

**Interrogating the creative dance methodologies of Jacques Le Coq, Steven Paxton and Lloyd Newson and how they impact on my own-contemporary choreographic practices – with specific reference to *Em(brace)* choreographed in 2015 and re-worked in 2016 (KZN, South Africa)**

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**DECLARATIONS:**

**I affirm that this is my own work and that all references and other sources have been duly acknowledged**

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This thesis is dedicated to my family (Busisiwe, Locky and Lindokuhle Zondi), and all those who are curious and work hard on their craft to make it better.

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## ABSTRACT

This half dissertation offers an autoethnographical (and hence, personal) study of the performance and dance/physical theatre training methodologies developed by France's Jacques Le Coq, USA's Steve Paxton and Britain's Lloyd Newson and how they impact on my own growing South African dance practices as choreographer, specifically in the work *Emb(race)*, created in 2015 and re-worked for Jomba! Fringe in 2016. This study focuses on interrogating ideas around training and developing performers for readiness in dance performance. As researcher, I also draw upon theoretical and socio/political ideas around constructions of masculinities and how they may relate to black male identities in the context of South Africa, as these were the themes I worked with in my dance work *Emb(race)* (2015/6).

Key words: Jacques Le Coq; Steve Paxton; Lloyd Newson; Autoethnography; Hegemonic masculinity; Black Identity; Emb(race)

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## INTRODUCTION

John Percival (1970) wrote that dance is the fastest-growing and possibly the fastest changing art today. Much of what is being performed now would have been unimaginable even a few years back (Percival, 1970; p. 6). Skills and movement abilities that were considered as avant-garde years ago are easily manageable movements today. The rapid growths that dance as an art form has enjoyed in the twentieth century have led to significant development and refinement in the art of choreography; “The practice of this art and the actual doing of choreography have raced far beyond the literature that describes it” (Chaplin, 1982; p. xiii). For me, I can only say that this fast growth is only possible through constant practice, constant rehearsal, and constant body training. That is the highlight and focus of this dissertation; training and development of the dancing/performing body, but not just physical training also psychological and imagination training.

I am a self-trained dancer/choreographer based in Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal. The knowledge of dance I have has been through a study of visual art, text, discourse analysis and my practical undergraduate years in University of KwaZulu-Natal studying drama (Pietermaritzburg) Art and dance were not necessary my original career path, even coming to university my intention was to do Psychology and Mathematics. As an elective I took Drama and Performance Studies because I had always imagined myself as an actor for film. The study of Drama and Performance Studies would be for the next 3 years, involve physical practices of movement and acting, none of which I had previously experienced. The only knowledge of movement I had at that time was perhaps martial arts, not that I had professionally done it either but was all self-taught from watching Jackie Chan and other Kung Fu films. The next three years continued to be hard but I did not want to stay behind, I wanted to be good at dancing too. So I learnt harder, I researched the dancers, I watched YouTube videos and most importantly I woke up every morning and went to the studio and practiced. Somehow it was never enough in practicals, rehearsals and auditions there would be people who were better than me. I encountered fellow students who had years of dance training and technical training who were doing ballet and ballroom. As time passed more individuals came to me for assistance in dance, what did seem to come to light was that I seemed to have a simple and perhaps intuitive understanding of movement, and I seemed to have my own way of capturing it and constructing it. The facts were simple, my constant training was making me better, and my body was getting accustomed to the idea of moving in

different directions. The more knowledge and ideas I took from other choreographers the more I expanded as a dancer myself. In continuation of this ‘simple’ learning revelation, I have been constantly developing my dance skills through improvisation (free dancing), attending as many workshops and dance programmes as I can. It is through this personal journey that I have begun to develop my own methodology and system of training and preparing performers and dancers for performance. This is primarily influenced by a few key dance and physical theatre practitioners that I have studied and been exposed to.

For the purpose of this dissertation, however, it is through a constant study, practice of a combination of three selected practitioner’s philosophies and working methodologies. These are France’s Jacques Le Coq (2001, 2006 & 2014), America’s Steve Paxton (1975, 1988 & 1996) and Britain’s Lloyd Newson (1995, 1999 & 2014). The common link between these practitioners (for me) is their growing ideas around dance as an art form that focuses on a search for personal identity where performers and choreographers use their art/dance making practice as a process of discovery into the expression of self (Buckland, 1995; p. 327). According to Oyserman (2012) “self is a regulating and motivating tool, both because the self feels like a stable anchor, and because identities that constitute self are, in fact, dynamically constructed in context” (Oyserman, 2012; p. 70). Self here is defined as reflection of personal beliefs, culture and ideas around how the world functions (Holman Jones, 2003; p.763); this is something to look at clearly.

This half dissertation will interrogate and critically examine these three working methodologies and how they have influenced and informed my own rehearsal and choreographic process, especially as this is related to the creation of *Emb(race)* a dance performance work I created in 2015 and then re-stage and re-worked in 2016 for the JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Festival at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theater (30 August 2016). As mentioned these internationally acclaimed dance and physical theatre practitioners Le Coq (2006, 2007 & 2014), Paxton (1975, 1988 & 1996) and Newson’s (1995, 1999 & 2014) methodologies acted as starting points for a working rehearsal process/methodology for myself and (potentially) for other South African dancers. A question that perhaps could arise is why - if this dissertation is for South African context, did I as black male dancer choose three white international (Europe and America) male practitioners as guides? In the on-going debates around decolonising learning spaces and looking at local and indigenous knowledge systems and learning, I am faced with the on-going questions around the relevance of looking

outside South Africa and Africa for meaning and method. In response to these debates I am thus interested in not abandoning a global history around dance training and methodology but am focused on how these methodologies combined together and can be re-imagined into my own personal context and performance needs and, with this, the contexts of a contemporary South African landscape of dance training and performance.

This dissertation is broken down into four chapters. In Chapter One, my focused methodology chapter focuses on unpacking the use of autoethnography as research methodology for this dissertation. Autoethnography is “research that draws on personal accounts and experiences of the author/researcher for purpose of extending sociological understanding” (Sparkes, 2002; p.121).

This method of writing is the methodological framework of this dissertation and I use it to fully articulate my experiences as choreographer and performer. Furthermore chapter one will delve slightly into my application of the training methodologies of Le Coq, Paxton and Newson in my own work, specifically how autoethnography itself as methodology relates to the chosen dance makers. This will introduce the next chapter which will provide full details on how I adopted and re-imagined the methodologies to create my own working methodology which I argue is relevant for a contemporary South African dance making climate.

Chapter Two focuses on understanding and unpacking dance training and dance making methodologies specifically methodologies from Jacques Le Coq, Steve Paxton and Lloyd Newson. In this chapter I lay out how each of the above three practitioner’s methodology works and importantly how I was able to use them in developing my own working way. Le Coq, Paxton and Newson had their own influence that impacted how they created their methodologies that I will highlight such influences as I believe it helped in creating who they were as practitioners.

Chapter Three has a highlighted focus of defining the choreographic project *Emb(race)* (2015); *Emb(race)* (2016). This chapter will offer a detailed account of the origin, process, creation, and personal application and/or combination of the three different methodologies to achieve my final performance product of *Emb(race)*. As a choreographer and theatre maker I favor the idea of work being guided by some narrative which is something that already exists in dance theatre. Newson (1995) wrote “it is crucial for my dance work to carry a message or

embody narrative meaning rather than it is beautiful movements (visuals) on stage” (Tushingham, 1995 on dv8.co.uk).

My interrogation, in the dance work *Emb(race)*, is further also around my own black masculinity and how it links to issues of sexual identity. Chapter Four the last chapter, thus deals with questioning and understanding gender and masculinity in the South African context. The chapter interrogates masculinities that have been constructed by society through culture, religion and media. I use this chapter to challenge and question these socially constructed roles black men have been expected to play in South Africa and the cognate physical actions they have been using to express themselves in dance theatre. In the chapter I look at myself and my personal identity as a black male choreographer.

I would like to highlight two important words in this dissertation that will appear congruently those are *developing* and *training*. When I use the words developing and/or training here I mean to strengthen and develop physical actions and movements, psychological states, and build a dance language. This will be unpacked and explored throughout chapters One and Two.

In my artistic and choreographic working process I have discovered that it is important that performer’s physical bodies are shaped, but further their psychological state strengthen and the creative abilities enhanced. Gordon (2010) stated “training should celebrate imagination of dancer [Performer], should be a kind of laboratory for playing with improvisation, creative tasks, transforming ideas into movement, confronting personal challenges, interact with others and collaborate” (Finestone-Praeg, 2010; p.35). Each of the three chosen practitioner’s methods of dance/physical theatre training helps both me as choreographer, and the individual performer develop these performance abilities. In my own strategy and perspective as an art/dance maker these ideas will be highlighted throughout the dissertation. Le Coq’s ideas assist in developing the psychology of the performer, Paxton’s processes support the need for physicality, and Newson’s methodology enhances the creativity of the performer.

This dissertation does not necessarily navigate any full attempt to offer South African dance histories but rather engages the ideas and concerns around assisting and developing South African dancers and performers. In conclusion my hope is that this dissertation can work to offer further debates and insights for training and/or developing performers for performance in South Africa based on the articulated need to strengthen South African performers

physically, psychologically and creatively and offer insight about my perspective on issues around masculinities.

## CHAPTER ONE

## **The Study of Self**

### **I. Autoethnography as methodology**

This chapter will focus on my chosen research methodology which is based on the growing area of autoethnography. I will explain briefly what autoethnography is in research and offer some details around its emergence as a valuable and viable means of studying one's own work – particularly useful in arts research and in research that looks to one's own arts production and art making. I use autoethnography (itself a varied field of study) to support and reveal how this methodology relates to my own work both as a dancer/choreographer, and also as a self-reflecting artists scholar. Autoethnography as a methodology is set up in this chapter to frame the subsequent chapter discussions and reflections on my own rehearsal and growing choreographic process, especially as this relates to the creation and rehearsal process of Emb(race) a dance performance work I created in 2015 and then re-stage and re-worked in 2016 for the JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Festival at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre (30 August 2016).

“Autoethnography is a methodology that focuses on using self, and understanding/recognising of self/culture as subject of study” (Wade, 2015; p. 194)<sup>1</sup>. It is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis and Bochner, 2011); “Understanding researcher as subject of study” (Jackson, 2008; p. 299).

Research as a subject of study is similar to an autobiography. Autobiography is an account of a person's life written by that person. In it (autobiography) the writer tells his/her personal history regarding birth, education, career and life. Autoethnography however does not journey with the narrative construct of the subject's life, rather it deals with narratives and events in the subject's life that can be systematically analysed (Ellis and Bochner, 2011). ‘Systematically analysed’ means it can be referenced/compared to some other writing or event/study, and, in the case of this dissertation, I am looking at live performance. Arthur Ellis and Carolyn Bochner (2011) write that “autoethnography is a systematic analysis of personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis and Bochner, 2011; p. 273). Understanding cultural experience perhaps is a reference to dialogue and debates that instigate and shape social change (Reinelt, 1998; Holman-Jones, 2008). Further, cultural experience offers an understanding of the context of one person, and in this understanding creates connections between writer and reader (Holman-Jones, 2005; p. 764).

What autoethnography aims to do is introduce introspective stories, link emotions; embodiment, spirituality, and action were one person can identify with the other (Jackson, 2011). Sherick Hughes (2012) adds that the autoethnographic researcher shares with cultural groups who are identified by researcher as same to self (Hughes et al, 2012). This means that, if the researcher is a theatre director, then the cultural group s/he speaks to would be theatre individuals, people who have the same interests as the researcher.

My aim is to connect with the performance artist, specifically dance performer/choreographers through what I have done as a choreographer in training and developing performers in preparation for performance. Roxanne Doty (2010) argues that autoethnography makes it clear that writers (and in my case; dance makers) are part of their work, part of the story they tell, they are connected (Doty, 2010; Holman-Jones, 2005).

With all that has been mentioned we can clarify that autoethnography is the writing of self, narrating of a personal journey in an academic form. ‘Academic form’ means the journey is relevant and relates to other/existing narrated journeys that have occurred in that field of study.

There are lots of writings and readings that argue against this form of academic writing. I want to dwell on the negative points about autoethnography first so I can make a counter argument with the positives that it brings into academic writing and why I favour it for my research. According to Sara Delamont (2007) autoethnography is a very problematic methodology of doing research. Delamont’s (2007) in her short essay ‘Arguments against auto-ethnography’ problematises autoethnography as a research methodology and summarises seven points of caution when using autoethnography. Although I will not look at all these seven points for this writing, focus will be laid on the one(s) that relate to my dissertation.

