

ADESOLA AKINLEYE DANCING STRONG

E: ADESOLA@DANCINGSTRONG.COM

CLIMBING WITH BARE FEET - THE PROCESS TO TRUTH & TRANSPARENCY

The process: the artistic choices behind the piece

Projection and form. The piece has been informed by Ralph Ellison's book, I have been interested in two strands within the book. One is Ellison's use of the metaphor of light and how it is interpreted by him as form of recognition.

"Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form"

Ellison is referring to light; both the physicality of lighter people, and light as in the status quo, having a place in the light of society. The character in Ellison's book talks about how he feels he is not within the expectations or understanding of the "light" that is therefore without light, in the dark; and in the dark it is as if you don't exist - thus the title of the book *Invisible Man*. The character refers to himself as invisible because people don't see him for who he is but only see who they project on to him. I have played with idea in the piece literally using projection in a way that makes the audience question if they are seeing the live dancers or the pre-recorded projections of them. I have tried to challenge the audience to question how they see.

In the book, the character goes through a number of stages of his life during all of which he identifies himself through the projection of other people - first as an honour student in his high school; then as a failing student in his college; then as a union leader and politician; and as the book climaxes, the character's identity changes very rapidly. The character is involved in a riot in Harlem and he is forced to change his appearance by putting on hats and glasses as he tries to get through the streets without people recognising him. In doing this, he finds he can become whoever people see him as, but as this happens he realises he does not know who he is himself. Finally he falls down a hole that is pitch black and in that darkness, without the projection of others, he starts to have a sense of identity, a sense of form. I am interested in this idea of finding form in darkness and use light and shadow in the piece in the reverse of how they are normally used; with white-out (all the lights up so everything is visible) instead of blackouts at the beginning and end of the piece, and at points between sections of the dances. The dance, however, is performed in very little light. I have explored the idea that the audience gets more of a sense of the form of the piece through less light, less information, than with more light.

The idea of being projected onto, and the sense of form, have been taken literally within the dance. Therefore *Truth and Transparency* is a dance between live dancers who represent the man's mind, and their projected images. Quite literally, if the dancers do not dance within the light of the projector then they start to become invisible on the stage. I have been interested throughout the development of the piece in the idea of seeing fragments of movement, understanding things and people through seeing part rather than the whole. And I feel that is what the character in the book suffered from - people saw parts - fragments - of his personality, and completed them into a whole, but this whole did not represent him. I have tried to layer images within the piece so that the different fragments that the audience sees does become a completed piece and the dance becomes a dance within the space rather than within the dancers themselves.

The projected images' journey ends before the end of the piece when the live dancers break away from the projector and start to light themselves rather than have the outside light of the projector to light their dancing. Therefore the piece ends with the dancers lighting themselves using hand-held lights. They don't carry enough light to light the whole of their bodies but they choose which parts of themselves will be seen as they dance. By choosing what the audience will see / know about them, they take ownership of their image.

Collective Seeing

I have also been interested in an idea I have called *collective seeing*. As you follow the character through the book, the reader starts to see him overall, but each of the people in the book that meets him only sees a part of who he is. I was interested in the idea that in our culture, we have an expectation (especially within theatre) that everybody in the audience will see the same thing and is free to interpret it individually. I wanted to create a piece where people in the audience - depending on where they sat in the auditorium - would see slightly different images, and I wanted the audience to feel comfortable with that, if possible. As one audience member said in a sharing of the working during my research, "I know only I had that view of the projection of the dancer for that moment; it was like a private performance just for me"

I think it is quite poignant that within our culture we have a sense of individuality, that we all have to have the whole amount and the freedom to interpret it ourselves; whereas in other cultures there is a sense of community: that older people have one part and younger people have another part, women have a part, men have a part, but that the knowledge is of the whole community and when everything is put together there is a harmony that becomes an understanding of the whole.

The vocabulary of movement

Alongside the ideas of projection and form, and collective seeing, I have been very interested in creating work that represents myself, as an Anglo-African of Nigerian descent, growing up in England and living in North America. I have tried to be really true to the movements I feel are a part of my personal cultural heritage - in a sense, a part of the African Diaspora. During my research, I have looked at break dancing, step dancing and some West African dancing. I have also looked at the more traditional training that I have had, which is through ballet and contemporary dance - Graham. I have tried to draw parallels between the intent of the different movements within all of these styles of dance, and to create steps that fulfill a vocabulary of my intent to find the voice of choreography for this piece.

I also had the goal of creating a movement vocabulary that was not just placed on the dancers I used. To this end, I spent a lot of the research and development time getting to know the bodies of the dancers I used, where their natural "safe" movements were, where their comfort zone of vocabulary lay, and how I could tease out of them a sense of risk within the movement they executed. I did not want to merely transplant my movement onto them, but organically grow a vocabulary that was informed by my physical history, the physical experience of the character in the book and the dancers' physical history.

Climbing to Transparency

I think the title - *Climbing with Bare Feet* - is a title of the work in progress. *Climbing with Bare Feet* really represented the piece as it was a work in progress, but *Truth and Transparency* represents the matured piece. I am very interested in process, so I do not mean the piece has come to end of its process. I can see developing some sections of the piece into an evening's work. But the piece is beginning to have a life of its own away from me. *Climbing with Bare Feet* to *Truth and Transparency* is a part of the process of it leaving me. Now it has a process of its own. I feel as an artist my process always carries on within what I create but there is a point when what I've created takes on an energy of its own and my relationship with it is more an intertwining with it rather than tearing it away from who I am.

Working on this piece has made me very interested in site-specific work because of the idea of the dance being within the space rather than within the dancer. When I think of that idea, it means that it's quite natural to think of dance being outside of the traditional theatre setting, or of a dance that challenges the fourth wall of the traditional theatre setting. This has meant that during part of my research, I developed pieces that were site-specific as a way of exploring the movements that I wanted within the final piece. I continued some work that I had been doing in Winnipeg in 2004/5 using the small space within an elevator or a lift. During Exploratorium I explored the idea of interrupted projection using a lift. The piece itself used a piece of cloth to define areas of the stage, creating sites on the stage in which the dancers can move. I would like to carry on my work with site-specific choreography. I enjoy the idea of going to a place and finding what is particularly special about it and then using that very thing to inform dance and movement.

Overall, the experience of *Climbing with Bare Feet* has been a wonderful learning journey. As with any experience, as Rainer Maria Rilke says, if we were a room, so often we spend most of our time walking up and down one side of the room never exploring the rest of it, I try really hard to push myself out into the rest of my room, to take risks and feel uncomfortable as I develop work.

I will add to this website in a few months, when the experience has had more time to settle. My plans now are to take time to analyse what I've learnt, to inform the next piece that I work on. I would like to continue working with projection, light and the human body. I am really interested in the way that light can exist only when it hits form, and that when it doesn't we can't see it, and therefore assume it's not there. I find this interesting, and how light carves up our space. We are only aware of it when objects interrupt the carving of the space. As a choreographer I feel that space is something that I have developed a relationship