

Shallow Eyes

What do you see when you're watching me?

By Rakesh Sukesh

Work in progress solo about the racial profiling of a man - based on a true story.



| | |
|----------------------------|-------------|
| I. Team and Summary | p. 2 |
| II. Summary | p. 2 |
| III. Starting point | p.3 |
| IV. Proposition | p.3 |
| V. Context | p.4 |
| VI. Embodiment | p.6 |
| VII. Dramaturgy | p.7 |
| VIII. Music | p.8 |
| IX. Costume | p.9 |

I. Team

Choreographed and Performed by
Rakesh Sukesh

*Assistant choreographer, Executive producer,
Esthetic adviser and Dramaturge*
Alessia Lunes

Text and Artistic collaborator
Marcus Yussaf

Music
Pol sinus

Production manager
Godlive Lawani

Co-movement researcher
Alicia Verdu Macian

II. Summary

Shallow eyes is a creation that will be developed in two parts:

Part one - Timeline creation and premier in 2022-2023

A dance-theater solo performance, lasting 60 to 90mins, that both embodies the inner state of a man of color that has been racially profiled, while simultaneously examining the questions mentioned below through the mediums of text, storytelling and videos. The piece will be interplay between dance and text.

WHY ARE WE NOT ABLE TO CHANGE? CAN WE CHANGE? IS THE NEW AGE SOCIETY, CULTURE, POLITICS, TECHNOLOGY HELPING US TO EVOLVE OR FLATLINE? ARE THE VIRTUES EMPATHY, KINDNESS, TOLERANCE, PATIENCE AND LOVE DISAPPEARING FROM HUMAN NATURE?

Part two: Creation and Premier in 2023-2024

A dance work performed for 6 to 12 hours. Three to four additional artists will be invited to join the event for one hour each. The audience will be allowed to enter and leave the space freely or stay for the entire piece. The performance will evolve through the course of the event, shifting from frontal, proscenium directed movement to a state of moving meditation, as if following the laws of entropy.

Synopsis for Part One

III. Starting point / *Stolen Picture*

The 10th of October 2019, the Tallinn (Estonia) Television used Rakesh's image to argue that there are too many migrants working illegally in the country. A foreigner's silhouette used to convince Estonians that dark skinned people are the cause of socio-political, economical problems, In this case, They video tapped Rakesh in the street without his consent and portrayed him as the face of the a contracted workers. Whereas Rakesh was visiting Tallinn to do a dance performance and to give master classes at the BFM Koreograafia(university of dance and film)

Below you find some of the statement translated into English.

Mart Helme (Minister of the Interior):

"The problem is that actually the state is being cheated on massively. It's cheated on by paying illegal salaries"

"Another issue with this is that the illegal workforce is very demoralizing. We see that in some sectors some enterprises have completely gone over to a "rental workforce", who are being paid lower salaries, basically the minimum salary, from which taxes are not paid. And the local Estonian workforce is being pushed out."

"Today we feel more and more that in the service sector we can no longer get services in Estonian, and what is even worse is that oftentimes it is not even possible to get it in English. Actually, in the service sector, the Estonian residents have to deal with workers that don't speak any languages, with whom you can only communicate with body language, using your arms and legs."

"We also see here that we have a lot of people, maybe from African countries, with darker skin that work here in the service sector. I see, for example, quite often bicyclists with pizza-boxes on their backs, they are also not from Belarus or Ukraine. They are from some other countries. I understand that presumably we cannot assume that if a person starts to live and work in Estonia, that he is immediately able to communicate in Estonian, but then the employers have to make efforts to teach them vocabulary on at least an elementary level"

Narrator: *In Tallinn we can first and foremost meet workforce with no language when using taxi services, or ordering home food. The companies where the most black-skinned people work, Bolt and Wolt, said in September that their workers don't have to communicate with the clients. Other ministers have also expressed their dissatisfaction with this topic, and Mart Helme promised that this problem will be dealt with on the government level.*

Follow the link below to see Rakesh's story covered in Estonian news paper DELFI

<https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/eesti/delfi-suutis-taas-uh-e-valismaalase-ara-hirmutada-ning-eestis-ja-eestlastes-rassismi-nagema-panna/>

