

YUCK! (2020) A Performative Exploration of the White Heterosexual Self in South Africa as Grotesque.

Francis Michael Mennigke
Student Number: 214531863

DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment / partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
in the Graduate Programme in Drama and Performance Studies University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Francis Michael Mennigke, declare that:

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---Francis Michael Mennigke---
Student

........ 15 November 2022
signature and date

--- Tamartha Hammerschlag ---
Supervisor

.....
signature and date

--- Jessica Lindiwe Draper ---
Co-Supervisor

.....
signature and date

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses how I used performance to explore my white-heterosexual-male identity within the context of contemporary South Africa from a grotesque perspective.

The research joins the academic conversation around performance as a method of inquiry into anti-prejudicial scholarship. It explores my experience as a white-heterosexual-male in South Africa as normative and privileged. I use the word *normative* in relation to my identity and the structural norms reinforced by white supremacy in colonial and apartheid South Africa. The research hypothesises that performing my identity from a grotesque perspective could aid in disrupting how I perform racial and or gendered prejudice within a contemporary South African context. I argue that this theory might be applicable to both my artistic practice as well as my lived experience. I find practical value in the above hypothesis due to both my prior artistic practice and lived experience having demonstrated a lack of understanding with regards to the socio-cultural and political effects of my whiteness.

MAPPING THE THESIS

Chapter one provides a multifaceted background to the research. It then illustrates how my prior artistic practice laid the foundations for the key research question. Chapter one also contains a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework draws on critical race theory, abject theory, and performance theory to establish the research perspective. Chapter one also includes an outline of the research methodologies used in this study. Those specific methods are practice led research and elements of autoethnography. The two research methodologies serve as umbrella terms that include an array of performance methods specific to my artistic practice. These specific creative methods were used to gather data to answer the research question.

Chapter two provides a discussion of the key research terms whiteness, the grotesque, and performance. Each term will be discussed and contextualised. I use the discussion to introduce the literature pertinent to this study, locating my research globally and within South Africa nationally. I conclude with a discussion that considers how I might employ the grotesque as a lens to subvert my whiteness in a performative way using my own body as the mechanism to do so. The discussion references three South African artists: Nandipha Mntambo, Tracey Rose, and Gavin Krastin, whose select works seem to demonstrate a similar subversive exploration of identity, using the grotesque as a critical lens. Similar to my research process, each artist uses their own body as both the site of exploration, as well as the mechanism of exploration. Thus, I consider these particular artists and their selected works to be useful in guiding the specific somatic [bodily] form that my own research takes.

Chapter three provides a critical reflection on the explorative creative process. It focuses on the experience of devising and performing *Yuck!* (2021). The performance explored six retrospective moments in my life, with each moment representing an aspect of my identity at various stages of its development. I critically discuss each moment and how I attempted to subvert my normative perception of these moments by performing them from a grotesque perspective. It is important to note that the process of devising *Yuck!* (2021) offered two preliminary performance offerings that were ultimately discarded: a short stop-motion film *The Salty Penis Rock Spider* (2020) and a brief

physical theatre film *The King of Portaloo* (2021). Chapter three will therefore also include a discussion of the two preliminary performative attempts that led to the creation of the final work.

Chapter four concludes the dissertation. It presents the research findings. It then discusses the challenges and limitations of the research project, and proposes scope for further research. The chapter is concluded with a brief summary of the creative process.

As this is a performance led research project my submission will take the form of a written dissertation and an integrated, carefully documented, performance which will be submitted as one body of work.

CHAPTER ONE: A GROTESQUE REVELATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The first chapter starts with a brief background to the research. In this background I explain how my prior artistic practice offered the motivation for, and laid the foundations of, this research project. I then provide the key research question which emanated from my previous artistic practice. I lay out the theoretical framework. Furthermore, I specify what methodological tools were most suited to this explorative practice-led research study. And lastly, the chapter is concluded with a brief summary.

1.2 A SENSE OF STRANGENESS

This research project was triggered by my developing an internal sense of strangeness; a sense of being other than I had previously perceived myself to be. It arose as I became more aware of my identity within the context of a post-apartheid and democratic South Africa.

How I became more aware of my identity is attributed, not to a singular moment, but rather a gradual process. It took place over the course of concluding my Bachelor's and Honours degrees at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg. The act of spending significant time in an environment where, for the first time in my life, my white identity was distinctly visible as a minority seems to have catalyzed a shift in the perspective I had previously held of my identity in a South African context.

Growing up, my identity experience in post-apartheid South Africa was normative and privileged. I use the word *normative* in relation to my identity and the structural norms reinforced by white supremacy in colonial and apartheid South Africa. Appelbaum argues that I might have considered my identity in this way as “white norms permeate white dominated society, yet these norms appear to be common and value-neutral to the social groups that benefit from them” (2016, p. 2).

Russo states that a *norm* “signifies nothing more or less than the prevailing standard” (1995, p. vii). Upon reflection, the prevailing standards in the socio-cultural spaces in which I grew up appear to have played a significant role in establishing the *normative* perspective I had held of my identity. What I mean by this is that despite growing up in a country as ethnically diverse as South Africa, the spaces I grew up in and frequented were predominantly populated by white bodies. In these spaces, I took part in activities that centred *white*, western European, cultural practices. Furthermore, black, coloured, or indian persons and their own cultural practices were diminished in contrast to white European cultural practices. The schools I went to employed predominantly white staff and the pupil demographics were made up of predominantly white students. In addition, these academic institutions held mission statements that enshrined western and Christian values. As such, what I mean by the word *normative* is that my own subjective experience of a so called *white* identity was often presented as the dominant standard.

I acknowledge that the privileged ability to have considered my identity experience as *normative* is directly linked to power – that is, only the power holders have the privilege to be considered as the *norm*. Dyer argues that a myriad of historical hegemonic racial practices, by white peoples, has created a standard for measuring humanness, that “the equation of being white with being human secures a position of power” (2000, p. 12). However, despite the power of whiteness being challenged as the normative standard of socio-cultural, political, and economic supremacy in a post-colonial, post-apartheid, and newly democratic South Africa, it is important to note that whiteness was intentionally placed and deeply entrenched in the physical and psychological fabric of South African society. Therefore the power attributed to me by my whiteness was not simply removed by the new, predominantly black, political landscape or racially inclusive constitution. Steyn affirms that “conquest and racial subordination has structured their [white persons] positioning within the country for close on four centuries” (2005, p. 272). I consider therefore, that in South Africa the complex hegemony of whiteness lingers in ways that remain unseen and unacknowledged from within, by those classified as white, like me.

Consequently, in order to better understand my identity I delved deeper into socio-cultural, economic, and political writings on whiteness. The process of questioning my identity gave rise to an internal sense of strangeness. I use the word *strange* in relation to the experience of feeling so

horrified by the trauma created by the white-heterosexual-male identity, globally and in South Africa historically, that I felt estranged from my familiar identity. Kristeva calls this experience the abjection, or casting off of self, the “experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations of its own being” (1982, p. 5). Thus, at this time, I began to view the white-heterosexual-masculine aspects of my identity as unfamiliar and strange.

1.3 A PERFORMATIVE CLUE

This feeling of strangeness found its way into my performance practice in the form of a character called Yuck. The character Yuck was named after the definition of the word *yuck*, which the online Cambridge Dictionary defines as “an expression of disgust” (2022). The character Yuck emerged in the process of making a theatre play titled *Fool of Wight* (2020).



Figure 3: The character Yuck in *Fool of Wight* (2020). Photograph by Hannah Lax (2020).

The play was devised in collaboration with director Hannah Lax and performed at the Schlesinger Theatre, at Michaelhouse School, in February of 2020. The play explored a dark, comic parable of white colonialism. The absurd story centers on the tale of Ma, a vacuum cleaner, and Da, a serious book, who arrive in a fictional land, violently bake a town called Wight, and give birth to a fool called Yuck. In the play, the character Yuck is revealed as a byproduct of white colonial history in South Africa. He served as a distorted representation of myself – an attempt to performatively capture the feeling of strangeness I was grappling with in my own identity. While in many ways a product of these conflicting histories, my exploration of Yuck’s story - my own contemporary story - felt monolithic. To fully understand the implications of my own identity I felt that my positionality warranted further dramatic investigation. I needed to dig deeper into the experience of my identity as *strange*.

Strangeness and familiarity appear to be intricately linked to a literary and visual-art term called *the grotesque*. Often associated with the “fantastic, absurd, antic, monstrous, bizarre, marvellous, disgusting, terrible” (Chao 2010, p. 7), Thomson maintains that the grotesque is “the familiar world seen from a perspective that suddenly renders it strange” (1972, p. 18). Interestingly, the grotesque also appears linked to what borders the conventional. Connelly affirms that “the grotesque is a boundary creature and does not exist except in relation to a boundary, convention, or expectation” (2003, p. 4).

Borders and boundaries in South Africa have played an integral role in reifying the ideology of white supremacy. Durrheim and Dixon note that boundaries established for racial segregation by the colonial and apartheid regimes “served numerous functions related to the production of privilege and inequality” (2013, p. 2). Whether ideological or physical it appears that boundaries are inextricably linked to my identity in South Africa.

Thus, as a performing artist, in this research project I intend to use the grotesque as a performance style, perspective, and lens. I aim to use this lens to explore the previously held conventions, boundaries, or expectations of my identity that I found to be so *normal*, despite belonging to a minority white ethnic group, in a context as ethnically diverse as South Africa. The reason I aim to do so is supported by Shabot who argues that:

by envisioning ourselves as grotesque creatures - open hybrid, plural beings that are intertwined with the world - rather than closed, immutable and limited individuals who are separate from the rest of the world by clear boundaries, we may be able to become diverse, intricate, ethical [...] creatures. (2013, p. 9)

However, despite the positive intentions I have to explore my identity as grotesque it is particularly important for myself, as a white-heterosexual-male, to be critically aware of the ways in which white men have previously used grotesque symbology or terminology to reinforce misogynist and racially prejudiced *norms*. Russo (2012), Shabot (2007, 2012), and Van Rensburg (2003) offer useful insight into how the grotesque has been used problematically to reinforce bodily prejudice, as well as more contemporarily to critique, reclaim, and then reimagine prejudicial bodily stereotypes. I found the perspectives of each of the above mentioned academics to be a helpful guide for remaining critically aware of my own racial and gendered prejudices.

I hypothesize that by being a white-heterosexual-male living in contemporary South Africa, who has been problematically socialized to consider his identity as a *normative* standard of socio-cultural, political, and economic supremacy, that to challenge my own perception of *normativity*, as Shabot suggests, might be a necessary and worthwhile endeavor from which positive consequences may occur. For example, being able to recognize how I perform my own so called *normative* identity, and then consider ways of performing my identity that might be less problematic and more inclusive, positive, and considerate.

This leads to this dissertation's central research question:

How might performance be used to explore my white-heterosexual-male identity as grotesque?

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The central research question necessitates a theoretical framework. In constructing my theoretical framework, I draw on the following theories: critical race theory, Butler's theory of gender

performativity, Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body, Kristeva's abject theory, and performance theory.

In accordance with Shabot, who argues that a grotesque perspective "enables a presentation of the subject [human being] as embodied, strongly rooted in concreteness, and inherently intertwined with the world and the other" (2007, p. 57) I hypothesize that performing my identity from such a perspective could initiate a process of inner estrangement. And furthermore, that this process of inner estrangement might disrupt how I perform acts of racial and or gendered prejudice in contemporary South Africa. I argue that such a disruption is plausible because the embodied grotesque subverts the ideals upon which whiteness is founded.

I initially draw on Crenshaw et al (1995) and Delgado and Stefancic (2017) for the use of critical race theory, CRT, as a lens to view my own identity as racialised. I imagine this lens to have various analytical filters, which I relate to three proposed tenets of CRT. Firstly, that "racism is ordinary, not aberrational" (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, p. 8). Second, that a "system of white-over-colour ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychic and material, for the dominant group" (ibid). And third, that "race and racism are social constructs, without biological or genetic reality" (p. 9). Whilst applying a CRT lens to my identity I also draw on Durrheim, Mtose, and Brown (2011) who argue for less binarized and more nuanced ways of theorising the troubles of race in a contemporary South African context.

In addition, I view my identity as gendered. I draw on Butler's theory of gender performativity which "presupposes that norms are acting on us before we have a chance to act at all, and that when we do act, we recapitulate the norms that act upon us" (2009, p. 11). As such, I acknowledge that socially constructed norms have performative power. DeFrantz and Gonzalez argue that *the performative* "does something to make a material, physical, and situational difference" (2014, p. viii). Thus, I consider Butler's theory of gender performativity as a template for analysing both my race and gender as socially constructed and influential performances.

To establish a grotesque perspective of my gendered and raced identity, I draw on Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body, "as a body in the act of becoming" (1984, p. 317). Bakhtin's theory of the

grotesque body appears to conflict with European ideologies of the body. For example, Descartes' mind-body dualist theory attempts to differentiate and dislocate the immortal and infallible mind/soul/identity/subject from the mortal and fallible body/object (2008). According to Steyn, dualist ideals like these appear synonymous with enabling ideologically supported social positionalities like whiteness (2005, p. 11). This conflict of opposing perceptions of self, as either a mortal/changing/fallible being or an immortal/immutable/infallible being, seems to create an ontological problem: who am I if not my dualist, white, immutable, immortal, socially constructed identity?

To consider this question, I draw on Kristeva's abject theory, particularly the abjection of self – "the self in conflict with its object, the body, from which it used to derive its sense of being" (1982, p. 5). The abjection of self, or the rejection of identifying as a socially constructed ideal, and the realisation of being embodied/grotesque/object, is aligned with Shabot's (2013) process of inner estrangement. That is, "envisioning or creating ourselves as *grotesque subjects* [...] by triggering a process of *inner estrangement* that enables us to recognize *the otherness within ourselves*" (2013, p. 2).

As I intend to initiate a process of inner estrangement through theatrical performance, I require a theory of performance. I acknowledge that there is no ubiquitous theory of performance "because the subject is inherently interdisciplinary" (Smit 2014, p. 6).

Thus, I draw on Auslander who suggests that "performance studies *is* theory: it is the myriad conceptual tools used to 'see' performance" (2007, p. 1). As I endeavour to use theatrical performance to explore my identity from a grotesque perspective, and considering that "performances are actions" (Schechner 2013, p. 1), I consider Schechner's study of actions (ibid) as a way of theorizing performance.

According to Schechner, "first, behavior is the 'object of study' of performance studies" (ibid). Within this research I intend to focus on two specific types of behaviour. The prior is my own behavior. In other words, the ways in which I might perform my own so-called *normative* identity.

The latter concerns the grotesque behavioural qualities of the European archetypal character known as the fool.

Secondly, Schechner notes that “artistic practice is a big part of the performance studies project” (ibid). Thus, I endeavour to use autoethnographic information as a conceptual starting point from which I will devise and analyse a new theatrical performance that I intend to make in this research project. The performance intends to explore the ways I might ordinarily perform my gendered and racialised identity, albeit from a fool’s grotesque perspective.

Thirdly, Schechner mentions that “fieldwork as ‘participant observation’ is a much-prized method” (p. 2). In the instance of this research project the participant being observed is myself. As such, it will be mentioned in the methodology section to follow, that I use elements of autoethnography to better understand the story of the self within the larger socio-cultural story. Furthermore, I use autoethnographic field work techniques to draw on previous experiences of performing my identity in various contexts, as reference.

Schechner’s fourth and final point in the study of actions notes “that performance studies is actively involved in social practices and advocacies” (p. 2). As previously mentioned, I intend to find ways of using my performance practice to disrupt how I might perform racial and or gendered prejudice, both in everyday experiences socio-culturally, as well as in my own artistic practice within a contemporary South African context.

As Schechner’s study of actions clearly necessitates methodological processes, I now consider the methodologies used in this research study.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

I use two research methodologies in a qualitative explorative model: practice-led research or PLR, and elements of autoethnography. These methodologies are umbrella terms which include within them the techniques specific to my own artistic practice which is situated in performance studies. Although the way I employ specific interdisciplinary artistic methods in my practice is referred to

in more depth in the third chapter, the techniques are: sculpture, physical theatre, creative writing, puppetry, and theatrical design.

Practice led research argues “that creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs” (Smith 2009, p. 5). Research outputs are found through practical methods. PLR incorporates several practical methods. For example, artistic practice reveals research questions, the research questions are in turn investigated through artistic action. Thus, the arguably cyclical research process seems to involve artistic action, reflecting on and then recording that action, generating knowledge through action and intentional reflection on that action (Barrett and Bolt 2007, p. 1-13).

Additionally, PLR is uniquely suited to explorative research questions, challenging more orthodox epistemological methods which seem to use a map that has been pre-made. PLR might argue instead that “we know as we go, not before we go” (Fleishman 2009, p. 121). PLR thus encourages explorative research concepts like mine. Furthermore, in this research I consider myself in the role of cartographer – mapping the research journey as I go. As such, I found guidance in Birch (2018) whose explorative practice led research process sought transformative methods of art making that deliberately placed the artist, to quote her coined phrase, “in-the-dark” (p. v).

In addition to PLR, elements of the autoethnographic methodology are required. This is due to the self-investigative nature of my practice led research. According to Chang, autoethnography is a “research method that utilises the researchers’ autobiographical data to analyse and interpret their cultural assumptions” (2016, p. 9). Adams, Jones, and Ellis state that “Autoethnography uses self-reflexive writing, recollection, and ethnographic field work: the study of cultural texts, conducting interviews, analysing oral histories, video, sonic, and literary sources, to situate the story of the self in the context of a larger interpersonal story” (2015, p. 46-67). Ethics plays an important role in autoethnography, as the conducting and writing of personal experience often indirectly implicates other people or institutions. This is known as *relational ethics* and requires autoethnographic researchers “to protect the privacy and safety of others by altering identifying characteristics” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 281). I draw on elements of autoethnographic enquiry to

excavate the experience of both developing, and performing my identity within a post-colonial, apartheid, post-apartheid, and democratic South African context.

Furthermore, the subjective experience is criticised in a western academy that privileges objectivity. However, autoethnographic researchers argue that “objectivity and neutrality are both unattainable and undesirable. If you pursue objectivity, you miss out on understanding how you are actively involved in producing knowledge” (Costley and Fulton 2018, p. 142). As my research deliberately investigates the effect of my own biases and prejudices, I found that practice led researchers, like Costley and Fulton, offer useful strategies for strengthening research projects, like mine, which are grounded in self investigative praxis.

Lastly, in this research study I use my own body as the primary methodological device. In other words, my body becomes both the site of exploration as well as the principal means of gathering data. As Coetzee states, “our bodies, continually in a process of becoming, organise our knowing, feeling and being” (2018, p. 1). Thus, I consider how my own body might be integral to the research process, in that it holds within it an archive of embodied knowledge pertaining to my lived experience, or in other words - the performance of my identity.

1.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I have given a brief contextual background which serves as the motivating factor for the research study. I have also noted how my prior artistic practice provided information essential to establishing the key research question. And lastly, I have charted a theoretical path and gathered the most relevant methodological tools in order to begin my explorative practice led research process.

CHAPTER TWO: FINDING A GROTESQUE LENS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to launch into the investigation, I need to establish a critical lens. In this dissertation, I identify whiteness, the grotesque, and performance as key terms. These three key terms will help to define my research lens. Each of the terms appears to be complex and multifaceted, evading a single concrete definition. I therefore refer to how each term has been used in a variety of discourse previously. I use this discussion to contextualise each key term in reference to my particular study. I also include references to auxiliary terms that might be connected to the key terms. I conclude the chapter by discussing how I might use my own body in a performative way to subvert the *normative* perspectives I held of my identity, employing the grotesque as a lens. The discussion includes references to three South African artists who, I argue, have used similar techniques with similar objectives. I refer to these artists merely to situate my own PLR study within the existing conversation around performance as a method for exploring, challenging, and critiquing identity.

It is important to note that the following sequence in which the key terms are discussed is deliberate. This is due to the arguably cyclical nature of a PLR approach. For example, my prior artistic practice revealed a desire to research my whiteness, which resulted in the perception of my gendered and raced identity as grotesque. Research into the grotesque revealed the grotesque's unique ability to estrange familiarity. As a performing artist, I became intrigued with finding a way of using the grotesque performatively to subvert my so-called *familiar* identity. Within the world of performance, the archetypal character known as *the fool* best embodied the qualities of the grotesque. Furthermore, the fool also performed a similar subversive function to the grotesque. As such, the fool seemed capable of subverting the conventional perceptions I held of my identity through grotesque performance. Interestingly, this specific method of investigating my identity was not self-discriminatory, rather, it was cathartic. Therefore, in line with the central research question, I considered using performance as a method for investigating my whiteness from a fool's grotesque perspective.

2.2 WHITENESS

I deliberately centre the term whiteness in this research study, acknowledging the pitfalls of using whiteness as a paradigm in anti-racist scholarship. Garner lists those pitfalls as: reifying the ideologies of whiteness by treating “an abstract concept as a concrete thing” (Garner 2007, p. 8). Additionally, conceptualising of whiteness as “fluid and contingent” (p. 8) appears to allow a person to “opt in and out of racial identification” (p. 8-9). Moreover, what is also problematic is to assume that the power dynamics of the white identity are on a level playing field with *other* raced identities (p. 9). Furthermore, Garner argues that if the focus of the study of whiteness is on “the details of white identities” (p. 10) rather than on “racism and racialisation” (ibid) then whiteness is merely being recentred. And lastly, Garner suggests that what might be a cumulative synthesis of the above pitfalls is “assuming that analysing whiteness is an anti-racist procedure per se” (p. 11). I also acknowledge that studies on whiteness originate from authors raced as black, and not for the purposes of academia but as coping and survival mechanisms in white supremacist societies (hooks 1997, p. 338). I consider further that the “meanings attached to ‘race’ are always time - and place-specific” (Garner 2007, p. 1). Furthermore, I align with Durrheim who argues “that racism is real in the same way that race is, that is, as a social construction” with real-world implications (2017, p. 321). Lastly, I acknowledge Draper’s careful attention to the problematics associated with racial terminology (2014, p. V). I consequently introduce sources which aid in establishing how the term whiteness has been used in previous discussion globally, and in post-apartheid, democratic South Africa specifically. I then contextualise my own whiteness as the problem this research study intends to critique.

Academic studies on whiteness are prolific and complex. The subject has been reviewed from a wide variety of academic disciplines. For example, Draper notes its application in disciplines such as sociology, psychology, education, theology, cultural studies, gender studies, international studies, philosophy, and visual art (2014, p. 69). I include studies on whiteness in South Africa from within the academic discipline of performance studies by Smit (2014).

Whiteness eludes a single concrete definition in academic discourse. It seems to do so, as Garner noted above, because its meaning is contextually specific. However, despite the contextual

differences, Smit argues that there is a core consistency when she states that “an investigation into whiteness is inevitably an investigation into race and racism” (2014, p. 13).

Whiteness has been considered as “terror, systemic supremacy, absence/invisibility, norms, cultural capital, and contingent hierarchies [...] a problematic, or an analytical *perspective*” (Garner 2007, p. 2-3). In addition, Frankenberg construes whiteness as “a location of structural advantage, of race privilege [...] a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society [...] a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (1993, p. 1). Furthermore, Steyn argues that:

whiteness is best understood as an ideologically supported social positionality [...] accrued to people of European descent as a consequence of the economic and political advantage gained and following on from European colonial expansion. (2005, p. 11)

My research is drawn to Garners deliberate use of paradox in his considerations of whiteness. He describes whiteness as both normative and therefore blatantly obvious, as well as being so normative that it is rendered invisible. This paradox will be addressed in the writing to come.

The academic study of whiteness has a significant history predating the popularity of the 1990's scholarly movement named Whiteness Studies. This history is embedded in the founding texts of whiteness written from the perspective of black authors living in white supremacist societies. Reading these texts has been integral in creating an awareness of my own identity from a racialized perspective that, as a white person, I could not have personally understood. Draper affirms that “most theorists agree that the beginning of academic inquiry into whiteness as a social phenomenon can be attributed to the African-American social activist and author W.E.B Du Bois, often particularly to his book *Black Reconstruction* (1935)” (2014, p. 70). Similarly, Garner lists notable black American authors and scholars such as Du Bois, Baldwin, Wells, hooks, Hughes, and Ellison who initiated “reflexive writing on white identities” (2007, p. 13 -14) prior to the establishment of whiteness studies as an academic discipline. Within a South African context significant literary work by black South African authors such as R.R.R Dhlomo, Sol Plaatje, Albert Luthuli, Peter Abrahams, Steve Biko, and Bessie Head have critiqued the white identity from within the white supremacist regimes of South Africa from as early as 1928. Furthermore, it is

necessary to note that the school of thought associated with whiteness emanated from prior academic theories on race and radical feminism which emerged after the American civil rights movement (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, p. 3-11). Hence, it might be argued that reading the foundational texts not only helps one evade the pitfalls of studying whiteness, as Garner (2007) suggests, but could also help establish a careful and considerate willingness to learn about whiteness as a white person.

Studies on race, particularly by white scholars, have previously focused on understanding race at the margins of and in opposition to whiteness, which has reinforced the power of the white race group at the expense of any persons not categorized as white (Garner, 2007, p. 5). Whiteness studies therefore intends to redress this issue by shifting the perspective onto the *white* race group. “Whiteness studies places whiteness under the lens [to] examine the construction of the white race” (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, p. 85). Furthermore, it aims to “reveal the invisible structures that produce and reproduce white supremacy and privilege” (Appelbaum 2016, p. 1). The reason whiteness seems to have been considered *invisible* in white dominant societies such as the USA and Europe, is that “in Western representation [white peoples] are overwhelmingly and disproportionately predominant, have the central and elaborate roles, and above all are placed as the norm, the ordinary, the standard” (Dyer 2005, p. 3). In these spaces being *white* appears so familiar to the predominant race group that whiteness is *normalised*. Addressing this point Applebaum affirms that, “white norms permeate white dominated society, yet these norms appear to be common and value-neutral to the social groups that benefit from them” (2016, p. 2). Dyer’s book *White* (2005) explains how these so-called *value neutral* norms are equitable to social, economic, and political power. Furthermore, Dyer shows how this powerful position is realised through the embodiment of Christianity, the social construction of race, and imperialism (2005, p. 14 – 40). Dyer argues that these three embodied ideologies enabled the white race group to strategically establish their/our identity as the exclusive standard for measuring humanness. Therefore, Dyer argues that the “point of seeing the racing of [white peoples] is to dislodge them/us from this position of power” (p. 2). “As long as white people are not seen and named, they/we function as a human norm” (p. 1). I now specifically consider the normativity and invisibility of whiteness which are linked to its perpetuation. However, I discuss these notions in the context of South Africa and in comparison, to that of the USA and Europe.

As previously mentioned by Garner the meanings attached to race are contextual. As such, Van der Watt argues that in “South Africa whiteness is neither ‘non raced’ nor ‘invisible’ [...] but constantly prioritised in political and cultural debates” (2001, p. 65). In South Africa the ways in which whiteness was established as a normative standard appear to be different to the USA and Europe. This was due in part to the white demographic being a stark and visible minority. Despite being a minority, white peoples in South Africa held political, economic, and socio-cultural power over the indigenous khoi, san, black, indian, and coloured populations through the systems of colonization and apartheid from 1652 to 1994. “Both colonialism and apartheid were systems where a small [white] minority [...] dominated, subordinated and oppressed the [black] majority” (Swartz et al. 2014, p. 347). Referring to signage used by the apartheid government to delineate the exclusive use of spaces for white people - Draper demonstrates that during apartheid “whiteness was something of which everyone in South Africa was acutely aware” (2014, p. 80). Furthermore, Draper argues that a history of blatant white visibility in South Africa renders the strategy of displacing whiteness by exposing its invisibility null and void (ibid). Draper considers therefore, that the deliberate visibility of whiteness in South Africa gives rise to what she terms the *invisible/visible paradox*; “how might one go about exposing something that is already so categorically present?” (p. 81). Furthermore, Draper argues that this paradox causes a dilemma for white people in South Africa, “ignoring whiteness perpetuates invisible advantage, and acknowledging it reifies a claim to apartheid’s visible advantage” (ibid). Although whiteness is highly visible in South Africa, there do appear to be aspects of its influence that remain veiled, such as white-privilege.

The advantages associated with belonging to the white race group are referred to as *white privilege*. I find it important to understand white privilege; particularly as the implicit effects of white privilege seem to have been deliberately illusive to me whilst growing up as a *white*-heterosexual-male in South Africa. Delgado and Stefancic argue that the term white privilege “refers to the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race” (2017, p. 89). However, as a white person in South Africa the word *dominant* does not mean demographically significant. Rather, it refers to the elevated socio-cultural and economic positionality, as Steyn (2005) previously mentioned, gained from colonisation and apartheid.

According to Swartz et al, some examples of white privilege are the relative ease that white people have superior access to “financial resources, education, healthcare, and treatment in public spaces and by public officials” (2014, p. 354). McIntosh argues that these privileges can be thought of as “an invisible package of unearned assets [or] unearned skin privilege” (McIntosh 1988, p. 34). The invisibility McIntosh alludes to is the value neutral, commonplace, standard of ingrained racial advantage that white peoples are so acclimatised to that we might not consider them to be advantages at all. Furthermore, Sullivan notes that as an “unconscious habit, white privilege operates as non-existent and actively works to disrupt attempts to reveal its existence” (2006, p. 1-2). This is perhaps best understood by analysing how white South Africans respond to the phenomenon of white privilege. Citing a study by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation; Swartz et al. note that “white South Africans are less likely than other [sic] South Africans to admit the lasting effects of apartheid’s legacy on current levels of impoverishment amongst black South Africans” (2014, p. 346). Thus, despite the heightened visibility of whiteness in South Africa the privileges of being white might not be so obviously apparent, especially to those who benefit from them; such as myself.

It is therefore perhaps important for me to point out that this research study focuses on exploring those normative/invisible mechanisms of whiteness, embodied in myself/my identity, that appear to protect me from recognising and or acknowledging my own white privilege. I use the word *protect* because I observe that while it might be beneficial for myself to remain ignorant of my own white privilege, I am also critically aware of the potential for that protective ignorance to inflict harm. Thus, I interpret that although my whiteness offers me privileges, I consider those privileges to be detrimental both to myself and any person who is affected as a consequence of them. This point leads me to considering the problematics associated with the term *white privilege*.

Critical of the term *white privilege* Smit (2014, p. 3) argues that the idea of white privilege needs to be demystified. The reason being, that it seemingly dodges the responsibility of acknowledging the cost at which white people benefit from systems of racial power. Smit considers that “any privilege owned by the white body is no privilege if it means a violation of the rights and lives of non-white bodies” (ibid). The above consideration seems integral for understanding how racial

terminology in South Africa might intend to make systems of white supremacy visible, and yet paradoxically have effects that reinforce its problematics.

Irrespective of the positive intentions of whiteness studies to decentralise its advantageous position both globally, and in South Africa, Steyn's research shows that whiteness is "strategic" (2005, p. 271). Steyn argues that whiteness, "does not easily give up: rather it realigns, re-organizes, reframes – reflecting sadly the tenacity of race as a way of organizing the social not only nationally [in South Africa], but also within the global project that operates across continents" (ibid). Furthermore, Garner notes that there can often be deliberate and violent resistance by white persons when the powerful position that our whiteness holds is challenged (2007, p. 5). Additionally, Steyn argues that "those who identify its operations are likely to be branded as oversensitive at best, but more likely as paranoid, or politically too radical to be taken seriously" (2005, p. 271). I have observed that when initiating conversations with white family, friends, or acquaintances about our whiteness the consequences mentioned by Steyn and Garner often arise. These negative interactions initiated a desire to seek out white persons who have successfully, and in a positive way, attempted to address the problem of whiteness in South Africa.

