my relationships, I've made this mistake far too much, of like:

well we're together now, so I'm going to tell you everything because you're my everything and I don't need to tell them (my friends) anything.

boyT:

I have a question? How do you think me being queer influenced the intimacy that we have built here? Do you think it was easier, or would have been easier or whatever whatever, had it been with a straight dude?

boyM:

I think there is definitely a bravado that I put on when I'm around straight men. And uh, I been thinking on this party that I went to last year. We parked up in Green Point, by the beach, living a nice life with a beautiful sunset hovering over the occasion; and there was this homie. He's a model, uh, and he's very like *cool*. He's like a Yours Truly kid, you know? He's got the dreads, but also kinda trappy, you know? He reads, but he still has this like energy. And I remember after that party, thinking like wow!

I'm so different around straight dudes, so different, we were like bagging on each other, you know? I mean still a different type of intimacy (I've come to understand) but but very much put on, very much an act. And I remember my other homie being very irritated with the way I was performing because I was like pantomiming this version of myself because of who or what I was in relation to. So, to answer your question, I don't know if you, being queer made it easier or hard – UH!

(squeals). Okay let me answer...

boyT:

You don't have to answer you can think about it as you continue to like...

boyM:

I think there is a level of safety that I feel here, and that could be attributed to you being queer, you know? I don't have to, I can kind of just *be* this person. That's what our relationship means to me, because we went from like not fucking with each other to like being smacked together into the same space...

boyT:

Fucking hell dawg!

boyM:

And seeing one another. It feels good. You know when shit just *feels* good. This feels good. And with straight men I sometimes just fall back into this nothingness of how I relate to myself.

boyT:

this is this is this is necessary.

boyM:

Yeah. Being comfortable with being comfortable within each other...

It May be Now

How often do men actually get the opportunity to express affection through long lasting platonic touch? How often does it happen between men? Not a handshake or a hug, but lasting physical contact that lingers and passes between two people that is comforting and personal but not sexual. Think, holding hands. Or leaning on each other. Sitting together. That sort of thing. Just the comfort of contact (Greene, 2017).

May be now, a collaboration between Mphumzi Nontshinga, Joshua Biggs and I, focused itself on needing to bring forward the envisioning of a “somewhere in advance of nowhere” (Kelly, 2002: xii). With this being said we were not sure as to how we would achieve such, but that I knew that the ‘brave-faced’ man inside me was no longer serving its purpose. Feeling estranged to myself, the envisioning of *this* somewhere, allowed for a leaning towards the possibility of embodying my need in creating new visions for myself. I had to look away from myself and begin an investigation within that aligns itself with Ahmed’s (2000) question around how we recognise a stranger? Extending this, I reckon with this question by grappling with the notion that a stranger is an *any-body* to a *some-body*, that we recognise from the moment in which they are understood to be strange/r (Ahmed, 2000:1). *This* some-body in this instance, is uMlondi (me). The work was not trying to transport the audience to an imagined state of being, that is *away* from the present; but rather the work served to imagine itself through and beyond the here and the now. The relationship between Mphumzi and I unfolds in the space and speaks to the conditions of finding a way in which we can exist with and beside each other. *May be now* captured a moment of intimacy between two Black men; who are engaged with the meaning and/or limitations of their own Black south african maleness.

A conversation with touch, versus the way in which we touch, happened. In the process of *May be now* we recalled the idea of feeling/sensing, in its general ‘sense’ (Derrida, 2005: 6). The moments of touch were never to be realised in destructive and violent ways, but rather were placed as a means to question the way in which we touch and the conditions in which touching is necessary. *May be now* depicts and predicts the actuality that touch suggests, and how it lends itself to different degrees of engagement (Derrida, 2005). The process for *May be now* was confused and altogether terrifying. But it was within the process that I came to the realization that “one has to admit that one has never understood anything” (Derrida, 2005:7). It is in the moments of sitting in nothingness and being undetermined; that we arrive at the questioning of the words that have constructed *t/his* world. It is at this point that I confess that the *things* that have presented themselves as definite, are the exact things that have brought me into their very questioning. It is an admittance to a not-knowing, and an ode to the thoughts that I dare to touch

on. The performance of *May be Now* served as a moment to dare to touch on/it, to question, to sit, to be still. This was but a trial, a trial that found itself through moments of story/telling. Furthermore, the trial itself has to admit to its failure and to its own not-knowingness of the world it inhabits. The work, with its hopeful title – *May be now*, as a one day– thus revolves around a moment in/around an event/happening, around both the past, and, in the present, about a certain somebody and a nobody; a persona in some sense and in no sense. Where the question of sense or sensing a world that has never made sense – linger. *May be now*, serves as a hope of what is to come, it is looking within and ahead of itself, to a promise of something, to a promise of it *may-be* one day.