IV. Proposition / *A # is not enough*

It wasn't the first time that Rakesh suffered from racism. This incident was specifically memorable because they used his body's image, the main tool used for his artistic work. tv channels work easily with stereotypes because it is a dramatic and powerful tool. Mainstream media continues to stigmatize non-white people. In the same period where people(We) were showing support to the #blacklivesmatter movement, nowadays most of us spend more time on social media than watching TV. Superficiality flourishes in this context. On social media we "believe" that we are able to choose our subjects and concerns, but we are

choosing content and acting upon it at an uncontrollable way.

We scroll. We like. We love. We unfollow. We hashtag. We create short-term communities to "connect" with each other. We create opinion polls. We share our concerns. We fight. We watch cat videos. We get distracted. We forget. We shop...

What can we do in real life? How can we support each other in real-life, everyday struggles?

Maybe we need more time? But maybe it's not just about slowing down. Perhaps we need to go deeper. Deeper than a scroll, to stay with a topic when the solution is not yet visible. It's about creating an open space that offers time to reflect on stolen images, often the images of the minority. Mindless stereotyping and the usurping of one's face, one's body for propaganda is violence. This is the violence that Rakesh experienced and observed the effects of it on his own body, an everlasting reminder of racial injustice.

When a majority of the population is a conformist society, how can we make any change against the thousands of years of history, the cultural destructions and divisions between race, gender and country? We all thrive for change, but we are afraid to fight, or not spend the time and energy to make the change. We prefer to conform with the big powers even when we don't agree with them. It's easy. We're lazy.

However, there is a positive side to conformity. For example, a majority agreed to standing up against tobacco companies in the 1960s. There was legislation brought in to demand transparency, to uphold freedom of choice and to respect public health. In this fight, both politics and society had agreed to a common issue, hence came the swift change. There are [studies that show](#) that it only takes ten percent of "unshakeable belief" to change a society. Then how come we are not able to do the same with the issues of racial hate, biases, and injustices? Why can't we come together to fight until lasting change is made? Why is it taking so long? The answers are left hanging in the air.

Even today there are major racial issues that continue in Africa. America and in other parts of the world seemed to address some of these the topics of racial injustice, but what happened to the big wave of **#blacklivesmatter** that once the conforming society was very excited about? Are we waiting for other tragic incidents such as *Breonna Taylor* and *George Floyd* to post our **#blacklivesmatter** again?

The aim of the piece is not about glorifying Rakesh, a racial attack victim, or to shame the attackers. It is a project that wants to go deeper in to the reasons why we still project our hate and anger onto other humans in the name of race, religion, nationality, gender. Why are we not able to see deeper? How does the virtual world shape the present and future generation?

V. Context

We are living in a hybrid society where our lives have become multicultural, globalized and living both in a physical and virtual reality. We are becoming more and more multidimensional beings. How much are we aware of this reality shift and who is in charge over these realities? Where are the regulations and education for this "meta-world?"

One of main issues of this way of living is that many of our realities are preprogrammed, engineered, and manipulated for us to consume as much as possible and disguised in the form of culture and politics. These doctored systems interlink with our daily lives and minds, not necessarily for the better, arguably, for the worse. The questions that come to mind: Why do we trust these programs, these artificial intelligences and algorithms, to work for the betterment of humanity as a whole? How is it reforming the mental and physical states of people in society? Where is the transparency, the freedom of choice? What is our future if we don't ask these (and deeper) questions?

*

“Where there is righteousness in the heart, there is beauty in the character. When there is beauty in the character, there is harmony in the home. When there is harmony in the home, there is order in the nation. When there is order in the nation, there is peace in the world.”

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

When we look at the above quote, Sir Abdul Kalam beautifully explains the process to a peaceful world. But the important question is, who is responsible for an individual to develop in the way afore mentioned? Each individual, isn't it? If we ask most human beings on our planet, wouldn't they confess a desire for peace, within, as well as in the world? So why do we not take our responsibility in this basic desire?