I found that Smit (2014), Draper (2014), and Steyn (2005), all show that it is possible to use a variety of practical methods to better understand, as well as challenge whiteness in South Africa. For example, Smit argues that "performance can be a valid form of resistance to static conceptions of race and subjectivity" (2014, p. iii). In addition, Draper considers that it is possible for white South Africans to use

bodily performances [...] to find a white identity in a multicultural South Africa [...] without falling into the ideological position of coloniser or allowing the invisible centres of power to re-position themselves as central. (2014, p. 161)

Furthermore, Steyn demonstrates the power of white South African discourse as a means for either perpetuating or dismantling whiteness in South Africa. She argues that "far from keeping the (neo)colonial discourses about Africa circulating, they [white South Africans] are best positioned to challenge them" (2005, p. 284). Thus, as a white person living in South Africa, I aim to challenge my own whiteness by embracing Draper's paradox and pursuing Dyer's objective; to learn to see

myself as white, to see my particularity. And to do so, as Dyer suggests, I need to make my whiteness strange (2005, p. 12).

As I endeavour to make strange the normative perceptions that I hold of my identity, and considering that *the grotesque* appears uniquely suited to estranging perspectives that might be construed as normative, I therefore consider the grotesque to be a key term in my study.

2.3 THE GROTESQUE

The grotesque is a complex and unstable subject in that it is contextual and subjective. However, there are also widely accepted consistencies that aid in recognising something as grotesque. To consider these complexities I select authors whose writing on the grotesque recurs across the genre. I then contextualise the discussion. I do so by considering that a grotesque perspective is uniquely suited to estranging my whiteness.

Considering the grotesque semantically, Connelly argues that the “term ‘grotesque’ is itself problematic, and a fortuitous mistake” (2003, p. 5). Explaining why this is so, Connelly maintains that the word grotesque surfaces “in the mid-sixteenth century to describe the fantastical figures decorating a Roman villa. Because the rooms were excavated below ground level, Renaissance observers ‘misconceived’ them to be grottos” (Ibid). Kayser affirms that the word grotesque is “derived from Italian [...] *La grottesca* and *grottesco* refer to *grotto* (cave)” (1963, p. 19). As such, the cave-like spaces with which grotesque imagery is associated have resulted in symbolism being applied to the term on a vertical binarized spectrum. Russo confirms this noting that the grotesque typically “evokes the cave—the grotto-esque. Low, hidden, earthy, dark, material, immanent, visceral” (2012, p. 1). However, Shabot states that “ambiguity prevents the grotesque from being explained through binary divisions” (2011, p. 61). Therefore, Connelly appears to be arguing that the word grotesque is problematic in that it might not effectively represent its substance.

The term grotesque has also been used problematically as a universal standard. This offers insight into how something might be considered grotesque from a subjective and contextual perspective. Connelly notes that the word grotesque “is a peculiarly western term, as its coinage in the

Renaissance as a way to describe the ‘estranged world’ indicates” (2003, p. 6). Connelly shows that a contextually specific perspective was applied to the term grotesque and then used hegemonically by western Europeans as a universal standard. For example, Connelly mentions that images, such as Ganesha - a prominent Hindu Deity, “were repeatedly described as monstrous and grotesque because of their perceived deformation of European rules of representation” (p. 5).

Consequently, when observing some of the earliest academic critiques of the grotesque by western European men it becomes apparent that they view the grotesque in opposition to what was familiar to their culturally subjective experience. For example, Wolfgang Kayser argues that the grotesque “is the estranged world” (1963, p. 184). Similarly, Philip Thomson maintains that the grotesque is “the familiar world seen from a perspective that suddenly renders it strange” (1972, p. 18). For Kayser and Thomson, familiarity and strangeness is dependent on the conventionally accepted *norms* within their Eurocentric contexts. As Russo has previously stated a *norm* “signifies nothing more or less than the prevailing standard” (Russo 2012, Vii). Kayser and Thomson both lived in colonialist societies that historically considered western European cultural perspectives as universal standards. As such, their perception of what constituted something’s grotesqueness might therefore be considered contextual and subjective. Thus, Connelly argues, that from a subjective and contextual perspective something might be considered grotesque only while it troubles an established boundary (2003, p. 5).

In line with troubling established conventions, the symbology of grotesque imagery appears to have initiated a shift in the way western Europeans perceived themselves as human beings. For example, the hybrid and visceral forms of the grotesque undermined purist and cerebral ideals within Eurocentric culture.

Affirming this point, Shabot notes that the grotesque emerged “as a concept originally referring to the visual arts, which has come to address concrete subjects and their bodies” (2007, p. 57). The *concrete subject* Shabot alludes to is an attempt at establishing a grounded, fallible, and variable representation of the human body; as opposed to a body that is ethereal, perfect, and immutable. For instance, Connelly notes the emergence of a grotesque style in the romantic period (1800-1850) “as a means to explore alternative modes of experience and expression and to challenge the

presumed universals of classical beauty” (2003, p. 1). Shabot offers a useful description of a grotesque body:

grotesque bodies are opposed to the classical bodies represented, for instance, during the renaissance. They are not clean, closed, well-defined, clear-cut, beautiful bodies striving for symmetry and order. Rather, the grotesque body is a body that defies clear definitions and borders and that occupies the middle ground between life and death, between subject and object, between one and many. (2007, p. 59)

Bodies, particularly in contrast to ideals of the human form, are central to the grotesque. Therefore, discourse on the grotesque centres predominantly on and around bodies. Shabot affirms that the grotesque deals with “hybrid bodies: mixtures of animals, objects, plants, and human beings” (2007, p. 57). Russo states that the “grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing” (2012, p. 8). Furthermore, Edwards and Graulund note that a “grotesque body that is incomplete or deformed forces us to question what it means to be human” (2013, p. 3). In addition, Bakhtin argues that the grotesque body, “is a body in the act of becoming [...] never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body” (1965, p. 317). Bakhtin’s use of the word *becoming* is intended to evoke images of bodies in transformation. Connelly affirms this noting that “grotesques may be better understood as ‘trans—’, as modalities; better described for what they do rather than what they are” (2003, p. 4). This point is important when considering both why the grotesque seems to elude definition, which will be pointed out momentarily, as well as who uses the grotesque conceptually or practically and for what reasons. For example, Greyvenstein notes that:

hybrid forms are used by contemporary artists to deliver commentary about social concerns and body politics, by referencing reality against the artist’s illusion in order to make people question their own realities. (2014, p. 66)

Additionally, Van Rensburg states that the grotesque is used in the “exploration of female embodiment, which aims to undermine the traditional aesthetisation and cultural objectification of the female body” (2003, p. 3). Furthermore, Thackara notes that current use of “the grotesque is interested in how bodies that are different from the white, male norm are treated as aberrant or monstrous” (2019).

In conjunction with defying a conclusive ideal of the corporeal, the grotesque also deliberately rejects definition. This aspect of the grotesque undermines the value that western academic thought places on definition as a signifier of knowledge. For instance, Connelly asserts that “any attempt to define the grotesque is a contradiction in terms” (2003, p. 2). Perhaps, as Connelly suggests, this has to do with the grotesque being “in constant struggle with the boundaries of the known, the conventional, the understood” (p. 5). Edwards and Graulund affirm this view noting that the grotesque can’t “be locked into any one meaning or form, historical period or specific political function” (2013, p. 15). Similarly, Shabot argues that:

[t]he grotesque subject, with its embodied, hybrid, and open subjectivity, is unrepresentable or unknowable by way of any system of knowledge or representation governed by rational principles that aims for a clear framing of its object of research. (2007, p. 58)

More recently, Semler hesitantly argues that the grotesque as a “concept and its vocabulary remain wild, which is to say, elusive, partly known and resistant to control” (2019, p. 3). Conversely, Chao argues that it is possible to define the grotesque. Chao suggests that “the grotesque is a corporeal, or flesh-made, metaphor which produces within itself (and within the reader/viewer’s response) intellectual uncertainty, emotional disharmony, and hermeneutic indeterminacy” (2010, p. 14). The experiential indicators mentioned by Chao are important since they appear to explain how the grotesque is revealed and perceived. However, I would align with Shabot, Connelly, or Edwards and Graulund, and argue that to attempt to define the grotesque, which appears to deliberately reject the definitive, might be to misinterpret the purpose of the subject. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, it might also be to fall into the western academic trap of valuing definition as a signifier of knowledge. As both a singular form and definition of the grotesque appear inconclusive, it might be in indeterminacy that the grotesque is most consistent.

Connelly affirms that grotesques “are typically characterised by what they lack: fixity, stability, order” (2003, p. 4). Furthermore, Shabot notes that “the grotesque has been recognized as a concept evoking monstrosity, irrational confusion, absurdity, and a deformed heterogeneity” (2007, p. 57). Additionally, Kayser argues that “suddenness and surprise are essential elements of the grotesque” (1963, p. 184). Also, Clark states that “the grotesque was always understood to be excessive, requiring boundaries and regulation lest it burgeon, ‘break out’, or get out of hand” (1991, p. 18).

Moreover, Chao argues that “the grotesque is, in almost all cases, composed of two elements, one ludicrous, the other fearful” (2010, p. 2). Similarly, Thomson notes that “the grotesque is itself ambivalent in that it is both comic and monstrous” (1973, p. 18). Comparably, McGrath observes that one might experience the grotesque as “the fanciful, the bizarre, [...] the absurdly incongruous” (1989, p. 107). Addressing the incongruity of the grotesque, Bakhtin seems to associate the subject with “deep ambivalence” (1984, p. 304). Czachesz gives an apt example of this ambivalence arguing that “the grotesque can be described as ‘laughing in pain’” (2012, p. 2).

The ambivalent combination of laughter and pain seems to play a crucially indicative role in the grotesque paradigm. Perhaps conventionally considered as disparate human reactions, laughter and pain also appear to be correlated. Particularly the role of laughter in the mitigation of pain, stress, or anxiety (Dunbar et al, 2012). As such, Connelly notes that when witnessing something grotesque “the impulses to scream and to laugh come at once” (2004, p. 4). Experiencing something grotesque causes this ambivalent sensation because a grotesque occurrence subverts our subjective propriety. Shabot affirms that the grotesque “threatens our sameness, our ‘normality’, our well defined and protected presence in the world” (2007, p. 65).

Offering an example, Edwards and Graulund note that “the defamiliarization of the human body can erupt in a form of grotesque laughter that is roused by juxtapositions, disjunctions, ambiguities” (2013, p. 91). They go on to explain that the reason we might laugh ambivalently seems to be that we are experiencing “the movement between the real, the grotesque realism of the body, and the unreal, the bizarre distortions of the ‘real’ body” (ibid). Thus, laughter and pain in an ambivalent combination could indicate that something grotesque is present, and subsequently, that a person’s subjectively familiar perspectives are in the process of being made strange.

As shown above, there are several widely accepted indicators that aid in recognising something as grotesque. Although not exclusively, recurring signifiers include: corporeality, ambivalence, excess, fallibility, incongruity, fluidity, hybridity, or transformability.

These aspects of the grotesque are distinctly characteristic of the human experience. And yet, the same qualities conflict with the conventions familiar to my own western European identity experience. In other words, the grotesque conflicts with my whiteness. As such, I will now consider why the grotesque might appear to clash with more conventional western European perspectives of the human condition. And as a consequence of this clash, I consider how a grotesque perspective might be uniquely suited to estranging my whiteness.

Shabot seems to offer a clear framing of the above mentioned conflict. Shabot argues that:

the postmodern subject must be understood as constantly re-emerging anew from its intersections with the outside world and its Other. No monolithic, closed, immutable Cartesian subjectivity is possible any longer. (2007, p. 57)

Shabot appears to articulate a clash between postmodern scepticism and modern idealist perspectives of the human condition. Hutcheon affirms that “modernists [...] have usually been seen as profoundly humanistic in their paradoxical desire for stable aesthetic and moral values” (2004, p. 6), whilst also noting that postmodernism, although seemingly also a contradictory phenomenon, “refuses to posit any structure” (ibid). In accordance with Shabot, a perspective that rejects structure could encourage a grotesque view of the human experience, whilst idealist perspectives that require structure might reject such a view. One such ideal mentioned by Shabot ensues from the philosophical concept known as Cartesian dualism or mind-body dualism, with which the grotesque is connected.

Connelly affirms, that “the grotesque is rooted in the powerful mind-body duality of western thought” (2003, p. 6). The mind-body duality Connelly refers to is often attributed to the influential French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist René Descartes (1596 – 1650). Wee and Pelczar state that “broadly speaking, dualism is the view that there is an ultimate distinction between the mental and the physical” (2008, p. 2). It seems that, in an attempt to find an irrefutable truth, Descartes dualist theory aimed to demonstrate “the existence of god and the distinction of the human soul from the body” (Descartes 2008, p. 1). According to Descartes’ theory, a person’s body is perceptively fallible, susceptible to doubt, and therefore unreliable for verifying a person’s existence. Conversely, Descartes found that he could not refute that his mind was thinking, and by

extension he must necessarily exist - as a mind. As such, Descartes proposes that we are not our bodies but rather “a thinking thing, that is a mind or a soul, or an intellect or a reason” (p. 19). Following this theory, dualism establishes a binarized idealist perspective of the human condition. The mind/soul is considered as both superior to and separate from the body, which is seen as an inferior and temporary object, a vessel for the mind/soul. Thus, the grotesque, which typifies embodiment, seems literally rooted in western dualist thought in that it appears to represent, at least from a dualist perspective, the antithesis of the disembodied mind. Thus, because the grotesque emphasizes the body, it therefore becomes possible to use the grotesque to subvert the mind/body binary on which whiteness depends.

Furthermore, dualist ideals like the above have influenced how the human body is perceived in western European thought. For instance, Shabot states that the “binary divides of mind/body or subject/object [...] have rendered the subject [human being] an abstract concept that is alienated from both its own body and the rest of the world” (2013, p. 4). As a consequence, Shabot argues that “imagining ourselves as *Platonic ideas* – transcendent incorporeal beings – runs the risk of legitimizing the aspiration for perfection, an undertaking that is readily associated with fascist or racist ideologies” (p. 5).

Affirming Shabot’s considerations Smit evidences how dualist ideals were used to legitimise *white* supremacy. Smit notes that “the dualistic elements of Christianity and Manichean dichotomies: of good and evil, light and darkness [...] were a means to justify the dominance of whiteness” (2014, p. 19). Showing how these dualist ideologies were reified, Smit highlights that the Eurocentric dichotomies “between notions of the material world in contrast with the spiritual was cast onto skin colour. Preference was given to white as closer to light and as akin to spirituality” (p. 20).

In accordance with Smit, and as previously mentioned by Steyn, whiteness is best understood as “an ideologically supported social positionality” (2005 p. 11). Much like dualism, whiteness is dependent on binaries to distinguish the white body, in particular the white male body, as superior to and distinct from bodies that deviate from *it* as the ideal standard (Smit 2014, p. 21). In contrast however, the grotesque deprives ideals the ability to establish binaries. As Bakhtin affirms:

the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity. (1965, p. 20)

If the principal function of the grotesque is degradation, it might then follow that If I were to consider my identity - which has been established as a racial and gendered ideal - from a grotesque perspective, that a process of degradation would occur. In other words, a grotesque perspective would subvert the idealistic aspects of my identity. Shabot affirms this assumption when she notes that a grotesque perspective “enables a presentation of the subject as embodied, strongly rooted in concreteness, and inherently intertwined with the world and the other” (2007, p. 57). Thus, a grotesque perspective appears uniquely suited to estranging the normative idealist and dualist boundaries of my identity established by my whiteness.

Lastly, because my research is not purely theoretical but rather grounded in embodied practice, and as the previous strategies for challenging whiteness mentioned by Smit (2014), Draper (2014), and Steyn (2005) all appear to be embodied performance-oriented processes rather than theoretical concepts. I therefore consider the grotesque - an embodied subject, better understood for what it does as a *process* rather than for what it *is* (Connelly 2003, p.4) – to be well suited to a practice led research inquiry.

2.4 PERFORMANCE

Performance is a multifaceted and interdisciplinary term. Thus, I briefly consider the term’s flexibility. I then focus on two varying types of performance specific to the context of this research – the performance of *identity*, and the performance of *the fool*. The performance of identity is better understood via the two terms *performativity* and *the performative*. Both terms are used to explain, for example, how written text, inanimate objects, or socially constructed concepts might be considered as performance. I use these terms to better understand how my identity could be seen to perform in everyday experiences. Conversely, the performance of the fool concerns a more theatrical style of performance referred to as free play or subversive play. Additionally, the fool embodies various qualities of, and performs a similar subversive function to, the grotesque. Thus,

I consider how the fool is suited to performing my identity as grotesque. The intention behind this motivation is to initiate, as Shabot suggests, “a process of inner estrangement that enables us to recognize the otherness within ourselves” (2013, p. 2).

The scope of what can be considered *performance* is so diverse that Schechner argues “anything and everything can be studied ‘as’ performance” (2013, p. 1). Schechner notes that the word *as* denotes that something can be studied “from the perspective of” (p. 42). In the case of this research, I consider both my identity’s behaviour and the behaviour of the fool from the perspective of *performance*. Furthermore, Schechner notes that the question what is performance “refers to more definite, bounded events marked by context, convention, usage, and tradition” (p. 49). Although the term’s elasticity may appear to weaken its specificity, Carlson (2017), Bial (2004), Schechner (2013), and Conquergood (2002) might rather argue that this points to the versatility of the term *performance*, for instance as an analytical tool. Bial affirms that performance “is also a concept, a way of understanding all types of phenomenon” (2004, p. 59). Despite the term’s fluidity however, Schechner does state “that any action that is framed, enacted, presented, highlighted, or displayed is a performance” (2013, p. 2). Thus, within the context of this research, I intend to frame and then display my whiteness and heterosexual masculinity as grotesque.

Schechner lists several types of performance which include “ritualisation, art making processes, play, performance in everyday life, sports, entertainments, eruption and resolution of crises, shamanism, and rites and ceremonies” (2013, p. 18). Although this research considers various types of performance in interconnecting ways, it will focus specifically on what Schechner lists as *performance in everyday life*, as well as, *play*. Performance in everyday life has a considerably different intention than that of play. For instance, Schechner states that “the performances of everyday life [...] create the very social realities they enact” (p. 42); whereas in the performance of play “the distinction between what’s real and what’s pretended is kept clear” (ibid). For clarity I initially consider the performance of identity which appears to fall within the parameters of performance in everyday life. I then consider the performance of the character known as the fool who appears to utilize the type of performance known as play.

2.4.1 Performance and Identity

Prior to considering the performance of my own identity, I offer an interpretation of identity, and then acknowledge the history of identity and performance.

Bamberg et al. (2022, p. 35) offer a useful way of considering the complex, predominantly European-oriented, phenomena known as identity. They consider a person's identity as a kind of complex internal navigational bridge that converges at the words *myself* or *themselves*. Furthermore, the spaces or routes that need to be navigated across this bridge they interpret as:

(i) temporal stability and change; (ii) how to blend in and differentiate from others (e.g., other people, animals, nature); (iii) how to engage as agentive subject or as recipient, i.e., subjected to forces in the world. (ibid)

Reflecting on this interpretation, I consider that my own identity is a way of both being affected and interpreted by external forces, as well as affecting and interpreting my own presence in the world. And furthermore, that this process, much like any action, seems to have a panoply of consequences.

The consequences of dismissing the importance of identity are reflected in a historical reading of identity and performance. The link between identity and performance is rooted in the performance-oriented work of women and any persons marginalised by white heteronormative masculine hegemony. Carlson affirms that “[t]he use of performance to present and discuss identity was at first dominated by white female artists in reaction to white male hegemony in society and the arts” (2017, p. 142). However, Carlson also notes that “the heritage of slavery could hardly be evaded in black autobiographical performance, and gave a number of such works a greater historical dimension than those of white autobiographical performers” (ibid). I acknowledge that due to this performative history, there is a better understanding of how identity, or the various interconnecting aspects of identity, such as race, class, gender, etc, might be considered as performance. I intend to refer to this extensive body of knowledge to better understand how I might perform my own identity in contemporary South Africa without the performance becoming problematic.

2.4.2 Performativity and the Performative

The terms *performativity* and *performative* have significant application in the performance of identity, and thus require brief explanation. DeFrantz and Gonzalez offer a useful interpretation of the term's *performativity* and *the performative* in relation to the term performance. They argue that:

if *performance* constitutes forms of cultural staging [...] *performativity* marks identity though the habitus of repetitive enactments, reiterations of stylized norms, and inherited gestural conventions [...] the *performative* is the culmination of both in that it *does something* to make a material, physical, and situational difference. (2014, p. viii)

Similarly, Schechner notes that “performativity points to a variety of topics, among them the construction of social reality including gender and race” (2013, p. 123). Whereas, the performative “indicates a word or sentence that does something [or] inflects what it modifies with performance-like qualities” (ibid). The term performative was coined by Austin to explain how “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (1975, p. 6). However, the term's application appears to have stretched farther than its initial use in reference to spoken text that is realised through an action. For instance, Jones and Stephenson refer to “the process of art production and reception as performative” (2005, p. 1). Additionally, recent studies in autoethnography such as Denzin (2018) refer to the writing of the socio-cultural story through the experience of the self as performativity, as well as, a performative act.

Although the terms do not appear interchangeable, it is possible to talk about something as performative, as well as the performativity of the same thing. For example, Butler mentions “the performativity of gender” (2009, p. 4) as well as mentioning that “gender is performative” (p.1). The way Butler mentions the performativity of gender highlights that the social construct known as gender is made up of a multitude of socially enacted processes. Whereas the latter example refers to the concept of gender, in its entirety, as imbued with the qualities of performance. From these perspectives the construct known as *gender* takes on performance-like agency.

Butler's theory of gender performativity offers one way to explain how a social construct like *gender* might appear to have performance-like agency. As previously mentioned by Butler, the

“theory of gender performativity presupposes that norms are acting on us before we have a chance to act at all, and that when we do act, we recapitulate the norms that act upon us” (2009, p. 11). Russo has previously stated, that a *norm* “signifies nothing more or less than the prevailing standard” (2012, vii). As such, Butler’s theory suggests that prevailing standards are framing and displaying how human beings should perform themselves. And because prevailing standards are established by dominant social groups, and thus have a powerfully suggestive affect, we as humans consciously or unconsciously re-perform these prevailing standards.

As both gender and race can be categorised as socially constructed phenomena, I also use Butler’s theory of gender performativity as a template with which to view my race. Therefore, as a white-heterosexual-male, I consider that by re-performing historically established prevailing standards of race and gender; I might be reinscribing both racial and gendered prejudice in current day South Africa. However, I also consider that as an actively performing participant I might equally be capable of disrupting that process. As such, I now consider how the character of the fool, who uses a type of performance known as play, might be best suited to disrupting how I re-enact those prevailing standards.

2.4.3 The Grotesquely Playful Behaviour of the Fool

This research does not intend to provide an extensive history of the archetypal character known as *the fool*. Rather, it intends to consider the fool’s grotesque-like qualities and playfully subversive functionality, used predominantly in theatrical text and or performance, as a method for undermining prevailing standards within a story. The character of the fool has a significant history in a variety of cultural traditions. However, within the context of this research I consider the character of the fool within the European folkloric tradition.

The fool, otherwise known as a buffoon or jester, might sometimes be confused with the clown. However, Lecoq notes a clear distinction between the two, namely that “while we make fun of the clown, the *bouffon* makes fun of us” (2006, p. 118). Additionally, Lecoq characterises fool’s as “people who believe in nothing and make fun of everything” (2001, p. 117). Furthermore, Lecoq also affirms the fool’s subversive functionality noting that the fool appears to “deal essentially

with the social dimension of human relations, showing up its absurdities. They also deal with hierarchies of power, and their reversal” (p. 119). As previously mentioned by Bakhtin (1965, p. 20) the essential process or action of the grotesque seems to be degradation. Similarly, the fool’s function as a character is the reversal of power, in other words, the subverting or degrading of prevailing standards. As such, I consider the fool’s degradative functionality as a character to be a useful mechanism for disrupting, subverting, or making strange the prevailing standards, boundaries, or *norms* that are prevalent in how I perform my race and gender.

Furthermore, the way the fool performs seems to be most closely associated with the type of performance known as play. Schechner states that “play is very hard to pin down or define. It is a mood, an activity, a spontaneous eruption. Sometimes it is rule-bound, sometimes very free” (2013, p. 89). The particular type of play which is associated with the fool is free-play, non-rule-based play, or what Carlson refers to as “subversive play” (2013, p. 26-28). What Carlson intuitively by the term *subversive play* is a kind of playing that deliberately undermines structured or rule-based kinds of playing. Lecoq affirms that subversive play is associated with how the fool behaves when he states that “with any situation, *bouffons* [fools] will deform it, twist it, play it out in an unusual way” (Lecoq 2001, p. 125). In addition, the fool behaves or performs much like children do. For instance, Lecoq affirms that “no one is more of a child than the *bouffon* and no one is more of a *bouffon* than a child” (ibid). Much like children use imitation, parody, or mimicry to play so too does the fool. Lecoq affirms that fools use mimicry, parody and imitation to play (Lecoq 2001, p. 117). Schechner identifies mimicry or simulation as a type of play, for example, “playing within an imaginary, make-believe, or illusory world. Examples: theatre, children’s make-believe play” (p. 94). These kinds of play disregard the kind of playing that might require strict rules, such as in sport or gambling, opting rather for irreverence and a deliberate disregard for rules. Thus, in a westernised cultural context, much like the one in which I have grown up, a fool’s type of play would disregard the rigid structures that maintain order and control. And so I find free play, mimicry, imaginative, or subversive kinds of play, the kind of play associated with the character of the fool, to be uniquely suited to subverting the kind of inflexibility and hierarchy synonymous with the ways I might perform my race and gender.

As Lecoq has mentioned above, a key characteristic of the fool is that the fool makes fun of or ridicules their audience. However, it is important to note that when the fool is making fun of people or of anything, the fool uses a grotesque type of humour, humour that is ambivalent, to do so. I consider it important to mention this point because mocking the self, or being mocked, might appear to be a negative experience, or have negative consequential effects. However, the way the fool uses mocking, or deriding humour, in other words *grotesque humour*, requires that the person doing the mocking also includes themselves as the *object* of mockery. In other words, the fool must necessarily include themselves in the act of ridicule. Thus, a fool's humour is inclusive and therefore cathartic, rather than exclusory and repressive.

Affirming this point, Mikhail Bakhtin, still widely considered an authority on foolish or carnivalesque humour, shows how ambivalent or grotesque humour – a fool's type of humour, necessitates a cathartic outcome. Bakhtin associates grotesque humour most often with the type of humour found in a carnivalesque environment. Carnival laughter, argues Bakhtin, is:

the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay [sic] relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent; it is gay [sic], triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. (1984, p. 11-12)

As such, Bakhtin argues that grotesque laughter provides a communal sense of relief from the “hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (Bakhtin 1984, p. 10) of conventional social life. According to Bakhtin, ridiculing ourselves communally is grotesque because it is ambivalent. For example, the aspects of socio-cultural life that are being mocked are those that all people strive to establish as conventions; yet paradoxically we might also find them to be painful.

Additionally, Bakhtin also pays specific attention to the self-inclusive aspect of grotesque laughter. Bakhtin states that he/she/they “who is laughing also belongs to it” (1984, p. 12). The reason self-inclusion in grotesque laughter is important for Bakhtin is that it appears to distinguish grotesque laughter as inclusive and cathartic from intentionally cruel laughter which is exclusive and repressive. This point is useful for establishing that grotesque humour/ambivalent humour, the type of humour used by the fool, appears to require a positive rather than negative outcome.

2.4.4 A Foolish Acknowledgement

Thus, as I endeavour to use the fool's grotesque humour to mock and ridicule aspects of my familiar identity, I remain vigilant of the difference between grotesque humour that requires inclusivity and catharsis, from deliberately cruel, demeaning, or self-defeatist humour that enables repression.

Additionally, as I endeavour to use the fool's grotesque-like performance style to subvert my whiteness, I am also critically aware of what Carlson refers to as "the problem of re-inscription" (2017, p. 164). Carlson notes that "any deconstructive operation that seeks to turn established structures back on themselves [...] may also [...] simply reinscribe or reinforce those structures" (ibid). Norris interprets deconstruction as "the task of dismantling a concept of 'structure'" (2003 p. 2). As such, I remain vigilant of performing the deconstruction of my *normative* identity from a fool's grotesque perspective because of the potential to further entrench the very problems I intend to undermine.

2.5 THE GROTESQUE IN PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

I now offer a contextual discussion of the grotesque in performance in South Africa. The discussion references the work of three South African artists - Nandipha Mntambo, Tracey Rose, and Gavin Krastin - whose select works, I argue, demonstrates a similar subversive exploration of identity, using the ambiguous qualities and degradative function of the grotesque as a subversive lens. Additionally, and similarly to my research, I argue that each artist uses their own body as both the site of exploration, as well as the mechanism of exploration. Furthermore, each artist applies the grotesque as a lens slightly differently from each other, as well as from how I intend to do in my own research. Thus, I consider how these artists use their own bodies, in a variety of performative ways, to explore aspects of their own differing identities, from varying grotesque perspectives, as important reference points from which I orient my own practice led research.

I acknowledge that South African performance has a significant historical tradition of using elements of grotesquery to reveal and undermine socio-cultural, political, and economic

conventions that stem from the country's history of oppressive regimes. Schneider and Nawa (2019) evidence a history of performance in South Africa that has established, and continues this tradition. Thus, my own practice led research is not unique in this regard. Rather my research joins this well-established conversation with the intention of including an additional perspective.

2.5.1 Nandipha Mntambo

I have selected two works by South African visual artist Nandipha Mntambo that I argue employ elements of the grotesque as a subversive lens in her work. The first is a sculpture titled *Minotaurus* (2015), and the second is a performance titled *Ukungenisa* (2008). Additionally, I argue that in both of these works Mntambo uses her own body in a performative way to disrupt socio-cultural/political conventions that either seem to affect and/or are present within her own identity. I take interest in how Mntambo appears to effectively employ the grotesque as a lens in delicate and deeply conceptual ways. Mntambo's use of the grotesque contrasts the grotesque choices made by the artists to follow, which are intentionally overt, vulgar, crude, or simplistic.

Having grown up as a black woman in South Africa, Mntambo's select works arguably depict her own experience of the racialised, gendered, and socio-cultural prejudice/conflicts/paradoxes at play in the diasporic and intercultural contexts of the country. Both of the chosen works, I argue, evidence a residue of historical clashes between Eurocentric and Afrocentric cultures/values/traditions. Furthermore, and perhaps similarly to my own artistic research, Mntambo's work questions the boundaries evident in her own identity, boundaries established by both Afrocentric and Eurocentric socio-cultural/political conventions. In a published conversation with Mntambo, Simbao affirms this point stating that that Mntambo's work "merges and blends dichotomies, opposites and contradictions" (2011, p. 13).

In her sculpted work *Minotaurus* (2015), a bronze sculpture of the artists likeness fused with her interpretation of the mythological creature the Minotaur, Mntambo reifies socio-cultural boundaries in grotesque form. Mntambo does so by fusing her own human form with the European mythological creature the Minotaur – the body of a man and head of a bull. Mntambo's *Minotaurus* appears grotesque, not solely because it is a hybrid form that elicits an ambivalent response in the

viewer. But also by fusing her feminine identity with a masculine mythological creature, Mntambo shows a deliberate intention to subvert the masculine gender bias imbued in the well-known mythological figure.



Figure 4: Nandipha Mntambo's *Minotaurus* (2015). Photograph by High Museum of Art (2018).

An additional aspect of the grotesque is evident in Mntambo's use of her own body as a cast from which the Minotaur sculpture is created, capturing her own body in figurative transformation.

Although the sculpture does not show the transformative process in progress there are performative qualities imbued in the sculpture. As previously mentioned by De Frantz and Gonzalez the performative “*does something* to make a material, physical, and situational difference” (2014, p. viii). As such, I argue that the way in which the sculpture establishes a live performative dialogue between sculptural object and viewer is evidence of the sculptures *doing something*. What I mean by *performative dialogue* is that there is some performance-like interaction that the sculpted form elicits in the viewer. I argue that it is the sculpture’s hybridity that initiates this performative dialogue. I consider that the viewer can relate to the familiarity of the human aspects of the form. For instance, I hear myself as the viewer consciously think and feel in my body that ‘I share similarities with the sculpture, I have arms and legs and a torso and face’. However the sculpture’s horns then create a dissonance, I then think and feel ‘but I don’t have horns, humans don’t naturally have horns, so myself and the sculpture are similar but different, and something isn’t quite right, something doesn’t fit, I feel ambivalent’. In this way I argue that the sculpture has deliberately initiated a somatic and visceral dialogue between itself and the viewer, and thus could be constituted as a performance between viewer and sculpture. I intend to draw on the way Mntambo uses sculptural forms in performative ways to elicit similar kinds of performance-like dialogue.