On this side.

I had just come back from school. In the back room an indistinct screeching sounds fills up the motion of those close to it. With intrigue, I follow the sound, which led me into my cousin's room, uMthokozi. *Sit*, he said. An autotuned voice blasts through the speakers saying:

Californiaaaa Looooove!

I had no care at the time for the words that the song professed, rather I was obsessed with Tupac's rhythm and flow. Rhythm drives the way in which culture is presented. The rhythm and cadences of hip hop are particular, and distinct from those of other cultures. I place myself within this culture because of its performativity. It is clear to note that culture isn't organic, as it would not exist without people 'transacting' in it (Conquergood, 2013:17). This transaction can be seen in everyday communication, in utterances of '*cav*', in knowing *when* the hands go up before a Travis Scott trap drum kicks in, to knowing the right moments when to '*smack 'em with dat Milly rock*'. The power of performing culture comes with what it centres. Hip Hop culture is split

into many factions, but each one represents a specific type of performativity that is supported by aesthetic choices (clothing, musical palate, speech, and energy).

Obsessed mainly with the energy of my favourite artists, and wanting to divert from understanding myself as ‘uMlondi’, I began constructing a stage name that was based off of but was not *necessarily* me. Becoming a myth to myself, I enacted and embodied a hyper-realised, pseudo famous and ‘important’ version of myself. The decision to begin constructing this persona came from analysing the ways in which hip hop culture articulates itself. Hip hop has and continues to move through varied expressions of itself. It has been understood as a key educational tool for Black youth, but has also been shunned for its misogynistic and violent utterances; but what rap music has seemingly achieved through rearticulating itself, is to reflect and question lived realities, and; express the burning problems and/or anxieties of a society (Rose, 1994:1). Hip hop has always positioned itself between and within the use of the “popular as political” (Farred, 2003:3) and the power of the popular should never be underestimated; because it is the popular that serves the ideological, and animates a political voice that looks to resist, subvert, disrupt, reconfigure and impact dominant discourse (Farred, 2003).

In many ways rappers speak directly to a political landscape, its message utters itself through and within popular language(in’) that delivers itself in personal and somewhat private tones. Slotted into my Spotify, I begin to listen in on my favourite rappers wording, placements of that very wording and how each album narrates a distinct reality in each of their lives. Finding myself at the bottomless pit of myself I turn my attention toward Tyler the Creator’s *IGOR*.

I have been following the movements of Tyler, the Creator, since he became famous in the music world. At first I did not get nor relate to the content on his earlier albums, as they expressed violent, angsty and sensational content. Tyler, himself, in an interview with Zane Lowe (2019), states that he doesn’t get why no one told him to stop screaming and shouting every time he produced a verse. I begin to see a noticeable shift in his music direction from the release of *Flower Boy* (2017), an almost aware correction of the division he had created in culture, because

of his misogynistic and homophobic lyrics. *Flower Boy*, has a meditative tone to it, it articulated itself as though Tyler, the Creator was left in a room alone for a long time and from there he began to ponder on the things that shape his own psyche. *IGOR* (2019) was immediately punted as a break-up album and/or Tyler's 'coming out' album. Neither of these have been confirmed by Tyler. The album came at a time where I was confused and bored with making performances, I was tired of feeling the need to perform myself in an enthusiastic, all together way. I wanted to move through different feelings, moods, questions and silences, much like *IGOR*. The album moves through expressing moments of "I think I'm falling in love / this time I think it's for real" to "I don't love you anymore" in quick succession. It is important to understand that I arrived at a point where I felt as though I had exhausted all of my creativity. Feeling what I felt, I turned to *really* sit with Tyler's latest albums. His album aligned with the thoughts of my performance work which had been steered by following uMlondi's journey through a series of interventions, slips, silences, giggles, mistakes and most importantly a sense of inward looking. It is through music but specifically hip hop that I've granted myself the language of probing into my own psyche.