“Auto-ethnography lacks analysis and ‘we’ are simply not interesting enough to write about” (Delamont, 2007; p. 2)

“The emergence of autoethnography and narratives of self has not been trouble-free, and their status as proper research remains problematic” (Sparkes, 2000; p. 2). Autoethnography is non-analytic and an abuse of privilege, self-indulgent (Sparkes, 2002), and irreverent, self-absorbed, sentimental, and romantic (Ellis and Bochner, 2002; Delamont, 2007). Paul Atkison (1997) and Andrew Sparkes (2000) raise the fact that by using self as a source of

data, perhaps the only source, autoethnography has been criticized for being “self-indulgent, narcissistic, introspective, and individualized” (Wall, 2006; p. 8). Their argument continues by suggesting that a focus on a single, subjective subject “lacks genuinely thick descriptions and threatens to substitute a psychotherapeutic for a sociological view of life” (Wall, 2006; p. 8; Holt, 2003; p. 3). In scientific or perhaps ‘academic’ arguments autoethnography lacks credibility, validity and reliability/trustworthiness (Wall, 2006). From the above arguments it is difficult to prove that the findings of autoethnographic are true or not.

Counter to Delamont (2007), however, Ellis and Bochner (2000) argue that scholars writing and researching within methodologies of autoethnography want to “concentrate on producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitise readers to issues of personal and hence social identity politics, to open up experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathise with people who are different from us” (Ellis and Bochner, 2011; p. 274). Wade (2015) further argues that autoethnographic research acknowledges that worlds are created through interpretation and writing and that all knowledge holds the bias of the author even when shrouded within the ‘scientific’ (Wade, 2015; p. 196-7). Wade (2015) challenges the idea that scientific research with its focus on data, theories and scientific information often forgets the existence of the individual as both subject and as author. Andrew Sparkes (2000) suggested that “autoethnography is at the boundaries of academic research because its approach does not sit comfortably with traditional criteria used to judge qualitative inquires” (In Holt, 2003; p. 3). The argument for autoethnography suggests that there should be a rethinking of terms such as validity, reliability and objectivity (Holt, 2003). Sparkes (2000) further argues that we should not impose traditional criteria in judging the value of personal text; the traditional forms of criteria should not/do not apply to autoethnography texts (Holt, 2003).

Wall (2008) writes if we do not impose these traditional criteria then we offer an alternative voice to the long held dominance of more scientific forms (Wall [2008] in Woodley, 2016; p. 45). As writers we should be offered a chance to write our own stories, perspective which could be offered because of race, age, gender, social change, context and more. Adam (2014) states that, by using autoethnography, we enable researchers to acknowledge the impact that their own identities, beliefs and values have on research, as well as seeing the same in those who may be participants (Woodley, 2016). Pratt (1995) concurs with the argument that “we

cannot move theory into action unless we can find it in eccentric and wandering ways of our daily life...Stories give theory flesh and breath” (Pratt, 1995 In Holman-Jones, 2005; p. 763). There are things, actions or events that we go through as individuals that cannot be analysed, but rather are narratives and stories that need to be told. “Stories were authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living” (Jones, 2013; p. 10; Custer, 2014; p. 1). This telling/narrating of the personal story creates a sense of relation between the reader and writer. Autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality and researchers influence on research (Ellis and Bochner, 2011; p. 274).

Stacy Holman Jones (2005) mentions a narrative by Carol Rambo Ronai’s (1995) “Multiple reflections of child sex abuse: an argument for a layered account”. She writes how the text combined with personal emotions made her, take “progressive political action, to theory and method that connects politics, pedagogy, and ethics to action in the world” (Holman Jones, 2005; p. 767). She practically makes the statement that autoethnographic reading takes the reader on an emotional journey.

Continuing with the challenge to Delamont’s (2007) essay, the following point(s) made by Dwayne Custer (2014) add to why autoethnography can be beneficial to many researchers. Through what he titles “lenses”, Custer (2014) highlights perhaps some of the most crucial elements on the methodological use of self in autoethnography.

These following points are counter arguments to Delamont’s negative/unfavourable views about autoethnography as research in academic writing

1. “Autoethnography requires vulnerability” (Custer, 2014; p. 3)

Autoethnography promotes vulnerability, nakedness, and shame in order to heal psychological and emotional wounds. Vulnerability in its own manner can be courage, to let go of the actions and events that occurred by letting someone hear them. In autoethnography the researcher/ writer engages with themselves to find ‘clarity of purpose’ (Custer, 2014; p. 4).

2. “Autoethnography embodies creativity and innovation” (Custer, 2014; p. 6)

Autoethnography incites creativity by enabling the imagination of the reader, and is innovative by design because it focuses on unique individual experiences. Having to follow a

certain narrative, autoethnography opens up the reader/audience's imagination to creating similar scenarios of the narrative. It makes the reader imagine the situation. Although an individual narrative in reading, the reader in a manner has a chance to place themselves in the writer's shoes.

This adds value to this dissertation, the understanding that autoethnography does not refer only to understanding/interrogating personal experiences but also to making the connections – via the personal - to understanding cultural/social experiences. Ellis and Bochner (2011) write that autoethnography is an approach to research that analyses personal experience in order to understand cultural experience; it works to hold self and culture together (as quoted in Holman Jones, 2005; p. 764). Autoethnography “use[s] personal experiences to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders” (Hughes, 2012; p. 210).

Cultural/culture experience and context can refer to a lot of things; however for this research that culture and/or cultural experience refer to performing arts and for me specifically choreography and dance. Researchers using the methodologies of autoethnography aim to avoid the existing methods of research; “resisting colonialist, impulses of authoritatively entering a culture, exploiting cultural members, and then recklessly leaving to write about the culture for ‘monetary gain” (Ellis and Bochner, 2011; p. 274). Colonialist in interpretation would be referring to a researcher that invades the field of study only for them to gain while the artist gains no value in the experience of partaking in the research.

When researchers work within the paradigm of autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about actions and events that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity (Ellis and Bochner, 2011).

From the above argument, I favoured autoethnography as the methodology for my research, because it connects with my work. I am a performing.

## **II. Autoethnography and writing/reflecting 'self'**

Autoethnography is a methodology that focuses on using self and understanding/recognising of self (Wade, 2015; p. 194). It is this idea that links and relates autoethnography, myself and the dance makers Le Coq, Paxton and Newson, the existence of self within their working methodologies; the belief that your persona/personal aim should find existence within your work and how work is created.

Using this understanding I intend to show how as a choreographer I have taken these three varying/unique methods from different practitioners namely Le Coq, Paxton and Newson; integrated them to form a personal working methodology of my own. Each methodology from these practitioners is capable of functioning on its own. Le Coq (France) whose methodology has been used for years in the L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq; Paxton (USA) whose methodology, technique has been used internationally by varying performers/choreographers/practitioners; and Newson who has used his method of working with DV8 Physical Theatre Company to develop and create internationally recognised theatre works. All these practitioners have with success used their methodologies to not only create works but significantly for the purpose of this dissertation have used their methodologies to train and develop performers.

It is said that three heads work better than one, in this situation I have taken three unique methods, carped in them what I believe to be essential and developed my own unique way of using them. As a theatre maker I believe we (Theatre makers) evolve by taking what we have learnt and what has worked, implementing our own ideas into it, and make something new. In my experience there perhaps is no original idea; there are different experiences to different situations and it is finding your own personal way to come out of that situation that makes it unique and original. With Le Coq, Paxton and Newson I found that individually/taking one of their methodologies was not for me, but certain elements of their methodologies articulated what I was looking for and what I would be able to work with.

The purpose of chapter two will be to highlight what their unique methodologies are like, what makes them personally unique for the practitioners who use them and how there developed them. I mention the development of the methodologies because there are unique; there came from personal yearning from the practitioners, the practitioners wanted something different to what they were exposed too thus created/developed these working methods.

## CHAPTER TWO

## 1. Inside the mind of the teachers

As a performer and choreographer I have been working with dance for about 9 years now. Throughout these years I have learnt various styles, techniques and importantly, methods of training and developing my body and the performer's body. In these existing various dance training and making methodologies I have constantly been drawn to three dance practitioners, Jacques Le Coq (France), Steve Paxton (USA) and Lloyd Newson (UK). I have found a resonance with these three practitioners despite their vastly different geopolitical contexts and histories as part of this dissertation is an attempt to unpack this personal 'resonance' and to look more deeply into what these three dance practitioners have offered to my growing understanding of dance making and dance training in my own context of South Africa. I believe they have offered me ways of developing an understanding of my own and the dancer/performer's physicality, psychology and imagination assets I believe are needed in any performer and especially in the politically charged 21<sup>st</sup> century in art and dance making in South Africa.

Each of these three dance/physical theatre methodologies chosen here can function individually in training and developing dancers/performers. I believe, however, integration and a combination of these different methods can function better in yielding what for me are even stronger performers. My own journey to finding the confluence between these three systems of training and moving is thus detailed in this chapter. In this chapter I will firstly offer a brief account of each practitioner's history; my main focus will be on their dance and training ideas/methodologies. Secondly I will delve into why I have chosen and been drawn to them as practitioners and how I have utilised/adapted and combined their ideas/methodologies in the creation of my work *Emb(race)* in its first form in 2015, and then in the re-worked for the Jomba! Fringe in 2016.

Before delving into these three practitioner's histories and their dance training methodologies, I would first like to highlight what I believe is needed in training and development of dancers/performers and why training can be considered as a crucial element for dance/theatre as well. As Le Coq (2000) has said "Theatre should always help develop new ideas, new language, and new bodies thus assisting in the renewal of theatre itself" (Lecoq, 2000; p. 162). As a performer myself I never got any 'formal technical' training for theatre, as already mentioned most of the training I received was obtained from what I saw

online and interpreting what I read on paper. Indeed what I learnt as a student I consider as training, however it was training to understand the world of dance and the many available techniques, ideas, and practitioners. What I consider formal technical training would be the constant teaching of specific techniques, learning the practical layout of how one practitioner uses their technique, the terms and uses of those terms in practical application. My journey in dance training did not focus on terms and languages that are found in dance; the focus was rather on getting the body to move freely in every direction. I yearn to get better and learn more.

While it can be argued that there are advantages of formal training in dance, it is more advantageous to understand the dance language for example the pirouette (A complete turn of the body executed on one leg) (<https://www.centralhome.com/ballroomcountry/dance-definitions.htm><sup>1</sup>), instead of having comprehensive knowledge on which techniques work best to develop a certain aspect in a performers. For myself, I came from a maths and science schooling background before making a move into theatre and dance. I became angry and frustrated at trying to understand what others seem to simply 'know'. I felt frustrated at being in position of not feeling like I could learn and adapting quick enough. I would later, through my own training, acquire this knowledge and working somatic physical sense but this is essentially why I began seeking my own way of creating dance, a methodology/s of integrating and interpreting what I intuitively and instinctually felt and sensed and that was influenced by these three specific dance practitioners.

### **I. Jacques Le Coq.**

Jacques Le Coq (1921-1999) was born in on 15 December 1921, Paris, France. Le Coq believed that, when it comes to theatre, individual performers should allow their sense of self, freedom of self and play to take over (Keefe, 2007; p.45). Le Coq believed the performer's unique self-ability should be a creative asset when it comes to his own development and growth. With that suggestion he considered himself as "I am nobody; I am a neutral point through which you (as learner) must pass in order to better articulate your own theatrical voice" (Murray, 2003; p.45). The quote has resonated to how I see myself as a trainer in developing performers. I am an individual who is there to guide rather than impose an

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed March 2018. <https://www.centralhome.com/ballroomcountry/dance-definitions.htm>

ideology. I see myself as a person who works to prepare the performer for theatre adventures beyond work that we do together.

The Intention behind Le Coq's methodology of training for performers is to train them physically, opening their physical language and enabling them to be articulate with the body. This physical training of performers functions in a way that it helps to develop the psychology of the performers, which is what I will be mostly focusing on. According to Le Coq's methodology the psychology of the performer plays an important role in how s/he grows. The psychology of the performer can be linked to their creativity and vice versa thus if as performer's psychology is strong then creativity is built as well. Bernard (2009) asserts that contrary to many American teachings, which support the occurrence of internal discovery (psyche) by performing exercises such as psychological recall and emotional memory, this pedagogy of Le Coq believes true discovery is achieved externally (Bernard, 2009). Which mean it is through physical action or outside experiences/what is applied outside the performer that allows them to grow psychologically. Psychology is defined as the science of behaviour and mind, embracing all aspects of conscious and unconscious experience as well as thought. In Le Coq's methodology interpretation behaviour would refers to physical action whilst mind being the psychology/thought.

Kemp (2017) supports this stating "Le Coq's conceptualisation of training is implicitly congruent with the principles of embodied cognition, and often explicitly forecast its precepts. Embodied cognition proposes that thinking and behaviour are properties of the whole human organism, not the brain alone, and that body, brain and cognition are "situated" – engaged with the surrounding environment" (Kemp, 2017; p. 94). In standard explanation this suggests that physical actions affect behaviour and creativity whilst the latter can affect the other as well. In basic the principle suggests that psychology, physicality and creativity have a working relationship. Thus because physicality, psychology and creativity link together extensively working on one will lead inevitably to developing the other. Le Coq then chose to work externally in order to infiltrate internally.