Furthermore, I notice that Mntambo centres her identity in the sculpture. By using her own body Mntambo turns the question of gendered ambivalence toward herself. Explaining the reasoning behind centring her own body in her work Mntambo argues that “imaging other people, for me, felt like quite a complicated thing. Because the politics of representation are complex” (Mntambo 2016). By positioning herself as the subject in questioning the conventions synonymous with gendered, cultural, racial, or species stereotyping, Mntambo demonstrates how self-inclusion defuses any notion of homogeneity or appropriation. I consider the way Mntambo uses self-inclusion to be a positive method for initiating conversations around socially constructed conventions that defuse the potential for prejudice. I intend to imitate Mntambo’s self-inclusive method in my own performance research, by turning questions of white-heterosexual-masculine prejudice toward myself.

I now consider Mntambo’s solo performance *Ukungenisa* (2008), translated by Mntambo et al. as “to allow passage, to allow something to happen, to allow space” (2011, p. 15). The performance

takes place in an abandoned bull fighting arena in Mozambique, a remnant of the Portuguese colonial presence in the country. In the performance Mntambo enacts a choreographed bull fight, without a bull or an audience, and therefore does so in ritualised solitude. In contrast to her performative sculpture, Mntambo's performance *Ukungenisa* (2008), referenced in part by a still photographic print, *Praça de Touros III* (2008), shown below, uses the grotesque as a lens slightly differently to her sculpture. Although perhaps visible in Mntambo's ambiguous costume choices, grotesque elements are perhaps less visible as she re-enacts the choreographed bull fight. For instance, it is perhaps less obvious to see that Mntambo is using ambiguity to grapple more introspectively with gender as a binarized concept. Mntambo affirms this insight noting that, "at the time I was really interested in androgyny as well and how we understand the male/female, or if we understand the male/female, and the fact that bullfighting is such a male centred sport" (Mntambo, 2016).



Figure 5: Nandipha Mntambo's *Praça de Touros III* (2008). Photograph by Jac de Villiers (2008).

Explaining further impetuous for the work Mntambo says she had an:

interest in the animal human and how we understand protecting oneself vs fighting [...] and decided to create this performance that is to myself but also in this very public space that is now no longer used for bull fighting [...] and how to become the fighter, the animal, and the audience within the space. (Mntambo 2016)

I chose this performance of Mntambo's because, unlike the obvious grotesque hybridity used in her performative sculpture, this performance did not initially appear, from my own subjective perspective, to hold grotesque qualities or perform degradation.

However, when I considered the performance contextually my perspective began to shift. Edwards and Graulund affirm that "to understand the grotesque, the work must be placed and understood in relation to the socio-historical context in which it is produced" (2013, p. 11-12). As such, when Mntambo's performance is unpacked within its particular context, the masculine bullfighting tradition, grotesque elements emerge.

For instance, in this particular performance I argue that Mntambo is the grotesque element. Mntambo affirms that her desire to be trained as a bullfighter was denied her because she was a woman. "He wasn't concerned about me being black, wasn't concerned about me being from Africa, his immediate response was just no, you're a woman, I can't do it" (Mntambo 2016). I draw attention to this interaction to highlight how Mntambo is contextually grotesque from the male Matador's perspective. For the matador, Mntambo troubles a cultural, historically established, boundary.

It is not only Mntambo's identity that plays a subversive role in the performance. Her deliberately conflicting costume choices similarly subvert the conventions of the matador's traditional uniform, known as the "*traje de lucas*, or suit of lights" (Mntambo et al. 2011, p. 10). For example, the ballet shoes and tights conflict with the shirt and tie - conventionally Eurocentric feminine dance attire fused with conventionally Eurocentric masculine business attire. Additionally, Mntambo replaces the intricately embroidered matadors jacket with a cowhide sculpted jacket. This specific stylistic choice creates a cultural dissonance, and evidences Mntambo's cultural hybridity. By displaying these conflicting costume choices Mntambo both deliberately subverts the *cultural* as a bound or fixed phenomena. Additionally, the lack of spectators and the absence of a bull all appear, like her

costume does, to seemingly subvert the conventions of the European bull fighting tradition – conventions of masculinity synonymous with fighting and femininity with pacifism.

Having briefly considered both Mntambo's performative sculpture and her explorative solo performance, I find them to evidence varied techniques of employing the grotesque as a style or lens through performative mediums. There are specific techniques implemented by Mntambo that I intend to experiment with in my own performance research. For instance, like Mntambo, I intend to centre my own body/identity, using it as both the site of exploration as well as the mechanism of exploration. In doing so, I similarly intend to set out to explore conventional aspects of my identity from perspectives that I deliberately render strange to myself. To do so, like Mntambo, I also aim to draw on techniques that deliberately subvert those conventions within myself that I find to be familiar. For example, to use grotesque sculptural forms, in performative ways, to elicit an ambivalent response within myself, and/or the viewer. Additionally, much like the characters the Matador and the Minotaur appear to alter Mntambo's identity in some way, perhaps to disrupt aspects of her identity that are familiar to herself, I intend to use the fool in a similar fashion. Lastly, I find the way Mntambo uses subtle, and conceptual grotesque forms, whether in sculpture or costume, to be just as effective as overtly vulgar or horrifically grotesque configurations, in creating the dissonance emblematic of the grotesque.

2.5.2 Tracey Rose

Much like Mntambo, I argue that South African performance artist Tracey Rose also employs the degradative functionality and ambiguous qualities of the grotesque as a subversive lens or style in her performance work. However, unlike the subtle, layered, ways in which Mntambo employs the grotesque, Rose does so more overtly and confrontationally. Importantly, Rose's *coloured* identity contrasts starkly with Mntambo's *black* identity offering an alternative perspective of grotesque performance in a South African context that similarly revolves around issues of identity. I will focus on her performance titled *The Prelude: The Garden Path* (2003), available on YouTube and referenced in *figure 4* below, as an example that further contextualizes the grotesque in performance in South Africa, as well as in relation to my own research.

Rose's use of the grotesque in her performance conveys feelings of rage, frustration, or despair that arguably originate from experiencing the socially-constructed conventions she aims to disrupt. Affirmed by McBride, "much of her work has been powered by rage, an affective grammar to articulate her opposition to unjust systems and her frustration at expectations that she perform as an embodied apartheid retrospective" (2022).



Figure 6: Tracey Rose's *The Prelude: La Primera Aparicion* (2003). Photograph by Unknown (2003).

In addition, Jamal describes Rose's "mixed-media works, part photography, video, installation, digital prints – a high-octane mix of the absurd, anarchic, and carnivalesque" (2022). Furthermore, Jamal situates Rose's work in the grotesque when he states that "paradox, not didacticism, is the key to Rose's photographs, videos, and installations." (ibid). This insight is reflected in the deliberate murkiness of Rose's performances, where she intentionally creates ambiguity. Referencing how Rose uses her body/identity in her work, Jamal also notes that Rose "capitalises on a deep-rooted psychic unsettlement that is peculiarly South African, because it pivots and twists about a body which resists singular definition, be it gendered or raced" (ibid). I include Rose in this discussion because her select performance, like the grotesque, deliberately rejects the ability to establish conventions/norms. In particular, and much like I intend to do in my own performance oriented research, Rose's performance evidences how to embody the type of ridiculous, subversive, degrading, and foolish style of play synonymous with the character of the fool.

In *The Prelude: The Garden Path* (2003), a multi-layered deliberately simplistic performance that seemingly mocks Christian creationism and the European colonial crusade, Rose makes intentionally messy, degrading, child-like, and irreverent stylistic choices emblematic of the grotesque. These choices are not isolated to this performance. Throughout Rose's body of work there is a deliberate and intentional disregard, or irreverence, for what is considered beautiful or desirable, in particular to Eurocentric/western conventions. In this particular performance however, Rose's aesthetic choices generally reflect the qualities synonymous with grotesquery. Additionally, I argue that Rose uses foolish, paradoxical, playful, and ambiguous acts to subvert socio-cultural/religious/political conventions. Thus, also reflecting the degrading functionality of the grotesque.

Of Rose's *The Prelude: The Garden Path* (2003) Jamal perceives a "nod to imperial invasion, the deluded belief in a civilising mission, the pornography of power, the precarity of womanhood in a white male world" (ibid). Additionally, Rose embodies ridiculous characteristics emblematic of the fool. She mocks Christian biblical references. Furthermore, rather than portray masculinity as embodied, Rose erases it. In the performance masculinity is instead represented by a paper-mâché hat in the form of a phallus and a pair of testicles worn on Eva's head. Much like a fool might wear a coxcomb or jesters hat to delineate the ridiculous, Rose uses this sculptural costume piece to

ridicule masculinity. My research pays particular interest to the way Rose uses grotesque sculptural forms, as symbolic devices, to elicit an ambivalent response in the viewer. The reason being that this seems to be an effective method for replacing the need to use spoken text to convey meaning. An additional reference to the grotesquery of the feminine form, Rose seems to birth her intentionally foolish feminine character from a cave-like hole in the ground. This choice is deliberately grotesque, as previously mentioned, the grotesque is synonymous with dark, earthy, subterranean spaces. Rose's choice of site, costume, and silly/frivolous/ridiculous enactments in the performance playfully and sardonically subvert *white*, Eurocentric, masculine, Christian, and colonialist conventions.

However, Rose implements grotesquery slightly differently to Mntambo. For instance, unlike the way Mntambo uses subtle conceptual ideas that establish a certain distance between the grotesque form and the viewer, Rose physically expresses grotesque acts with her body that are deliberately confrontational. Additionally, and differently perhaps to the curated way in which Mntambo uses grotesque elements, Rose uses the grotesque to intentionally make a mess, to spoil, to unravel the beautiful, neat, coherent, and curatorial. I also pay particular attention to the way Rose uses her own body adorned with grotesque symbology, to perform degrading acts which appear to reclaim the feminine body, attack the masculine gaze, and reject as Jamal states a "singular definition" (2022).

Much like Rose, the next artist, Gavin Krastin also subverts socio-political convention through the method of performance using a grotesque-like lens. However, Krastin's *white*-queer-masculine identity adds an additional perspective to the grotesque in performance in South Africa.

2.5.3 Gavin Krastin

South African performance artist Gavin Krastin will be the final artist whose work I reference as representative of the grotesque in performance in a South African context. I include Krastin because his select works share similarities, as well as noticeable differences to the work of Mntambo and Rose. I have selected two of his performances that seem to resonate most specifically with my own research intentions. The first is a performance titled *Pig Headed* (2016) and the

second is a performance titled *Nil* (2017). Similar to my own research aims and the work of Mntambo and Rose, Krastin uses his body in grotesque performative acts which appear to intentionally subvert socio-political conventions that might either affect, or be present in his own identity. Krastin also uses his body as both the site of the performance as well as the mechanism for performing. I thus consider Krastin's works integral to discussing how the grotesque might be used as a performative perspective/style/lens to reveal, subvert, or critique identity-oriented conventions in a South African context, as useful reference points for my own explorative performance research.

The first of Krastin's work discussed here is a performance entitled *Pig Headed* (2016). In the work, while half-nude and in the process of physically and painfully distorting his face and body with various implements, Krastin reads out excerpts of the South African constitution in a mock-patriotic toast to a severed pig's head. According to Krastin:

Pig Headed calls into question the political terrain regarding the power dynamics in acts of external and self censorship [...] inspired by the speaking severed pig head in Golding's novel as well as the demonstrativeness of our highly mediated 'glocal politricks', [...] *Pig Headed* speaks back to the to the abject pig head, which is both a window and a mirror that not only represents 'the state' and its autonomy, but the self too. (2022)

In the performance Krastin employs elements of grotesquery in both subtle and blatant ways. The severed pigs head, and the self-mutilating acts on his fleshy body - intended to disfigure, inhibit, or transform - are perhaps blatantly obvious as grotesque. The more subtle forms of grotesquery are, for example, the mock toast that Krastin performs to a severed pigs head. In these more subtle grotesque moments Krastin seems to highlight the grotesqueness of socio-political apathy evident, as Krastin mentions, in the reflections of the self as part of the monstrous whole. In other words, the social citizen as an agent of 'pig-headedness'; paradoxically as active in the frustratingly obstinate political inactiveness as the political figureheads we as citizens critique.

Similar to Mntambo and Rose, Krastin uses his body in a dual purpose. That is as both the site/place/subject/object of the performance as well as the performer/explorer/excavator catalysing the action. In doing so, Krastin positions his body and identity - as the space in and on which, Krastin argues, 'glocal politricks' takes place. What appears to be a phrase coined by Krastin,

glocal politricks appears to refer to the deliberately deceptive trickery of politics as a local and global experience. Thus, as an individual agentive body Krastin openly acknowledges the self as a part of the political, complex, paradoxical, fallible, messy, diasporic, socio-cultural, communal South African and global whole. Much like Mntambo and Rose, Krastin's use of his body as the site and agent of the performance is an effective method with which to critique socio/political-conventions. A technique I endeavour to emulate in my own research.



Figure 7: Gavin Krastin performing in *Pig Headed* (2016). Photograph by Sarah Schafer (2016).

Interestingly, Krastin also uses elements of grotesquery slightly differently to Mntambo and Rose. For instance, in *Pig Headed* (2016) Krastin physically self-mutilates, distorts, choaks, or causes

physical harm or pain to his body, as he manipulates or transforms his own face into a what appears to be representative of the severed pigs head, whereas in the works of Mntambo and Rose they do not appear to use self-inflicting physical acts of violence against their own bodies. I raise this point to mention that although all three artists appear to use grotesque qualities and functions they all appear to do so in distinctly different ways, and with varying intensity. I consider therefore, that the grotesque is capable of being applied as a lens in a multitude of compositions.

Finally, Krastin's performance *Nil* (2017) further evidences the transmutative ability of the grotesque as a performance style. Explaining the performance, Krastin states that *Nil* (2017)

queers and reconstitutes, and at times ridicules, notions of a white cultural body in South Africa [...] Treading silliness and perversion, while undercut with a deep sense of civic concern, *Nil* agitates considerations of privilege, eroticism and patriotism as cultural capital in a regulated social economy. (2017)

Over the period of approximately 50 minutes Krastin performs a series of deliberately silly, and intentionally witty, macabre, self-flagellating, ambivalent, shocking, and grotesque acts. For example, he appears to mock former Democratic Alliance leader Hellen Zille, by performing her as a sycophantic ribbon cutter, a so called *poster-child* of whiteness in South Africa. Furthermore, in a grotesque form of patriotism Krastin pulls a large South African flag out of his anus.



Figure 8: Gavin Krastin performing in *Nil* (2017). Photograph by Mia van de Merwe (2017).

Additionally, Krastin concludes the performance by positioning the white South African body as grotesque, a kind of weird hybrid creature - a self-mutilating, ambivalently-patriotic, a local-foreigner, who seems to desperately cling to and emulate the ideals of white Eurocentricity on the African continent.

However, unlike the way Krastin embodies the grotesque in *Pig Headed* (2016), in an arguably overt and sardonic way, he does so slightly differently in *Nil* (2017). For instance, in *Nil* (2017) Krastin seems to use his own body in ridiculous, silly, and deliberately self-defeating ways. Krastin uses his body/identity/self as a kind of symbolic, homogenous white cultural body, who emphasises varying white cultural tropes, whilst catalysing the narrative.

Thus, in a narrative sense, Krastin appears to use self-derisive humour as a vehicle for ambivalence and degradation. However, the humour is cathartic, not cruel. This is evident particularly because although Krastin ridicules the audience he also positions himself as the object of mockery. Krastin quite literally uses his own body to mock himself.

Differently perhaps to Mntambo and Rose however, Krastin uses intentionally crass or vulgar grotesque qualities and acts. For instance, where Mntambo and Rose might intimate at traversing somatic boundaries, Krastin physically does so; and with various objects. However, I would argue that this does not diminish or exclude Rose or Mntambo's performances as forms of grotesquery.

2.6 A SUMMATIVE REMARK

Although what is overtly grotesque might be contextual and subjective, and although there seem to be clear distinctions between the intensity of the grotesquerie used by Mntambo, Rose, and Krastin, the grotesque as a style or lens is consistently evident across all three works.

For example, Mntambo uses her own body to create sculptural representations of herself in grotesque figurative transformation. Mntambo also appears to use the grotesque more conceptually than in vulgar or overtly abject representations. Rose on the other hand adorns her body in the grotesque. For instance, Rose uses costume, paint, and ridiculous or degrading grotesque-like acts

to traverse both conceptual and physical identity-oriented boundaries. Whereas, Krastin opts for abject grotesquerie, physically traversing the conceptual and literal boundaries of convention inscribed in or on the body by grotesquely inflicting harm to his body in the process of doing so.

Considering the varying performative ways in which Mntambo, Rose, and Krastin implement elements of the grotesque as a subversive lens to critique identity oriented conventions, I observed several recurring phenomena. The most obvious is perhaps that there is a deliberate intention to subvert socio-cultural/political conventions in order to reveal, critique, and then re-imagine them. What I find most useful in relation to my own research is the way each artist offers unique and varied perspectives of using grotesquerie as a lens whilst doing so.

As previously mentioned, the grotesque is ambivalent/ambiguous/transformative. Thus the grotesque seems capable of transforming and adapting to different performative contexts, perspectives and forms. I find this transformability appealing. There does not seem to be a uniform way of defining or implementing the grotesque in performance. Nonetheless, despite these variances, I argue that the qualities and degradative functionality of the grotesque are identifiable.

Therefore I intend to draw on the variable forms with which Mntambo, Rose, and Krastin implement the grotesque in performance. For instance, from Mntambo I intend to draw on her subtle use of grotesque sculptural forms that prompt ambiguous responses in the viewer. From Rose, I intend drawing on her effective embodiment of folly and silliness, as well as her use of ironic and sarcastic symbology evidenced in her sculptural design and scenic choices. And lastly, I intend drawing on Krastin's ability to use the body as an effective means of subverting the conventions that the very same body has been socially constructed to be representative of.

However, and in obvious contrast to all three artists, my identity as a *white*-heterosexual-male, an identity that is responsible for establishing many of the conventions which the above artists rally against, might nonetheless offer a varying perspective of the grotesque in performance in a South African context.

CHAPTER THREE: PERFORMING MY IDENTITY AS GROTESQUE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter three focuses on the practical component of the research project. My creative research process used interdisciplinary artistic techniques. These included sculpture, puppetry, creative writing, physical theatre, and theatrical design. I used these artistic methods to devise the performance *Yuck!* (2021). The process of devising *Yuck!* (2021) offered two preliminary performance offerings that were ultimately discarded: an incomplete stop-motion film *The Salty-Penis Rock-Spider* (2020), and a short physical theatre film *The King of Portaloo* (2021). Although discarded, these two attempts provided invaluable research material, and evidenced how my artistic practice led the research process. Thus, chapter three initially discusses how the two preliminary performative iterations led to the creation of the final work *Yuck!* (2021). The final performance explored six retrospective moments in my life, with each moment representing an aspect of my identity at various stages of its development. I therefore discuss how I attempted to subvert my normative perception of these moments by performing them from a grotesque perspective. Lastly, I give a brief explanation of where and how *Yuck!* (2021) was performed. The chapter ends with a summative conclusion.

3.2 THE FIRST ATTEMPT: *THE SALTY-PENIS ROCK-SPIDER* (2020)

The first performance attempt in the devising process took the form of a two minute long stop-motion animated film titled *The Salty-Penis Rock-Spider* (2020). Although incomplete, the work intended to show the similarities between my conception/birth in South Africa and the colonization of Southern Africa as grotesque.

The title of the piece stood as a grotesque metaphor for my own hybrid Afrikaans/English identity. In line with the hybridity of the grotesque, the name *Salty-Penis Rock-Spider* is a hybrid term that I created by joining two separate, and contextual, South African insults. The first part of the term *Salty-Penis* is an English translation of the Afrikaans insult *soutpiel*. Norman notes that “‘Soutpiel’

is a derogatory term referring to the English-speaking South Africans and denotes a person who stands with a foot on each continent so that their ‘dick’ gets salty from dangling in the ocean between” (2013, p. 404). Norman further suggests that this is an apt “description of the localized foreigner; the dual-citizen descendent who sees the act of not committing to either nationality entirely as a cunning way of safely ‘keeping options open’” (ibid). The second part of the title *Rock-Spider* as defined by the online dictionary of South African English, is “a derogatory and offensive name for an Afrikaner” (DSAE 2022).

I conjoined the derogatory terms to create a grotesque hybrid identity for myself, that I then might explore through performance. The reason I did so was to reflect the complexity of my ancestral heritage, a hybrid combination of French Huguenot, Dutch, German, Afrikaner and English settlers. I envisioned the Salty-Penis Rock-Spider as a grotesque puppet made from mutton cloth, twine, wire, and cotton thread. This puppet was designed as a grotesque hybrid creature; with the face of a distorted adult self and the body of a spider with eight spider-like legs intended to resemble eight phalluses.



Figure 9: The Salty-Penis Rock-Spider Puppet. Photograph by Francis Mennigke (2020).

I also created a young grotesque boy puppet, representative of my younger child-like-self. I intended to devise a performance around the two puppet characters that might show the development of my identity from conception through to my adult self - a grotesque child who grew

into the Salty-Penis Rock-Spider. In order to explore the way in which these characters came into being, I also created an opening sequence, made from the same materials, that attempted to show the conception of my identity as similar to the process of colonization in South Africa. I experimented with using stop motion animation as a method of capturing the performance.



Figure 10: Young grotesque boy puppet from *The Salty-Penis Rock-Spider* (2020). Photograph by Francis Mennigke (2020).

Although it is not immediately evident in the performance video, the space in which I chose to create and film the performance was influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic. At this point in the research process, the lockdown restrictions in South Africa made it impossible to create the performance anywhere other than the home I was currently living in. Thus, I chose to use a corner of a room in that home. The corner of the small 3m x 3m room was a determining factor for many of the creative decisions that were made. For instance, the size and scope of the performance, the soft fabric materials I chose, and the method of using stop motion animation, a predominantly intimate form of documentation. As it is well known the Covid-19 pandemic placed restrictions on spatial, inter-personal, and socialized movement. And as it will be shown, these restrictions did appear to have similar constricting effects on the creative process.

In summary, the incomplete stop motion animation shows a pair of testicles made from mutton cloth and thread. From the testicles a swarm of sperm emerge. The sperm swim across a sea, and onto a shore. The sperm travel through various landscapes in the search of an egg. After finding an egg, a single sperm tunnels inside of the egg. A process of fertilization begins, which culminates in a humanoid figure. The figure is in a process of being birthed when the scene cuts to a small grotesque figure playing with a cotton bobbin. The clip then cuts to the Salty-Penis Rock-Spider gazing at the grotesque child figure. The clip ends.

PERFORMANCE VIEWING: *At this point I would like the reader to view the brief, incomplete, animation: The Salty-Penis Rock-Spider (2020) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCRiF3o-HrM>*

The animated performance, although ultimately discarded, offered valuable research questions. However, in its current form it was not representative of the grotesque style I was searching for. Additionally, while the performance attempt might have held visual and cinematic potential, the arduous documentation process of using stop motion animation was labor intensive and too slow for the time constraints of the project. Additionally, the method of using fabric and thread to make the puppets and the performance world were equally time consuming. Furthermore, the method of stop-motion animation seemed not to be an effective way of capturing a sense of live performance. The animated format did not seem to evoke the sense of immediacy or liveness that I felt was integral to the research.

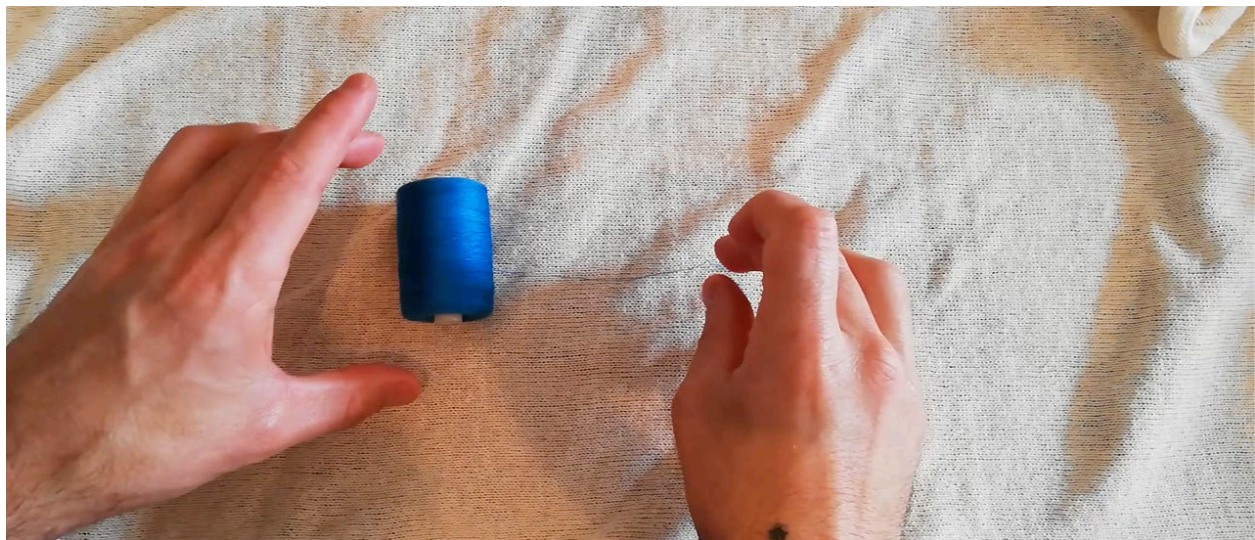
Most importantly however, I realized I had unconsciously chosen a performance form that enabled myself to remain absent or invisible to the viewer. Despite my best research intentions of centering myself and my identity in the performative enquiry, as the viewer will notice in the short clip, the only part of my body that is visible are my hands. I found that self-evasion intriguing. Why was I attempting to remain invisible? Why was I hiding my body?

I wondered whether this evasive tactic was linked to my whiteness and the notion of disembodiment. As previously mentioned, my white-heterosexual-male identity seems to be deeply rooted in the ideals of disembodiment or of mind/body subject/object dualism. In other

words, associating my identity with my immaterial mind, and therefore disassociating my identity from my material body. This is affirmed by Shabot who mentions that the “abandonment of the flesh-and-blood body has been interpreted as resulting from anxieties regarding the vulnerability and fragility of the physical body” (2007, p. 60). I consider therefore, that not showing my body might have been connected to the fear or anxiety of identifying with my body, because that was not where I considered my identity or sense of self to reside.

Furthermore, I was also intrigued with why I was using puppets and material objects to represent my body. My absence in the performance demonstrated a curious hesitancy to center my own body, and a disconcerting comfort in using and centering other bodies, even puppet bodies, instead. This seemed indicative of my whiteness, which as previously mentioned, has been synonymous with the white body trying to find explanations for white racial prejudice on the margins of and in opposition to itself (Garner 2007, p. 5).

These observations although disconcerting, were invaluable in prompting further performance enquiry. In lieu of the three South African artist’s work I had drawn inspiration from, I realized I needed to find a way of centering my body and my identity, as both the mechanism and site of the performance.



*Figure 11: Evidence of somatic evasiveness in the making of *The Salty Penis Rock Spider* (2020). Photograph by Francis Mennigke (2020).*

3.3 THE SECOND ATTEMPT: *THE KING OF PORTALOO* (2021)

The King of Portaloo (2021) was therefore the second performance attempt. It was devised over the course of two months and took the form of a twenty-minute filmed physical theatre performance. Prior to constructing the set and the physical performance I spent two weeks writing a script. As such, the performance was narratively centered. It focused on the character of a delusional king in a fictional land called Portaloo. Whilst the king falsely believes he is under threat of an invasion, a fool appears from inside the king's toilet/throne. Offering a solution to the invasion the fool tricks the king into recounting the tale of how he ascended the throne. The act of remembering the story reveals the king's illegitimacy as monarch. Furthermore, it is revealed that the king's perception of self was grounded in delusions of supremacy. The king's perception of himself is therefore revealed as grotesque, or monstrous, rather than as immutable or supreme. More importantly however, rather than finding resolution, the performance concludes with the illegitimate king choosing not to accept his delusions of supremacy. At the time, I thought this ending would perhaps best reflect my own delusional sense of entitlement as a white male South African of colonial descent, who might not want to accept the problematic aspects of his identity.

As such, the performance of *The King of Portaloo* (2021) attempted to juxtapose the King's identity, with my own identity in the context of contemporary South Africa. The performance drew inspiration from Julia Kristeva's previously mentioned theory of abjection: "The experience of the subject to which it is revealed that its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations of its own being" (1982, p. 5). Thus, as the performer-researcher, I wanted to embody a character coming to grips with the realization that their identity is based on a grotesque delusion of supremacy. Therefore, I wanted to explore the parallels between the king's grotesque delusion of supremacy, and my own delusional sense of supremacy, embedded in my perception of my own white-heterosexual-masculinity in a contemporary South African context.

The entire physical performance was set in a portable toilet that I made from cardboard, pictured in *Figure 10* below. The cardboard "Portaloo" served as the literal throne for the King as well the site of the performance. The performance utilized cardboard as the primary design medium. I felt that cardboard brought a sense of childlike irreverence and playfulness to the visual language. The

cardboard Portaloo - unable to function as a working toilet - instead became an emblem of the ridiculous; an impermanent, nonsensical grotesque kingdom.



Figure 12: The Portaloo performance space made from cardboard in the corner of room. Photograph by Hannah Lax (2021).

Similar to the first performance attempt, the Portaloo was built in the corner of a room during the Covid-19 lockdown period. As such, although the size and scope of the performance had developed, it was still within the confines of this small room that the set was built. Again, the size of the performance space was a determining factor in the creative decisions that were made for the performance.

Furthermore, to redress the challenges that arose in the first performance attempt, *The Salty-Penis Rock-Spider* (2020), I needed to ensure that my body was both the mechanism and site of the

performance enquiry, as well as that my own identity was being actively/visibly explored. I thought that physical theatre would serve as the best medium for this, as physical theatre utilizes the body as the primary medium for performance expression and creation. Although a deceptive and slippery term to define, Murray and Keefe note that *physical theatre* “traces its origins in our contemporary sense to those ideologies and manifestos which sought to reverse a dualism and hierarchy of word over body” (2005, p. 11). Furthermore, Bauman in Murray (2002) remarks that “physical theatre uses as its primary means of expression movement, dynamic immobility [a movement itself], gesture and a variety of acting techniques” (p. 17). Thus, what I interpret by the term *physical theatre* is a style of creating performance that does not privilege either written text or the moving/immobile body, but rather attempts to use both in explorative combinations.



Figure 13: Still frame from *The King of Portaloo* (2021).

Furthermore, to better capture a sense of liveness, I chose to use film instead of stop motion animation as the means of documenting the performance.

PERFORMANCE VIEWING: At this point I would like the reader to view a portion of the performance: *The King of Portaloo* (2021) – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7y57v37QBGc>

I drew inspiration from the challenges that were revealed whilst critically analyzing what was now the second performance attempt. I thought that using such a deeply somatic performance form would naturally prevent me evading centering myself and my identity in the performance enquiry. However, I observed several predominant challenges in that premise.

Firstly, I had overlooked that physical theatre is a deeply comfortable performance language for me personally. As an artist, physical theatre has served as the primary method of my performance practice for nearly a decade. It is therefore a performance style that does not ask me to be somatically vulnerable and therefore requires minimal personal risk. Thus, the physically theatrical technique seemed to allow me to remain physically visible, whilst at the same time help mask or evade re-enacting my identity in an honest and vulnerable way. Why was this? Why was I attempting to mask my identity again?