Studies show that we are living in a virtual reality more and more every day. An average human being spends 3 to 4 hours per day online. What does that mean for the current and future societies? Although the virtual reality has been developed for the "betterment of humanity," there are some severe consequences to it. The business and political agenda behind these virtual realities is allowing big powers to invade our privacy, constantly observing, studying our behavioral pattern to monetize, manipulate and reengineer every single individual as the system pleases. As a result, we have seen chaotic incidents all across the world. The machines reprogramming their makers.

See:

Ethnic violence in Myanmar 2017. “A genocide Incited on Facebook, with posts from Myanmar’s Military” - A quote from The New York times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/technology/myanmar-facebook-genocide.html>

Religious conflict between Hindu and Muslims in India. “Inflammatory content on FB was up 300% before Delhi riots, say internal reports” - A quote from The news Minute. <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/inflammatory-content-fb-was-300-delhi-riots-says-internal-report-156878>

Violent protest in United States capitol building 2021. “Some pro-Trump extremists used Facebook to plan Capitol attack, reports finds” - A quote from NBC news. <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/some-pro-trump-extremists-used-facebook-plan-capitol-attack-report-n1254794>

We can see our behavior has been affected as a direct consequence of AI programing. These programs have been engineered in such a way as to tap into the human subconscious. They manipulate data, easily magnifying particular of traits by feeding off of harvested data. In this chaos of interlinked physical and virtual environments, how can a person find the truth of any given situation or even have a full control over their own body, mind and emotions? Even the references I have given above are put into question. Are they legitimate? Do they objectively tell the full story or are they purposefully misleading? Are we asking ourselves these questions when we are fed through media and social media?

VI. Embodiment



Work in progress showing in Tic Tac Art Center 2021

Complexity, chaos, and an audience

When an audience sees something alien, something unfamiliar, on stage, what is the first reaction? What judgements are created in the mind? What is our experience when we witness chaos? What relationship do we build with the performer, if any? Will the spectator shift their eyes away if they feel discomfort? Is it possible for the audience to see themselves within the chaos, to empathize with the 'alien'?

In the current era of contemporary movement, the body is often influenced by modern or postmodern dance aesthetics and techniques. Often the movement is very polished and the state of the performer is neutral, cold, codified, unexpressive, unemotional. In India, classical dance forms have given profound importance to emotions and expressions as the basis of an act. The intent of the Indian performer is often quite explicit and direct, which, to a western eye, may be seen as "too much" or "over the top."

Our minds are programmed through our cultures, our experiences, our "feeds" to rank beauty (or non-beauty). The point isn't to bring a halt to change, but to question a forced and narrow aesthetic, to see further than the labels "beauty" and "form." The focus of this work lies in creating a raw physical state that allows chaos to exist without guiding meaning. The human mind will fight to create meaning, to see form. It is inevitable. But can it find peace, can we see ourselves, in something we might initially label alien, ugly, scary or even violent?

The essence of this physical investigation will be in its complexity, chaos and embodiment of the inner state. The work specifically looks into the experiences of one victim of intolerance and develops physicality from his experience. How to embody vulnerability? How to explore chaos in a body? What are the states of a body in chaos? Is there an authentic method to access a state of chaos in dance?

VII. Dramaturgy

Marcus Youseff

One of the core collaborators for the project will be, award winning theater director/playwright/artistic director, [Marcus Youseff](#).

I decided to use comedic text in this dance piece to create a safe space where I can talk and discuss the topic of racial injustice in an neutral and nonjudgmental way. Although, this is an highly sensitive topic I do want to keep a sense of humor, to be able to invite the audience to reflect on these issues in a less confrontational manner. I want them to feel safe, I want them to laugh, reflect, question and open their eyes for a deeper perspective. Humor loosens the body, which softens judgement.

When I was introduced to Marcus Youseff I had an immediate connection to his energy, vision, and art. I went through his body of work and quickly realized he was the right collaborator for this topic. He uses art as a medium to challenge our mental constructs over socio-political issues. I am attracted to the grounded self-awareness that he uses to parse through issues and solutions. As a mixed race American, he is familiar with racial injustice and has been using his art as a medium to talk about it.