Simon Murray who wrote a book dedicated to the life and influence of the practitioner Jacques Le Coq writes, "although Le Coq's attribute influence comes from individuals such as Jacques Copeau (1949-1979) who is well-known for his work in mime and mime training, and practitioners like Antonin Artaud (1896- 1948); it was his own curiosity with the body and how it moved that create Le Coq's methodology" (Murray, 2003; p. 2). Le Coq was

influenced by sports which in essence is where his interest for body movement began. In his work he retained interest in how athletes effectively organise and use their bodies (Murray, 2003). In Le Coq's (2000) book "*The Moving Body*" his journey from Sport to theatre is richly highlighted. These journeys from Le Coq are what adversely led him to develop his way of working. This is significant because it highlights that Le Coq did not start in dance/theatre rather he had a movement based journey outside theatre that led him to theatre. This echoes my own journey of travelling through several techniques and styles of movement to inevitably end up where I am now.

Furthermore it would also be his mime work that would play a huge contributing role in Le Coq's ideas, teachings and methodology. Mime work requires the performer to be imaginative, requires his/her psychology to be strong in a manner that they can endure ridiculing themselves to any means necessary to entertain. In my understanding a mime is required to take movement back to its simplest form, to use minor gestures extensively and express themselves through facial expression and body without use of words; basically what we might call physical language. It would be in both the interests of sport and mime that Le Coq devoted himself to running a school of mime and theatre based on movement and the human body; "a school relying on knowledge of the organic and emotional dynamics of man and nature" (Murray, 2003; p. 16). Le Coq's methodology which is developed for training students at the L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq (1956) requires the physical performer to understand themselves, their psychology and understanding of their surroundings (Keefe, 2007; p. 147) awareness of self in context (Bernard, 2009; p. 22).

Training begins with the performer becoming acquainted with his/her body (Bernard, 2009; p. 22). This is done by stripping away all that the performer knows in order to re-teach and re-learning their bodies. The student is asked to forget all they know about theatre, the physical part of theatre. Physical theatre should be approached as an empty canvas where nothing is written and performers are shown or taught to begin writing that information on their canvas which would be their minds. Keefe (2007) writes in the beginning (of training), it is necessary to demystify all that we (theatre makers) know in order to put ourselves in a state of non-knowing, an empty foundation, a kind of openness and availability for the discovery of the elemental (Keefe, 2007; p. 145); "to create a site to build on, not a finished edifice" (Bradby, 2000; ix).

Many approaches from Le Coq's school are used to demystify the performer amongst them mime but one approach that I would like to focus on in this writing is how Le Coq's technique encourages the performers to discover their own styles rather than forcing them to adapt to a certain style. The method aims to develop a performer's own special idiom of physical expressivity through opening up their 'physical imagination' (Bradby, 2006; xv). Bradby (2006) continues to add that "Le Coq's training methods were unusual in that they encouraged the performer to discover their own style rather than imposing one upon him [sic]" (Bradby, 2006; p. xii). Bradby (2000) writes "Le Coq respected differences of culture, talent, physique: all who came to him were encouraged to develop according to their own peculiar gifts" (Bradby, 2006; p. xii). Le Coq uses exercises to hone and develop the performer; these exercises are created in "accordance to nature and elements, the organic and emotional dynamics of man and nature" (Murray, 2003; p. 16). Nature refers to trees, mountains, and rocks while elements refer to wind, earth, fire and water. Le Coq's ideas would ask the performer to transform themselves according to these given natural elements. These elements would be used in a way that they tapped into the emotions of the performer. Le Coq applies the elements in behaviour that they would inevitably awaken the performer to psychology of the performer.

In order to get a practical understanding of Le Coq's approach I mention some of these exercises that Le Coq used; although I do not utilise some of them in my interpretation of Le Coq, as there are mostly built for movement performers rather than dance, I do find them to be relevant in how they assist in strengthening the psychology of the performer. The exercises ask the performer to be creative by going through a mental and physical journey. In Simon Murray's book (2003) *Jacques LECOQ*, David Bradby's (2000) *The Moving Body* (Translated) and John Keefe's (2007) *Physical Theatre: A Critical Reader*, provides a good summary on some of the functions that Le Coq's exercises had in performers.

Principles that are crucial from these exercises are;

- a) Movement provokes emotions

*The departure*

"A member of the family (usually son or daughter) leaves home. Different possible reasons might be given to justify the situation: the only son is being called up to go to war; the

pregnant daughter has decided to follow her lover who is not accepted by the family; the gay son who has just 'come out' to his family is leaving to live with his boyfriend etc.

The situation to be improvised is the moment of departure from home just before the person leaves. The family is in the sitting room when the son or daughter enters to say goodbye. The improvisation should be played in silence, so as to confront the characters with a situation where no one present needs to say anything. Thus, focus is given to the silent dramatic tension between characters” (Murray, 2003; p. 139)

b) The body remembers

The next one is an exercise I used as a form of action-reaction in creating dance. The idea was to create dance with just simple movements.

*I am pushed...I am pulled*

“Working in pairs, stand immediately behind your partner. The person in front is the puppet, the one behind the puppeteer. The puppeteer provokes movement in the puppet by touching different parts of his body- back or side of the head, shoulders, pelvis, knees, heels, etc. When the puppet’s head is pushed slowly forward, for example, the impulse is accepted until the pushing stops. The head then returns to the initial position of departure. As you both become more confident with the game, the puppeteer provokes faster and faster movement, and different body parts at the same time. The puppet must accept the rhythm offered, always trying to return the moved body part back to the point of departure” (Murray, 2003; p. 140)

Le Coq’s ideas amongst the three practitioners chosen are perhaps the hardest to unpack, simply because my interpretation of his ideas does not directly link to what he does. What Le Coq offered that I have found to be deeply useful to my one growing confluence of choreographic ideas, is a sense of the freedom of the spirit and knowledge of the body. That is where my interpretation and utilisation of Le Coq’s ideas lie; stress on the psychological discipline of the performer. I favour how his idea of physical training allows the performer to grow within and thus have the ability to grow outside; interact and communicate with their surroundings in order to understand the world better. Psychological discipline with me comes in the form of sharing personal stories and experiences with performers. I share what I have experienced with the performers so to prepare them from what might come then, I communicate what I believed worked and why it worked, and finally teach all that worked.

This idea of ‘teach everything ‘means teach everything that I consider functioning as movement and can be used to create dance. Techniques and styles such as martial art have been part of my growth as choreographer thus I use them, capoeira (Brazilian dance movement) and even sports becomes part of the process. In some of the rehearsals for Emb(race) (2016) we spent time just choreographing fight scenes, re-enacting choreographies done by the likes of Chinese martial artist and film star Jackie Chan and Mua Thai star Tony Jaa. It is this approach to training and developing performers that I have used and so far for me it seems to produce and develop psychology I need in the performers. Similar to Le Coq I work with different talents, cultures and physiques but I work to bring the performers to the same level of skills and abilities; what one performer can do, we constantly work hard to make sure everyone else can as well, no matter what their physique. This is significant in a South African context because ...

1. Many black South African dancers come to performance training later in life and like me, have no perceivable/recognisable dance training skill and mind set to draw on,
2. I work in an African cultural environment that actively seeks to challenge the hegemonically white Western image of a dancer so that I can actively insert black African bodies into dance making and training;
3. The narratives I tell adapt to social change. There is a need for work that challenges how we think, what we think is right and what we think is wrong in the now.
4. The need to stop others from telling our (Black) stories when we can tell them better because we experience them. People need to share their stories, their experiences and perspectives of culture, context and the world in their way.

## **II. Steve Paxton**

Steve Paxton was born in 1939- in present day Phoenix, AZ. He began his movement studies in gymnastics and then trained in martial arts, ballet, and modern dance. Gymnastics and martial arts form the basis/structure of the movement technique contact improvisation that Paxton would develop, movements such as falls, rolls, jumps, and lifts are used in the fighting technique of aikido and Tai Chi Chuan which Paxton learnt in his college days (Rachel Elliott, 2012). Paxton worked with recognised individuals such as Jose Limón,

dancer, choreographer and creator of Limon Technique in the 1960's. In the same era Paxton danced with Merce Cunningham another well-known choreographer, who with Paxton would be responsible for the development of the technique "Chance operation" a dance/technique that looked at relationship between dance and music (Leader. 15-04-87|Los Angeles Daily News).

Paxton was a founding member of the dance collectives Judson Dance Theater and Grand Union (with Yvonne Rainer, Barbara Lloyd, Nancy Lewis, David Gordon, Douglas Dunn, and Trisha Brown) it is during his time and influence from Grand Union that Paxton would develop Contact Improvisation. As a performer/dancer Paxton wanted something different from what he was experiencing, he wanted to develop a non-hierarchical structure in dance and consciously look for something different from that based upon the traditional choreographer-dancer relationship (Stahmer, 2011; p. 9; Klatenbrunner, 2004). Paxton's idea was to put the dancer's body into unusual, disorienting, and often emergency situations (Stahmer, 2011; p. 9)

In the 1970's Steve Paxton and Nancy Stark-Smith formed a movement called Contact improvisation, Paxton and Stark-Smith wished to challenge the status quo in dance (Klatenbrunner, 2004: p. 21; Humphrey, 2008; p. 14).

He created an entire "non-dance" dance vocabulary (Elliot, 2012), a dance not focused on the pure technicalities of dance/movement but rather on understanding the body's physique and momentum. Paxton also often worked with very non-traditional groups of dancers. It was his aim to test if contact improvisation would work for those who had no prior history of dance. Hence why he began with those who did not have understanding of what dance rather an understanding of a moving body.

Paxton's methodology and choreography is built upon a buoyant investigation of the practice and process of dance improvisation; this practice and process relies on self-awareness mediating on the body, and strengths of the performer. Contact improvisation subverts the dictatorship fashioned in classical training where there is someone who constantly teaches their ideas on movement and dance. Paxton's contact improvisation as I will highlight replaces this head instructor or choreographer with the dance itself (Stahmer, 2011).

Although contact improvisation is an instant choreographic tool, it can also be utilised as a dance training tool something that I have taken up. The general idea behind this technique is

to develop the physicality of the performer and, performer's awareness of self and others. Cynthia Novack's (1988) essay titled "Contact improvisation: a photo essay and summary movement analysis" provides a highlight of how contact improvisation achieves this physical awareness of self and others.

Contact improvisation (C.I) is a system based on the senses of touch and balance (Paxton, 1975; p. 40). It is a creative process which occurs when two or more people move in mutual support and play with shifting weight, collective equilibrium (Kaltenbrunner, 2004; p. 11). It is the body's innate ability to respond physically to its environment (Lepkoff, 2008; p. 2; Stalmer, 2011; p. 9). The common factor between all these definitions is that all come from personal experience of contact improvisation. Each individual is explaining contact improvisation the way they felt it when there were in the process of it and/or learning about it. The words that occur consistently in defining CI are touch, weight, support and bodies. Kaltenbrunner (2004) writes contact improvisation is a process that involves two or more people (Lepkoff, 2008; p. 2; Kaltenbrunner, 2004; p. 11; Humphrey, 2008; p. 18). Gradually as individuals take on the process and training they learn to understand their physical bodies, where they are stronger/weaker, where they need to fold in order to roll better without hurting themselves and other bodies, how they can lift others without needing to use too much strength and how to make contact with other bodies, contact that will eventually be used to develop a narrative or vocabulary. Taking weight from and giving weight to a partner slowly develop (Turner, 2010).

Within these descriptions and definitions it becomes clear that CI builds the performers physical awareness; "perceiving the minor shifts of weight and reacting accordingly" (Kaltenbrunner, 2004; p. 10). As the performer trains s/he develops a sense of self-awareness with their muscular reflexes. Kaltenbrunner (2004) and Turner (2010) adds that the sense of self is not only of the physical but the unconscious; that in this creative process the performer learns and understands to let go of the conscious; conscious must leave and let the body's innate ability take over.

According to Paxton (1975) culture has inhibited our movements to nothing but codes and structures; CI allows the performer to disregard culture and find the personal, "bodily experience" (Turner, 2010; p. 131). Culture here refers to systems of teaching dance, specific techniques e.g. Graham Technique movement that is based on fall and recovery. Falling down and recovering. Contact improvisation is not a technique as such but teaches a

dancer/performer to understand how they move and be aware of others movement within the same space they are in. Paxton (1975) continues to add that tension is also cultural; tension holds the body back and it can be resolved simply by going back to one's bodily sensations and relaxing.

In training the performer through contact improvisation you are in basis suggesting them to go through the following actions and activities noted by Cynthia Novack's (1988) essay titled "Contact improvisation: a photo essay and summary movement analysis"

1. Generate movement through contact.

In contact "movements occur between two bodies, the performers through touch find mutual, easiest spatial pathways to create movement "(Banes, 1989; p. 65; Humphrey, 2008; p. 19). In touch performers are mutually supportive and innovative (Humphrey, 2008; p. 15). Stahmer (2011) writes "physical touch can be considered the Rosetta stone of contact improvisation. It is the key element. Through contact is how the body allows itself to move; "Strong contact of a shoulder against a stomach, can initiate several different reactions, from shoulder lift to a roll over the back" (Stahmer, 2011; p. 19).