Perhaps the reason for this masking lay in the physical theatre-like performance style I was using. Traditional physical theatre language is deeply rooted in using somatic illusion for storytelling purposes. For example, physical theatre performance draws significantly from various mime-oriented theatrical performance techniques. Lecoq affirms that “mime is central to theatre: being able to play at being someone else and to summon illusory presences” (Lecoq et al 2011, p. 22). As such, it appeared that in *The King of Portaloo* (2021) I was inadvertently using illusory performance tactics to prevent myself, my identity, from being seen and enquired. I remark on the deference between this kind of theatrical play-acting that is integral to the physical theatre form, and the performance of pedestrian actions/acts in the third performance attempt. Again however, in this performance attempt I was curious about why I was using performance techniques, that were familiar to my artistic practice, as tactics of self-evasion.

As previously mentioned, due to the restrictions on interpersonal contact during the Covid-19 pandemic I was also required to document the performance digitally. In this attempt I chose to film the performance. After editing the film, I noticed that I was inadvertently controlling or determining the gaze of the viewer. Despite being aware of the way in which theatrical performance in at least some way always attempts to control or determine the gaze of the viewer, I found that I was leaning toward curating my body, letting the viewer see only what I wanted

them to. Again, editing the viewer's gaze also appeared to be an evasive tactic. Controlling the gaze of the viewer protected me from being vulnerable. I could choose when and how and in what way I wanted the viewer to view my body. Although the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated that I find a digital means of documenting the performance I was still curious as to why I was seeking ways of documenting that allowed me to control the gaze of the viewer. In lieu of the need to subvert or undermine my identity I considered that I might therefore need to undermine the level of control I had to protect how my body was viewed.

Additionally, despite my intentions to use my own body to devise the performance, I started the second devising process by writing a script. In retrospect, I considered that I was attempting to use the safety of pre written text as a wall to hide my physical self behind. I consider that this intention revealed the anxiety and vulnerability of using my body to devise the performance. This decision exposed the safety and comfort I felt in working from a conceptual idea. I appeared to literally be hiding behind words, and clearly feeling anxious or fearful of trusting my own body and its somatic/intuitive knowledge to lead the practical performance process. Again, these observations prompted further artistic exploration.

Lastly, I had also not adequately found a means of embodying the character of the fool. I consider that my decision to use other bodies, even puppet bodies, as the character of the fool revealed an unconscious comfort in positioning other bodies as ridiculous, rather than my own. Upon reflection I asked questions of myself such as: why did I not want to ridicule myself? What was I afraid of? Would ridiculing myself make myself vulnerable and exposed? Why did I appear to find it so difficult to associate my identity with folly? Remembering the performances of Rose and Krastin, and the way they quite literally used their own bodies to ridicule themselves, or socio-political conventions present within themselves, reaffirmed the need to position my own body as foolish in the next performative attempt.

Reflecting on the process of the second attempt, I observed that had made creative decisions that kept placing my body in familiar, comfortable, and risk-free environments. Additionally, I had not at the time made the symbolic connection between the small, squashed, hidden, performance space and the restrictions that I might subconsciously or consciously be enforcing on the research enquiry

- an enquiry that might require the physical and psychological room for a deeper more expansive exploration. Furthermore, I had also found safety in using the comfortable performance techniques of physical theatre and creative writing. Additionally, I had used a style of documenting the performance that allowed me to control how my body was perceived. I had also again not captured the sense of liveness so intrinsic to the live performance genre. And lastly, I had been afraid of using my own body to expose my identity. Instead, I had chosen to use fictional characters, metaphor, and allegory. And again, these specific challenges prompted further practical artistic inquiry.



Figure 14: Still frame from *The King of Portaloo* (2021).

3.4 THE THIRD ATTEMPT: *YUCK!* (2021)

The need to continue exploring culminated in the performance *Yuck!* (2021), the third performative attempt, which served as the final performance component in the creative research process. The work was devised over the course of three months. It takes the form of a 36-minute performance, filmed in a single continuous shot. The performance explores six, specific, retrospective moments in my life, performed chronologically - from birth through to the present moment.

As it can be seen below in *Figure 13*, the performance is housed inside a large, cavernous space made of paper. The performance space is populated by various sculptural objects organized into six visual vignettes representative of the six retrospective life moments. The performance space is inhabited by a single performing body - a fool. The fool functions as the caretaker of the space; helping to re-enact the various retrospective moments from a grotesque perspective, thus, catalysing the narrative.



Figure 15: Performance space for *Yuck!* (2021) in the Hexagon Theatre, UKZN. Photograph by Hannah Lax (2021).

The performance appears to be narratively cyclical. I wanted to capture a sense of quotidian ordinariness for the grotesque: a window into an ordinary grotesque day on loop. In this way I aimed to present the grotesque as the everyday. I wanted the viewer to come away with the sense that the world that existed in the enclosed space would continue looping for evermore.

The retrospective moments I chose to explore as grotesque were, from my own subjective perspective, deliberately banal. The reason I chose to explore ordinary or banal moments and not extraordinary moments was because I had previously considered my identity as normative and ordinary. As previously mentioned, having considered my identity as ordinary, particularly in the context of a country as ethnically diverse as South Africa was problematically linked to white supremacy. Thus, to disrupt my notion of the ordinary in relation to my identity, I chose ordinary moments in an attempt to reveal the ordinary as strange or uncommon to myself.

3.4.1 Devising *Yuck!* (2021)

Synonymous with PLR, the process of devising the performance *Yuck!* (2021) was informed by the issues and challenges that arose from the prior two performative attempts. As mentioned in my reflection on *The King of Portaloo* (2021) I realized I had been inadvertently using familiar/comfortable performance tactics to prevent my identity from being seen and enquired. Thus, to avoid using a method of performance creation that was familiar to me, I decided that I would not write a script or use physical theatre as a theatrical style. I also decided that I would not do anything at all that might be familiar to any of my own prior performance-oriented creative artistic practice. These decisions, although ultimately liberating, were also frustrating. I did not know where to begin. At this moment, I felt, to quote Birch's method of transformative artistic practice, "in the dark" (2016 p. v). And at the time I did not know that *in the dark* was exactly where I needed to be.

3.4.2 Finding Paper

Whilst feeling *in the dark*, the first thing I decided to do was use my hands to make something. I began by sculpting the figure of a baby out of some old newspaper. The speed with which I made

the figure was much faster than having previously used cardboard or fabric. Furthermore, the material of newspaper seemed to have life-like qualities. For example, when scrunched up and then released it would move kinetically. The newspaper also had a particular texture that was neither too rigid nor too soft. Thus, the paper held form without crumbling, like fabric might, but was also malleable unlike cardboard. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, the paper, when scrunched up and then undone, had a crinkled and creased effect similar to that of flesh or skin. Thus, the figure of the baby that I had sculpted not only looked strangely life like, but because it was clearly discernable as paper, the baby figure had a grotesque appearance. It was somehow in-between, inanimate, but also held the potential to suddenly come to life. It was then I realized I had found the next material. However, to make the entire show out of newspaper I required an enormous amount of it. I sourced and found a 50kg roll of blank newsprint. Additionally, the cream/white color of the blank newsprint was aesthetically useful for a performance that intended to explore my whiteness.

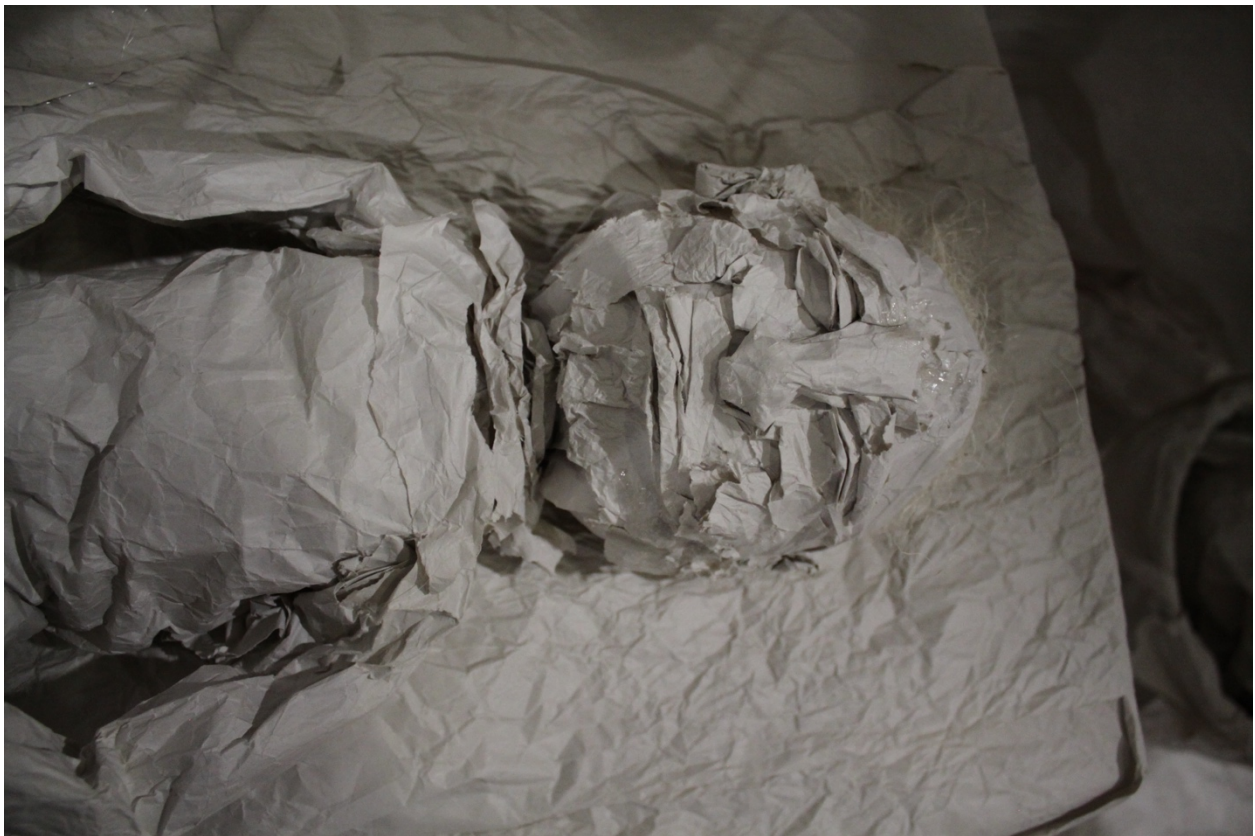


Figure 16: Figure of a baby made of paper for Yuck! (2021). Photograph by Hannah Lax (2021).

3.4.3 Sculpture

Having found a material/substance that seemed to work both practically and aesthetically, I returned to my autoethnographic conceptual starting point. I considered that the retrospective life moments might offer clues about how I had learnt to perform my identity over the course of its development. As I had found sculpting the small baby child out of newspaper a fast and effective technique that held grotesque potential, I decided to follow this impulse.

Thus, I would sculpt the objects required to represent each of the retrospective life moments out of blank newsprint. The decision to use sculpted objects rather than my own body, to create the illusion of objects in space, came from needing to find a way of distancing myself from familiar performance practices, such as physical theatre. I had never performed with sculptures before, and thus considered this a reason to follow my intuition and move into less familiar performance territory. I found that the process of paper sculpting had a significant effect on how the performance language, style, and form developed. Upon reflection, the design *style* appeared to influence or lead the devising *process*.

Additionally, in order to pay more attention to the grotesque aesthetic in this performative attempt, I sought a way of creating sculptures that would emphasize the grotesque. I drew inspiration from Bakhtin's imagery of the grotesque body. Bakhtin notes that "the artistic logic of the grotesque image [...] retains only its excrescences [...] and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths" (1984, p. 317 – 318). Thus, as I endeavoured to find ways of representing various aspects of my identity from a grotesque perspective, I chose to make sculptural forms that emphasized the grotesque body. The body parts I chose to sculpt and use in the performance were an ear, eye, nose, buttocks, phallus, testes, and gaping mouth.

Whilst sculpting the various objects, with which I would eventually perform, various things began to happen. I noticed that the process of physically using my body to sculpt the objects brought a sense of liveness to the sculptures. Slowly, as additional layers of paper were added, each sculpted object would begin to take form. As the forms were taking shape, I would move them around for various reasons. For instance, to see what part of the sculpture needed more paper. When I was

moving the sculpted objects around, they would appear to come to life. I did not realize it at the time but these small manipulations were in effect like those of a puppeteer manipulating a puppet. Thus, I began to see each sculpted object, not as an inanimate object, but rather as life-like, imbued with their own performance-like qualities. Similar to Mntambo's *Minotaurus* (2015), these sculptures, in the process of being constructed, seemed to take on the qualities of performance, they became *performative* objects. In other words, objects that had performative agency.



Figure 17: A gathering of paper sculptures from *Yuck!* (2021). Photograph by Francis Mennigke (2021).

Additionally, each of the sculpted objects were in some way connected to a very specific time in my life. The objects themselves therefore seemed to again become more than mere objects, but were also imbued with a history, their own story, their own biography perhaps. This thought is affirmed by Thythacott who argues that “objects gain different social lives at the whims of those that encounter them” (2011, p. 173). These specific objects and the stories that surrounded them

appeared to influence the performance. For instance, the large sculpted nose that was created for the fifth moment in the performance titled *Confirmation*. The nose in this scene was not merely a random nose, but was rather intended as a grotesque representation of the then bishop of KwaZulu-Natal who had confirmed me into the Christian faith, at a ritualized confirmation ceremony in my grade 10 year. Whilst interacting with this sculpture as I was making it, there was one moment I recall that stands out as a useful example of sculptural performativity, that is, the sculpture took on the qualities of performance, of action:

I picked up the nose, in a deliberate and sensitive way. Without needing to think, my body began moving, or rather my body was being moved by the nose. As I was imagining the nose as the bishop of KwaZulu-Natal, performing an act of prayer over me with his hand placed on my head, the nose began to bounce up and down, added to the bouncing movement the nose began sniffing. I moved with the sniffing nose in a circle, most probably evident of the cyclical nature of rituals, the nose seemed to be performing a sniffing ritual. I imagined the nose, the bishop of KwaZulu-Natal, sniffing me to determine whether I was worthy of being confirmed into the Anglican Christian faith. (Artistic Journal entry April 2021)



Figure 18: The Bishop's nose from *Yuck!* (2021). Photograph by Francis Mennigke (2021).

After this occurrence, I observed that these sculptural objects and the process of making them seemed to inform the narrative of the performance, and furthermore, had in some way begun to affect how my own body devised the performance. This leads me to a brief discussion on the role of my body in the devising process.

3.4.4 Body

As previously mentioned in the first two performance attempts, I had struggled with finding a performance style that would center my body as both the mechanism as well as the site of enquiry. And given the repetitive, arguably white/masculine, evasiveness I seemed to display in first two iterations, I also needed to ensure that my identity was being actively/visibly/somatically explored.

The physical process of creating and manipulating the paper sculptures provided essential clues as to how I might solve this. The action of sculpting the paper objects catalyzed the devising process. It provided physical, visual, and metaphorical form for the varying aspects of the personal retrospective moments which made up the performance narrative. Yet it also necessitated that I performatively engage with the sculptures in a more tactile and functional way. As many of the objects were large or cumbersome to hold, I began working with them performatively in simple acts of movement and manipulation. I would pick up and put down the sculpted objects next to each other to create a visual landscape/vignette. The simple act of moving the objects into different formations seemed to hold rich performative potential and led to an interesting distinction between two perceptions of the word *act*. Schlosberg mentions that:

in both the noun and the verb, the word ‘act’ divides itself into two basic categories of use. Looking at the verb, we see that one of the categories concerns the idea of doing something, or getting something done, or having an effect on something or someone, while the other has to do with the idea of feigning something, personating or impersonating someone, dissimulating, dissembling. (1974, p. 2)

I realized that both of my two previous performance attempts were concerned with the second use of the word *act*; they were concerned with putting on an act, with pretending, with play-acting. However, I also realized that the first definition of *act* - a simple everyday doing – seemed to provide an authenticity or truth to the style of somatic performance I was looking for. As I was

looking for a way of re-enacting my literal identity, I realized the promise of using simple *acts* and *actions* as the basis for the performance style. I therefore chose to move away from theatrical *acting* and strove to use pedestrian *actions* as the performance language.

This became the central somatic language with which the work was made. After the sculpting process was complete, I arranged the objects into six visual vignettes representative of the six retrospective moments in my life. I tried to figure out a way to connect those moments to create a sense of story and flow. I moved the objects around the space, attempting to use the functional action of the object, and the proximity of one object to another, to provoke narrative. I found that each object's ordinary function informed its performative action. For example – the bishop's nose sniffed, a mop mopped, a washing machine washed. I then sought to use my body, or the character of the fool, to perform those familiar actions from a grotesque perspective. To do this, I subverted the ordinary function of the object in an attempt to make it strange. For example, the mop danced, the washing machine ate, the telephone barked, the tractor flew. In this manner, the grotesque actions of the objects established the key moments of performative action and therefore the central narrative points in the work. They also determined the grotesque/subverted laws of the performance's world.



Figure 19: The flying tractor in *Yuck!* (2021). Photograph by Hannah Lax (2021).

Additionally, the grotesquely subversive performance world, was also aided by the character of the fool. In order to use or center my own body in the performance, as well as subvert that white masculine body in some way, I decide I would attempt to embody the character of the fool. The reason for this was in line with needing to find a way of both keeping my own white male body visible, whilst at the same time attempting to find a way of subverting the ordinariness of that same body. As previously mentioned, the fool's principal objective is to subvert or degrade the conventions within a story. Thus, the fool in my own story functions as a character of playful ambivalence. Because the fool appears to embody the qualities of the grotesque, the fool seemed capable of holding both the ordinary and the grotesque simultaneously. Thus, in *Yuck!* (2021) the character of the fool functions in two ways. To both make my own ordinary body strange to myself - much like the way Mntambo's Minotaurus or Matador characters did - as well as to subvert the ordinariness of my retrospective life moments – much like Rose's foolish feminine character subverts heteronormative masculine Christian coloniality in *The Prelude: The Garden Path* (2003). Thus, in the performance world of my own retrospective life moments, the objects and their normalcy are affected by the fool's subversive functionality. When the fool interacts with the mop it dances, when the fool interacts with the telephone it barks. These actions were intended to performatively show the process of grotesque subversion.

Before asking the reader to view the final performance, I introduce the six retrospective life moments the fool intended to subvert, as a means of providing context.

3.4.5. The Six Retrospective Moments

The first moment is titled BIRTH. It aimed to explore the origins of my identity as a white, heterosexual male in the context of South Africa. I was interested in the parasitic nature of the white colonial body feeding and breeding on the nutrients and wealth of the host - South Africa. I used this metaphor as performance scaffolding to craft the first retrospective moment in the work. I made a puppet of a baby and several sculptural objects – namely a phallus, a bunch of testicles, milking teats and a sculpture of the African continent. I performed a sequence in which the fool character ends up birthing a child puppet, representative of myself, from a phallus. The phallus is connected to a cluster of testicles. The testes are fed nutrients through a vein, on the end of which

are milking teats. The milking teats drain an udder, representative of South Africa, that is situated at the bottom of a suspended sculpture of Africa.



Figure 20: The fool milking the African continent in Yuck! (2021). Photograph by Hannah Lax (2021).

This grotesque re-enactment of my birth intended to represent the natural order of the violent, parasitic coloniser. I was fascinated by the grotesqueness of the residue of colonial rule and how it was passed on, and thus situated in my own identity, my own body.

The second retrospective moment is titled MY LITTLE RED TRACTOR. It aimed to explore myself as a white boy child playing with a red toy tractor that I had been given for my third birthday. In this moment I wanted to explore my own relationship to land as a white child of colonial descent in a South African context. I was fascinated with the symbolism of this moment. For instance, the innocence of a small child playing with a toy tractor, in the soil, in the flowerbed, in the garden, on the piece of land in South Africa, that had been fenced off, owned, and occupied by my family. I saw this innocent playful moment juxtaposed with the violent way in which land

in South Africa had been, claimed, fought over, displaced indigenous bodies, cut up, demarcated, settled, farmed, and developed by my European ancestors. I attempted to show up the grotesqueness of this juxtaposition. In doing so I used the character of the fool to perform a sequence showing a puppet child, representative of myself, how to play with a toy tractor. However, when the child is asleep, in the child's unseeing subconscious absence, the fool enacts a process of farming a group of silent figurines and placing them in a bag – an enactment representative of the violent removal and displacement of indigenous Africans by colonial powers.



Figure 21: The fool farming the silent figurines and placing them in a bag in Yuck! (2021). Photograph by Hannah Lax (2021).

The actions performed by the fool intended to show how I, myself as a white boy child, learnt and was taught to think, perhaps even subconsciously, about my entitled relationship to land in the context of South Africa.

The third moment was titled MAKHUMALO. It attempted to explore the historical socio-cultural, political, and economically skewed power dynamics at play between myself as a young white boy

and an older black woman employed as a domestic worker by my family. Growing up, the experience of an older black woman, cleaning our family home – washing the dishes, scrubbing the floors, cleaning the toilet, and washing my clothes was ordinary, commonplace from my subjective childhood perspective. As an adult, I was intrigued by the absurdity of this situation. In a post-colonial, post-apartheid, and democratic South Africa an older black woman appeared to be in a position that re-affirmed the white colonial supremacist narrative. In this moment I intended to show the ordinariness of this phenomenon as grotesque. I intended to do so by removing the black body from the conventional uniform of a domestic worker and replacing the black body with the fool's white arm that manipulates the uniform.



Figure 22: The fool manipulating the domestic worker's uniform in *Yuck!* (2021). Photograph by Hannah Lax (2021).

I used the character of the fool to perform a sequence that explored the complexities of the relationship between myself as a young white boy and the older black women employed as a domestic worker. Although the relationship was problematic, I also intended to show that the relationship was complex. The complexities of this relationship were however, from my own perspective, one-sided. They resided in the caring and maternal aspects shown me by the older black women, in a position which clearly demarcated a racially skewed power dynamic. A power dynamic that ensued from a history of white supremacist colonial rule in South Africa.

The fourth moment was titled SUNDAY LUNCH. It aimed to explore a ritualistic Sunday meal specific to my own European cultural heritage within the context of South Africa. Sunday lunch in my Christian family was not just an ordinary weekly meal, it was imbued with Christian ritualistic symbolism. Sunday is typically the day of rest in the Anglican Christian religion. On this day a Christian typically rests from work and feasts on the fruit of their labour. I wanted to explore my memory of the *ritual* my family followed during this meal. In this moment I intended to subvert its normativity by drawing particular attention to the grotesque narcissistic subtext. In essence, we were not really consuming a meal, we were consuming ourselves. In the performance the fool enacts the eating of a ritualistic Sunday lunch meal. First the fool plays the role of a waiter offering wine, the fool mocks the ritualistic prayer over the food, the fool then imitates consuming a small puppet child, representative of myself, throwing its remains into a large paper sculpted mouth, representative of my own mouth.



Figure 23: The fool feeding the mouth in *Yuck!* (2021). Photograph by Hannah Lax (2021).

The fifth moment was titled CONFIRMATION. It aimed to explore the ritualised enactment of my confirmation, or acceptance, into the Anglican Christian faith, when I was fifteen years old. In the Anglican Christian religious cultural tradition, the act of being confirmed is seen as a rite of passage, the movement from childhood into a form of young spiritual adolescence. Considering the cruelty with which Christianity was used to enable and reinforce the European colonialist mission in South Africa, I began to see my confirmation into the Christian faith in the context of contemporary South Africa as a grotesque ritual. A confirmation of my joining the ranks of the colonial Eurocentric clan of *white* religious missionary supremacists. In the performance the character of the fool subverts the normativity with which I used to associate this moment by using a sculpture of a nose, representative of the Bishop of KwaZulu-Natal who confirmed me into the Christian faith. The fool manipulates the nose as it performs a sniffing ritual, in which it is determined whether or not I was deemed worthy to join the ranks of Christendom. The nose then sneezes its assent, and from its nostril is produced a key, symbolic of my acceptance into the Christian Faith.

The sixth and final moment was titled YUCK! This moment attempted to explore how the five previous retrospective moments might continue to affect the ways in which I perform my current identity in contemporary South Africa. It synthesized the five previous moments into a ritual that sought to do two things. Firstly, it attempted to reflect the prejudicial power of my own *white-male-heterosexual* gaze back onto myself. And secondly it attempted to show that wherever I travel as a *white-heterosexual-male* that I carry with me my grotesque whiteness and all the problems and paradoxes that come with this identity. In this moment the character of the fool retrieves a suitcase inside of which is a mask. The mask has a penis for a nose and testicles for eyes, in other words it is a *dick-face* mask, a mask that intended to represent the vulgarity of my *white-heterosexual-masculine* identity. The fool then places the mask on a paper puppet figure representative of my adult self. The fool then places a sculpture of a giant eye, representative of the *white-heterosexual-masculine* gaze on its head. The fool then spends some moments returning the *white-heterosexual-masculine* gaze at the puppet representative of myself. The fool then packs the puppet representative of myself into the suitcase. The fool then deposits the suitcase at the entrance to the performance space, removes the giant eye sculpture from its head and returns to its starting position at the beginning of the performance. The camera-operator, representative of my

own or the viewers perspective, takes the suitcase – inside of which is my grotesque self, and leaves the performance space.



Figure 24: The fool carrying the suitcase to the entrance of the space in *Yuck!* (2021). Photograph by Hannah Lax (2021).

PERFORMANCE VIEWING: I now ask that the reader watch the final performance attempt *Yuck!* (2021) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ej2Y5nQmY1Q>

3.4.6 Performing *Yuck!* (2021)

I now briefly discuss the performance of *Yuck!* (2021). In this brief discussion my aim is to consider where, why, and how and I chose to perform and document the final performance. Whether or not these decisions were affective is considered in the final chapter of the thesis, and thus I do not unpack the successes, failures, or prompts for further research here.

I decided to perform, what would be the final performance attempt, in the Hexagon Theatre, a traditionally Eurocentric theatre space located at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, on the Pietermaritzburg campus. It is important to note that due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions at the time I could not have a live audience witness the performance. This changed the way I thought about how the performance would be viewed. I therefore did not need to take into consideration the site lines of a seated audience in the theatre, but rather took into consideration how a camera might capture the performance from the perspective of an audience member walking through the performance space.

Had I been able to have an audience witness the performance I intended that the performance be viewed by between three and five people at a time. They would move along a similar path as the camera does in the filmed performance, following the character of the fool catalyzing the narrative.

The central reason I chose to use this space for the third performance attempt was informed by needing to address the challenges that arose from having used restrictive and confined performance spaces, evident in the prior two performance attempts. As previously mentioned, these confines appeared to have suffocated and restricted the creative process. These restrictions lead to performances that were underdeveloped in some ways, and did not appear to sufficiently grapple with the depth the research question required. Therefore, I sought a large enough space, in which to create and house this performance attempt, that might allow the work to expand, to evolve. The Hexagon Theatre offered enough physical performance space for my own body to move around in unrestricted. Additionally, it offered enough room to allow the creative process the space to breathe and to grow intuitively. Furthermore, and in retrospect, I had returned to the site where the initial sense of abstraction, my own internal sense of strangeness, had begun. I consider therefore that the

Hexagon Theatre played a significant role, either consciously or subconsciously, in informing creative decisions that allowed my own initial feelings of strangeness to take physical form.

I used the enormity of the theatre space to create a large cavernous performance area. As previously mentioned, the grotesque seems to be conventionally associated with cave-like and subterranean spaces. Thus, the intention was to imitate some form of enclosed cavernous space with a fissure or cave like opening, that might, from a spatial perspective, offer a sense of something hidden, something submersed within. Inside of this cavernous space I placed the paper sculptures I had made – representative of the six retrospective life moments – that were organised into six visual vignettes.



Figure 25: Exterior view of set for *Yuck!* (2021) in the Hexagon Theatre. Photograph by Hannah Lax (2021).

As a performer embodying the character of the fool, I moved through this cavernous space, or grotesque world, catalysing the actions that re-enacted the six *ordinary* performative moments, albeit from a grotesque perspective.

The way in which I chose to document the final performance was considered in reference to the need to capture the sense of liveness I had been looking for. I considered that the best way to achieve this, having reflected on the failure of the prior two attempts to do so, was to film the performance in one continuous unedited shot. Thus, over the 36-minute duration I asked a camera operator to follow me, the performer, embodying the character of the fool, through the enclosed cavernous space, in the process of re-enacting the six retrospective moments.

In addition, I made the decision that the camera operator would not receive any information about the performance prior to its filming, or rehearse filming the performance. In doing so I attempted to use the camera and its operator to achieve an effect similar to the eyes of an audience member or spectator involved in watching the performance as if they were viewing for the first time.

I found that filming the performance in a single continuous shot, combined with the camera operator's ignorance of the performance's context, and no prior rehearsal of filming, to be useful ways of conveying a sense of liveness or immediacy over the digital format.

3.5 CONCLUSION

In summary, I have outlined the three explorative performance attempts that were required to create performative data significant to answer the central research question. I have considered the three performance attempts individually, in an attempt to provide the reader with a clear outline of the practice led research format the devised creative process took. I have also provided evidence that the PLR methodology requires continuous artistic practice to reveal further research questions, which in turn prompt further artistic practice. Thus, in the reflective chapter that concludes the dissertation, I will now consider the central research question in relation to the findings provided by the three performance led research attempts.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE INVISIBLE MADE VISIBLE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I discuss my key research findings in relation to the central research question. The central research question posed in chapter one asked: *how might performance be used to explore my white heterosexual male identity as grotesque?* In response to this question I consider what insights *performance*, as the medium of artistic exploration, offered the research project. The chapter will then cover the challenges and limitations that emerged during the research process. Furthermore, I put forward two specific questions which might offer scope for further performance led research. Finally, the fourth chapter is then resolved with a summative conclusion.

4.2 FINDINGS

The explorative performance research process revealed two key findings pertinent to the central research question:

1. The first key finding indicated that using elements of the grotesque, in performative ways, to subvert the familiar perceptions I had held of my identity, initiated a process of inner estrangement.
2. The second key finding indicated that the nature of performance, which necessitated “the displaying of actions” (Schechner 2013, p. 2), presented the potential to make visible my subconscious attempts to hide the prejudicial aspects of my identity.

I now briefly explain how these two key findings arose.

4.2.1 Unpacking the First Key Finding

In reflecting on my performance attempts, I observed that both *during* and *after* each attempt at performing my identity as grotesque, I would feel emotionally or physically estranged in my body. I felt exposed and vulnerable and therefore irascible, touchy, prickly, and angry. In retrospect, I

consider that these feelings might have arisen from having subverted, disrupted, disturbed, gazed at, and put under the microscope my white-heterosexual-male privilege/prejudice – something which I had been socialized not to see. In this way, I argue that the privileged/prejudicial aspects of my identity were resisting identification. Sullivan has previously noted that as an “unconscious habit, white privilege operates as non-existent and actively works to disrupt attempts to reveal its existence” (2006, p. 1-2). I consider therefore that the feelings of discomfort and irascibility I was experiencing were emblematic of my white male privilege/prejudice attempting to actively reject being identified, seen, or gazed at. According to hooks, I was experiencing the shock of being recognized as visible and identified as *white* - because part of the whiteness belief system asserts that “ways of looking that highlight difference subvert the liberal conviction [...] of universal subjectivity (we are all just people)” (1967, p. 339-340). Thus, I argue that my body was somatically responding to the process of estrangement; of being identified as white, as heterosexual male, of being looked at, of being made visible.