I Promise.

The task of the one person show stated that we had to perform our biographies. I centred my show around materialist philosophy (Cull, 2012:21) by engaging with Ahmed's (2010) *The Promise of Happiness*. The first thing I focused on was aligning myself with Ahmed's statement of how a person's biography comes into intimate contact with objects, of and within likes and dislikes. The leaning towards a materialist philosophy serves as an activation of the ways in which we turn towards objects, but more importantly it tried to "rethink 'meaning' itself" (Cull, 2012:21).

The performance was an experiment, not invested and/or interested in the spectacular or ground-breaking, but rather an experiment that served to remove all confusion or speculation

of the well- made, useful and purposeful image of uMlondi. *The Promise of Happiness* was not an exhibition, but it showcased; it was not a ‘well-made’ play, but it aimed for ‘neatness’ and theatrical affect; quite simply the work was set “in a present that began some time ago” (Stewart, 2007: 1). It brought to the forefront a feeling of boredom and indifference. The importance of these two concepts are for the refusal to be reduced to and understood as ‘sweaty flesh’ (Zondi, 2016:48). What I mean by this is that in my wanting to envision alternative modes of understanding myself and my own maleness, there is a need to not revert to the production of imagery that expresses the brave-faced, worthy to others, trapped within the confines of a patriarchal thinking, Mlondi. The show tried its best to imagine and realise itself beyond such readings.

Departing from everything, I tuned in to listen deeply to my world; bringing in my everyday thoughts, anxieties and troubles into the space, as though they were happening in real time. Encountering this brought attention to the ordinariness of Mlondi’s every day. The ordinary can be understood as “a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life” (Stewart, 2007:1). This unfolded by packing and sorting the room with a varying number of objects, that tried to communicate and move through and/or beside each other. These objects being a fridge, a microwave that was heating up chips and chicken, marbles, a suitcase and photos of myself from my time at Rhodes University. The title of the work was inspired by Sara Ahmed’s, *The Promise of Happiness*. The day before I showcased, in the Green room, I had scheduled a showing with Professor Fleishman. After improvising my way through uncertainty, Professor Fleishman turned to me and asked: ‘if you are in this performance how? And if you are not why?’

When I proposed this show I had likened it to being interested in the ways in which objects can perform their function, with and/or without the augmentation and orientation of a human. Professor Fleishman’s questions about my involvement or lack of involvement in the work was a questioning around how I was positioning and orientating my thinking; and how my

involvement or lack thereof could or could not extend the thinking. The thinking being the interrogation of my thoughts and worries through centring the *things* that I have made important in my life. Happiness being one of these *things*.

For Ahmed (2010), happiness is in conversation with a history of associations, therefore, my desire for happiness, simply means, desiring an association with and proximity to happiness. This dance with associations began my building of the text for the performance, a 15-minute rant-monologue that searches for happiness through wanting to be in close proximity with the *right* associations. A wanting to feel necessary and part of *a* something. This wanting to be a part of/in 'something' came from investigating my own self-worth, which only understood itself as a function for and to others.

“I can't even lie I been lonely as fuck” (Okonma, 2017).

The energy of honesty and reveal can be seen throughout the work. As an artist, a lover, and human; the work looks into the essence of what uMlondi has been chiselling at in relation to his previous works. A hopeful and sincere look into finding one's self, and the possibilities of, or, and with grappling with one's self-worth. Walking into the passages of uMlondi's mind in the top left corner hangs a poster written 'the me, me, me generation.' Being welcomed into the room, a voice, situated in the fridge; begins speaking in an muffled lazy tone. A microwave is heating up food, there are marbles on the floor, pictures of uMlondi from his 'Rhodes days'. We finally arrive at him. He is looking up but laying down.