2. Sensing through skin.

In this form of training it is not the centre or the heel of the leg that must be used to create movement. CI asks the performer to use the entire surface of the body to support one's own weight and the weight of another. Through skin (sense of touch), physical harmonisation one performer know where the other needs support (Stahmer, 2011; p. 17). "As bodies roll, slip and slide along one another, non-verbal communication and the ability to respond fluidly to impulse of movement becomes paramount to individual volition or will" (Stahmer, 2011; p. 5).

3. Rolling through the body

Rolls when it comes to CI are routine. Turner (2010) wrote rolls in CI draw from martial arts (aikido); this roll requires attention to sensation (on the back and neck). This roll allows the

performer to slow down movement amongst other benefits (Tuner, 2010; p. 126). Falls and rolls add/create that sense of relationship with gravity and the floor.

#### 4. Experiencing movement from inside

This refers to being physically aware of everything around you as performer; that you need to get a sense of focus internally whilst absorbing the sensation of moving (Novack, 1988; p. 125). Ming-Sheng Ku (1997) supports this saying in CI I start to let go of my body and the mind responds to partner's energy (Stahmer, 2011; p. 18).

#### 5. Using 360 degree (space)

The making of spirals, curves or circular lines with the body (Novack, 1988; p. 121); Novack's (1988) analysis states performer learn to lift in arc positions which requires less muscle strength than lifting directly upwards. Humphrey (2008) says "through contact I learnt more about what my body could do in space in forty-five minute compared to dance that I had in previous years of technique classes" (Humphrey, 2008; p. 7). The use of this methodology teaches indirect space effort, which is about seeing everything, as if one has eyes all over the body (Humphrey, 2008; p. 22).

#### 6. Going with momentum, emphasis on weight and flow

Momentum, flow and weight are the foundation of CI as emphasized throughout the writing. In training through CI the use of these elements is vital. The performer in CI doesn't need to exert too much energy in order to achieve required movements. It is just guiding one's or the partner's weight using momentum. Paxton (1975) wrote "CI resembles aikido quite a lot, in that they are both partnering forms and both concerned with a very light and appropriate use of push and pull energies". They both rely on training or manipulating the instinctual reaction in some way (Burt, 2007; p. 135). "There are places on the physically lighter bodies where the weight of a heavier person can be comfortably taken: around hips and on the thighs" (Paxton, 1975; p. 42).

#### 7. The dancer is just a person

I want to quote exactly what Novack (1988) wrote as it strikes an identity of what CI is about. “Contact dancers generally avoid movements clearly identified with traditional dance techniques and do not distinguish between “everyday” movement and dancing; they adjust clothing, scratch, laugh or cough whenever necessary”. This is an important element to understand when working with CI that movement/dance becomes anything; natural gestures become dance. Humphrey (2008) adds that “Dancers and non-dancers extend the systems limits according to their own ideas, experience and desire” (Humphrey, 2008; p. 17).

8. Everyone should be equally important.

Appearance does not play a role in this type of dance. Whether tall, short, skinny or fat the understanding of one’s body is what is important, and it’s what allows performers to move. This point also refers to the trainer/choreographer. Contact Improvisation helps one realize that you do not have to be in control all the time; that performers need to assume positions of control in what they do. Contact improvisation allows one as choreographer/trainer to take a step back and allow the creative process to occur (Humphrey, 2008; p. 26). Contact improvisation subverted the authority found in classical training by replacing the head instructor or choreographer with the dance itself (Stahmer, 2011; p. 14).

Contact improvisation continues to question dance and has influenced huge changes in the dance world through its physical approach. It continues to pose questions relating to sex and gender and disability in dance. Freire (2001) writes “until a short time ago the world of dance was a space only for those with perfect bodies, perfect both in sense of absence of physical ability, and as defined by a standard demanded by classical dance” (Freire, 2001; p. 74). Contact improvisation (amongst other forms and practices in dance) has been used to challenge on what constitutes as dance, movement and what body constitute as dancers (Freire, 2001; p. 74; Albright, 1997; p. 57).

Ming-Shen Ku (1997), a dancer and choreographer from Taipei, Taiwan in an interview shares her views on how Contact Improvisation has assisted in the growth of understanding gender roles, sexuality and touch in dance (Davis, 1997; p. 2). What she highlights that the small touch that occurs in contact improvisation should not be regarded as a sexual advances or any other form of sexual approach; it is still dance and the more communication about it the better for the growth of the field. Touches in dance can rather be used to form meaning,

narrative and languages that go beyond the sexual. Further, in terms of gender and sexuality CI work has been able to assist me eliminate gendered and stereotyped roles in dance. I have been able to put males in a female defined position in that it enables males to be lifted by females and shifts this idea of power relation in dance.

In the work *Emb(race)* (2015/6) there were no women performers, however one of the performers openly identifies himself as homosexual and this allowed very interesting gender dynamics to occur in the unfolding work and in the dance process I will get into full details around this in Chapter Four.

After Paxton began CI it developed beyond even Paxton's initial experiments, he "decided against trademarking the work, preferring ongoing dialog instead" (Pallant, 2006, p.14; Humphrey, 2008; p. 14). Thus allowing for practitioners, choreographers and performers to interpret contact improvisation and use it in their own way. This is also a fragment of my use of the technique. In perhaps any dance that involves two or more dancers/performers contact cannot be avoided. Is it then possible to classify any form of contact that occurs between two performers as CI? Highly unlikely, as read in the previous paragraphs CI is more than just mere contact between performers, it involves weight shift, momentum and understanding one's own body. It is turning any physical body into a moving, dancing body. In essence it is about understanding physical body itself and what the possibilities it can achieve

Throughout the years of choreographing I have learnt this and have been able to use these ideas to develop others. Body awareness is perhaps one element I can state is influential in my use of the method. I am able to teach performers how to roll in multiple ways from rolling over the shoulder, to rolling over the head and to rolling over each other. Rolls when it comes to CI are routine. Turner (2010) wrote rolls in CI draw from martial arts (aikido); this roll requires attention to sensation (on the back and neck). This method (Contact Improvisation) has allowed me to train performers to communicate personally and with each other's bodies simply with support and resisting weight.

Furthermore I favour this style because it does not require you as dancer to be too technical, to point with your toes or arch a certain way. Rather, it requires you to use innate movement, it asks you to be aware of self and space. The most benefit I get from Paxton's CI is the idea that anyone can be lifted and anyone can lift. It so often that individuals get insecure about their own physique and are self-conscious about what they believe their bodies cannot do. In bringing the science of CI all that is eliminated; it brings to light the statement that there are

places on the physically lighter bodies where the weight of a heavier person can be comfortably taken: around hips and on the thighs (Paxton, 1975; p. 42).

Further auxiliary elements I can mention from Paxton's contact improvisation are C.I eliminates predictability. So often that in technical dance individuals ends up being predictable. An example my mentor uses is in Ballet, he would say the only time Ballerinas would go to the floor is when the Swan was dying. Predictable refers to movements that are usual, standing upright for ballet is usual rather than being on the floor all the time. Contact Improvisation does not teach a certain style or form, the movement is free form, it is dance that can be created in a moment; Movement comes from doing action and the body next to you innately reacts, and the movement/action continues.

As choreographer, and importantly performer, it is through improvisation that I have learnt the majority of what I know. I have been lucky enough to have a space where I can enter and freely practice dance, were I can throw myself on to the floor, the mat and flip off the walls. All this is and has been done so I can test out the limits of my body. This is perhaps the most striking resemblance contact improvisation has with my development as a performer and choreographer. For years I have been copying and freestyling movements I have seen from Martial arts films, those same movements which I transform into dance movement. In reality it means I have been doing improvisation for years without the contact.

### **III. Lloyd Newson**

Lloyd Newson was born 1957 in present-day Albury, Australia. He completed a degree in psychology at Melbourne University and this is where his interest in dance arose (Luckurst, 1999). Later in his work and methodology the ideas found from psychology would arise; "I [Newson] want to find more physical ways of talking about emotional and psychological states" (Luckhurst, 1999; p. 114). Newson started as a dancer with *Extemporary*, which is perhaps where he began questioning ideas about dance. Newson (1995) states he would work with thirty different choreographers; the value of this was that the choreographers showed their perspective on movement and he realised it wasn't his (Buckland, 1995; p. 372). Similar to Paxton, Newson journeyed to find his own language in choreography and dance. He believed attention that more attention should be paid on training the intellect of our dancers and placing greater emphasis on choreography, creativity and their unique abilities (Tushingham, 1995). It was not long that he found resonance with German post-modern choreographer Pina Bausch. Bausch is recognised for her contribution in dance physical

theatre with Wuppertal Dance Theatre. Bausch's work continually delivers messages about societal conventions and human behaviour (especially in regard to gender roles) (Mollie O'Reilly, 2009). In an interview with Luckhurst (1999), Newson admits to his Bausch influence.

Pina Bausch changed how we perceive theatre and dance (Luckhurst, 1999). Buckland (1995) adds by writing 20 years on, DV8 Physical Theatre is recognised as being the prime British exponent of the Bausch-influence. Bausch's aesthetics constantly re-affirmed the importance of a performer's personal history and identity as the content of work (Murray, 2007; 77-8).

It is through these experiences and influences that Lloyd Newson formed Deviate (DV8) Physical Theatre Company. Newson found it increasingly difficult to work with a medium like dance which, at the time 70's Britain, was more concerned with movement than with motivation (Buckland, 1995; p. 372). DV8 Physical Theatre Company works towards reinvestments of creative need in stage performance (Buckland, 1995; p. 371); Houston (1995) added "the company is about taking risks, aesthetically and physically" (Houston, 1995; p. 1). "It is about breaking down barriers whether in dance theatre or personal politics" (Winter, 1989; p. 10)

Playing with set, music, social issues and physical bodies in Newson's work and DV8 became something new to watch. Adshead, (2007) writes "Lloyd Newson's work with DV8 emerged from a white American/Australian/European nexus of 1970's youth culture, notably of those interested in theatre dance as well as the popular and physical arts of the time" (quoted in Whatmore, 2008; p. 7). Newson's ideas on dance and what dance is would transition with changing times.

What Newson was looking for and perhaps was able to interrogate with DV8 Physical Theatre Company as Bausch did with Wuppertal Dance Theatre is personal identity, not just for him but for performers as well. Personal identity is the existence of self, the shining of individuality and movement that comes from personal experience. In Newson's methodology of training and development it is all about unique stories and the shifting nature of identity in Britain and bringing them together through dance. In Keefe (2007) Newson is quoted with "what fascinates me is who performers are...none of us move the same way; I want to acknowledge the differences and what there mean, not eradicate them. It is this approach that allows us to see and understand individuals over form" (Keefe, 2007; p. 82)

Perhaps it is possible to classify Newson's methodology as "architectural improvisation" and work as physical theatre even his founding company embeds the name. Sanchez-Colberg (1996) writes, "Physical theatre gives credit to both dance and theatre; it extends discursive practices within the relative and tense relationship between the body/text/theatre realities which goes beyond mere representation of the body" (Sanchez-Colberg, 1996; p. 40). Furthermore Newson's "architectural improvisation" works in preparing the performer for a performance; through combination of rigorous techniques such as mime, text and spoken word, contact improvisation, release techniques, relaxation, centering and architecture. Architecture in this Newson context refers to structure, space and the bodies; were the performer can move around and create certain working narratives.

Using all these techniques Mime (physical expression), Spoken text, Contact improvisation (already mention in Paxton's section), release technique based on breathing, skeletal alignment, joint articulation, muscle relaxation, and the use of gravity and momentum to facilitate movement ([www.contemporary-dance.org/release-technique.html](http://www.contemporary-dance.org/release-technique.html)<sup>2</sup>). Newson helps and guides performers to be creative in how they approach work, importantly integrating all these techniques Newson is able to understand how he and DV8 need to work in order to prepare for any performance.

"Architectural improvisation" is perhaps best described as the relationship that exists between the body and architecture. In perhaps all of, if not most his work with DV8 Newson has had a prominent relationship with setting and design. The architecture/setting not only becomes part of his work but also helps the performer exuberate their skills and individual abilities. Newson (1995) stated "I'm interested in the relationship between architecture and the body". He (Newson) continues to add that set design has become integral to their invention of movements. "I am interested in understanding movement in different spatial contexts" (Luckhurst, 1995; p. iii)

Newson's and DV8's production *Enter Achilles* (1995) provides a good look at how architectural improvisation functions. *Enter Achilles* (1995), is a dance choreography about (amongst other things) male sexualities and stereotypes. I choose this work as an example for discussion because it was one of the key/main influence in creating my own work *Emb(race)* in 2016. I must mention that with the choreography *Enter Achilles* there is a live performance version (1995) and film version (2004) that I will make reference to *Enter Achilles* (1995) "is

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<sup>2</sup> Accessed February 2018. [www.contemporary-dance.org/release-technique.html](http://www.contemporary-dance.org/release-technique.html)

a funny, cruel exploration of the male psyche. “*Enter Achilles* (1995) is set in a typical British pub, a shabby, nicotine-stained boozery, pop songs lark around, pint glasses in hand” ([www.ubu.com/dance/dv8\\_achilles](http://www.ubu.com/dance/dv8_achilles)<sup>3</sup>). In the work, performers throw themselves across one table to the next, they jump from a bar to the floor even the pillars of the pub become structures the performers use to dance around.