Furthermore, I considered this estrangement to be proof of the grotesque at work, within myself. As previously mentioned, experiencing something grotesque causes an ambivalent sensation because a grotesque occurrence subverts our subjective propriety. Shabot affirms that the grotesque “threatens our sameness, our ‘normality’, our well defined and protected presence in the world” (2007, p. 65). Thus, in accordance with Connelly who has previously argued that “the grotesque does not exist except in relation to borders and boundaries” (2003, p. 4), it seemed to follow that the grotesque would only have been present if I had disturbed or subverted boundaries familiar to the way I might normatively perform my identity. It seemed therefore that what I was experiencing was the grotesque in the process of revealing a familiar border or boundary. And that the particular boundary/border being revealed in this case was my whiteness and heterosexual maleness attempting to remain invisible. Thus, performing my identity as grotesque had revealed my whiteness and maleness attempting to disrupt the attempts to make it visible. Shabot explains why performing my identity as grotesque might have produced discomfort as a result of my whiteness and maleness conflicting with the grotesque. Shabot states that:

The grotesque world constitutes, then, an ambiguous mixed reality, which can easily trigger anxiety [...] where clear hierarchical relations derived from well-defined binary oppositions are not viable. (2007, p. 60)

I might therefore conclude that the irascibility I was feeling was evidence that preforming my white-heterosexual-male identity as grotesque had initiated a process of inner estrangement – that I had made my whiteness and heterosexual masculinity strange to myself.

4.2.2 Unpacking the Second Key Finding

The second key finding is related to the first key finding in that performance, the key method of exploration, made visible the internal feeling of strangeness I was experiencing – the grotesque at work within myself. As Schechner has previously argued, performance requires the “displaying of actions” (2013, p. 2), as such, an implicit element of performance is its ability to make things seen. In the case of my research what was displayed and therefore made visible was my whiteness in the process of being made strange. I argue that this estrangement was made visible through the various evasive performative tactics mentioned in chapter three. For example, whilst reviewing the footage of the performance attempts, I would observe that my body was either almost physically invisible during the performance, *or*, that I was using performative tactics in an attempt to hide or protect the ways I might normally perform my identity. In other words, performance offered me the ability to observe myself attempting to mask my identity.

Additionally, due to the need to create more than one performance, in order to have sufficient performative data to analyze, there were three varying performance iterations that evidenced the attempts to mask the prejudicial aspects of my identity. Although each performance attempt was different from the next, all three attempts held varying degrees and forms of evasiveness. This recurring pattern seemed to show that the act of performing my identity from a grotesque perspective continuously made visible my own attempts to protect my identity from being made visible. It seems therefore that what *performance*, as a method of investigation had to offer the research process was the repetitive exposure of the act of attempting to remain invisible. Thus, perhaps catching my whiteness as agent in the act of re-centering itself.

It might also be argued that my performances interpellated my whiteness – drew my whiteness out of hiding by forcing it to act. In this way the performance of *Yuck!* does not just represent my whiteness conceptually, but also gives physical body to it so that it becomes *real* – an actual

embodiment of my whiteness. I am personifying whiteness here, and this is intentional. Whiteness, at least from the perspective of this research, is agentive, whiteness has agency. This consideration is affirmed by Steyn who argues that whiteness is “strategic” (2005, p. 271), as well as Sullivan who argues that white privilege, an integral part of whiteness, “actively works to disrupt attempts to make it visible” (2006, p. 1-2). The words *strategic* and *works*, show that whiteness is spoken about academically as agentive, as if it were a living breathing entity separate from the human being it originates from. Although it is interesting to consider whiteness as independent and intelligent, perhaps one also runs the risk of allowing a person to disassociate themselves from their whiteness and thus not take responsibility for it?

Lastly, it is integral to note that the key findings were only revealed due to the repetitive and cyclical nature of the PLR inquiry. A process that required looking and relooking, performing and re-performing. The PLR process necessitated various performative attempts, to find a performance language/style/form that held significant performative potential in relation to the central research question. The repetition of these attempts revealed a pattern. Because PLR calls for a cyclical process of artistic action and intentional reflection on that action there were necessarily many versions or iterations of the performance made. Thus, as I was re-performing these behaviorally evasive acts, I could therefore see those evasive acts repeating. I might consequently conclude that as a method, *performance* offered the research the ability to make visible my attempts to hide the prejudicial aspects of my identity. I argue that in this way, the performance process actually revealed my whiteness.

4.3 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

There were various challenges and limitations that arose over the course of the research study. As a performing artist however, perhaps the most significant challenge and limitation that faced the research process was the way the Covid-19 pandemic inhibited varying integral components of the live performance medium. Live performance appears to require, at least in part, a sense of assembly, immediacy, physical proximity, and somatic or viscerally felt components that are witnessed over a specific duration. From the perspective of my own research there are some

predominant ways in which the Covid-19 pandemic challenged and limited the *live performance medium* of my research.

Firstly, I was restricted and challenged by the isolation of making alone and then of performing alone. During the pandemic it was not possible to assemble or gather a group of people, and so the process of making the performance and performing it live were significantly altered. For example, during the making of the first two performances I was isolated and confined, like most people during the pandemic, to my place of residence. I therefore had to make use of what space was available: the corner of a small 3m x 3m bedroom. The confines of this small space, although a significant spatial challenge, also ironically seemed to hold expansive imaginative potential – for instance, it was in this space that I built a life size cardboard portable toilet that became an entire world of its own.

However, the confines of this space also had a significant restrictive effect on the creative process. For instance, in the first two performance attempts I could not physically or creatively spread out. Interestingly however, the spatial confines also reflected and emphasized the restrictive, bordered, and bound aspects present in my own identity. Being physically confined in a small performance space was therefore evident in the first two squashed and constricted performance attempts I had made. In retrospect, I observe that the third performance attempt was also performed in a confined space – the grotesque paper world. Despite the performance being performed in a significantly larger space, and housed inside a large theatre, I had also perhaps confined myself in some way again.

Additionally, the inability to have my supervisors, other staff members, or industry professionals view the research performance offerings in person also seemed to stagnate the creative process. I found myself in a solitary creative echo chamber. What I mean by this is that the usual in-person dialogue between students and staff members in the medium of live performance, I find to be an integral part of the creative process. During showings of the performance work-in-progress I was unable to have other people witness and critique my work collectively, in person, and in the same space. Therefore, I felt dislocated from other creatives, from the positive energy, input, or collaborative momentum perhaps afforded by a more interpersonal creative process.

Lastly, the Covid-19 pandemic also deprived me of the rich performance experience offered by a live audience, and therefore, also perhaps the way I could use my performance research as a method for live assembled dialogue. A dialogue between performer and audience, where the audience is rarely a passive witness. For instance, in live performance the audience member becomes an active contributor to the performance event. Their audible and physical reactions to the performance are in *dialogue* with the performer and performance as it unfolds. For example, as a performer you can often tell when you are holding the audience's attention, whether the performance has a stable or unstable rhythm or flow, or whether or not the intentions of the performance are affecting the audience. This dialogue is intuitive, observable in small somatic gestures, audible reactions, and shifts in collective energy and attention. For instance, in my own performance, if it had been performed live, I would have been listening or watching for any audible or physical signs in the audience that the grotesque might be present in the performance. In particular, responses that might indicate ambivalence or discomfort. However, performing in isolation, through a digital platform, negated the possibility for this kind of live assembled dialogue.

As it was not possible to have a live audience witness the performance, I attempted to find a digital medium that might evoke and capture the qualities of live performance that were so familiar to me. This presented its own challenges, most notably, that it seemed impossible to capture the sense of liveness I was looking for. Phelan aptly confirms why I might have found it so difficult to do so. Phelan notes that:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. (2005, p. 146)

Considered in this way the medium of live performance requires a certain immediacy, a liveness, an in-the-moment temporality, and a communal somatic intuitively experienced quality that was perhaps lost across the digital mediums I was experimenting with. The digital mediums I chose to use, such as film or stop motion animation, contrasted with those intimate proximal, perhaps even partly ephemeral experiences of live performance that I was trying to recreate. The digital formats seemed only to capture and document any live performance moments in time. Thus, there was

quite obviously a disconnect in attempting to convey a sense of live performance over a digital medium. Although this is an impossible, even unnecessary task, I consider that my performance did manage to convey, at least in part, some of the qualities synonymous with the live performance medium.

There were varying challenges posed to the live performance component of my research. And this therefore meant that some of the rich offerings of live performance as *medium* and *methodology* were limited. I would have found the interpersonal interactions and the sense of live assembly, to have been an invaluable research component that was impeded by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, although I was challenged and limited by not being able to perform live in front of an audience, and that a live performance could have offered my research rich protentional, these so-called closed doors offered a different kind of opportunity. Perhaps most importantly, the opportunity to have to find creative/imaginative solutions to creating performance in isolation. I might also argue that performing in isolation offered a research process that became more about me and my own personal journey than about the audience and how the audience was responding. This intimacy therefore might have been responsible for my uncovering of the character of Yuck! or my whiteness. Or additionally, uncovering the *fear* of having my whiteness and sense of identity confronted.

The above-mentioned *fear* is also evident in the lack of attention paid to my sexuality over the course of the research study. I set out to explore my race and gender specifically, and yet there is not a significant exploration of my heterosexual masculinity, or at least it does not seem to hold as much investigative weight as my race. In the concluding thoughts I question why this might be?

1. Did I find it uneasy or unsettling to discuss heterosexual masculine sexuality?
2. Why did I find it so difficult to point the finger at my sexuality, to put it on show, to observe it?
3. How might the Christian, hypermasculine, heteronormative behavioural ethos at Michaelhouse around the topic of sexuality have affected the ways in which I deal with my sexuality now?

4. How might these behavioural tropes affect the way I have, and continue to treat, persons whose identities differ from mine?

As I write these words, I can feel the heterosexual/heteronormative aspects of my identity attempt to hush up and silence these questions. It feels uncomfortable to think the thoughts... again, why is this?

In this way I consider my fear to have been a hindrance to the research process – not because I was incapable of examining my heterosexual masculinity, but rather I think I was afraid of *going there*, afraid of revealing the abject, messy, hurtful - perhaps even lovely, warm, and kind aspects of my heterosexual masculinity. I was afraid of exposing my sexuality to examination, to ridicule, to scrutiny, and potentially, I was afraid of bearing witness to how my sexuality has impacted others. In essence, this fear seems to be protecting me from having to examine how my identity might be harmful. I consider the absence of a deeper exploration of my sexuality in this research to be a fascinating window into my own white heterosexual masculine evasiveness. In this way I consider that fear plays a significant role in preserving white heterosexual masculinity as normative.

4.4 SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings, challenges, and limitations of this research have revealed additional research questions where there might be potential scope for further practice led research. I consider two central possible areas of enquiry. However, after these two main questions, I list several additional questions that might hold interesting potential for further investigation that reach beyond the word count and scope of this research project, and were therefore not considered in full.

1. Firstly, it could be useful to Performance Studies to understand in more depth how the white-heterosexual-male identity might perform itself as invisible?
2. And secondly, to consider what grotesque performance might offer, as a positive and cathartic method, for disrupting covert acts of prejudice in contemporary South Africa?

I chose to highlight these particular questions because the two key research findings necessitate further enquiry. And furthermore, as previously mentioned, this research attempted to join the academic conversation around grotesque performance as a method of inquiry into anti-prejudicial scholarship. As previously mentioned by Schechner, “performance studies is actively involved in social practices and advocacies” (p. 2). I therefore intended that the research might in some way have a socio-cultural impact. Even if the socio-cultural impact was only as far reaching as myself. In other words, that my research might only contribute to revealing and disrupting the ways I myself had problematically performed my identity in the context of South Africa, with the benefit that I might become more aware of how *not* to contribute to gendered or racial prejudice in contemporary South Africa.

I now consider additional thoughts that pertain specifically to this particular research study and its process, which were not unpacked in full and perhaps warranted further investigation, if the scope of the research had required or allowed it, for instance in a PHD thesis.

- The decision not to use verbal language in the final performance and what effects this may have had on the findings, particularly in reference to one of the central aims of the study being to reveal those invisible/silent/insidious aspects of white heterosexual masculinity that maintain prejudice.
- How might the audio aspect of the final performance *Yuck! (2021)*, (the grotesque rustling, echoey static, grunting, laughing, prattling, muttering sounds of the space and the fool), have mirrored or resisted/repelled/conflicted with the physicality of the body in performance?
- How did the prior two performative iterations influence the final performance of *Yuck! (2021)*, particularly from a practice led research perspective?
- What role did the design / visual component play in the final performance iteration of *Yuck! (2021)*?
- Puppets played a significant role in each of the three performative iterations, and yet puppets and their agentive role in each of the performances were not fully considered in the research study. There are questions around puppet agency, accountability, the relationship between puppet and fool, manipulation – who is manipulating who, how might

the manipulation of the puppets relate to heteronormative masculine sexuality and manipulative psychological or physical acts, and did the relationship between puppet and puppeteer/fool raise these issues?

- The inadequate reflection of heterosexual masculinity in the study reflects a hesitancy or perhaps a squeamishness to approach the subject matter. Was I, as the actor / performer / investigator afraid of my sexuality and how might this fear have affected the study? What might be gleaned from further investigation into white heterosexual masculine fear around the topic of sexuality and how might performance be used as a method to investigate this fear?

These are some of the questions that perhaps required further investigation, that were potentially not fully or adequately answered in the research study.

4.5 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In conclusion, this research used performance as a method of exploring my identity from a grotesque perspective. It did so with the specific intention of using the grotesque as a subversive lens to make strange the normative ways in which I performed my identity within a contemporary South African context.

I argued that this was a necessary objective because the normative and familiar ways of performing my identity seemed to contribute to the maintenance of gendered and racial prejudice in contemporary South Africa. As previously mentioned, norms/prevailing standards are usually performed unconsciously. This is so because *norms* are so ordinary to the person that benefits from them that they remain conveniently invisible to that person. This convenient invisibility maintained the ways I performed racial and or gendered prejudice in my everyday life, and in my previous artistic practice. Thus, this research intended to use the grotesque as a performative lens/style/perspective to make strange the normative and familiar perceptions I had held of my identity in an attempt to make them visible to myself. Through the various performance attempts, I was able to actually *see* my own whiteness, as it recentred itself to avoid visibility. Having made those normative aspects of my identity visible, I deduced that I might therefore be able to view my

own intricate diversity rather than consider myself an ideological standard of racial and or gendered supremacy. As previously noted, this intention was informed in part by Shabot who has argued that by “initiating a process of inner estrangement we might see the otherness within ourselves” (2013, 9). Thus, I consider that performing my white heterosexual male identity as grotesque did initiate a process of inner estrangement within myself. And furthermore, that this process was a cathartic and therefore positive experience. I acknowledge that although this process has been initiated, it is a process, and thus remains ongoing. However, it must also be acknowledged that without having begun a process that aimed to perform my identity as grotesque, I might not have been made aware of the evasive performative tactics I was using in an attempt to remain problematically invisible, or *normative* in a South African context.

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APPENDIX A

Filmed recordings of the three performance attempts are hyperlinked in-text, as well as below, and are additionally available via the Google Drive link also shown below.

Google Drive Link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1vIPVPZLY7uwz5DvCfzJ3j0fc3lnXwxSK?usp=sharing>

1. THE FIRST ATTEMPT: *THE SALTY-PENIS ROCK-SPIDER* (2020) -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCRiF3o-HrM>
2. THE SECOND ATTEMPT: *THE KING OF PORTALOO* (2021) -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7y57v37QBGc>
 - 2.1. *The King of Portaloo* (2021) Script
3. THE THIRD ATTEMPT: *YUCK!* (2021) -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ej2Y5nQmY1Q>

APPENDIX B

Artistic Journal

Process Journal

– Devising *Yuck!* –

A Practice-Led Research Process



Francis Mennigke
214531863

A
Starting Point

Rehearsal 1

BEGIN

2020/10/01

Reflection on "FOOL OF WIGHT"

Although the performance held potential, it ridiculed
~~whiteness~~ ~~the white~~ ~~totem~~ a homogenised version of
whiteness in South Africa. I felt like it positioned my self
as different from and separate to other white people

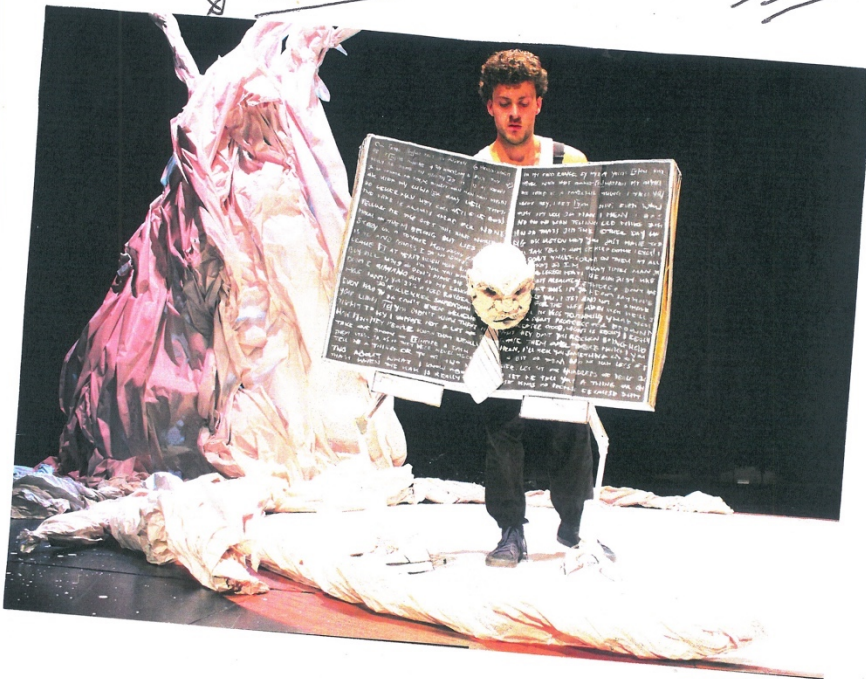
Da and Ma wight are representative — who
of my Ancestors, but I don't know
their story, it's not my own. I wasn't
there.

↳ Story??

↳ What's my
Story?

Why was
I separately
or distinguishing
myself from the
white colonial
story?

↓
Am I not?
a part of it?

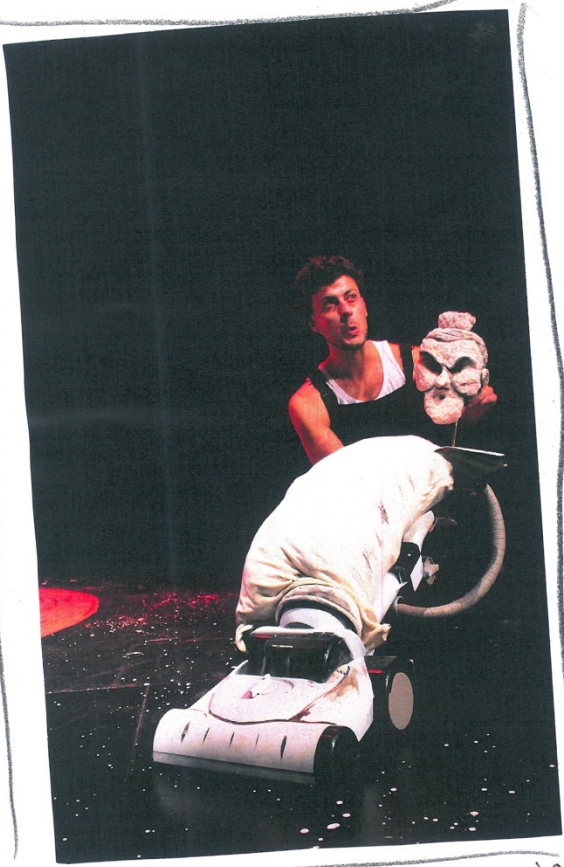


"Da Wight
was a ~~series~~
book"

①

②

③



"Ma Wight
was a vacuum
cleaner"

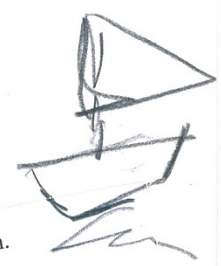
I feel like I
was using Ma not
Da as character tropes.

④

⑤

⑥

I think "Fool of Wight" offered
me a door to step through
that portal. ~~to~~ Re beginning of
an investigation into my story.



The salt water had carried them.
No space, no space, to open place.

MA & DA

Move over.

I can't.

Row.

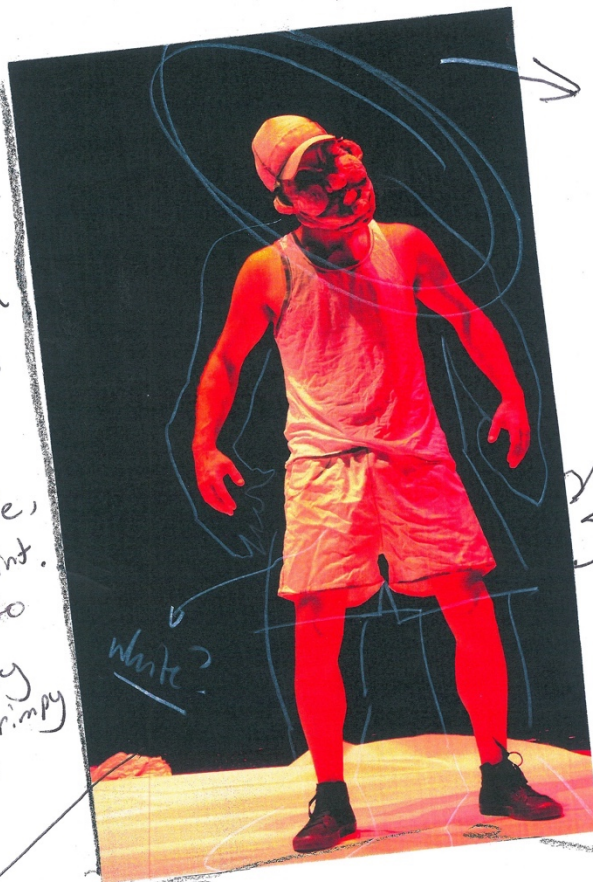
No you row.

Ouch! That's my foot, stupid bloody woman.

- ① The character
 Fuck
 offered me the opportunity
 to step into the Mash and
 boots of a stereotype of
 white heteronormative masculinity → but that's not
 me, maybe, in part
 but not all.

②

"How's it sta, Ka
 no, lekker man,
 rangers locked and
 loaded ready for
 the weekend, sink
 a couple wetties
 with the betties.
 Burger, beet, boi,
 car guns, bakkie,
 bettie, chick, bint.
 Are you going to
 have a big boy
 burger or a shrimp
 dick mushroom
 burger"



who's adding!

Mash?

Mash
 was
 successful
 Yes or
 no!

It hid
 my identity

Who
 am I?

⑥

Costume
 white vest
 didn't work
 why?

"My dick is as long as my forearm
 it hangs on the ground when I walk
 on when chicks gle is shit we
 gle rem rectal pain rectal pain ha ha ha"
 Need to push
 more. Pooooosh!

→ Shame
Squashed
Mashed

My time at
 boarding school,
 Michael Buge, offered
 me a window into
 deep heteronormative
 hyper masculinity

I didn't like
 performing Yuck,

why → Maybe
 because I
 also resonated
 with Yuck?

I felt at odds with
 this stereotype, felt afraid,
 like I had to conform,
 like I couldn't be different
 from the rugby chucking ball
 smashing womanizing

→ It felt
 Sore.

Arrival

NARRATOR

I'm going to tell you a story. It's difficult because I wasn't at the beginning and I won't be at the end. I'm going to tell you a story, it's difficult because it's not all words like stepping on a, and swimming in a, and stubbing your... Understand there are parts to this story I will not remember. It will be imperfect, irritating and very, very one sided, as my tongue is large, flat and folded. I'm going to tell you a story... I think it starts with a sound...

Yuck

Am I homogenising whiteness in South Africa
and what does that even mean, why ~~do~~ do
① I find it so easy to point the finger outward
and not at myself - I want to ridicule and
make fun of whiteness because it ~~is~~ ^{does} make fun
of other people what does other people even mean?

② I think it's fascinating that I don't want to tell my
story, is it boring, yes and no, what is my story,
how am I involved in whiteness right now in SA?

I find it so easy to speak about and for
③ other people - why is that? why do I find it
so hard to talk ^{about} or criticize myself. Is that not
just as evil or bad as being a white racist
dick? I want to combat whiteness, but how

④ do I do that if I only focus on me and my
story → I am realising I don't know myself
very well, at least the white and inescapable
parts who are me?

⑤ What if I ridiculed myself instead of Ma and Pa,
what if I didn't tell their story, for which I
was present! What if I told mine and investigated my
⑥ own role in the colonial story of South Africa?

A Beginning...

Refining Theoretical Thinking
As a response to Fool of Wight.

Project

Title: Exploring the white South African male as grotesque through contemporary performance.

Aim: I aim to use the grotesque as a lens with which to explore, through performance, the white male as incongruous in the context of South Africa, using myself as an example.

Question: How can I grotesque in the context of South Africa?

Motivation: In a Post colonial, post apartheid new democratic South Africa. The white (SA) male has positioned itself precariously. Racial and gendered equality prejudice has both privileged and problematized the white male (SA). Belonging to a generation of white (SA) men that were born during colonialism and apartheid but having grown up in a democratic South Africa has meant that I am both privileged by white historic hegemonic practices and problematic because of them. I am interested in this strange identity which I possess and which I don't fully understand as the reasons for this research.

Key terms: Grotesque: the grotesque deals primarily with incongruity/borders

Whiteness: whiteness deals primarily with the white identity.

Performance: deals primarily with?

①

Qualitative
Research
Study

②

Project Title

①

②

NOT A
Check list



Noticing
the process
SA Production

③

③

Theoretical Frame-
work

* Understanding CRT as a
Frame work in higher education (Sams 2014)

* Critical Race Theory an (Delgado Gaitaneri 2001)

④

⑤

⑥

④

Methodology



Process
Product
Archive
(Car?)

(PLR)

Knowing through making
the role of the artefact
in PLR (Makela 2007)

(Critical Ethnography)
Method Ethics and
Performance (Madison 2005)

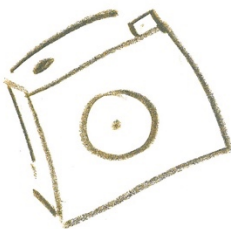
Whiteness: A Critical Study and Performance of a contemporary Source.

Key Words

Noticing, whiteness, CRT,
Performance, SA,

Literature

- * Intro to whiteness (Steve Garner 2007)
- * critical whiteness studies (Nayak 2007)
- * The history of South Africa (Thomson 2001)
- * Introduction: Intersecting whiteness
- * "white talk" interdisciplinary debates (Steyn 2010)
- * white South Africans and the management of diaspora (Steyn 2005)
- * Performance as a research paradigm for Africa - FIEISH man



①



Why are do humans distinguish themselves from animals? Imagery for metaphor.

②



Hybridity is an essential element of the grotesque.

How can I play with hybridity? Animal, human

③

HYBRID



in between

Are grotesque Squak

Paradox of Religious Power?

⑤

⑥



Far tiny Man sitting on a throne looks like he's just done a poo



* White men performing Grotesque.

I see the grotesque in these images
I don't feel like it resonates with me.
The is something vulgar or overtly
crude, does the grotesque have to
be vulgar or crude or violent?
Maybe not → Could it also be
insidious, silent, quiet



What is
grotesque about
the insidious? about
the small thing inside things?

↓ Steven Cohen
pushes the boundaries
of the body quite listlessly

So too does
Garth Kristoff.

↓
Throne
Sitting on the Throne
On the loo?

How can I
use the grotesque
differently?

Both of these
masculine figures
seem to be overtly
grotesque, ~~but~~ they are
also both queer →
What does this mean
for me a white
heterosexual male?

Self Perspective.

Anamorphic sculpture. deals with perspective. You can only see a single as a whole from a certain perspective.

①



The in-between space is also Gogol's "In the pocket of becoming"



(Perspective relief)

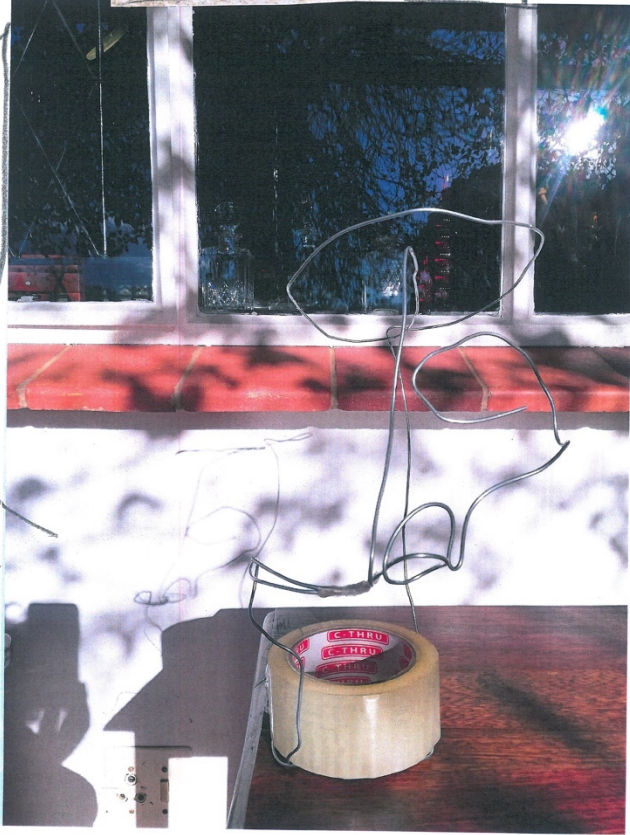


The white male perspective.

The South Asian white male perspective.

②

③



Anamorphic Shadow Sculpture

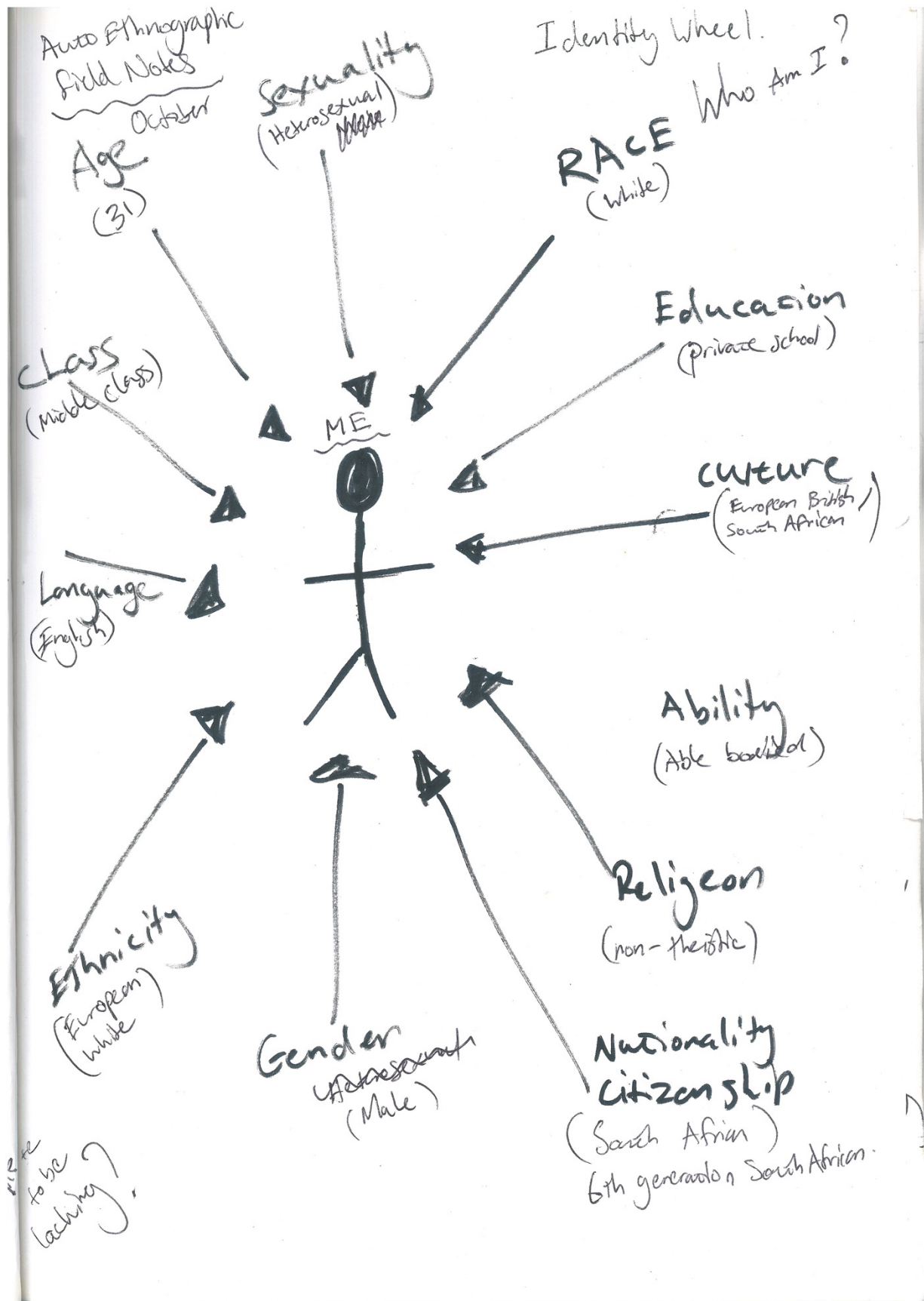


I realised there already in anamorphic sculpture and my wire shadow experiment were evidence of my body is liminal - I also saw that my body is not in complete form - something can be seen

④

⑤

⑥



Sohannesburg 1989

Where
do I
come from?