Marcus Youseff, a Canadian born half Egyptian, half Anglo-American. Rakesh Sukesh, an Indian living in Europe for over 10 years. We do share some common experiences surrounding systemic racial injustice. At the same time, I am curious to embrace the moments where our experiences and viewpoints differ. In our research, we will delve into the topic and develop text based on the the confusions, contradictions and ironies of the whole situation. The intent is to question the current state of racial injustices with an undertone of comedy. We are looking forward to see what will be the outcome of the meeting of our minds, experiences, and mediums of expression, whether harmonious or conflicting. Many questions already come to my mind.

How do we construct a performance that expertly weaves text, dance and story telling? How will we meld together both abstraction and narration. How will the body affect the nature of the text and how will the text affect the body?

What exactly we will develop and our approach is not yet defined. There are some suggestions we've discussed, which will likely develop or shift during the course of our research. The piece might either develop into several, small comedy sketches or one larger storyline, both attempting to address the topic from local and global perspectives.

VIII. Music

POL Sinus

The piece will be backed with the music of [POL Sinus](#), a Swiss electronic music composer/choreographer.

The music will have variety of characteristics. It will create soundscapes that will support the emotional, physical and psychological space of the performer. It will be an echo of the body, while at the same time its own entity. Choices of harmony and disharmony will juxtapose what is happening on stage. At times, the music will create familiarity, a safe space. In other moments, it will create chaos and complexity.

We will use the audio of the Tallinn news channel and mix text from Youssef to create a kind of score. We will use "technological" sounds such as a clicking keyboard, mobile phone photo capture sounds, or other familiar technological sounds as the starting point. We imagine the music breaking the space and opening an unpredictability, constantly shifting form and pattern.

POL and I met in India during a residency program in 2012. During this residency he created a music for my solo, "A dream of silence." Then, later I was one of the performers in his project, "Axis Mundi," where he was the composer and co-choreographer. POL has an in-depth understanding and sensibility for both music composition and choreography, which makes him a great match for this project. Coincidentally, POL had an immediate connection to the topic when I proposed the project to him since he had already been busy with topic of a conforming society. Working together, we both have open minds to hear each other's suggestions and to challenge each other's ideas.

Website:

<http://www.otaku.ch/>

www.otaku.ch/aeroflot

www.otaku.ch/sunisit

www.otaku.ch/Enoia

www.otaku.ch/chymere

www.otaku.ch/toutbleu

IX. Costume



**Visually unfamiliar, uncomfortable.
Something alien or grotesque to break
from an idea of minimalism.**



**First reactions! Repulsion, distance?
Attraction to exoticism? Destroy? Steal?
Something else? A challenge to see deeper.**

Mat Voorter

The images above are ritualistic performances from south India, called Theyam. These are manifestations of gods and goddesses from different communities. There are 456 different kind of Theyams. As we can see, the manifestation of something divine has been portrayed as something visually frightening. This is a great example of how we might question what is "beautiful" or "ugly." The idea is not appropriate the image of the Theyam, but these images give inspiration to help develop a multilayered character for the work.

I want to avoid any sort of exoticism or Orientalism, rather, to use the costume as a means to transform the performer's personality, outlook, and meaning. We want the costume to be playful, residing somewhere between familiar to unfamiliar. In fact, the "meaning" of the performance could be further complicated through the lens of what is covering the body of color.

For this task, I could only think of costume designer, Mat Voorter. A performer and choreographer himself, he has in-depth understating of how a costume can accent or hinder a performance. Voorter has a special talent at luring the eye of the onlooker, while also providing costumes that open new passages for the performer. Our main task in designing the costume will be to assist the transformation of the character while highlighting the idea that "what we see" is NOT necessarily "what we get."



David Zambrano:
"Soul Project"
davidzambrano@planet.nl

photo © Anja Hitzenberger
www.anjahitzenberger.com
anja@struckmedia.com
PHOTO CREDIT MUST APPEAR ON ALL MEDIA