The architecture in the work not only worked to develop performer’s abilities but further assist in articulating the essence of the work. Architecture provides the piece with elements where risk and danger can be explored. Newson (1993) supports with the words risk do not necessarily have to be physical/physical danger, content or approach can also be risk (Butterworth, 2004; p. 11). What as choreographer you explore can also be something that is frowned upon, something that challenges people to be either for or against you?

For *Emb(race)* (2015) some of the movements explored and created came from ideas seen and explored in *Enter Achilles* (2004). For example *Emb(race)* (2015) used chairs, it is around these chairs that we were able to create movement for the work.

With architectural improvisation dance and movements become easy to build, as choreographer you use this structure to guide you, the structure/set you choose to use almost becomes another body to manipulate and play with. Furthermore as mentioned previously this methodology challenges the awakening of self, were the performer freely develops their dance language similar in intent to Paxton’s Contact Improvisation. With architectural improvisation I ask the performer to improvise, do what comes into their minds when they at the structure or set design.

For *Emb(race)* (2016) there was no architecture to work with thus bodies had to become architecture, became structures in which other bodies can roll over, jump over and lift ; this introduces ideas from Paxton’s Contact Improvisation. Using contact improvisation we used each other as architecture/structures were language could be built upon. Bodies would take each other from one place to the next; bodies would become obstacles were another needed to jump over. Performer bodies became set design for the work. In that we were the set and we moved around ourselves.

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<sup>3</sup> Accessed June 2018.[www.ubu.com/dance/dv8\\_achilles](http://www.ubu.com/dance/dv8_achilles)

#### **IV. Conclusions and ways forward**

In conclusion, Jacques Le Coq, Steve Paxton and Lloyd Newson all play a role in informing how I have worked and created work(s). Singularly, I believe their methods function to develop a good performer; however integrated together I believe their methodologies create a well-rounded performer as will be read in chapter three in my application of their methodologies. It is the uniqueness of each practitioner's approach to training and developing performers that makes them function well together. This echoes the idea found in autoethnography about uniqueness. What makes work better is ability of different ideas working together.

It is my belief that in order to yield better results in any form of training we venture in as dancers/performers versatility is crucial. To have a body of dance knowledge is to not only reach a vast scale of audience but also for the performer to access various fields' of theatre. This chapter has highlighted the history of the chosen practitioners Jacques Le Coq, Steve Paxton and Lloyd Newson. It covered why I see/use their methodologies in order to develop performers for performance. In chapter three I will be showing exactly how the methodologies properly assist me in developing the physicality, psychology and creativity of the performers. While in Chapter four I highlight (given my own geopolitical location) how these three oddly White western practitioners act as base/foundation for me an African choreographer to find my own personal voice, and challenge not only my identity but social constructs in the South African context

## CHAPTER THREE

## Embracing differences

The intention behind this whole chapter - by means of autoethnography - is for me to connect with the theatre/dance makers discussed in Chapter Two to interrogate, how I develop performers/dancers and create dance work, specifically *Emb(race)* (2015/6). This chapter is layered in the following manner; first I will describe and offer a brief narrative around what *Emb(race)* is about this will intersect with why the work was initially developed. I find it is significant for every work I develop to interrogate/question something about society. In this way I am offering my perspective of what action or event I am interrogating. Secondly I will look at how the work *Emb(race)* came about, from its first version in 2015 to the re-worked Jomba! Fringe version in 2016. It is important that foundations of the work are understood and where they led to. Finally for the chapter I will look at the creation methodology, the process and the final products; how both works were developed; linking the development and creation process back to the ideas provided in Chapter Two by practitioners Le Coq, Paxton and Newson.

*Emb(race)* (2015/6) interrogates the general stereotyping of men; the idea that men should not be emotionally or physically expressive. While ideas around the social and cultural constructions of masculinity (and their link to my own dance work) are more thoroughly dealt with in Chapter Four following this, I offer here a short introduction to key gendered ideas as these are significant in how I have set up my working and choreographic methodology. In Keefe's (2007) words, "The work looks at vulnerability, grace, humour, tenderness and insecurities of the male person" (Keefe, 2007; p. 82). As a man, if I can shrink it even further down so I can link it to chapter four; as a black man I feel society has closed us down in terms of how we should express ourselves. Walt (2007) "men and women behave, feel and think the way as a function of their sex, and these perceived differences are determined at birth and fixed throughout life" (Walt, 2007; p. 3). Conventionally gender and sexuality have been classified as mutually exclusive; men and women have been told they have to act and behave a certain way thus to fit in the correct social construct. Social construct referring to the created standard of behaviour for men and women. Walt (2007) writes "the sex-role paradigm theory continues to assume that men and women behave, feel and think the way as a function of their sex, and these perceived differences are determined at birth and fixed throughout life" (Walt, 2007; p. 3). Although the theory targets both masculine and feminine Identities, my focus is on masculinities the piece *Emb(race)* is about particularly black South

African masculinities, and this is done as part of my own personal and political interrogations of my own race and sexual identity.

According to Jackson (2011) the aim behind autoethnography is to introduce reflective stories, link emotions; embodiment, spirituality, and action were one person can identify with the other (Jackson, 2011; p. 300). *Emb(race)* (2015/6) developed from the same instinct of telling a reflective story about male identity, connecting my emotions and identifying with those who feel the same way. With this dance work I set out to interrogate and question male sexualities (masculinities) and identities in the South African context. I grew up in a female headed household with no male or father figure. My mother was the breadwinner and she was surrounded by her siblings', my aunts (all seven of them). I mention this because I feel it plays a significant role in my own ideas around gendered identity. There are various things I question within the ambit of the social reality for hegemonic masculinities One in particular – in my own content and then pushed into my dance making - is the hindered ability of men to express their feelings whether physically or emotions.

According to Brannon (2004) Women are expected to be weak, dependant, and timid, whereas men are supposed to be strong, wise, and forceful (Brannon, 2004; p. 162). “Men should rather be agentic, and goal oriented” (Cuddy, 2010; p. 3). I find these ideas rather offensive and wholly out-dated. This dissertation and the reflection on my own working process as a dance maker is part of me beginning to interrogate these social constructions of physical touch, behaviour and emotions around men, and share my experience, perspective and dance practice around ideas I have on the representation and exploration of masculinities through dance theatre. The following narrative is an experience I had that led to the development of the work *Emb(race)* (2015) which was later re-worked for Jomba! Fringe 2016

### **I. A long road trip and a start to my ethnography**

The year is 2014 June, I am traveling with five male dancers to the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. I was the representing candidate for UKZN (PMB) for the student production festival of Nation Art Festival. We are crammed into a Toyota Avanza 6 seater. The idea is to travel all night so that we can get to NAF for the opening ceremony; little did we know that drama and adventure would unfold along the way. We are given the gendered title the

“sausage crew” by our peers because of our all male travel party. As we travel we have music on full blast, various tracks are playing. Everyone is singing along, I am holding a small Panasonic video camera, recording all this adventure. It is at that time that popular R’n’b musician Beyoncé Knowles’s song comes in on the stereo, and to my surprise everyone begins to sing along. We are all there singing along to Beyoncé? It dawns on me that all these big men would never be caught in their normal everyday life singing along to Beyoncé, especially to a song titled “Single Ladies”. I know this because they are my friends and anything that would be considered a ‘gay’ action is socially forbidden. According to social construction and discourses such as culture, religion, society, media and class; masculinity has been classified as show of strength, dominance, rational thinking and aggressive behaviour (Burt, 2007; p. 6; Brannon, 2004; 162). Singing out loud to a song specifically created for females does not fit. This does not suggest that men cannot be singers or that men should not sing Single ladies, it is merely the context and manner in which the song is sung that can alienate a person to be classified as gay. Highly expressive singing can be considered feminine traits, and masculine ideas reject or prohibit against being a sissy and expression of feminine traits (Brannon, 2004; p. 163)

The deeper we travel the more expressive singing occurs, people scream along to Mariah Carey. It is at this point that I am inspired to devise a piece about men and their lack of freedom around expressing differing senses and definitions of sexuality. I am concerned about what stops, supposedly heterosexual men from such actions as singing and dancing to Beyoncé (amongst other actions). I have the realisation that all this expression has been suppressed by society and in turn we (as men) have taken this on and suppressed our own divergent and open expressions of differing masculinities and in turn divergent sexual identities.

Were a slight expression of female identified emotions from a male is tagged as being ‘gay tendencies’ or not ‘manly’. For the next year – 2015 - I begin my research on male stereotypes and the social construction of sexuality and its link to constructions of hegemonic masculinities. Hadebe (2010) writes “Robert Connell believes ideas on masculinity are not fixed, but are constantly changing, according to social context” (quoted in Gennrich, 2013; p. 12). It is that reason I introduce the bracketed race in the title *Emb(race)*. The work no longer just questions masculinity by itself but questions identity as well, specifically African identity. What makes men, specifically for this writing black man (identity) vulnerable to

ideas of aggression/violence/status and power; is it norms, values, beliefs, culture, religion and/or media. While these socially constructed ideas of masculinity exist for everyone my focus in terms of the work interrogates more around the body, ideas surrounding physical touch and personal identity. Although in consultation during the process of creation with the dancers we did interrogate masculine constructs beyond touch. I was interested in understanding why black men is so afraid of physical touch between each other, when in essence men have so much physical contact with each other.

As I continued in the process of research I recall that DV8 Physical Theatre Company produced Lloyd Newson's *Enter Achilles* (1995) which negotiates and addresses hegemonically constructed male physicality and sexuality in the British context. I explored it again in my work in the South African context. ; *Enter Achilles* (1995) looks at the "stereotypical generalisation of the emotionally constipated male" (Keefe, 2007; p. 82), "Men who are unable to express their vulnerability, grace, humour and tenderness; men who are insecure about their sexuality; the work invites us to the precariousness of identities which often seem so energetically fixed" (Keefe, 2007; p. 82). These words echoed my own ideas around black masculinities and their constructions in South Africa. This became the starting point for my own proposal for the work *Emb(race)* (2015/6)

## **II. The creation methodology, the process, and the final product**

### **The creation methodology**

*Emb(race)* (2015) (the first version) is made up of three performers, mainly Mlondi Ngubani, and myself (JC Zondi) with Smangaliso Xaba as invited performer, while *Emb(race)* (2016) (the second version) is made up of five performers Mlondi Ngubani and Myself (JC Zondi) who remained as original members with the addition of Vuyo Ndawonde, Fisokuhle Shezi and Mncedisi Zulu, all drama and performance studies students at UKZN-Pietermaritzburg. What is significant about the students is that their dance training was developed by me (JC Zondi) as movement/dance instructor at UKZN-Pietermaritzburg Drama department. Beside Mnguni and Ngubani who had a background in some form of dance, the other performer's introduction of dance - contemporary dance to be specific - occurred at UKZN. Mlondi

Ngubani's *Sbhujwa*<sup>4</sup> background which is a local format of dance played a significant role in the process of developing the piece (2015) while the openness to learn, adapt and acceptance to be challenged from everyone was significant for the 2016 re-worked version.

Each step in the process of creating *Emb(race)* (2015/6) was designed to train, develop and strengthen self-identity within dancers. It was to hone their diverse abilities to work together psychologically, physically and creatively, rudiments I revere significant in any performer which I will be exploring below and links into my Chapter Two and my own influences in setting up a training and choreographic methodology. The idea of self-identity – or interrogating self - has been echoed throughout this dissertation from the use of the methodology autoethnography, to the three identified practitioners whose methodologies enhance and develop self in performers, and finally to this chapter were I now look at my (self) working method of creation.

In order to create structure my process of working, and creation comes in sub-categories/forms of Discipline; Physical, Psychological and Creative Discipline. Discipline is defined as to improve or attempt to improve the behaviour of someone by training or by rules (Treffry, 1999; p.223). Under each practitioner discussed in Chapter Two; namely Le Coq, Paxton and Newson, I introduced each discipline, were Le Coq's methodology uses psychological discipline, Paxton uses physical discipline, and Newson uses creative discipline. It is not to say that each practitioner solely focuses on one discipline to train performers rather it is the ideas I take from each practitioner that are designed in that manner.