An AutoEthnographic
Creative writing
task

med entry
August
2020

BIRTH

- Sohanneburg
1989
July 29

FRANC
MICHAEL
MENNIGHE

I was born from a phallus.

Separated from the feminine by a wall of hypermasculinity
hedges, not my fathers doing, but his fathers and their fathers
before them - bristly, hard, and AFRAID of the unknown.

I was born from a phallus wrapped in a white sheet, covered in
the red soil of Africa. Held by my ankles I was smacked
into consciousness by the hand of my sterilized ancestors.

WHACK! tears... when I woke I stared blurry eyed
into the ceiling of a bleached bubble.

Hardly written creatively on my inception
 into this world I am struck by how
 masculine everything in the world seems, I feel
 like this is the only perspective I know,
 that my experience of the world is so
 heavily dominated and infused with
 masculine propaganda that's all I seem
 to know.

Rehearsal
 August 2020

I know that the world and everything in it
 is not all masculine but I feel like I
 don't understand anything other than a
 masculine perspective.

As I reflect on my identity, that I am
 a heterosexual male, or that I identify as
 a that, I am curious about how I could
 subvert or make alien to myself the common
 place-ness of this feeling.

Why do men say
 things like "we are having
 a boy or girl, there's
 no one in birthing a human
 being?"
 The patriarchy
 the deep misogyny
 runs in my
 veins too... I perform it.

Like why do
 I not feel like
 I was born from
 a woman and woman
 the word is also suffocated
 by men, created by
 men.

but How?
 How do I perform
 My Masculinity?

Gained July 2020
 Ideas: Anamorphic Sculpture
 Performance

122

YUCK: The project will explore six different moments in my life, from age 3 to 30. Each moment represents a time which was fundamental in my development as a white South African male. I will make six Grotesque sculptures figures representable of myself in each of the six moments. I will perform with

my Grotesque representations telling the story of the moments, exploring the notion of ^{stability} integrity ^{mobile} immobile. grotesque

1991 - 1992
I was a white boy, playing with a black boy, who was very shy in 1991

③ Little Red Tractor (1991) Colonialism/Land (Empire building)

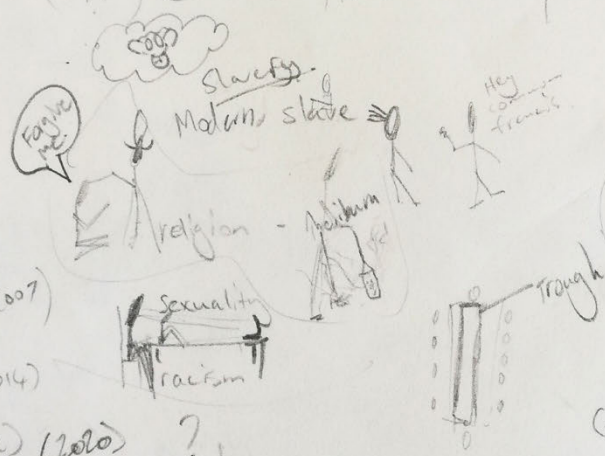
Elizabeth (2003) Modern Slavery

④ Holy Goat (2005) Confirmation

Where is my Sex (2007) Man? (Sex education)

⑤ Dima (racism) (2014)

⑥ Yuck (the white SA male) (2020)
The grotesque representation of myself.



Exploring the male as grotesque performance

Gender Identity

Anyone can get inside and walk around inside me.

| Equality | Equity |
|----------|--------|
| | |



↓
Master Francis.

The uniform
worn by
Makhumalo

↓
I see
similarities
in the uniform
choices of
Dool of Light
↓

Myself, Makhumalo, Makhumalo's Mother Margaret.
1991

Rehearsal → Auto Ethnographic exploration on the
November 3rd. relationship between myself as a
small white child and the woman
employed by my family as a domestic worker.

There is a
complexity as play
in the relationship between
myself and Makhumalo.

↓
Myself as a
white child held
power in a shared
dynamic.

↓
How could I
proceed this dynamic
as grotesque?

This photograph offers me many
memories of growing up in a
home that I did not think
was white or European, but where
felt strange was that an older
black woman cleaned my clothes, made
my bed, cleaned the toilet - Meneal
Jobs - yes a job - but still
Meneal → The memories
I have were of
being embarrassed
especially when I was
older.

I see
modern day
slavery →

But this
↓
No but
this is such
a display of
white supremacy

① the disembodied teacher, the legs in cow and chicken?



② This picture offers evidence of learning to play with each other → a childlike version of the adult equivalent?



My brother Luke and I
Pfeiffermontsburg
1993

③ Garden Wall learners boundaries → what is the difference between this wall and the South African border? damn by the colonialists
Angie M. &

My little Red Tractor

Autoethnographic
Rehearsal
November 5th.

→ I am curiously or stupidly to call
my autoethnographic wistfully exploring
rehearsals →

There is something
similar about wistfully
autoethnographically and
a rehearsal in a theoretical sense.
I think what is similar
is that the body is doing
and wistfully memories,
feels like performing,
reality.

I want to
investigate this moment
deeply → It feels
rich with
storied potential.

It offers
a moment in my life
there was so innocent,
just playing with my
little tractor that
I got for my 3rd
birthday →

but
hardly begun
receding whiteness
I see this moment
as disturbing →

I think what
I feel is disturbing
is the innocence

What does
just playing
mean?

There is something
here, something
beneath the surface
→ Subterranean

under the surface
of the garden.

The innocence is
disturbing →

Playing as in
child like
enormous?

What about it
is disturbing?

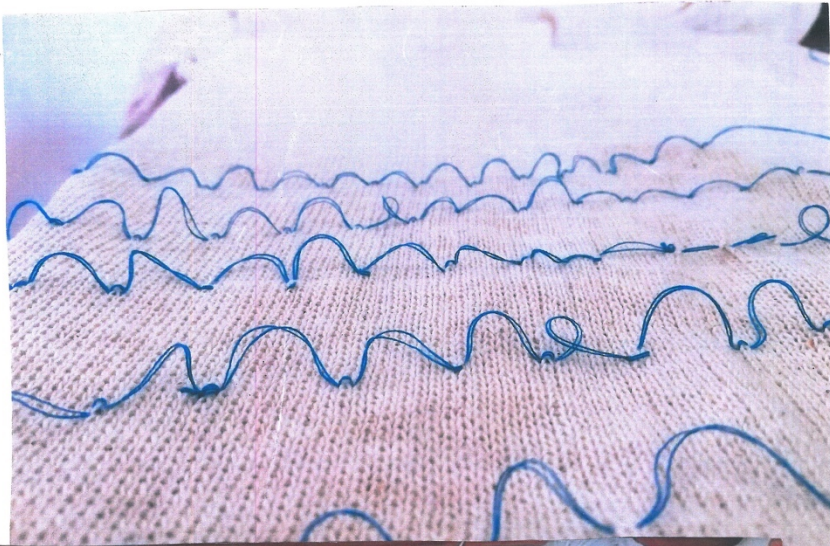
is it that I am
playing with land as
a white child? In
SA?

①



②

③
Lit.
C. B.



④

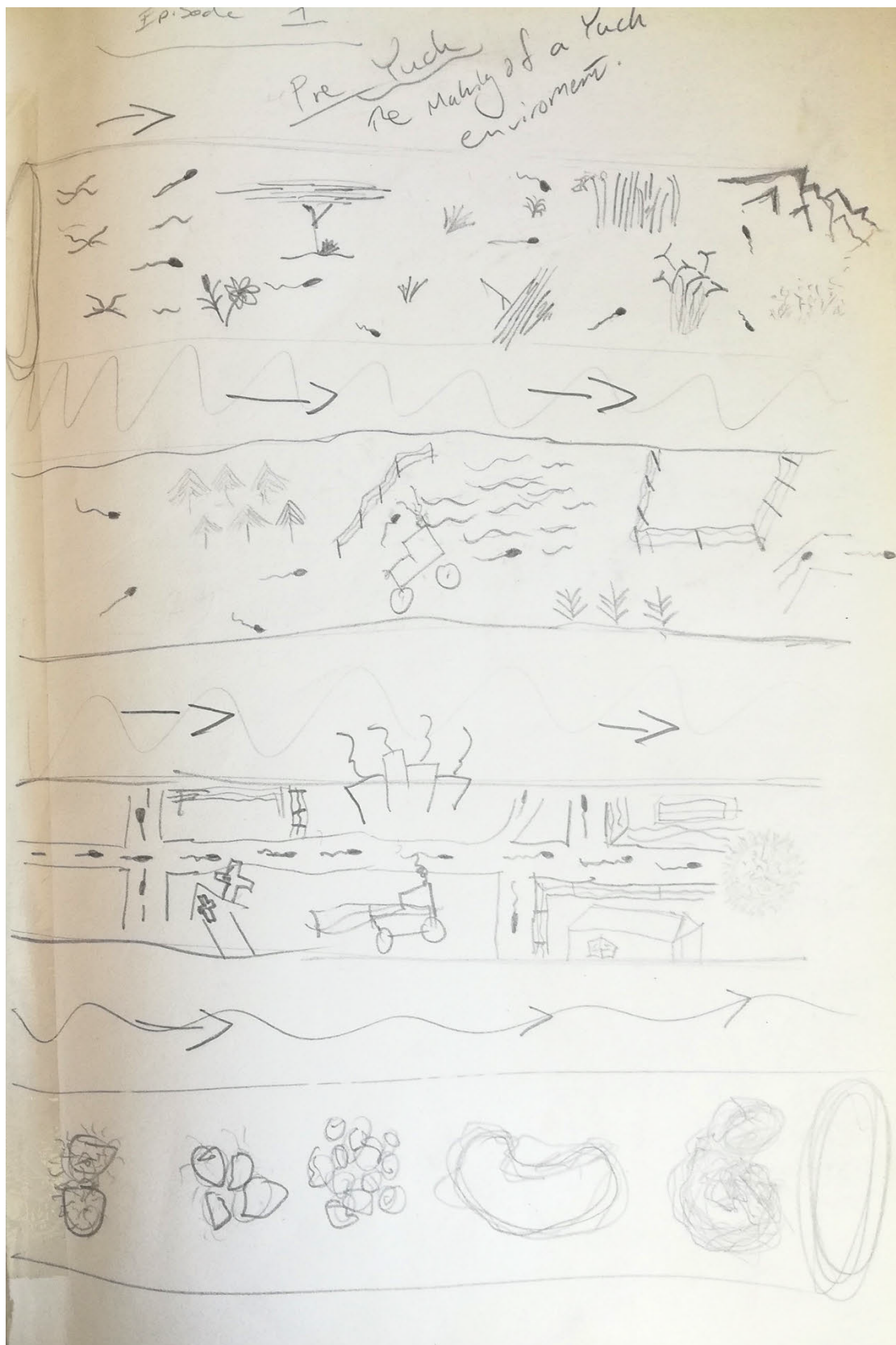
Elv
C. Mac
Hol
Cor
Whe
man

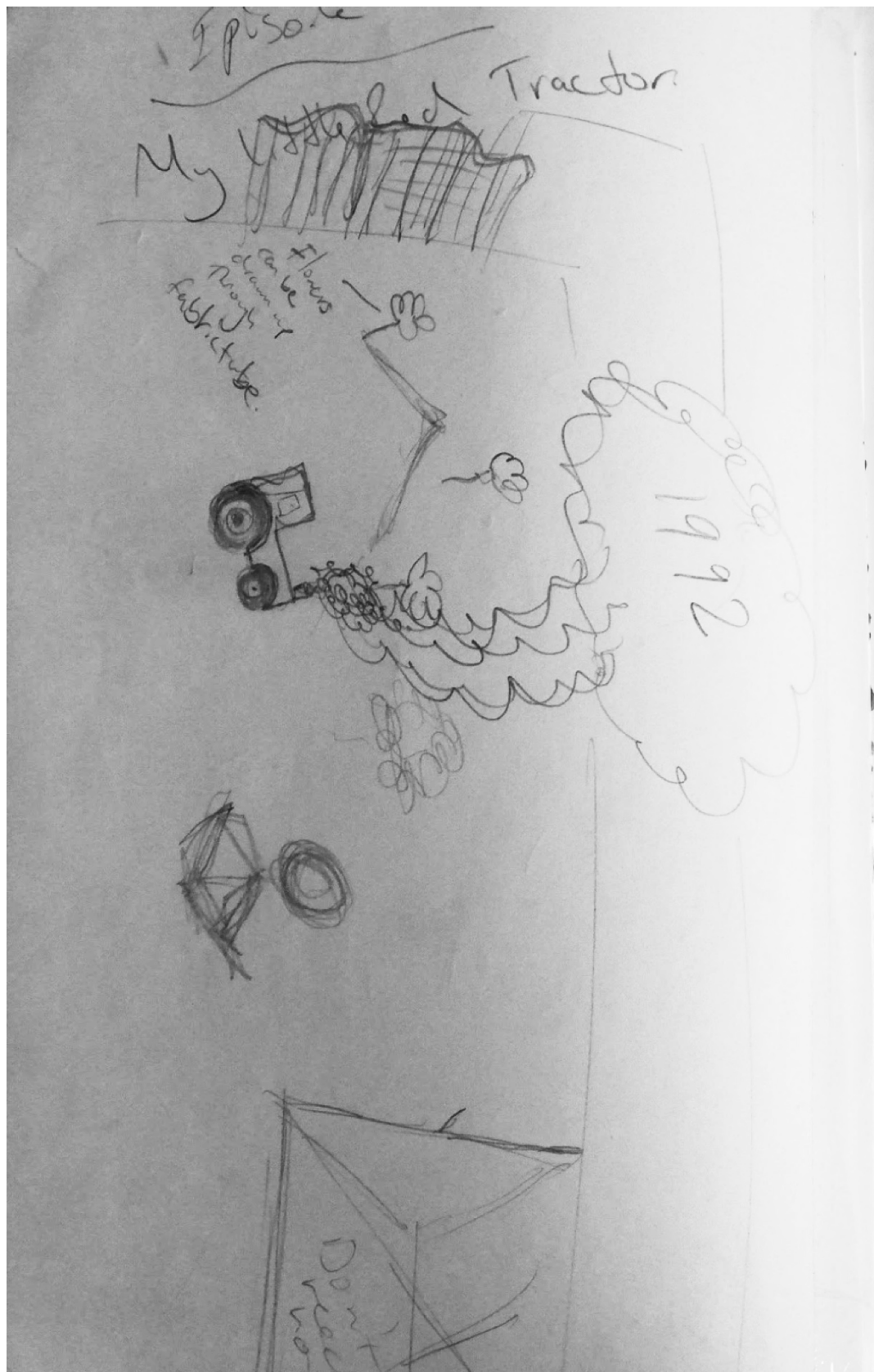
⑤

Oma
Yach

⑥







obscure!

I aim to use the grotesque as a lens to explore, through the method of performance, the white male as incongruous in the context of South Africa; using myself as an example.

Question:

How is the white male

The process deals primarily with incompatibilities ^{problem} and has been in the ^{performance area} world to show up/reveal how ^{single} particular standards of being, largely decided by white men, are ^{not only} prejudicial or hegemonic and don't take into consideration ^{any} other ways of being. ~~negatively and deliberately~~ ^{is normal on} ~~consider~~ ^{account}. This is problematic for a plethora of reasons, but this much is interesting only in the context of South Africa, and ^{identifies} ~~which~~ ^{which} has been historically ^{imposed}

Proterus.

Problems

In order to
not fall into the
same regressive (proble-
matic) as we have when we
have done before we, I aim
to use an ethical theory called
intersectionality to guide me
in making decisions
from negative impact
on would include white men.

Story Board

1961
Little red tractor

like my
garden wall
at home.

Birds 1989

Strands
of DNA
Story -

English

GERMAN *Germany*

April

French
Huguenot

2003
Elizabeth

AAA

South Africa's

My Garden
Fence/wall

2020 Yuck - A combination of all the numbers.

2014
Sunday
West

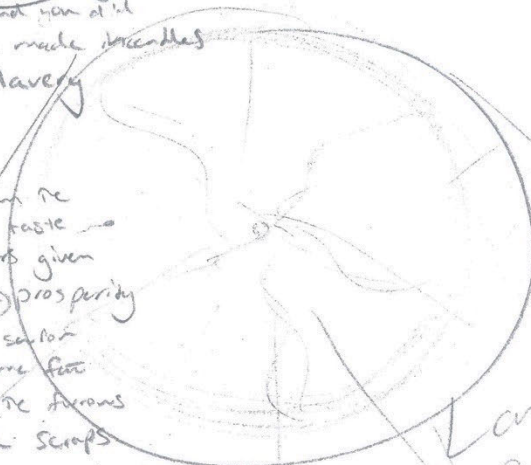
You came here from there
 out of fear of the sword
 for believe as you did in the
 wrong little lord given land by
 the lord to whose land you did
 flee put up fences made barriers
 to the natives for slavery

ooh.

You came later when the
 flavor was to your taste
 Savory when the rivers given
 Shivers delivered gold prosperity
 I'm the lord yes the savior
 give me food keep me fit
 Push the barrows dig the furrows
 fed on sorrow and scraps

Turned

Episode 1



Land
 Occupator
 Various
 Species
 Intermingle

Mimic

Can you help me can you
 explain why after all this
 time we sit so high.



Palm (see)

Thorn tree
 (Acacia)

Fences

Natural
 so each
 may in
 unwar
 so ca

Veldt
 Grasses

Grasses

Natural
 resources

Succulents

Land

Veldt
 Field

Wattle
 (Acacia)

③ 200g 3. 12.11
 L
 L
 E
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 M
 ⑤ O
 Y
 ⑥



A pair of testicles made from Mutton cloth and sewing Thread.

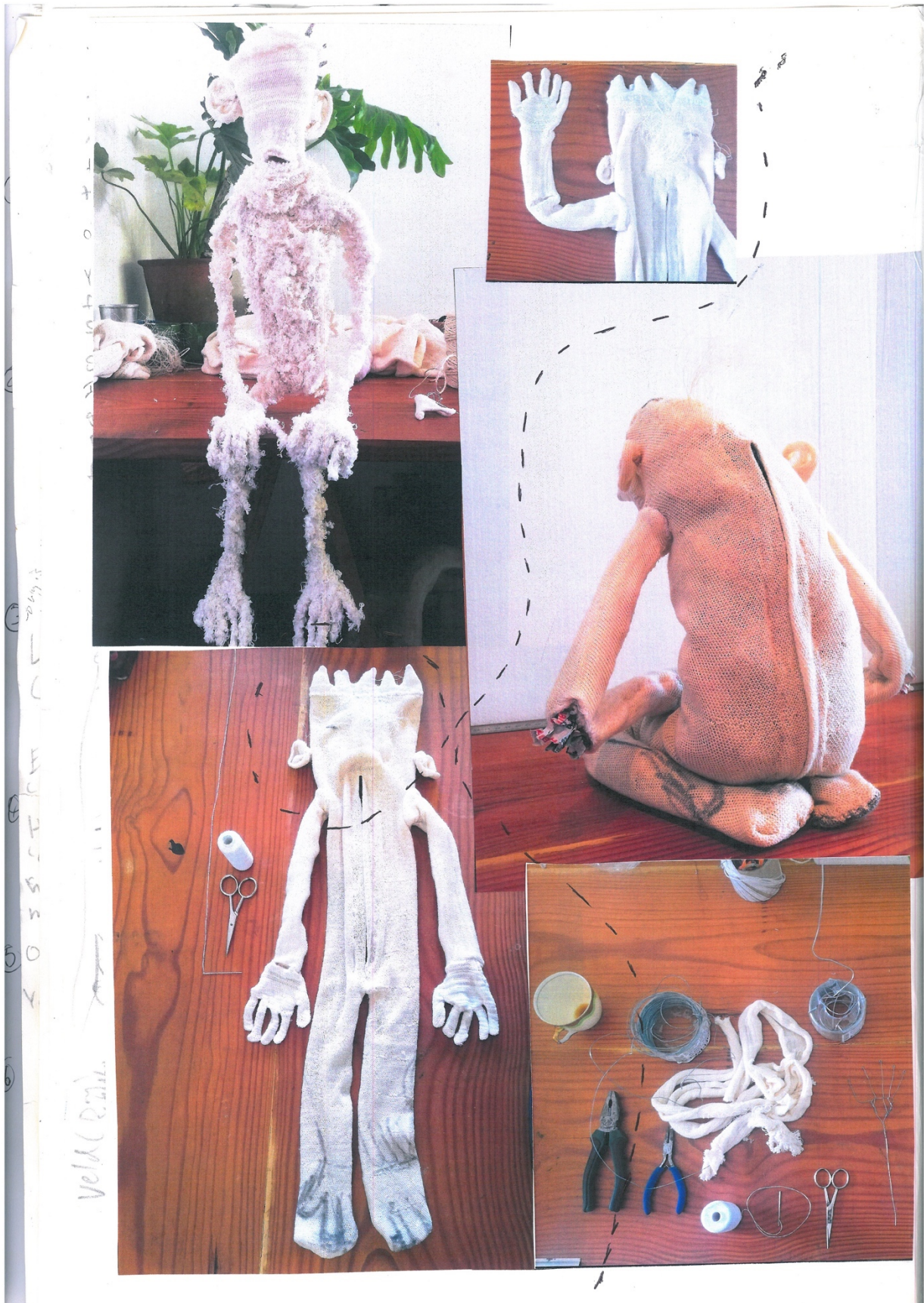
Rehearsal
December 5th

Where I come from.
A pair of testicles.

I think the testicles
offer me a useful
Platform to begin
my story from
→ considering
that half
my dna is
from my
father
And that
I am deliberately
showing only the
testicles story
It seems to
only reaffirm the
masculine as
rediculous.

In reflecting on the decision
to make a pair of testicles
today I think it really captures
the kind of humour associated
with grotesquery ^{particularly} ~~that~~ ^{it is}
it is made from mutton cloth
and sewing thread. It has
a rediculous absurdness above
it → like the antithesis of
real testicles but meant for
the same purpose.

reconcile
Masculine as
rediculous.



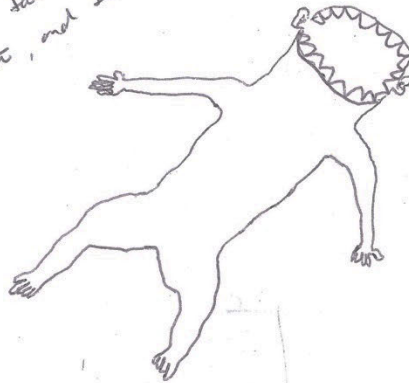
Velvet (R. 1914)

My Little Red Tractor 1992

2020
July 21

I'm lying in bed
having conversations with
my younger selves. I am
thinking about them intently.
They are showing me how they are.
I don't feel like I initiated the conversation
one of them, the second moment, when
Francis is three years old just showed me
that he doesn't have a face yet. Only ears
and a body. He's flat, not bent on earth.

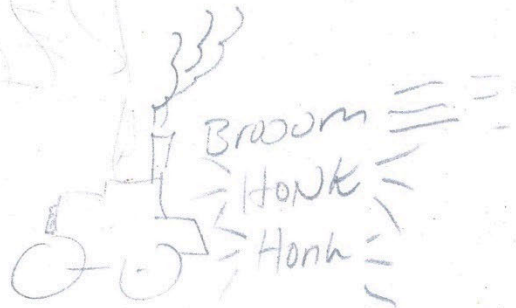
→ A grotesque
version of
my younger
child self.



3 year old Francis is the
stitched together with
the strings of his various
ethnicities. He doesn't
yet have a face, he
still has to grow, his
his features, where
there should be a ~~face~~
Francis face there is a
hole with teeth. Into
that hole Francis is fed
or feeds himself blood
red earth until he becomes
big enough to walk around.



Earth.



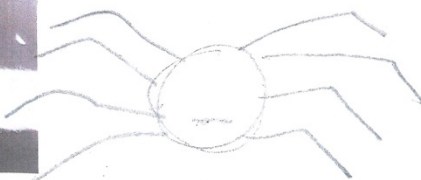
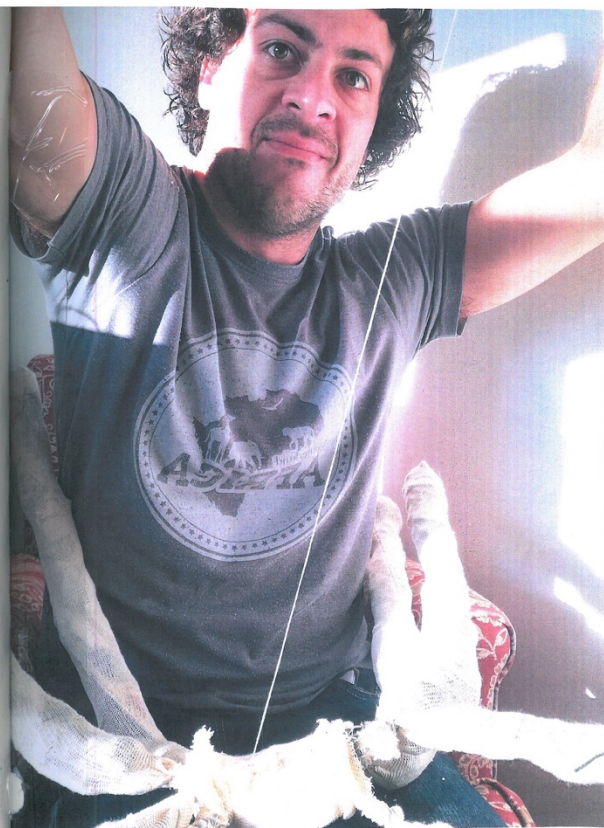
Broom
Honk
Honk

The Sully
Penis Rock
Spider

→ A real hairy
version of my hybrid self.

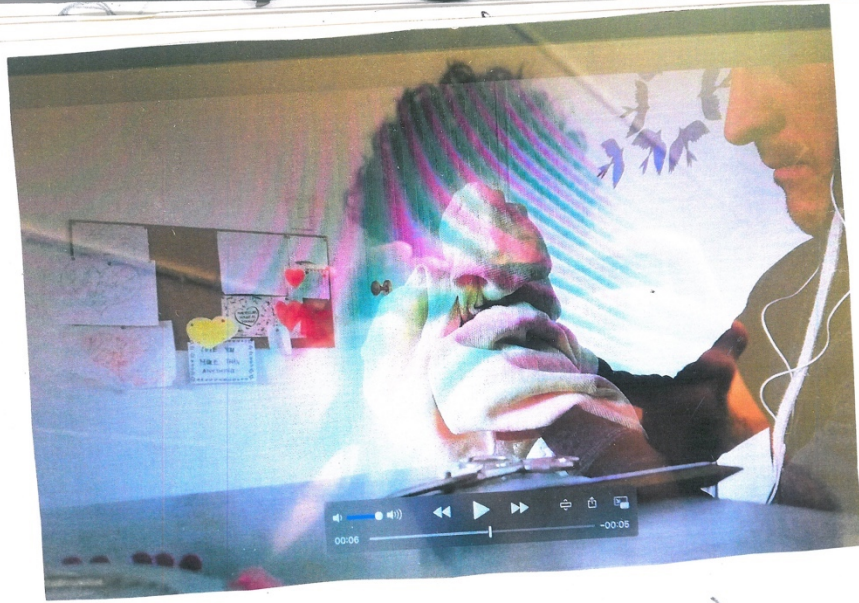


→ Penis legs



I am
exploring
my hybrid identity
as English/And Africans
mixture. Two derogatory
terms being both
English and Africans
a double colonial
whammy!





stop motion

The medium of
stop motion is Sooooo Slow!!!
It feels like I am
ageing as I make each
tiny movement →

It is taking
forever to get
anywhere
I've only
made
2 min
of it

Process - slow

The stitching with cotton thread to
make all the puppets and scenery is just
too slow for the process, with only me
this is going to take years to finish the
performance. I am still only on the
first episode ...

I need a
better method!
of making.

Supervisor
Meeting

Dec 15
2020

I've just had a supervisor meeting with Tami. I was really nervous to show my material. I showed her the stop motion video and the two puppets.

Feedback.

es
age.
* Tami suggested that although the stop motion holds potential, she suggests I move outside and get DIRTY - she says it's too clean for the grotesque.

* she also suggested that I explore more of the crude grotesqueness I am playing with already with the genitals → why can't they crawl, why can't the genitals come to life? → Tami says I need to dig deeper!

Rethink!

Oh I need to rethink how to speed up
the create process...

→ Motion clock and slightly the puppets
by hand is fairly too long

→ stop motion as a method of
documenting the performance is
too slow, it takes hours
even days to make 1 minute
of film footage

→ Iami has suggested I move outside?

→ Iami also suggested that I
need to dig deeper
what does she mean by
this?

Metaphorically
Maybe I need to
quite literally tunnel, dig,
but into what?
Too serious? Must yourself

What's it
working where
to for here?