Ahmed (2010) speaks of 'Happy Objects', and the ways in which we come into contact with things, and about how “objects acquire value through contact with bodies” (Ahmed, 2010:23). To trying to think through the way in which happiness operates and how it influences our “near sphere” (Ahmed, 2010:24); which is very simply the world around us, Ahmed then moves to theorizing and grappling with how being affected “*in a good way* thus involves an orientation

toward something as being good'' (Ahmed, 2010:37, emphasis added). This is but a mere summary of the key points that are found in the chapter and shall serve as an entry into some of the key ideas that can be found in my activation of *The Promise of Happiness*. If I am indeed inspired by Ahmed, then one might say that there wasn't enough of an intimate bounding up with objects (Ahmed, 2010:27). There was an eeriness in the room, an almost emptiness that was filled up with this voice/voice note/voicemail. The objects themselves were placed in their normal-every-day-use-orientation, however; what was maybe not 'normal' was the way in which the objects themselves drove and required of the audience to try and see, hear and feel (Moten, 2013:737). In speaking to some of the audience members it was clear that what was created, was an atmosphere or mood that suggested a tension within.

I don't even know. I guess when people talk about love, they think about the pretty parts, the romantic parts. Uhm I don't think everyone agrees with what love looks like, whether it be on the street or personally, you know. I am just trying to start a conversation with this medium, you know what I'm saying? I think because I am a person who is obsessed with the idea of love, or who loves to be loved, I just find myself with questions about life and death and happiness.

Ahmed (2010) understands happiness as being contagious, as being something that is sent forth; much like this performance, it looked at feelings of boredom and indifference; which had a contagious and hypnotic effect to my life. Struggling to digest myself, the work tried to tap into 'some' meaningful philosophical questioning around being *made* happy, or 'the promise of what being happy might be'; or, quite simply what sitting in indifference looks like. The aesthetic choice of indifference, and of sitting, is a thought that stands side by side with my previous works; which look into a rare engagement of the difficulty within the meanings and limitations of contemporary Black male south african identity (with a particular interest in gendered dimensions of experience). My works look to both public and intimate expressions. My previous works have been interested in turning towards; but *The Promise of Happiness* invested itself in 'away-ness'. The voice describing the things that boil within. *The Promise of*

Happiness, then stands as a rejection of understanding my own Black maleness as always needing to be on ‘the go’, ‘brave faced’ and ‘determined’. The work is invested around and in questioning my own orientation, whereby we can begin to think of being ‘orientated’ as having followed certain steps in order to arrive at finding one’s bearing. I may have not known this then, but I can assume that, within my younger years, I had to have followed certain guidelines that were ‘laid out’ in order to have reached this orientation. The importance has never been to try an answer anything but rather, this project was but an entry into my pursuit of reflecting on the *things* I have not dared to touch on.

To Reflect.

For, perhaps we should feel this way

For, perhaps we feel too light-hearted and more often than not step heavy footed

For, perhaps we stay with our hands in the air searching aimlessly for that key connection

For, perhaps the connection kicks us out of range

For, perhaps it might be 3AM

For, perhaps it is night, but we call it morning, prematurely

For, perhaps I write of love as if I know it

For, perhaps I crave just a glimpse of me

For, perhaps I ponder on my existing

For, perhaps I raise my hand to ask for the drawing back of time

For, perhaps the drawing back is the essential handling of time

For, perhaps this is time manhandled

Perhaps we should feel this way

Perhaps I should feel you where it really hurts

Perhaps I jumped the gun hoping that I wouldn’t trigger

Perhaps heavy hearted

Light footed

I wonder what leg we have to stand on.

Conclusion

More of a proposition. This paper does not look to put forward a grand theoretical answer to a question, but rather; it should be read and understood as uMlondi's response to a concrete political problem. It is vital to understand that even in its attempt at the poetics, the paper expresses itself through, within, around and beside language. It employs specificities, and draws examples from its own near sphere, by interrogating from that place onwards. The project is in its own pursuit of trying to understand its writing, in hindsight and in the present. uMlondi has begun to include himself in a conversation that thinks itself through lived experience; but in no way does the paper begin expressing any answer. It tunes into, turns away from, and flows against the specific practices that have been spoken, practiced and reiterated into the everyday. There is a saying that says, 'speak things into existence' and this project is but at the beginning of its speaking. Concluding suggests being 'done', but by no means is this research 'done'. It is a proposition that pairs performance with culture or rather performance in culture as a suggestion to the ways in which we can begin elevating, stretching, sitting, and moving with, through and without. The paper seeks to touch on what thinks itself to be untouchable by bringing myself closer in reach to myself. In that 'bringing' I make myself touchable, reachable and identifiable within myself.

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