### ***The process***

The disciplines physical, psychological and creative that follow here go back to the idea introduced in Chapter One and the methodology of autoethnography, the idea of writing self. Discipline as noted above, refers to improvement through training, and for this dissertation this refers to improvement of performer's abilities to perform. Furthermore, discipline adheres to the idea of bringing different things together. Steven Brecker (2005) with the American Psychological Association writes "discipline implies that there is a lot of knowledge to be master and skills to acquire" (Brecker, 2005; p. 1). In order for performers to perform well, I believe (as argued in Chapter One) the performer needs to have an understanding of self. Understanding of psychological, physical and creative self, are assets I

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<sup>4</sup> "SBHUIJWA means being stylish and trendy from the way you dance and dress, it has been derived from the French word 'bourgeois' (halostudio.co.za). Accessed Feb 2017

find to be invaluable in performers. Similar to Newson, who says, “what fascinates me is who performers are [...] none of us move the same way: I want to acknowledge the differences and what they mean, not eradicate them. It is this approach, which allows us to see and understand self-identity over form” (quoted in Keefe, 2007; p. 82). Disciplining performers in this manner – a manner that respects difference; helps me work in a method that does not ask the performers to lose their sense of self or identity

### **Psychological Discipline**

Le coq suggests when you train performer’s mind you allow the performer to discover something new that they may have underestimated about their bodies. Thupten Jinpa (2006) editor of *Mind Training: The Great Collection* writes “mind training practice is the profound reorientation of our basic attitude towards our self and fellow responsive beings, as well as toward the events around us” (Jinpa, 2006; p. 21).

With *Emb(race)* (2015) I was working with a performer who was new to contemporary dance, the knowledge they had on this form of dance was through drama movement in second year at University of Kwa Zulu Natal (Pietermaritzburg). For this version of the work psychological discipline worked very close with what happened physically, meaning psychological and physical discipline worked hand in hand. I was in a position where I had to introduce a new dance style to a new body. My performer was familiar with a form of dance called *Sbhujwa*. “SBHUIWA means being stylish and trendy from the way you dance and dress, it has been derived from the French word ‘bourgeois’ (halostudio.co.za).

I realised it was not easy to just delve into doing contemporary dance, the performer was not ready mentally and perhaps physically, thus in order to build psychological strength I had to get the performer comfortable with contemporary dance, the soft and flexible movement found in it. I applied the idea that in contemporary dance any form of dance/movement can be turned into dance. I asked the performer to show me movements in his dance, *Sbhujwa* and we worked to turn those movements into contemporary dance. With the words turning something into contemporary dance I am not suggesting in contemporary dance there is a specific way of moving, rather what I mean here is I took the elements of the movements I was shown by performer and applied narrative behind them jumps, floor-work and other existing elements in contemporary dance.

This idea seemed to help a lot as it functioned to create a space where the performer was comfortable. As the rehearsal process continued more contemporary dance based movements around the theme masculinity were developed. This idea of using *Sbhujwa* as the core of training, development and creation of the work's movement as I stated leaked into physical and also creative discipline. Creative discipline which is focused more on Lloyd Newson's methodology as mentioned in chapter two. Accessing the creativity of the performer

For *Emb(race)* (2016) a development of the 2015 re-worked version continued to explore the same themes, those being (black) masculinities and identity. The psychological hurdle in here was getting six male performers – all functioning within the ambit of constructed power-play and hegemonic masculinities - to be comfortable in talking about their emotions. Expressing emotions, as Brannon notes, “is not a valued behaviour in men; men are supposed to be strong, wise, and forceful” (Brannon, 2004; p. 162)

The content of the work developed from asking questions and communication with the performers about their experience with masculinity. Therefore before embarking on the physical part of the work I sat the performers down explained the concept of the work and asked what experiences they have around the concept. I first opened up about my own experiences of growing up without a father, explained all I felt about the experience. As I did that there was an ease in the group and everyone else opened up about their lives. I became aware that my sharing my own narrative around an absent father opened the possibility of others in the group to speak.

Furthermore to aid with disciplining the psychology of the performers; to have access to their thoughts in a way; I gave each member a diary/booklet where I asked them to write anything they remembered relating to the work or something that occurred in rehearsals that was interesting to them. This idea of using diaries is something that I personally have been using ever since I began choreography. It allows me to record - without censure – my own process of thought - and in this context it allowed me to ‘listen’ to the dancers I was working with in new and intimate ways.

A psychological hurdle I must mention (as it was important in the development of the work in 2016) is that one of the members is openly gay (homosexual). Although the performer is a dear friend to us all, there is always in constructed heteronormative masculinity certain unease that was felt amongst the identified ‘straight’ cast members. The idea of five men openly talking about their sexuality with one of the performers openly offering an alternate

sexual orientation to the majority was frightening to some; “Heterosexuality is delineated as the only permitted sexual identity” (Walt, 2007; p. 7). Black men due to culture and religion believe men are framed as ideally being in relationship with women. A real man is the one who is in a heterosexual relationship with a woman (Charlene van der Walt in Gennrich, 2013; p. 81). Any deviance from this is regarded as un-manly and not acceptable in society. Homosexuality is seen as a threat to what being a man is, and black men fear being around homosexuals in fear that through association they might be labelled as homosexuals thus get excluded in the male community.

The more of these conversations we had after every rehearsal and the more we shared about what we had written in the diary, the more I felt the psychology of the performers strengthening, bonds were building and that for me that is the best space to work in.

Linking this to Le Coq in chapter 2; his methodology advises the strength of the performers’ psychology. For the performer to excel physically and creatively they must clear themselves of any psychological blockage; in regards to *Emb(race)* (2015/6) the psychological blockage was insecurity about physical abilities and communication around social constructed ideas about men; talking about men’s problems. I as choreographer and performer, am able to understand the state of mind performers, were in and willingness to challenge themselves beyond any limitations.

### **Physical discipline**

The human body comes in a myriad of shapes and sizes. We are built differently our structure and shape; our physical bodies do not always adapt the same way. Steve Paxton’s Contact Improvisation (as discussed in Chapter Two), however has found a way to help us manage our bodies in dance. C.I. has eliminated shape, size, structure and ability in dance, making it easy for any-body to move and/or dance. Contact improvisation (amongst other forms and practices in dance) has been used to challenge on what constitutes as dance and movement; as well, as what body types can be identified dancers bodies (see for example; Albright, 1997; p. 57). With *Emb(race)* (2015/6) I had diversely shaped male bodies

In *Emb(race)* (2015) physical discipline came in combination of using the performer’s own street/township dance style of *Sbhujwa* as core of his training and development as mentioned earlier on. Due to the style of his dance Ngubani was not highly familiar with lifts and

partnering work except for what I already taught in movement practical. Using Paxton's weight and momentum ideas, which appears in Novack's (1988) summary of movement analysis mentioned earlier, I was able to get the performer to understand that lifts do not have to come from strength rather lifts come from understanding how to manipulate one's body weight around another body's weight. The performers were generally bigger in weight than me but using Paxton's ideas and methodology I was able to lift them with ease. This helped strengthen again I believe the psychology of the dancer; with the idea that he (Ngubani) being physically big can be lifted by me (JC) who was fairly small in physical size. Paxton's contact improvisation methodology formed the majority of the training and creation of the work, meaning the method extended to become part of the final product.

The process of understanding one's body, especially body to body contact did not come without consequences. In one of the rehearsal during practice of a jump that I was familiar with, I ask the performer to performer the lift as well. Unfortunately it did not go well as he was still frightened of his capabilities, in a matter of seconds, I was bleeding. The performer's heart sank. I felt his psyche getting broken, in that moment he lost trust in his physical capabilities. We spent hours convincing him to attempt the jump again. It was a belief that the lift was a psychological hurdle that needed to be passed. I needed to convince the performer that the jump can be done by any physical body; In the end he was convinced that it was a physical and psychological hurdle that he needed to overcome and we attempted the jump again until he was able to get it. I still believe if the jump was never done the performer would have always had the idea of its failure distracting him.

In *Emb(race)* (2016) my aim was to be more physical with the work, to have more contact probing the idea that men cannot touch each other. I aimed to generate more movement using touch, contact and skin (Stahmer, 2011; p. 19). Having different physical bodies with different abilities I knew I had to strengthen performer's bodies. I needed the performers to reach equal capability in free flowing movement<sup>5</sup>. Prior the work, two things contributed to the success of the physical disciplinary of the performers. One was an Artist in Residency (2016) I had with Forgotten Angle Theatre Company<sup>6</sup> in Mpumalanga. As stated in the introduction, as an artist I have learnt dance and forms of dance in various places and it is that

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<sup>5</sup> Free flowing movement which can refer to improvisation, which is a process of spontaneously creating movement.

<sup>6</sup>Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative founded by PJ Sabbagha, Artistic & Managing Director.

learning that contributes to the success of my work. At the residency I was able to meet Lucia Walker<sup>7</sup>, a contact improvisation practitioner/teacher. Walker, herself a student of Paxton and Nancy Stark, was able to enhance my abilities in understanding contact improvisation. She introduced ideas on how to lift other bodies with more ease, she introduced ideas such as resistance and support exercises, where two performers either resist or support a push from a partner. This was teaching me how to use a partner's weight to lift them. Walker's teachings were something I already was familiar to but she was able to bring an in-depth understanding that I was able to use in training performers for *Emb(race)* (2016). The second contribution that occurred was that months prior to rehearsal for *Emb(race)* (2016) we were part of a production *Maleficent* (2016) by a dance-ballet production by Pietermaritzburg based choreographer and teacher Domainne Keyser. I was asked to choreograph a section that used my five performers. Thus, in a sense, physical training for *Emb(race)* (2016) began there. In body preparation for that work we ran every day to develop stamina and used hurdles to develop our jumping abilities. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvWyx6CI-rk> (final performance of *Maleficent* [2016])

Physical discipline also came with me teaching performers martial arts. Martial art, mixed martial art and kung fu amongst other fighting forms has been part of my growth as a choreographer. In the rehearsal process I would choreograph fighting scenes that I felt would enhance physical and creative abilities in the performers. I cannot help as well - in the physical disciplinary of the performer - but mention contribution made by Russel Maliphant's (a dancer who spent his early career dancing with Lloyd Newson and DV8 Physical Theatre) choreography *Critical mass* (1991). Lifts found in the work were utilised in developing our own duets.

Linking this back further to Steve Paxton's methodology that is fixated on developing and creating movement using weight and momentum; it is clear in my use of his ideas I was able to get performers to understand their physical abilities, make performers understand that movement and dance does not depend on a person's structure or physical abilities rather it depends on the performer understanding his and other physical bodies.

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<sup>7</sup> Lucia Walker Lucia Walker has 30 years of experience of teaching AT internationally to both individuals and groups. She works with a wide range of people including young people, people with chronic illness, professional musicians and singers. She is also a movement artist and teacher specializing in improvisation and finding ways to fully enjoy moving and to be fully present in the moment of performance.

## Creative Discipline

According to Sir Ken Robinson (2006) Creativity is the process of having original ideas that have value ([https://www.ted.com/talks/ken\\_robinson\\_says\\_schools\\_kill\\_creativity](https://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity)). It is important to have performers who can be creative in how they move, performers who can think and not only move. Creative discipline (in my use of the term) is seeing the ability of performers to put together everything we learn in the rehearsal process in order to reach closer to the final product/performance. Creative discipline is at most about discovering self-identity within the work; that is to say, what as a performer have you learnt and how can you interpret what you have learned.

In *Emb(race)* (2015) having introduced the idea of manipulating *Sbhujwa* into contemporary dance it became easier for the performer to start becoming creative. Ngubani was getting a needed understanding on making his movements flow and building a narrative out of them. In developing Ngubani's opening solo, we worked around the idea of having *Sbhujwa* in it and slowly progressing and shifting into contemporary movements and it seemed to work.

The most crucial method of development or enhancing creative discipline came in the form of Newson's "architectural improvisation" (Luckhurst, 1999; p. iii) as discussed in Chapter Two. Architectural improvisation is using and/or manipulating set in order to create movement. In *Emb(race)* (2015) I used chair(s) as set; around the chairs is where we developed most movement for the work. Some physical training, development and creation of the work occurred around these chairs. We manipulated the chairs to fit certain movements and/or build narrative. I would ask the performer what can he do with the chair, and what can the chair do for him. As we rehearsed the chair would be on our heads, we would flip on the chairs, go under the chairs and on top of the chairs.

Most of the chair manipulations would never made it to the final product however working with them that way helped us build a relationship with it. As one does in contact improvisation we became familiar with the chairs weight, we became familiar with the chairs physical build and more. It would happen that the chairs broke and they had to be fixed with addition of metal in them. There was a change in weight however having understood and worked with them we continued to re-build the weight and physical relationship.

With *Emb(race)* (2016) I decided not to use props, I thought using the bodies only would benefit the theme of the work and offer us more physical contact. I asked the performers to

combine all the lessons and various movements we learnt from Walker's contact improvisation, mixed martial arts to Maliphant's choreography, to create solos; these solos would be based on whatever language they could get from the themes around hegemonic masculinities. The solos were to attest performer's abilities to create something new out of what they learnt.