→ I need a
machine's
→ cardboard
gun + gun?
Instead of
stop motion you could
just film
it.
There is
something
here
it's like
being
small again

More Plan

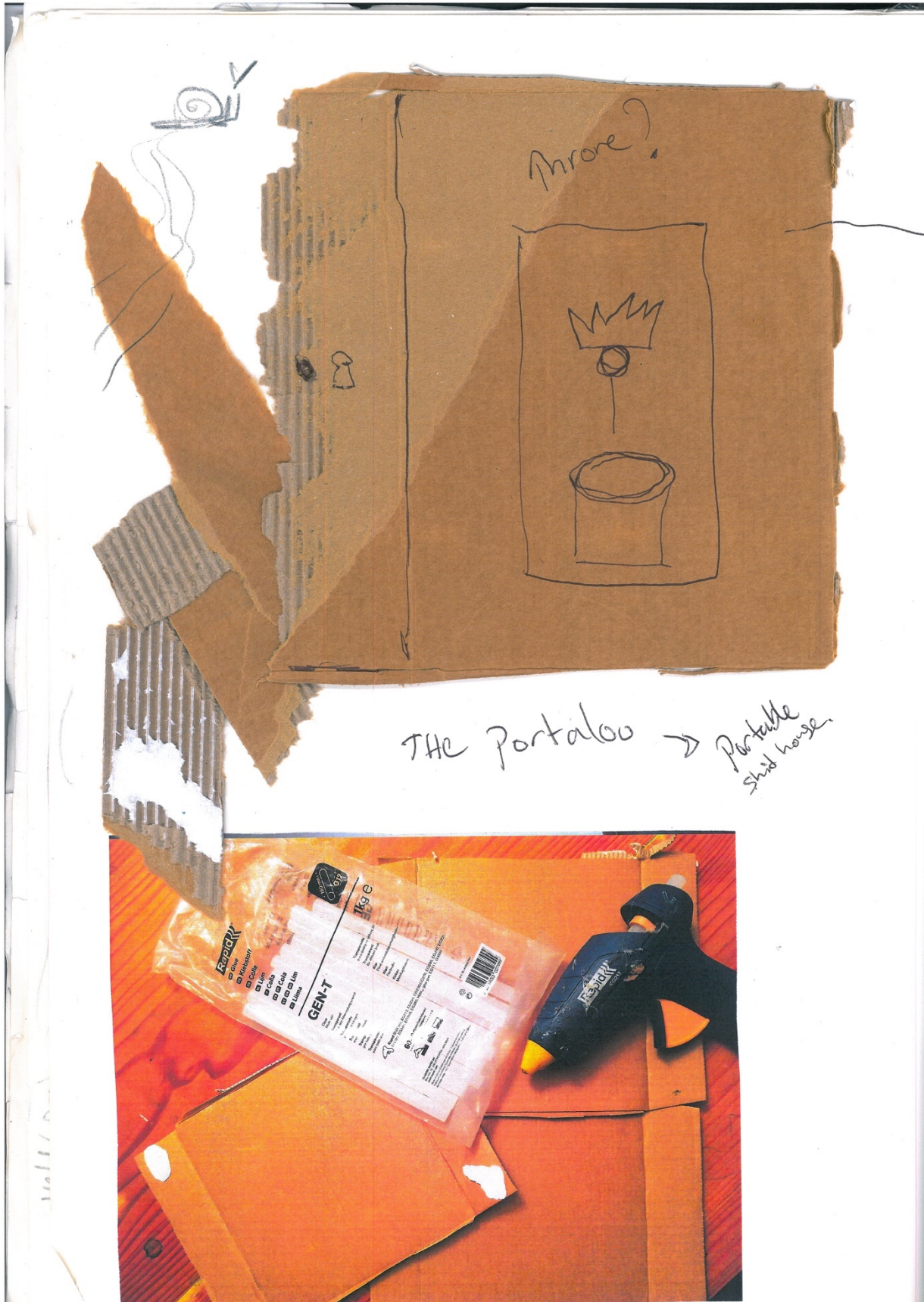


Synthesizing
with children's
experience!

use film to
capture yourself
plunging with cardboard-
Iami said make plan



For
light
→ comedy?
puppets
the fool?
what if we
make the whole
world out of
cardboard?



Rehearsal Jan 18
2021

→ I am thinking
Symbolically → What
Symbol could I use for
the performance → where could
I situate the performance.
The last performance
didn't really have a space
or place it was kind of
displaced ...

My whiteness
as a metaphorical
space? Place
→ Portaloos!!!

Rehearsal
Jan 19

What if the portaloos
became like a metaphor
for the shitty temporary space
that I carry around with me on my back?

I've been thinking of
a portaloos → Portable
toilets are so similar
to colonial people, they
exist in inbetween spaces
like me → one foot in
South Africa one foot in
England / Europe. Portable toilets
are often found in spaces
that are in transition

There is also something transient
about portaloos as well
The portaloos could
be like my snail's
shell.

Portaloos - snail shell
a portable house / place.

There is something
here

like building sites
or road works
or temporary
festivals

Rehearsal
Sun 20/2021

Designing My Metaphorical home of Portaloo — How to

build a
portaloo?

The space

→ In the corner of a small room
3m x 3m.

I start by
building the walls

→ Load boxes
outside a door
for see.

I am considering that
the Portaloo needs to
look like a portable toilet
but also could have lots
of doors, entrances and exits,
a magical world → because
the whole performance will happen
inside the portaloo I need to
make sure it is interesting to look at

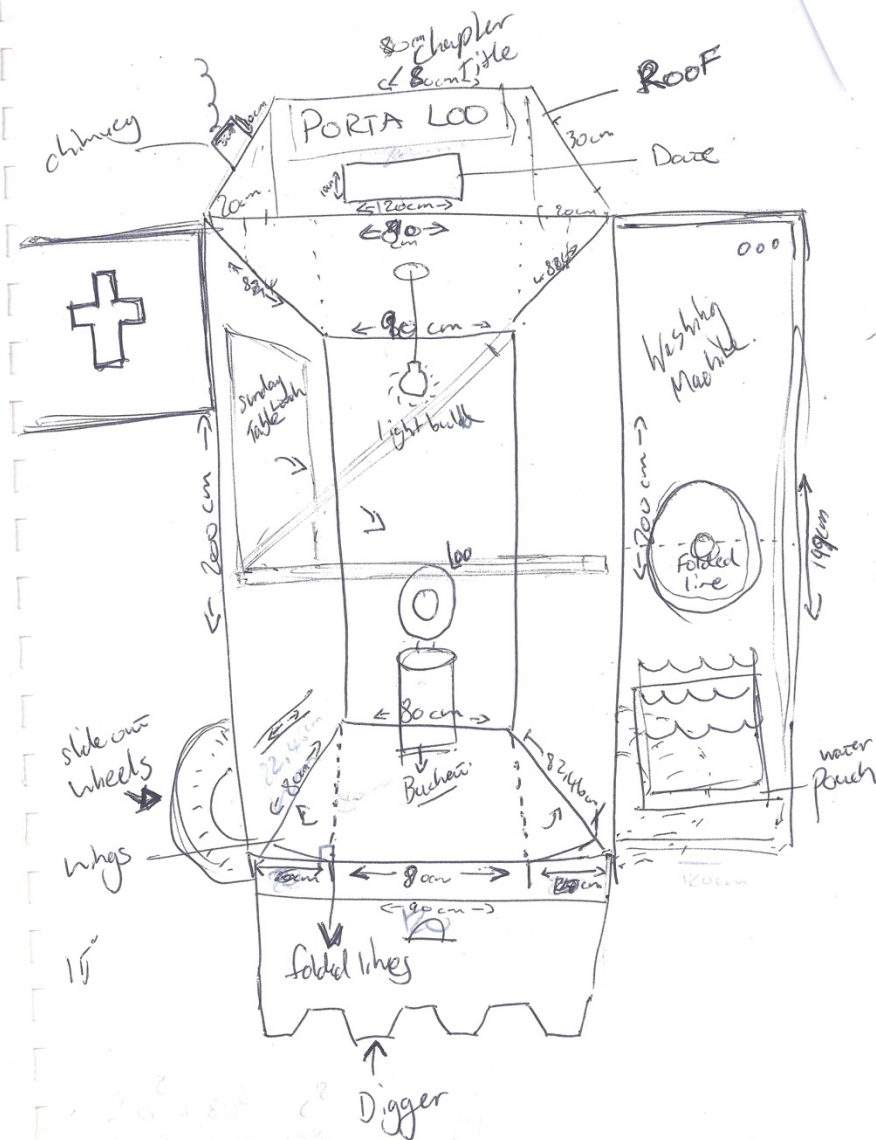
The different side moments that
I want to investigate could be

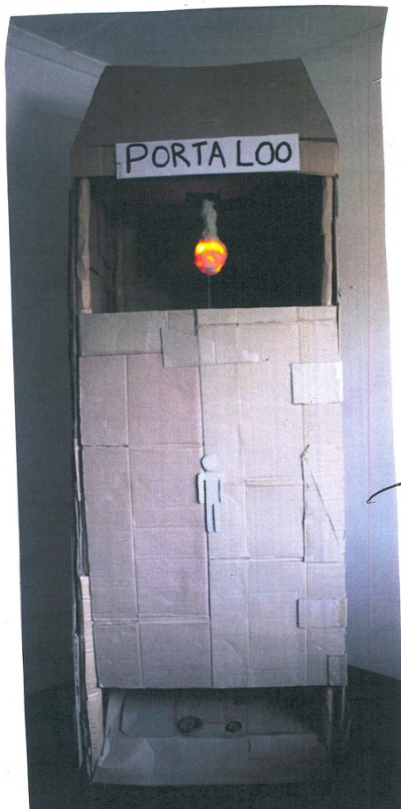
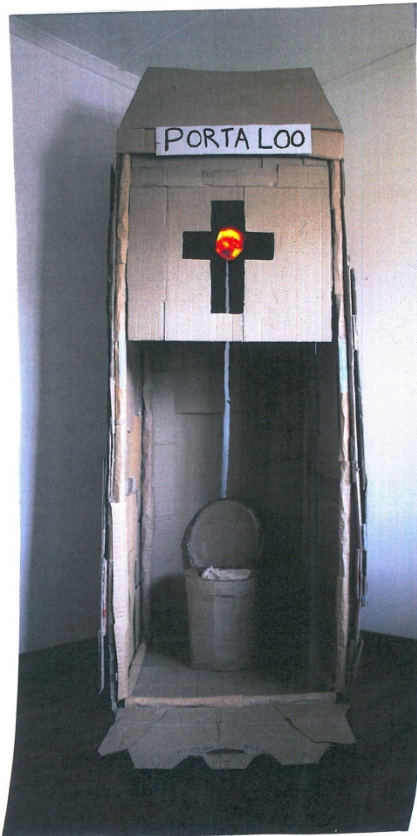
The new environment → I decide to

make six distinctly
definable artistic
choices that can
transform from one
space to the next

Make it can transform

because it is
a transitory object
maybe it adapts
to its new environ





Rehearsal Feb 3rd 2021

It has taken two weeks to build the Portaloo

The most fascinating thing has happened!

I did not know how I would create the story for the performance but whilst I was building the Portaloo it was like the Portaloo began to influence how I thought about the six moments of my life I want to explore → the Portaloo started to become a world of its own

It has begun to influence the story

→ The building of the set informed the allegorical story

→ using now the building of the set as a mechanism to tell my own story

and the allegory was influenced by the toilet → I remember a friend of mine referring to the toilet as a throne

mm
U
K

This is perfect!!!
The throne of Portaloo

I am beginning to write the script, I have just sat down inside the half made cardboard port a-loo set and I was thinking about how the second chapter would begin and I saw myself doing a silent scream on the toilet and then turning a knob near me on the cardboard port a-loo wall which I thought could control the volume of the sounds I make sound playing a crucial role in how I begin to learn things— what was interesting is that the image only came to me when I sat in the set itself, the physical act of sitting inside the box stimulated my imagination, rather than having written it into the text and then it becoming a possible act.

→ A digital journal note on the creative writing process of "The King of Portaloos"

The Portaloos has become a metaphorical space/place to represent my whiteness



↖ In rehearsal March 2021

↑ Bowing before Parmesan the king of all cheeses.

The Devine Right

Before you can be sure of anything you have to be confirmed, and for that you have to go to confirmation camp, that's where they teach you how to make decisions.

Are you sure?

We played ping pong and volleyball and sang songs about cheeses and when we were exhausted we ate little pink willies slapped between two stale buns squirted with genetically modified toe's that are whizzed up by sharp scissors and made into toe-sauce that stains your tongue red, see.

Are you sure?

Then we watched a movie about Pious the Parmesan Cheese who said it was the king of all cheeses. It grew quite a following and many of the other cheeses were so jealous they stuck it on a toothpick

Excerpt from the King of Portaloos script.

The idea I have is of a humming buzzing eerie kind of low resonance hum that introduces the initial shot, create suspense, something amiss,

Perhaps we change the initial shot to my back facing the audience on the loo, vulnerable position? sitting the wrong way around, the toilet door ajar? Undies around ankles something is wrong from the beginning? Your not doing a poo but masturbating into the loo?

Francis, delusional King of Portaloo, is under threat from an invisible ant invasion who he believes are challenging his right to the throne. In order to bolster his claim he must sire a son.

However the King realises something is amiss when it is revealed that Yuck! is only a sperm. In order to rectify the problem they must find Ova in Fallopi so Yuck! can become a man.

They journey into the King's memory in the hopes of finding Ova in the fields of Fallopi.

This recollection reveals that there are no ants, Francis is no king, Yuck!'s death is imminent, and the reality of this situation triggers a reversion to delusion, the cycle starts again.

Pulls up undies and turns dramatically arms swung wide in ecstatic achievement.

People of Portaloo, it is done!

Close up

I Beat the meat, pulled one off, spoiked one out, and shot it straight down the center of the hole. I planted it my ancestral pip deep in the pit of portaloo covered in poo. There it will lie gestating in the royal grotto, legitimising my righteous claim to the throne.

I belong, and you do too, we all belong in Portaloo!

Don't Judge Yourself

Can things grow out of the toilet, perhaps branches, or penis', or something to do with the story that is slowly revealed after each episode, with the transitions perhaps. The things that grow can be pre-made and added whilst the transition happens, perhaps in stop motion.

Or is the thing already there in full?

I'm not sure but something needs to grow out of the toilet, out from its walls, like a bacteria or a fungus, or a something that then takes over the thing?

YUCK: Notes on the process

25th february 16:22 sitting in 113 and reading on Practice as research whilst reading I began hearing a deep gutral drawling sound in my imagination, I was thinking of myself as grotesque and I saw myself as a heavy cumbersome sluglike slop of flesh moving through an undefined space making this sound

Digital Journal entry
March 2021

Notes on YUK

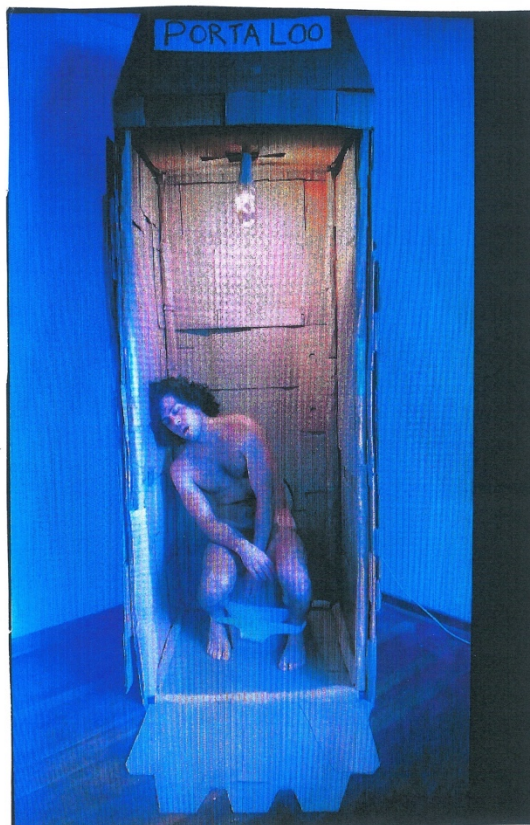
- 1) I'm so Wrapped up in my own cock I can't even see out!
- 2) Im buried in a mound of my own fake phallus
- 3) I am so lubricated in unearned privilege its disgusting!

A circle. Dark. A traffic light.
Then...

I am the heavens
I am the earth,
The word,
The heavens, the earth,
Without me there exists nothing
said the Lord, the lord god
Dog fuck yuck, man
Smack! Yelp, Yelp, Yelp, run off run off run off run off
Look at what you've done
Shit piss
dammit everywhere now
Fuck off
Bugger off
Good afternoon sir
God bless
Off

A poem
whilst sitting
on the throne
in Portaloos.

↓
Exploring
the supremacy
of the King of Portaloos
His device right so
Sits the throne.
↓
A Lools
Throne.



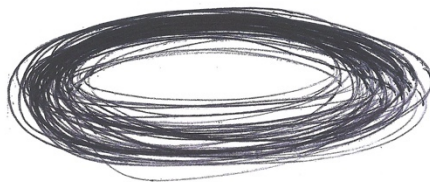
Rehearsal entries for Writing of Paradise

12
March 2021

I am tired, I don't feel like writing today, Covid has been really difficult and draining on the process.

I feel so alone and isolated from other students and creators. I have a show coming up and I really don't want to do it.

I feel ashamed of what I have made, I feel like it is so devoid of the craft I am used to making. I feel so stuck.



March 14
2021

I am finding it really difficult to
learn my lines and just get the
show ready. It feels hollow.

I can see my last journal entry and
it looks sad. I just want to get
the show over with. There are going
to be several lectures from the show
on diagnosis over shit!

March 24

Something seems to be working.

I have decided to make a huge costume
for the play as he turns into a grotesque
form of self.

→ I am using the same
muslin cloth fabric I used in the first
performance → Pres is someone about 7'5"

Costume that evokes a sense of
the grotesque.

→ Intensely by I don't
talk when the costume
is on

→ Non
Verbal
Performance



released

March 25

I have released
and Ahmed the person
I feel mixed about
the shanty

But there is
something about this
grotesque costume
is working.

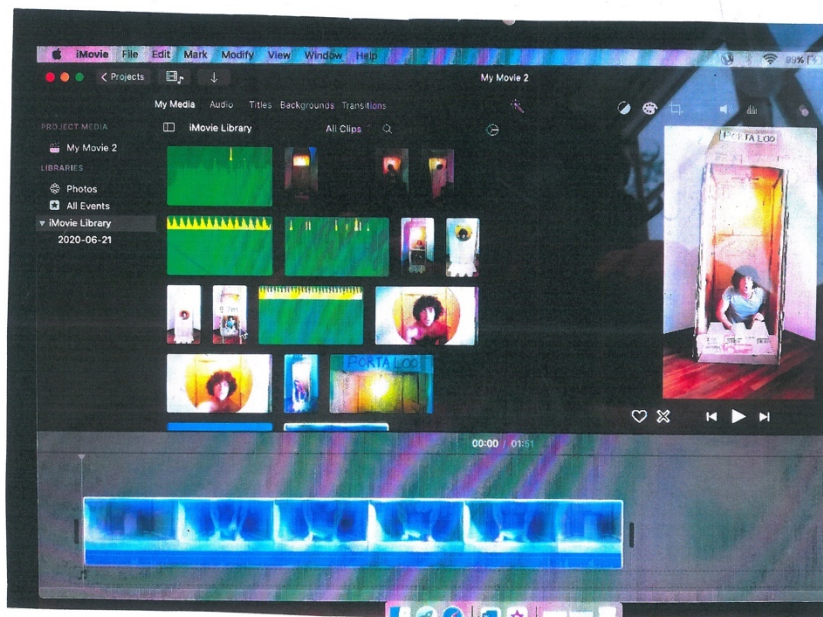


"AAAAA
AAAAA
AAAAA
HHHH
AAAAA"

* Perhaps
there is something
in his silence that
is honest

March 25

→ Evidence of
editing the
footage for
"The Key of Portuloco"



Before the SHOWING
nerves.

I don't want to do this
shouldy it is for seven
people all lectures and
I literally feel so weary
ashamed at the level of
work I have put out.

I feel like
it isn't a
proper diary into
the garbage

why?
Is it because ...

I feel like
it's too tame
too boring → so that
being.

Not polished.
unprofessional.

26 March
2021

Digital Journal
Feedback from Super8s
on "The Holy of
Portals"

Feedback session Yuck!

Jess and Tami

- being quiet - redo with proper sound, sounds like you are tentative.
- Stylistically - Its become quite traditional 1 man show, that's not bad but just make that choice, if you are making that decision deliberately - when you write up the theoretical part, I need to make the choice about style, feel free to play and see what works but make a decision.
- Concerning writing, you need to arc back on the narrative otherwise you are
- Ants and toilet were racist and sexist, unless you arch back.
- Allow the character to have fun.

Follow the creative drive,

What are we going to do about the notes?

Stylistic choice -

How can we make it more experimental without trying too hard to make something stupid and effects driven?
It needs to be more experimental.

We need to film in HD and light it better.

How do we film it and in what style? Selfie for the whole story?
complicated as it limits movement.

The camera angle is still, how can we adjust angles to make more interesting, film from a variety of angles, what story is the camera telling, how could the angles suggest character tropes etc?
Could we start outside of the property and walk in holding the camera like a selfie.

Sound?

How can we use this element as a character in the play, sound can help drive the story.

The FOOL - needs to be explored more, do we make the fool you and just film you from a different angle, different facial expression or does the fool remain the puppet because I am playing it it is a version of me.
Whatever happens the fool needs to be explored and get enough time.

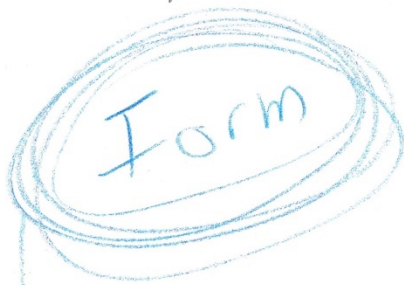
Do some research into the fool, its language, its, intention is to reveal, but how does your fool reveal francis? What does your inner fool do to reveal?

SO if each part is 5 minutes and we have 7 parts we have 35-40min of show - perfect!

29 March

Feeling frustrated
that I have to make
more performance but
I also understand

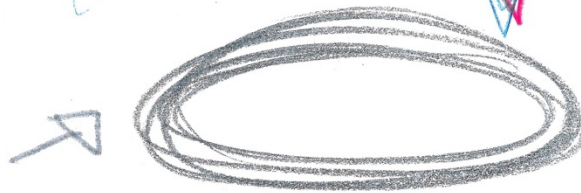
→ The why of
Portafolio doesn't
feel like it was
the right form



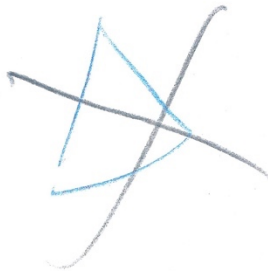
Important
I like the circle

What shape
can we make two

Where
from



A circle?



Monday
at

Yr X 3

Materials → cardboard too rigid
Fabric too soft

* Plastic?

* News paper

* Food materials

* organic materials

→ I started
scrunching some
news paper whilst
playing in the park
Maybe that is
the key?

to
here

I don't
know where to
go from here

organic materials
might be really
interesting. Something that
Naturally decays

This seems
right.

What if we
make the performance ball
a circle. Could we allow
the circle to shape the
work.

↓
Nice idea
but the performance
has to be outside
Is this a bad thing?

returning to
think about
performance less control over the
environment...

Re Skidde
Notes on
the critical
seed ball session
from "Fool at
night"

Where do we go from
here?

Perhaps they each have something in that moment that could weave into the next.

The reason I am doing this is because, some of the critical feedback I received was that each episode was coming across as very linear and episodic, they were neatly defined, they each had a border and a title etc - this is fascinating because despite trying to achieve a performance that was attempting to show myself as grotesque - the process revealed that I found security in creating small, tight, compact, bound, fixed, immutable scenes, clearly defined and belonging to a single moment in time, this reflects a kind of learnt behaviour to return to the source of being a white heterosexual male, who's very idea of being in the world has been shown to be fixed and rigid and clearly defined and obsessed with categorising things - whereas the process that I am needed to lean into is to break from these norms.

So without going into so much detail above, I want to take on board the critical analysis of the performance looking rigid, and I want to drop it on the ground and let it shatter, see how the pieces fall and break and then not try to put them back together again but rather assemble them in a way that reflects the complexity of being shattered, and not immutable.

There is more to discuss here in terms of form and how it came across and what was learnt... this is part of your process, the showing was part of your process...

The form of the piece was not just clearly outlined and linear but the shapes it took on as a whole were one dimensional, they relied a lot on language, and while the language was effective, the feeling was that the language was doing all the heavy lifting and that the audience/witnesses wanted to see some of the things that were being spoken about.

So how could I show these things.

Well I think that I need to build some of the things I am talking about. For instance how do I come into being?

Could I make some testicles and a penis, perhaps a long line of testicles - to show how many lineages of white male testicles I come from - perhaps I could be birthed out of the penis (could this challenge this superior notion men have about being the patriarchal male that is the reason for birth?) that has all these testicles connected to it, maybe the testicles hair becomes roots that sew themselves into the blood red soil, the soil is taken by force, by law, by title deeds, the soil that is played with as a boy, that is imbibed as a boy, that has helped me grow into a man, a white heterosexual man in a land I don't understand. That I feel so disconnected from. A land I have not assimilated to in anyway.

Perhaps we start with me outside of the property, I then say open the gate and I close it behind me with the ease of a click.

Then I walk into the room where the testicles are.

Perhaps the boy that is birthed, how is he birthed, do I cause this to happen? Do I pull him out? Is it forced that way, is that useful? Then the boy is moved/carried by me, from that scene into a scene where he plays with a red tractor in the garden.

For instance "the feast that arrives in the form of a boy."

What does the boy look like?

How does it move?

What does it have inside it and how can the feast be shown in three dimensions rather than just explained with the English language - which is so fixed immutable unchanging in many ways -

A compilation
of Notes

Beginning to
creatively think
again about
how to start
making
another
performance

part of the earth grew richer in minerals and more abundant in life than any other part of her world.

Really?

Apparently.

Whats that coming out of there?

Thats the boy I was talking about.

Is this the...the?

The Penis, ya.

.....i sprinkle the earth I have just dug up over the roots, then start tickling the testicles.

What your doing?

It has to be stimulated.

Yuck!

Ugh, ya, you get used to it hey, here you try, just start at the base and tickle the bottom ones and then move your way up.

Sis man, its moving inside,

Just start tickling man...

Ya like that, nice.

The testicles start laughing, and build a nice cacophony of laughs, then the penis starts convulsing and I push it up the shaft which helps the baby move up the tube...

Ok its about ready now.

For what?

To make a boy.

What?

Ya, should be almost there, sometimes it just needs help (draw word out)

Put hand and arm inside penis and sucking sounds... and POP!

There we go, then you just have to hold it upside down and smack it.

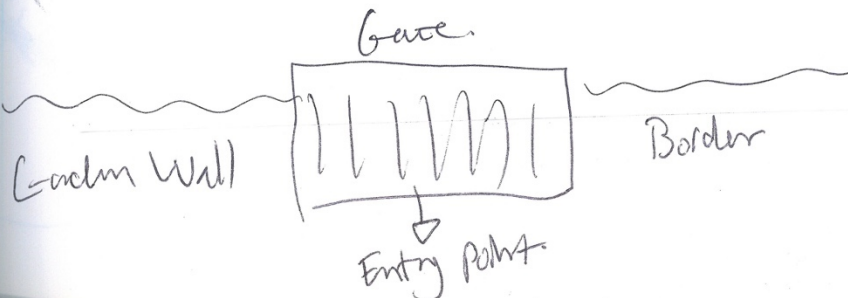
What?

Ya it stimulates the lungs you know.

MY LITTLE RED TRACTOR

... Then whilst walking around in my tractor I start the text, "my first word was out..."

outside
performance?



Returning to My Autoethnographic Prompts.

March
28 2021

Birch

3 years old

6 years old

I was prayed
for.

I was read
Stories —

Humpty Dumpty
The hungry caterpillar

Peter Rabbit

Love
family kindness

Transformation
possibility "

anything is
possible.

all the things
horses and
all the things
men couldn't put
Humpty together a

Support

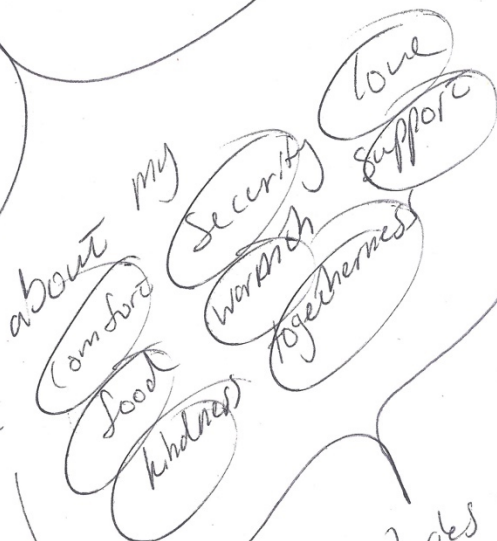
These childhood
Stories are filled
with so much hope
and love and possibility
is this part of my
privilege?

How do these
perhaps almost banal
life moments I have chosen
to explore ...

Perhaps they are
only banal to me
to someone who is
privileged.

- 1) Birth - 1989
- 2) My little red tractor 1992
- 3) Makhmulo
- 4) Sunday lunch
- 5) Condemnation
- 6) Yuck!

There is something
upbringing and



The stories of
my upbringing contrast
so strongly with the
path and discomfort experienced
by so many children in
South Africa

MY LITTLE RED TRACTOR:

"OUT! I want to get out of my cocoon please!"

My first word
was "Out"

My Grannies
Connisford Farm



BIRTH

Description of event.

Outside my suburban home. I open the gate, with what appears to be my hand, walk in and close it behind me. I walk up to a spade and dig open the earth, I take the earth to feed the flaccid penis sculpture, I walk up to its roots and sprinkle the earth over them, then I tickle the testicles and they start laughing which turns into pushing sounds which turns into pulling sounds as I pull the boy out from the penis head with a pop. I hold the boy in my arms and walk him a few steps to a tractor. I get inside the tractor and put him in a smaller tractor in the front of the big tractor, so that he can watch what I am doing.

He was born from a penis.

Actually?

No not actually, metaphorically.

Oh.

But he came from a loooong lineage of testicles.

What?

Ya.

How many?

I don't know, hundreds of thousands, millions maybe.

Yuck.

I know.

The penis had put down roots.

What you mean roots?

Roots, like a plant you know, roots. It had Sewn roots deep into the soil. That's where it got its nourishment.

Form the earth?

The earth is blood red.

Why?

There is a myth, that long ago when this part of the world was being formed...

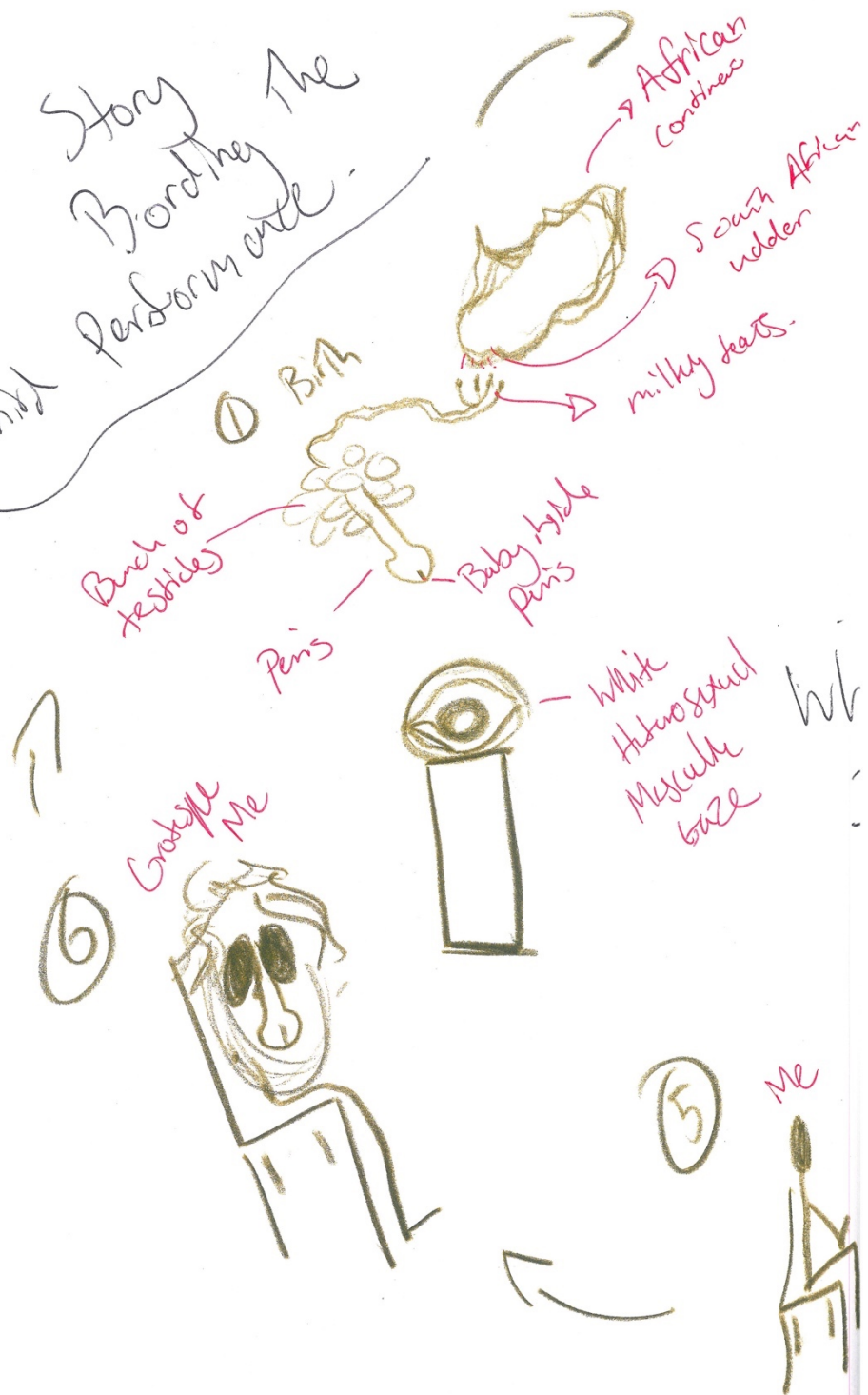
By what?