Furthering the creative discipline occurred when it came to the creation of duets. As choreographer I gave the platform of teaching lifts - as mentioned earlier these were taken from different performance works such as Newson's and DV8's *Enter Achilles* (2004), *Never Again* (1989) and Maliphant's *Critical Mass* (1991). Using these learnt lifts and a rule that the duet had to move from left to right in a horizontal position, the performers created duets. It was amazing to see that although given the same tools to work with, the performers were able to create varying duets. Self-identity and utilisation of different bodies and different abilities in duets was visible in that each duet was using the strength of the other; where one performer was weak the other assisted to cover it. These created and improvised duets would inevitably develop as I would make such statements as nothing is ever complete, choreography and dance always need to develop; the duet would keep developing until the final performance at Jomba! Fringe (2016).

Linking this back further to Lloyd Newson's methodology which in my interpretation develops creativity within performer, not only that but affirms performer's self-abilities. With how I worked with performers I too developed their creative abilities. By working with the chairs and creating movement around the chair we became creating. Further I believe I did as Newson does let performers affirm their self-abilities, by allowing them to create freely from what they learnt in the process of rehearsals.

### **III. The final product**

There is perhaps one step I implement is training performers that deserves further discussion. This step becomes a crucial method in my work and this I will explain as the 'exchanging of performer's'. When the final performance ready version of the work has been reached I devise the idea of having performers change roles. For example in *Emb(race)* (2015), I would do everything Mnguni does in the piece while Ngubani does everything I do and Mnguni does what Ngubani does. I believe this step works in a way that it combines all the disciplines I have mentioned in this chapter. Psychologically it helps the performers understand each other's roles in the work, physically it challenges the performers to explore movement that is

not initially meant for them and, creatively I believe it helps the performers learn how to adapt. Being able to adapt as performer becomes crucial in any work as it allows you to learn faster and not be comfortable in moving/doing things the same way There are instances where one performer is unable to perform the moves the same way thus they adapt. E.g. Because Ngubani's movement are *Sbhujwa* based there would be difficult for Mnguni who is contemporary based thus he manipulates the moves to fit his understanding. Furthermore it helps performers get to understand the work through someone else's physical embodied perspective and pay attention to what everyone else is doing in the piece. This echoes what was said by Roxanne Doty (2010) in her discussion of autoethnography, "we are part of our work, part of the story we tell, we are connected" (Doty, 2010; p. 1048). The experience of one can be the experience of another.

In reaching my conclusion I would like to reiterate the statement I made at the start of this chapter. The written form of my working methodology can never substitute for the lived experience of a face-to-face embodied encounter of how I create and train dancers. As I write the full extent of how I created *Emb(race)* (2015/6) I feel there are elements that I am unable to explain or expand just because there are no words I can use to explain them. This is, of course, the difficulty of working in a physical medium and finding written language to explain and expand on it. As choreographer I was able to reach a certain level in disciplining psychology, physicality and creativity in performers what perhaps I cannot articulate is what the performers brought in the space.

Furthermore the way I work develops with every new work I create, with every new body I work with. How I worked developing *Emb(race)* (2015/6) will not be the same as how I will develop my next and on-going work. What I can be sure about however is that using ideas from Le Coq, Paxton and Newson in disciplining the psychology, physicality and creativity of the performers will be something that is constant.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have shared how I utilised ideas from Le Coq, Paxton and Newson to train and develop or in my way 'disciplining performers' for *Emb(race)* (2015/6). I have written how I used ideas from these practitioners to develop and strengthen psychology; physicality and creativity of performers which I believe are needed traits in every performer. In the next chapter I will focus more specifically on the ideas of race and masculinities and how my work began my own navigations into these questions of identity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Negotiating Black South African Masculinity

In this chapter I will look at Black Masculinity in the South African context. Masculinity defined by Antony Lemelle, Jr. (2010) as “socially constructed characteristics that society expects for the male sex” (Lemelle, Jr., 2010; p. 18). In this chapter I will be interrogating these characteristics/ideas, looking at how they affect men’s beliefs and attitudes towards male identity. I will first look at the ideas around masculinity -what it is - then I will look at the socially constructed characteristics expected from men, how there differ racially and specifically how they contribute to black men’s self-identity. Secondly using familiar and influential practitioners in this dissertation Steve Paxton and Lloyd Newson I will look at the role(s) dance theatre has played in interrogating masculinity. Finally using my own interrogated working/dancing self-identity, I will share how using my own style and creation of dance theatre, I interrogate ideas around black masculinities in my work *Emb(race)* (2015/6).

According to Burke (1988) “femininity/masculinity/one’s gender identity refers to the degree in which a person see themselves as masculine or feminine given what it means to be a man or woman in society” (Burke, 1988; p.1). In essence this means socially constructed characteristics expected of each gender (Lemelle, Jr., 2010; p. 18). Because these characteristics are socially constructed it does not mean they are fixed, they offer construction around gender that can be challenged, This is what I set out to do in creating with *Emb(race)* (2015/6). It is important I mention this early so it can be understood that masculinity/femininity are socio-political constructs, and that these gendered terms do not – of necessity - form the basis of individual self-identity.

Masculinities without a doubt are constructed through gendered social politics (Connell, 2005; p. 30). Gendered social politics insist that because our sexes are not the same, we are inevitably socially different; that because of our biology we should act and behave differently. According to Malan van der Walt’s (2007) dissertation, the sex-role paradigm theory<sup>8</sup> says “men and women behave, feel and think the way as a function of their sex, and

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Sex-Role Paradigm Theory’ is the study of gender in the late 20th century. The study specifies how “biological males and biological females became socialized as men and women in a particular culture” (Van der

these perceived differences are determined at birth and fixed throughout life” (Walt, 2007; p. 3). In addition Linda Brannon (2004) writes repairing cars being a physical and heavy lifting job predominately is associated with men while repairing clothes, working with light fabric is associated with women (Brannon, 2004; p. 161). So, for example, repairing a car has been socially constructed to be the domain of men while sewing is construed as feminine.

According to Linda Brannon’s (2004) Male sex role identity<sup>9</sup> there exist some social and political characteristics that are significant for men to identify, understand and conform to in order for their hegemonic masculinity to be intact. The characteristics range from physical, emotional and behavioural; similar to those interrogated in *Emb(race)* (2015/6).

1. No sissy stuff: No feminine characteristics
2. The big wheel: men need success and status
3. The sturdy oak: toughness, confidence and reliance
4. Give ‘em hell: aura of aggression, daring and violence (Brannon, 2004; p. 162)

In interpretation according to the male/gender sex role identity, physically men should be strong, behaviourally there should be aggressive/violent/competitive and emotionally they should show no emotions. Walt (2007) writes “men construct their masculinity through an ongoing, long-term project of managing the expression and exerting control over their emotions and management of their physical appearance” (Walt, 2007; p. 2). The constructed ideal of a man this means that he must appear physically strong, he has muscle and is built. According to Connell’s (2005) book *Masculinities* true masculinity is always thought to precede from men’s bodies- a body that naturally/appears more aggressive than that of women (Connell, 2005; p. 72). With a body that appears weak there is unacceptance in the masculine category. Connell (2005) writes that men are specifically thought to be more masculine (and hence manly) physically if they are involved in sports; sport that requires strong bodies and involves strong physical performances. It is more than physical appearance that a man must identify with, as noted behavioural and emotional traits are involved as well. Aggressive/violent/competitive behaviour is a requisite when it comes to masculine

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Walt, 2007; p.3). The theory has been criticised, as the so-called ‘socialisation’ of females and males into sex-specific roles effectively prohibits thought about how femininity and masculinity is inherently relational. Malan Van Der Walt (2007)’s *South African men and their construction of masculinities in relation to women and homosexual men: A thematic analysis*

<sup>9</sup> According to Joseph Pleck (1981, 1995)’s Male Sex Role Identity (now called the Male Gender Role Identity), is the dominant conceptualization of masculinity in our society. The theory stereotypical categorises men and women into specific social roles. Based on “The Male Sex Role: Our Culture’s Blueprint of Manhood and What It’s Done for Us Lately,”(p.12), by Robert Brannon, in Deborah S. David & Robert Brannon (Eds.)

behaviour. This goes back to Brannon's (2004) Give 'em hell: aura of aggression, daring and violence (Burt, 2007; p. 6; Brannon, 2004; p. 162). It is clear the social constructions around men expect them to live on the edge of life, take more risks and if you do not conform to these characteristics you risk being called a 'sissy'<sup>10</sup>. Brannon (2004) continues to add that strongly fighting "against being a sissy and the rejection of feminine characteristics are strong components of modern masculinity" (Brannon, 2004; p. 163). To top it all, masculinities make the suggestion that being emotional is a characteristic associated with women. Men – in constructing this acceptable hegemonic masculinity - should be tough, confident and reliant (Connell, 2005; p. 24; Brannon, 2004; p. 162). According to Connell (2005) "Boys/men are deliberately toughened in the course of growing up, told to shy away from crying and rather bottle up their tears" (Connell, 2005; p. 24). In my Zulu culture we even have a phrase that states "indoda ayikhali ikhalela ngampakthi" Easily translating to "Men don't cry, they cry on the inside". In combination of all these characteristics be they physical, behavioural and emotional, Brannon (2004) writes "the more closely that a man conforms to them, the closer he is to being a real man" (Brannon, 2004; p. 163).

Definitions of what counts as a "real man" are impossible to pin down since they differ from not only nations but from culture, religion and education. "[Man] hood means different things in different times to different people; its meaning might change in experiences between different cultures" (Kimmel in Lemelle, Jr., 2010; p. 26). Burke (1988) adds that femininity/masculinity are not innate but are based upon social and cultural constructions (Burke, 1988; p. 3). In addition I believe media, religion and education also play a huge influence in the ideas around masculinity. The idea of different influences however brings me to my next section of the chapter which questions whether ideas around masculinity are the same when being interrogated alongside issues of race.

### **I. Bringing out the race in Emb(race)**

Lemelle, Jr. (2010) writes "Masculinity across nations and across sub-cultures within nations is not necessarily the same" (Lemelle, Jr., 2010; p. 18). This I believe cannot be truer than it is if we bring in the complicity of race and specifically for this dissertation, race and blackness in the South African context. In *Emb(race)* it was my belief that masculinities differ within differing race identities ; that due to experiences - whether cultural, religious or

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<sup>10</sup> Sissy: Is defined as an effeminate, weak, or cowardly person. (Treffry, 1999; p. 775). Editor, Treffry, D. (1999). *Collins paperback English dictionary*. Harper Collins Publishers. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition

educational - we are exposed to varying ideas about what it means to be a man. So while I am aware that there is a hegemonically constructed masculinity that is premised on issues (as discussed above) around strength, power and prowess, I am interested in how these notions of masculinity are further constructed in relationship to race. To create a further in-depth connection I want to focus more on the identities of Zulu black men. All the performers in the work were from a Zulu background, and significantly in accordance with my autoethnographic research focus, it will help me connect myself deeper in the research as I am Zulu as well.

For black Zulu South African men I believe it is cultural history and ideology that has had a huge implicating influence on how masculinities are constructed; According to Hadebe (2010) “culture and faith/religion play a huge role in influencing Zulu men’s understanding of their masculinity” (Hadebe (2010) in Gennrich, 2013; p. 12). In Zulu traditional culture, men are seen (and constructed) as the head of the house, the economic provider. Men are socially groomed for this role from a young age, were they are taught to be hunters (violent) and cow herders (leaders). “Socially boys must be aggressive and vie for respect among their male peers” (Hadebe (2010) quoted in Gennrich, 2013; p. 15). Although having grown up in a less traditional strict neighbourhood, I concur with Hadebe’s (2010) words. These words correlate with stories my grandmother would tell me when I asked her about the past<sup>11</sup>. Hadebe (2010) adds that upon these cultural influences on masculinity came the Christian traditional hierarchical model which endorsed Zulu male patriarchy. Religion, Hadebe argues, gives men and women different roles; “the Zulu Christian used scripture to confirm their cultural practices and beliefs in relation to male dominance” (Hadebe (2010) quoted in Gennrich, 2013; p. 16). These cultural and religious ideas confirm physical and behavioural characteristics exerted by Zulu black man; their seemingly predisposition to dominant attitude and aggressive/violent behaviour. The ideas are so embedded within the Zulu black constructions of masculinity that this has tended to become a signifier of identity; an identity that makes the black Zulu man believe he is above women and that violence/aggression is an acceptable solution to solving conflict .

In the South African context racially and cultural constructed and endorsed aggressive behaviour from men have led to high level of violence against women, children and minority group (frequently other men) (Morrell, 2001; p. 1). In my sincere belief – and indeed in my

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<sup>11</sup> She would tell us about stick fighting. How young men would be pitted against each other, showing their manhood and skills through the aggressive sport of stick fighting.

artistic practice – I believe that there is a need for constructions of black South African masculinities to be challenged. *Emb(race)* (2015/6) in a broad sense is created as contemporary and cultural artistic work to challenge these existing ideas around masculinities. Reading Hadebe (2010) and perhaps my own understanding of what I deemed it means to be a man, made me realise that being outside ideas of culture and religion perhaps makes me become an onlooker of my tradition, I am part of it by birth, but outside of it in belief. Hence why I believe I am able to challenge these ideas around masculinity, significantly the Zulu male masculinity.