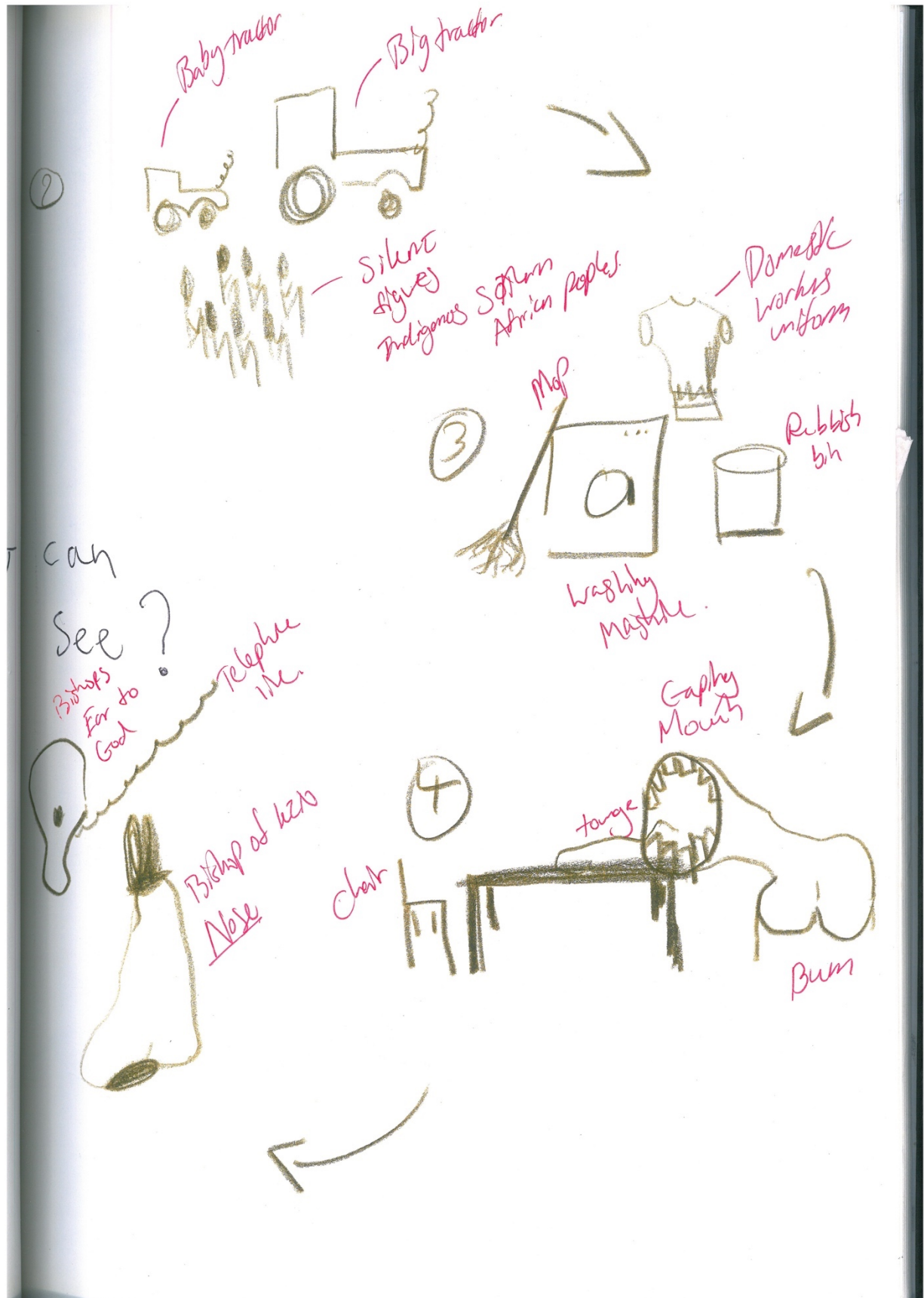
Depends on what story you believe in.

Ok.

So when this part of the world was being formed the creator walked out from a bed of reeds, and as she was walking out over this part of the world she cut her leg on a blade of Pampas grass and spilled some of her life blood into the water, it hardened on top forming the upper crust of the earth, but underneath the soil was of a soft, warm, moist, blood. And because of her blood this

Story Bordley the Performer.





Rehearsal
March 1st 2021
Fiddly Paper

Example of
scrunched up
news print.

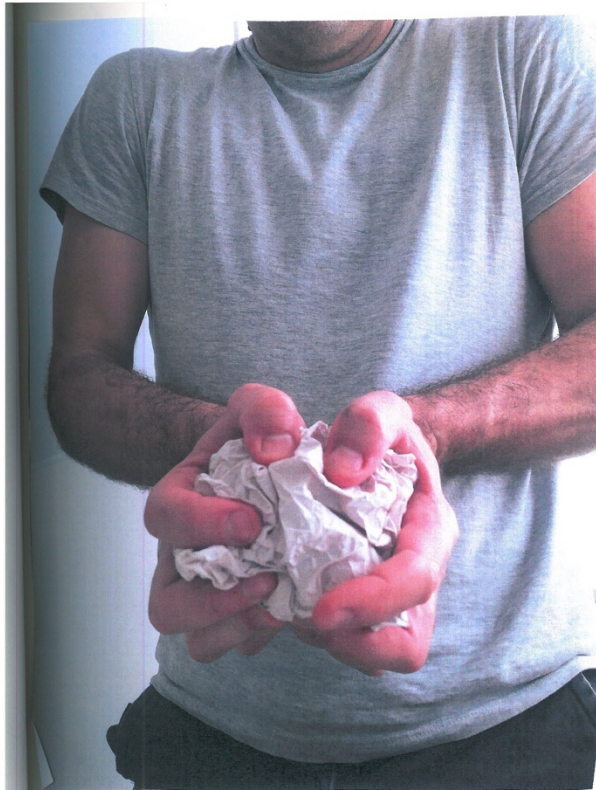
Example
of smooth
news print



Hooray!

When
It's crunched
up and crinkled
it looks like this.
and it moves whistlingly
after you scrunch it
up...

Found Paper
This is It! This
is the Material!!



Mr Scrunchy



Scrunching sounds
easy but when
you have to scrunch
all of the pieces of
paper you use, because
it creates texture,
it takes a long time.

The scrunchled affect
seems to add tone
and depth, you
can create 3d
objects and depth
from a 2d substance
in seconds.

This rehearsal
was a dramatic
shift in the
creative process

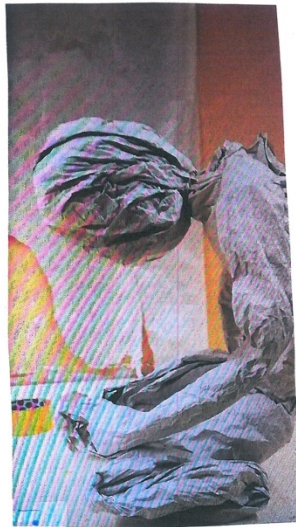
↳ Sometimes the medium/material
decides the story.

This is it!
Yay! →

→ It's so easy to sculpt
using just Sellotape you
can so easily manipulate
and secure a shape.

Rehearsal
April 28

The Rehearsal is in the Making...



This is an adaptation of
a quote from Borrett and Bolt
where they say something like
the knowing is in the making or praxis

↓
What I am finding is that I don't
even need to write a text or do
anything at all that might be similar
to my usual performance practice, which
is so heavily focused on writing. I
am just letting the sculptures do the
work. It feels too easy, but I
think I am underestimating all the
history of these objects that are so
personal to me - each object has a
very particular life event story of mine
attached to it, so it's almost as if
I don't have to do much performing.
All I can just lift them up and put
them next to each other and they start
talking - A performance
conversation

↓
between myself
as the catalyst
the sculpted objects
with their own lives

April
30/2021

The Nose

I was just making the
nose sculpture when
the classroom and
as I picked the nose
up in a deliberate and sniff

Sensative way without needing
to think my body began moving
or rather my body was being moved

by the nose. As I was imagining the
nose as the bishop of KZN performing an act of
prayer over me with his hand placed on my head

the nose began sniffing I began to bounce up and
down added to the sniffing. I moved with the
sniffing nose in a circle probably ending

of the cyclical nature of rituals
the nose seemed to be performing a
sniffing ritual, I imagined the nose
the bishop of KZN sniffing me to
determine if I was worthy of
being confirmed into the Anglican
christian faith.

"Sniff sniff"



recesses continued.

May
3rd

Thinking about
Sculpture

→ something
new, p.
with

Sculptural dialogue

The Alamo lab
reputation of the
obsession with time → the time
controlled nature
of the European
way of life.

How can the sculpted
objects communicate though
if there is no text



Non verbal
dialogue ?

??

Are these
not the same?
The body
as text

The object
as text ?

Performing
sculptures?

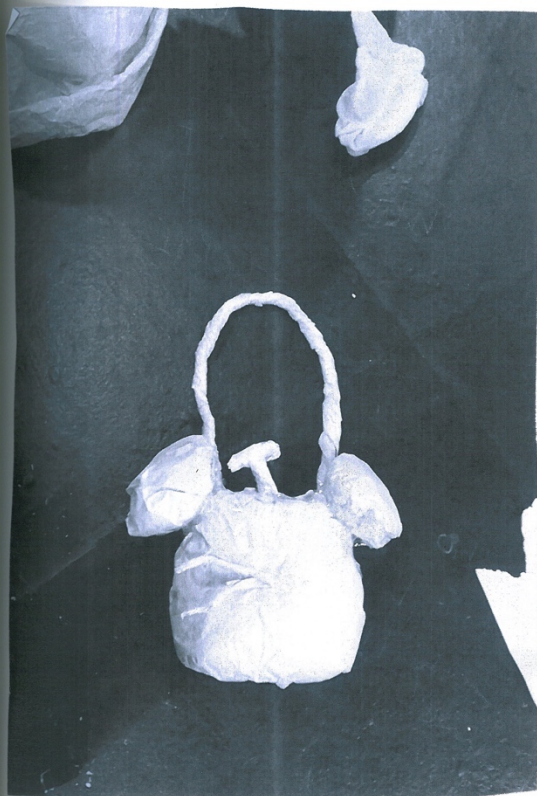
"I'm late I'm late for a very
important date no time to say
Hello good bye I'm late I'm
late I'm late"



tick tick
tick tick

Lewis Carroll's
Mad Hatter greatly
inspired the alarm clock for the Dool.

The folly of Time



→ The Dool's
alarm clock

The Dool's alarm clock
is intended to make
how I think of time
as being such a determinant
of my life

→
I'm late!
for what
though?

The costume.

May 30

→ I needed the costume of the fool to emphasize the ridiculous



A Cox comb hat emphasize that this fool was quite literally chicken, afraid, scared, unsure, and not stable.

The pants → The ridiculously / pants I made I felt like I was wearing a tent. When putting the pants on I felt


uncomfortable

I felt like it was really difficult to move around. The pants make so much noise when I walk → It's like when someone is talking and someone makes

hot Sweaty
Sticky Silly
I can't hear myself when I move with the silly pants on



Expectant
 waiting
 waiting
 for who
 for what
 for a beginning
 and end
 for being
 alive,
 what are
 these characters
 waiting for?

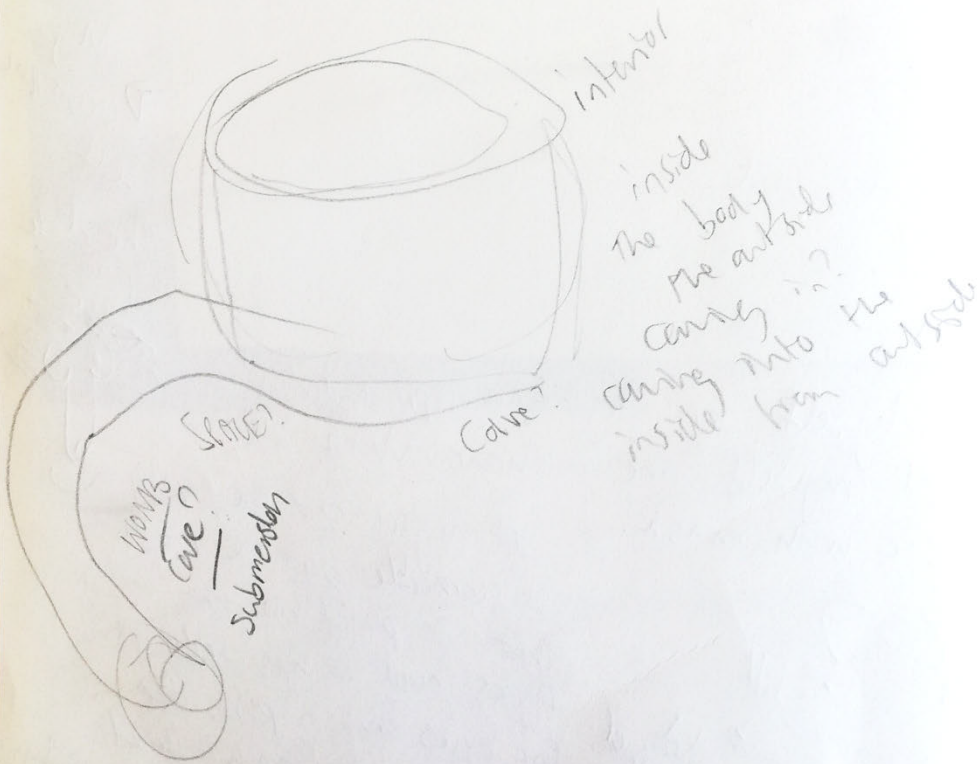
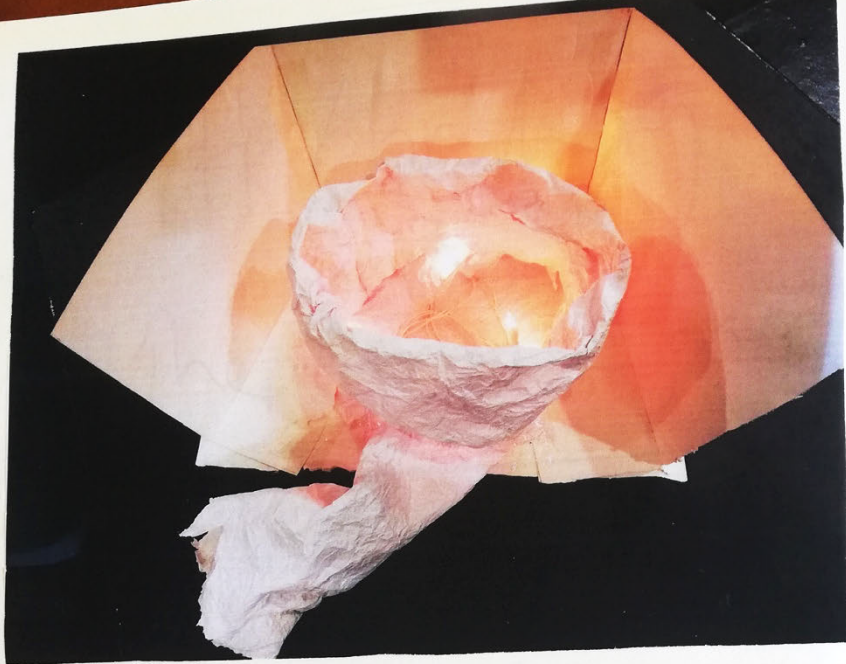
My
 → Groggish
 self
 The clerk
 face


Myself or figurative representations
 of myself one without mask and
 one with mask.

→ his
 puppet →

as I am still
 unsure about
 whether I should
 have made another
 puppet - or other
 representations
 of self.

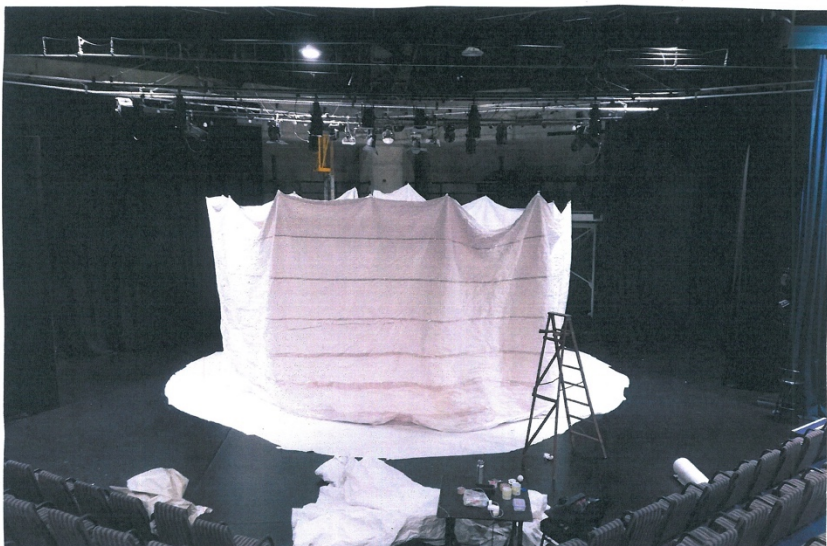
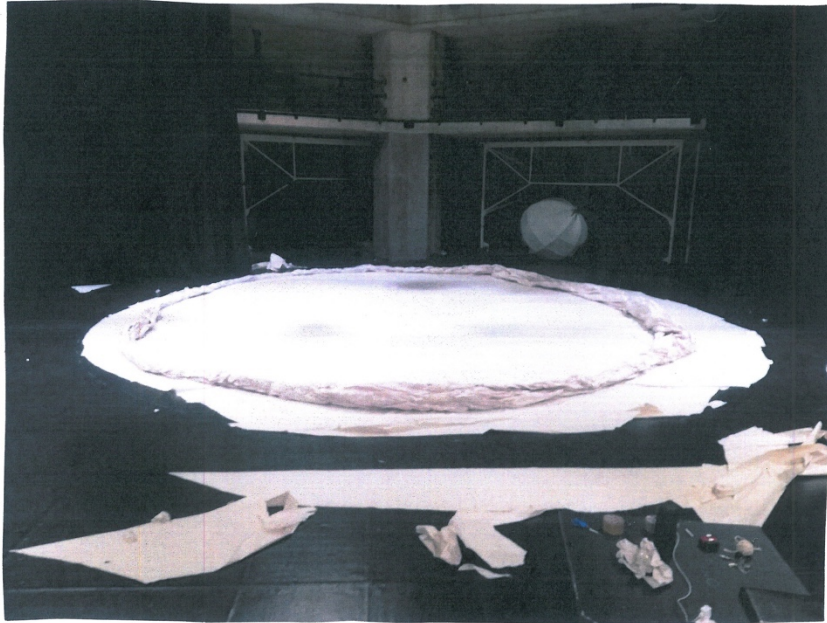
It might not be easily
 discernible but the mask
 that is placed on my
 figure's head has testicles
 for eyes and a penis for
 a nose → the mask offered
 to replace my face with
 a stereotype of ~~other~~ masculinity.



June 21/2001 The Set in the Space.

I wanted to make a Set that felt like something was concealed within, I originally wanted the space to look like a cave — because caves are synonymous with a stereotype of the grotesque but when I started making the Set with or the mock up of the Set it was the sculptural figures that determined the cavernous circle shape → the reason being that it was very important that all of the sculptural objects could see each other → I needed to address the prior critical feedback from "the King of Portals" who suggested that the performance was too linear and episodic → where life is not like that it flows from one moment into the next → so this shape was determined by the sculptural figures → I also wanted to make a tunnel → it was very important that the viewer — in my case — could cross a threshold a border or boundary because part of the way the grotesque works is that a border or boundary not be traversed or passed through in order to show its fluid, transmutable, ambiguous porous like, shifting, constantly shifting form. I wanted the viewer to pass through into another world.

Loading the show
June 2021



Reflection
post load

This was an extremely exciting moment for me.
After about 1½ years of no performance
outside of my home I got to load
a show into the hexagon.

The Hexagon Theatre is enormous - Filling the
space
was a huge challenge.

3 days to build
and load the show.

This space
offered the
potential for the show
to breath

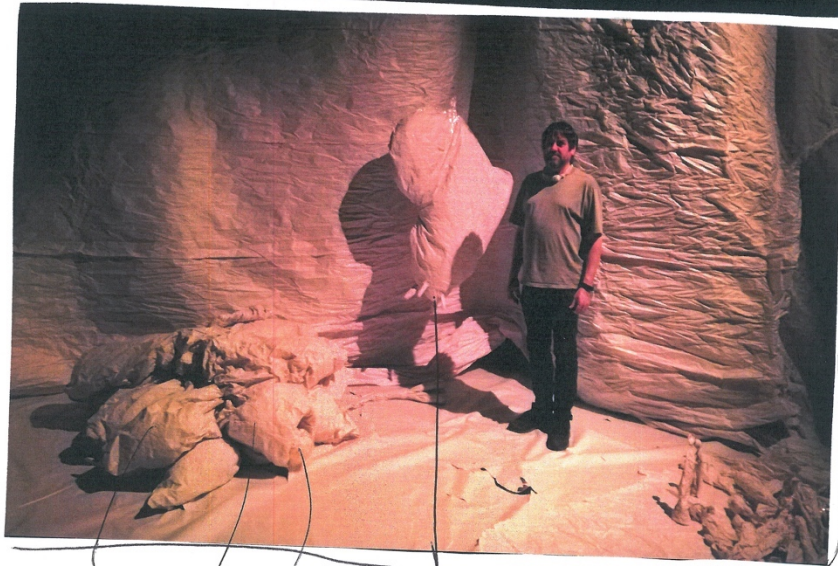
The bank
news print was an
extremely useful material
for filling large amount of
space

The intention
was to create
some kind of enclosed
space within the Hexagon Theatre

This space
allowed the performer
the space to sing from.

Submitted, although I was
enveloped, although I was
looking for a
way of creating
a really of
being confined
in a bigger
more expansive
way.

11/11/11
 11/11/11
 11/11/11
 11/11/11
 11/11/11
 11/11/11



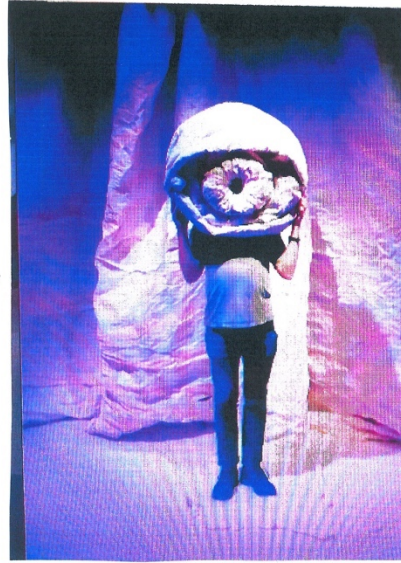
Testicles
 head of penis
 Baby

African Condome
 with South Africa as the udder.

Play by
with light
June 21

Colored
texture

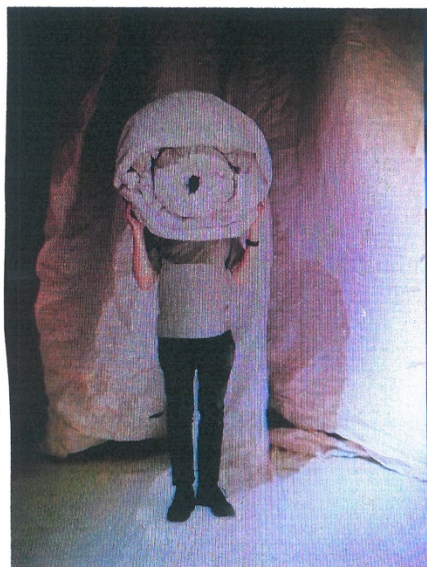
There is not
much to record here.
I was fortunate to get
a lighting team from the
Hearst Theatre on to campus
during lockdown to help me
light the show.

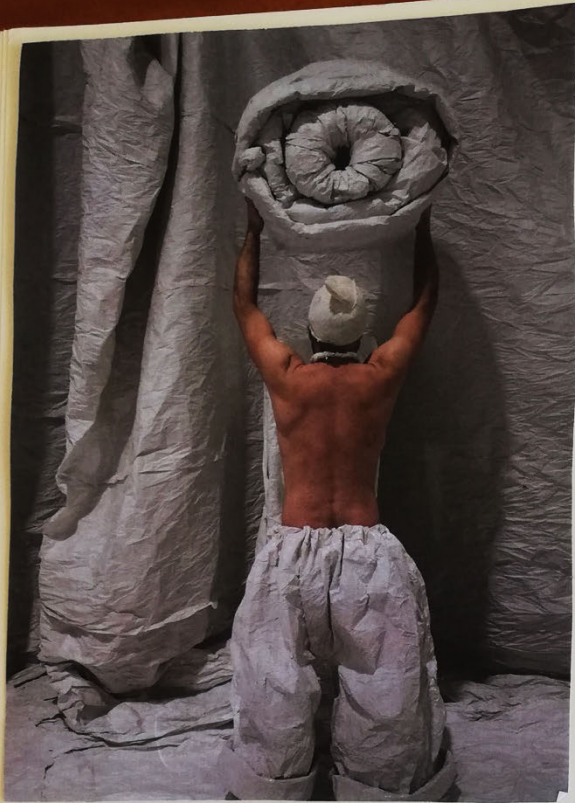


Ways at
seeing

The led lights
add some beautiful
texture to the sculpted
object, but when
the light is white
then I think because
the sculpture is white also,
they just disappear.

White light
texture.





rehearsal
June 28th 2021

I write rehearsal
but this doesn't feel
like a rehearsal
It feels like a
cop-out, because
I am trying not to
follow any similar or
familiar performance practice
so instead of rehearsing

familiar moves over and over again or using
text as a means of creating physical movement
phrases I am just moving objects/sculptures
around the space.

when I say just
It sounds like it's so easy that it feels
stupid, like a toddler could do it,
Yes they could! but this very simple
act of moving the sculptures
around seems to be enough, it seems to
create narrative.

CREATING NARRATIVE

Rehearsal
June 28/2021

I am moving the sculptural
objects around the
space.

They seem to talk to each other
or at least they seem to
connect via their biography
Their own stories interconnecting
showing a common history a progression

When the sculptures
are placed next
to each other in
different arrangements
they create different

↓
Stimulate
Narrower pathways



2001
June 20
Dakota

Vulnerability in Performance

It is the day before the show.

I feel

Exposed vulnerably
in territory I've
never seen before

Show time!

Nervous!

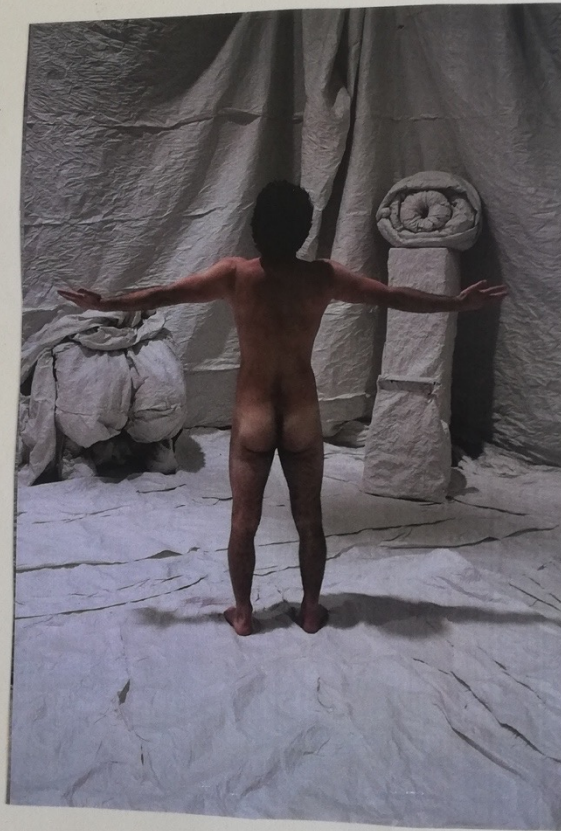
Liberal

Scared

Free

Enchanted

Excited!



I feel small in the space it
engulfs me eats me up humbles
me there is something sacred about
the energy I have given to the performance

It feels like a ritual that I am going to perform
a ritualized silence a simple act, like that of
a person who is isolated and alone.

Seeds
into
The
for
It

a prayer but subverted and strange.



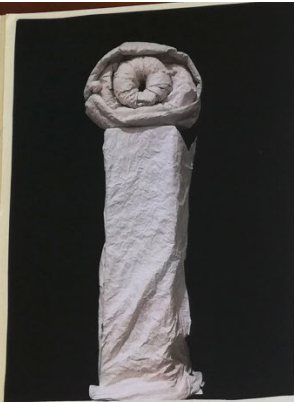
I see you!

→ I've never made a performance that doesn't have any script, I say one word in the whole performance there is no text to rely on it's more in the body exposed. I chose to walk into the space and the space because I thought it would capture the nerves and exposedness I was feeling, but I also felt liberated and free.

Feeling of sacred

When I walked into the space this morning the show had been installed for a few days already, and it felt as if all the sculptures had been having some sort of silent conversation a whole life of their own it's as if they are alive.

Someone excitedly about not having released the performance about having no text to say acts and the symbolic text imbued within the sculptures do the speaking.



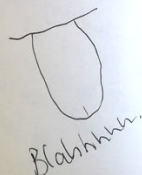
The white
Heterosexual Masculine
Gaze sculpture.

It feels like the
all seeing eye, the
eye of Sauron in
"Lord of the Rings".
There is something powerful
about being looked at
especially by a gaze that
has done so much
harm.

This gaze
has a text
of its own.

A Note On Sculptural Performativity

The sculptures have taken on
a life of their own. They seem to
be imbued with a history a biography
of sorts - connected to the 5th morning
in my 1.2. This I will remember.



The ear
on the Bishop's hat
to God or Dog as god
is thought of by myself
in the performative Dog is
the inverse of God, fittingly
I think as no-one is
more god-like than a
dog. It seems
to judge to question
the validity of, to
see without needing to speak
to look as a verb.



The Nose of the
Bishop of Kum-Zulu
Novel Sculpture.

The nose has become a separate symbol
in the work. It speaks so loudly in its
striking ritual, I command presence with
its misdeed and hotline to the ear of God.
There is something altogether uncomfortable about
the Bishop's nose, I intended it to make
us of the statue of the Bishop in the Anglican
church, but its striking how it seems to
be very difficult to laugh at the nose. ^{I was an}
unnatural laugher.

LAST THOUGHTS

July
15 2021

Whoaaaaa!!!

Horay! I've finished the
practical component. Wuu.

What a journey! I am busy striking
the sea alone because

covid pandemic still prohibits anyone from
gathering on the university. But there is
something ritualistic about striking the sea
alone → It has been a lonely process

during Covid, I've had to make this entire
process and show by myself and with no-one
in the department. It feels surreal to be
complete → My supervisors are happy that

the this performance, coupled with
the other two attempts will be
sufficient to gather enough data
to answer the research questions.

I feel a huge sense of relief... It has
been a very long process of making, of trial
and error, lots of errors

Making Mistakes

Shifting outside of my
comfortable performance practices
not writing a script, not rehearsing the performance, not using
the making process as the rehearsal process, inviting discomfort,
inviting the uncomfortable, the irregular, the discordant,
the disquiet, being alone, the separated individualist
Covid separateness that all combined to make for
a very uncomfortable creative process and all of things
that would normally not have been a part of my
familiar practice seem to have emulated the perfect
conditions for me to have been made uncomfortable
enough to break from the familiar and embrace
the strange... I wonder how when I write
the thesis now - how much these creative conditions
and choices will impact the writing/ thinking as well
as my artistic practice to come.

Thank you process...

And perhaps this
is where I would
like to conclude my
journal with