Morrell (2001) adds “it is not all men who threaten peace, democracy and harmony, but rather particular constructions of masculinity that legitimise the use of violence” (Morrell, 2001; p. 1). As an artist/choreographer I believe dance theatre can contribute to the reformation of all, if not some of these hegemonically constructed ideas around masculinities and their cognate connection to race.

## II. Challenging masculinity through dance

There is a certain gendered stigma that centres on the male dancer in certain contemporary cultural contexts. In all honesty as a black Zulu male and a contemporary dancer I have been on the receiving end of being seen as ‘feminine’ and of what I do as being ‘not manly’. Black Zulu men are asked, culturally, to locate their dance in alignment to *indlamu*<sup>12</sup>, where the feet hit hard on the floor and there is an arguably huge display of masculinity and strength.

With existence of local South African versions of shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance*, and international films like *Step Up* (2006, 2008, 2010, 2012 & 2014), however, dance in all its form has been adapting as a cultural activity that is beginning to include powerful constructions of masculinities. Men have struggled with the idea of dancing, possibly because of dance being tagged as a “feminine activity” (Clegg, 2016; p. 1). Nadine Holdsworth (2013) professor of theatre and performance writes “Western European paradigm situates some form of dance as primarily a ‘feminine’ art form” (Holdsworth, 2013; p. 170); with men’s participation frequently associated with homophobic stigma (Owen, 2014; p. 6; Aleksandrovich, 2014; p. 1).

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<sup>12</sup> Indlamu: Is a traditional dance most often associated with Zulu culture. It is performed with drums and full traditional attire and is derived from the war dances of the warriors. It uses calculated, less frantic feel, showing off muscular strength and control of the weapons with mock stabs at imaginary enemies According to the source (<https://eshowe.com/zulu-dance/>). Accessed 12/06/2018

For the constructions of true black Zulu masculinities, being homosexual is seen as a betrayal of manhood. “It is true that there are a lot of homosexuals (gay) men involved in dance/contemporary dance world. Although by no means all male dancers are gay, this is what prejudice suggests” (Burt, 2007; p. 11). Burt (2007) continues to add “it has been considered appropriate for men not to appear soft and not to appear emotionally expressive, as dance theatre makes him” (Burt, 2007; p. 22).

Dance theatre has the tendency to conform to these ideas, as it can potentially makes men appear soft and emotionally expressive (Burt, 2007; p. 22). Dance theatre, however, is not only about appearing soft and emotionally expressive. It is also about dealing with social issues, about learning and understanding the body, self and others. Prime examples come from Steve Paxton and Lloyd Newson who - as mentioned in Chapter Two - have used dance theatre to tackle social constructs around issues such as masculinities amongst many things. In the next section of the chapter I will thus move on to discuss not only how Paxton and Newson used dance theatre to challenge masculinities but I will combine this with an interrogation of my own working process for how I did the same with in *Emb(race)* (2015/6). So, while Paxton and Newson are working in a First World context (America and England) and do not necessary look at how masculinities and race connect, their work becomes an interesting navigational point for my own artistic journey into the South African landscape of gender and race in dance theatre.

### **III. Tackling dance theatre stereotypes**

In developing/creating *Emb(race)* (2015/6) my aim was to challenge black Zulu constructions of masculinities and to look at physicality, behaviour and emotions. It is my belief that because of the existence of these ideas, black men are trapped in a loop they cannot escape, a cycle of violence and aggression. Black men feel they need to conform to these masculine ideas, ideas which as I have explained in this chapter idea that are socially constructed and ideas that have been proven to not make society a better place. Having being raised in a household primarily filled with women, it was easy for to understand ideas of affection, tenderness and care. These actions and behaviours of course I saw, not to say there were no times were aggressive behaviour was seen.

The first approach to tackling these issues of race and gender in the work came from the title of the work “*Emb(race)*”:

1. Embrace: Hold (someone) closely in one's arms, especially as a sign of affection (Treffry, 1999; p. 256)

I wanted the dance work to be about men embracing each other, physical embrace and embrace their self-identities. My aim was to find shared space amongst men to create movement that would revolve around touch, eye contact and play. For this I looked at Steve Paxton's Contact Improvisation. As explained in Chapter Two, contact improvisation uses contact as a form to develop movements/dance. During the process of *Emb(race)* (2015) I came to understand it to be strange that men are against physical contact socially, that long hugging and eye contact is hardly done. I found it strange because it is often that men make physical contact; contact that is intimate; an example of intimate male contact is cutting hair/shaving. During cutting hair/shaving the stylist has full control of the customers head and face, he touches it and brushes it; yet the customer who is often male has no argument against it; a socially accepted touch but a touch nonetheless.



*Mlondi Ngubani (left) and JC Zondi (right) in Emb(race) (2015). Image by Simphiwe Fiddy Ngcobo*

In *Emb(race)* (2015) we played with these ideas of physical touch, developing dance movement from shaving, greeting and hugging. Furthermore in reference to hugging, in one of the scenes from *Emb(race)* (2015) Mlondi Ngubani and I hug each other and walk away.

Then I turn around to the audience having ‘heard’ someone say something, I ask ‘what did they say’ in which audience tended to respond ‘gay’ ‘*ubutabane*’<sup>13</sup> and laughter. It was my intention that audience members - for a short moment – would become mesmerised by the dance that they forgot that two men were touching and hugging each other, but as soon as it was brought to light they began to see a stigma of homosexuality. We as performers gave them (audience) an opportunity to react truthfully to what they, as audience were seeing and thinking. It would be a few audience members at the end of the show who would come and ask if the work was about two male lovers whilst others would come with another perspective, understanding that the work dealt with socially constructed ideas around men.

In the work, *Emb(race)* (2015), we used three chairs as set. Using these chairs in the work we tackled ideas of risks and danger, this influenced by Lloyd Newson’s *Enter Achilles* (2004). We would use the chairs to jump off from, flip off from and pretend to hit each other.



*JC Zondi in Emb(race) (2015). Image by Simphiwe Fiddy Ngcobo (Chair used)*

In the re-worked version of *Emb(race)* (2016), performers were doubled and no props were used rather the bodies became the props. We explored more social constructs around men. I had more different bodies and identities; bodies that were built physically different, behaviours that were not the same and different social experiences. The dance work became a place where we would challenge each other in all aspects. Again Paxton and Newson’s ideas

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<sup>13</sup> *Ubutabane* is a Zulu term/word that is derogatory for Homosexuality/Gay. As an action, *Ubutabane* means acting gay.

on dance theatre were effective in the development of *Emb(race)* (2016), through adopting Paxton's contact improvisation as a training method and using Newson's work *Enter Achilles* (2004) to borrow dance movement.

In developing *Enter Achilles* (1995) Newson observed that men expressed different behaviour patterns when they visited him in hospital, after he tore his Achilles tendon. According to Newson (1995) "there was an inability for males, even some of his gay men to express emotions in that context, thus a piece around emotionally constipated male was developed" (Keefe, 2007; p. 82). With *Emb(race)* (2016) already social constructs such as emotional constipation were challenged and interrogated in the previous work, *Emb(race)* (2016), the plan was to continue tackling and challenging more socially constructed ideas amongst black men.

As noted in terms of dance/movement I used contact improvisation to interrogate ideas of physical touch as done previously with *Emb(race)* (2015). We constantly worked with lifts that would combine both risk and elegant properties; lifts over the shoulder, lifts over the back and carrying lifts. Each of the lifts combined characteristics classified as masculine and feminine; which involved strength and light touch, bridging the gap between the two constructs. Furthermore it was visuals used in the work that interrogated masculinity. In the work, *Emb(race)* (2016) we all wore different coloured tops as costume, a representation of varying self-identities that are coming together; the pants are all the same because in belief we are all just men with penises.



*From left Mncedisi Zulu (Blue), Vuyo Ndawonde (Green), Mlondi Ngubani (Red), JC Zondi (Maroon) and Fisokuhle Shezi (Yellow). Picture by Val Adamson*

At the end of the work however we take off the shirts, this is to state that our differences should not divide us, that ultimately although our experiences may differ we all can converge as men to challenge masculine ideas. It was to state that we can strip off these masculine

ideas and reveal our true-selves. In this scene of the work, we first struggle to rid these tops, we are chained by them at the back of our hands but then at the end through assisting each other we are able to break free. Break free of the socially constructed ideas around men, break free as in understand and grasp that we are in control of the ideas around our identities and we are the ones who decide for ourselves what is right and what is not.



*From left- Mncedisi Zulu, Vuyo Ndawonde, Mlondi Ngubani, JC Zondi and Fisokuhle Shezi.  
Picture by Val Adamson.*

In conclusion what happens at the end of the work *Emb(race)* (2016) is what I would like to be taken from this chapter, that through working together and understanding each other's differences as black Zulu contemporary men, is how we will be able to challenge and interrogate hegemonically constructed masculinities. In this chapter I have spoken about masculinity and what it is, I paid special focus to black masculinity in the form of Zulu man. Finally using *Emb(race)* (2015/6), a dance work , I spoke about how I interrogated and challenged masculine ideas and with hope that others can be able to do the same.

## Conclusion

I would like to believe that finding a conclusion for training and developing performers is something that can never be met. There are always new ways of working or new approaches to making arts. For my approach into training and developing performer I come with the same mentality that I approach choreography; that it is a process, that the idea does not stop here, it continues.

I am a learner, I keep finding new choreographers and new performers to work with, all who bring a different perspective and a different bodies to work with which makes the way I work alters always. What I have mostly learnt, however, during my time as a choreographer, performer, and teacher is that I have a lot of weaknesses myself – and a lot of learning to still do. This is why I have belief that as trainer and choreographer one needs to work with as many varying people as possible in an endless process of discovery.

I have in this dissertation looked critically at my approach to training and developing dance performers for performance. I have specifically looked at the professional and external practitioners that I have constantly (and consistently) used in my own years of training and developing these practitioners are France's Jacques Le Coq, America's Steve Paxton and Britain's Lloyd Newson.

In Chapter One I looked at autoethnography, the methodology for the dissertation. Autoethnography is study of self, looks using self as a method of research, which is suitable for this dissertation as I look at myself in how I work. The chapter looks at how autoethnography can be a useful method of research academically and in performing arts. In Chapter Two I discussed the three chosen practitioners, France's Jacques Le Coq, USA's Steve Paxton and Britain's Lloyd Newson. I looked at their methodologies, influences and ideas when it comes to developing work and training performers. I linked their ideas back to autoethnography, how their methodologies echo the significant of self in the development of performer's own skills and abilities. The chapter further expresses why these practitioners were chosen as they benefited me and my approach into devising and creating work. I use the practitioners as a structure and guide, into my work *Emb(race)* (2015/6). The chapter adds that although these practitioners act as core to the training and development of performers; any other choreographers could, arguably, choose to use different practitioners and

methodologies and yield the same result. It becomes the manner of approach and the ideas each choreographer is producing that enables training and development to be successful.

Chapter Three focused on looking at self, self being me and my work. In this chapter I looked at my work *Emb(race)* from 2015 to its re-make in 2016 for Jomba! Fringe Dance Festival. In this chapter I looked at how I used the methodologies of Le Coq, Paxton and Newson in my work *Emb(race)* (2015/6). I looked at the influential ideas contributed by the practitioner's methodologies and which I found to be influential in my own gowning practice as a young choreographer. Finally Chapter Four, looked critically at the content and meaning of in *Emb(race)* (2015/6), - these dealing with issues of masculinity and identity. The chapter looked at the social constructed ideas around gender, specifically masculinities. It looked at social constructed ideas around black man specifically in the South African context and how the work *Emb(race)* (2015/6) interrogated these ideas.

As choreographers I believe we need to explore and play. We cannot simply get comfortable in routine. There are many ways in dance that we can use to express ourselves but I believe in order to reach a wider scale or perhaps wider audience we need to learn how to combine dances, integrate varying techniques and skills. I, myself am trying to apply this concept further, concept of collaborative working. I believe in due time (and as my own work grows and is tested) I will be producing dance work that integrates itself with varying art forms, working more with people who bring different elements of training in my work and significantly as I mentioned in Chapter Four - develop work that challenges the social constructs of power. My hope, too, in writing this dissertation is that it adds – in some small way - to a growing lexicon of scholar/artists who are beginning to critically research their own practice with the key mandate to grow not only the art but also grow the critical research in South Africa.

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3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xxhfz-IMR4w> (Fisokuhle solo [2016])
4. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiLe\\_Yo3Bm0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiLe_Yo3Bm0) (Mnce and Vuyo duet)
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6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dt2dumURdQ> (Mnce solo [2016])
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