

RICK SETH OFORI

# **THOUGHTS ON MASCULINITY**

(MA RESEARCH PAPER 2022, KUNSTAKADEMIET OSLO)

This text is a dramatized depiction of what I perceive to be reality. It is an exploration into thoughts, and fears I guess I, and many men harbor. I don't speak for anyone but me. This is not a grandstand against society, I'm not that full of myself anymore. These are mere reflections I have made after interacting with men and getting their side of the story.

Masculinity, one word with so many associations both good and bad depending on which side of the coin you land. This is the landscape I have chosen to explore. Why? I guess I've always been drawn to the things I can't comprehend or things that are a bit too close for comfort.

As a child I really looked up to my father, toxic traits, and all. He was the head of our family, the breadwinner. He was loved and feared.

As a teenager I despised him for holding my manhood captive in his image.

As an adult I feel indifferent. I know he isn't perfect, in fact he is rather cruel, but at the same time I can't help but wonder why or better yet how he turned out that way. What was the catalyst to his trauma that he passed on to me.

I guess that is the most honest answer to why I've been so obsessed with the theme of masculinity. I have a need to understand why I display the behavior I do, and why I see the same in so many men around me. Why is it that I can be a feminist on one hand, but then laugh at my friends' chauvinistic jokes on the other.

I wish I could crack open my father's head and pour out its content to better understand what went wrong. But instead, I guess I'll have to crack open my own.

*“A boy is standing on a table, in hand, a lit sharpie and in the other a can of bug spray. The room is dark only the faint light from the sharpie illuminates the child.*

*We see a staircase on the right side of the stage as the room is lit by small gusts of fire. then it stops and again, the room is only lit by the sharpie fire, now more intense.*

*His sister (around 5 years older) walks down the stairs and stops mid-way. She looks at her brother, she's*

*confused. Her eyes widen as she realizes what he is about to do”*

## **ACT I**

### **“BLACK BOYS CRY”**

**There was a time in my life when I was oblivious to the injustice of the world and the level of hatred that people could bear. To be frank, I genuinely wish I could go back to that oblivious state... But I can't.**

**When I was a child, I understood as a child and processed the world as a child. You see, I knew that I didn't look like the other children in my kindergarten. I knew that I was brown, and they were “skin-colored.” I knew that they used the yellow crayon to color their hair in drawings, as I used the black one. I knew we didn't look the same, but I thought nothing more of it. The thing is children aren't cruel. They don't bear prejudice and hatred, at least not to begin with.**

**I was probably around 5-6 years old the first time I was teased for being different. You might think that this would have been some sort of wake-up call and that I finally understood that the world isn't fair and that this was just the beginning. But please refrain from any assumptions of me as the narrator, and I won't assume anything about you, the reader. This “wake-up call” was more of an alarm, and every time I should have woken up, I chose to hit snooze.**

**This bullying would go on for 3-4 years. It wasn't constant, at least not at first. No, it was wavering, like the calm sea before the storm. Then without any warning, it came crashing down, leaving me disoriented, trying to find my way up. Only to realize that I was in much deeper water than I thought.**

**Over these years, I would be teased, slapped, punched, pushed, kicked, bit, literally thrown in the trash, laughed at, and so much more. The school did the best they could... and by that, I mean, they sent me to an “anger redirecting treatment.” So, there I found myself, surrounded by my tormentors and the**

**bullies who made my life so miserable. Learning how to step away, not get angry and not fight back. This was my first taste of how unjust the world was. And If I knew then what I know now, I might have just stopped trying. But I didn't, so I didn't.**

**After a while... a long while, things started to turn around, and I even made new friends, some of them the very same people who were willing participants in my bullying. Now, why would I befriend them, you ask? "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer" Someone once said this or something along those lines. I'm not going to Google it to find out who, but just know that they were on to something. Being friendly with them made me feel safer. If I was in, I was safe, I was warm, and it's cold out there.**

**- R**

*“A new room appears, smaller than the previous room, but still dark. Source of light is the full moon beaming through the widow on the wall on the left.*

*On the wall in the middle is faint drawing of a big eye. Underneath is a big white bed and on the edge of this bed sits a teenage boy only wearing boxers.*

*His face is obscured by a wool-knit balaclava, but his eyes are still visible. He is looking directly at us.*

*Next to him is an axe, three black hoodies and a backpack”*

## **ACT II**

### **“M.A.M. – MEN AGAINST MASCULINITY”**

**WHAT WOULD BE WORST, STAYING QUIET OR  
SPEAKING TOO LOUDLY?**

**BOTH BRING SHAME. THIS SHAME MIGHT BE  
DIFFERENT, BUT ITS SHAME NONETHELESS. ARE YOU  
NOT REVOLTED, ASHAMED, OR EVEN JUST  
EMBARRASSED? OR DID THEY TELL YOU IT WAS OKAY,  
A PART OF YOUR NATURE, BOYS WILL BE BOYS.**

**IS THERE NO SENSE OF URGENCY ANYMORE? YOU CAN NOT AFFORD TO BE THIS QUIET, TO BE THIS COMPLIANT, TO BE THIS STUPID. ARE YOU NOT SEEING WHAT WE ARE SEEING?**

**IF NOT, WE UNDERSTAND. WE HAVE ALL BEEN WHERE YOU ARE, TOO TIRED TO SCREAM BUT TOO ANGRY TO SMILE, CONFLICTED.**

**WHO ARE WE? WE ARE MALE PRESENTING INDIVIDUALS THAT HAVE BEEN SO SILENT THAT THE VOLUME OF OUR DEFIANCE FRACTURED US IN A WAY THAT NO NUMBER OF BANDAGES COULD EVER "FIX." LIKE A CHILD THAT GOES THROUGH A TRAUMATIC EVENT BUT DON'T RETAIN THE VOCABULARY NOR THE BRAIN CAPACITY TO REFLECT UPON THE EVENTS SIGNIFICANCE, WE FRACTURED TO SEE MORE CLEARLY. WE FRACTURE TO REMAIN SANE.**

**WE DO NOT CLAIM TO NOT BE A PART OF THE SYSTEM; THAT WOULD BE NAÏVE-DUMB. WE ARE NOT BETTER OR "SUPERIOR." WE WOULD NEVER USE SUCH LANGUAGE; THEY CAN KEEP THAT. SIMPLY PUT, WE ARE M.A.M. OR**

**"MEN AGAINST MASCULINITY" THE STEREOTYPICAL  
DEFINITION OF MASCULINITY.**

- 1. He was eight years old the first time he cracked. He was too young to really understand at the time, but after this, he would never be the same. Before he descended the stairs and into the bedroom of his older friend and joined his friend in this "game, " the boy trusted, the boy belonged. The eight-year-old boy who ascended from those very stairs would never trust again. So, what does he do now? What can an eight-year-old boy do with this information that he does not comprehend and is not equipped to decode? It remained as a feeling, but quickly it translated itself as shame, a type of shame that lingers underneath the skin. There is only one option, suppress!*

**SO THAT NEVER HAPPENED.**



**BUT YOU FEEL IT NOW, RIGHT? YOU'RE UNCOMFORTABLE. YOU'RE WAKING UP! SO OFTEN, THEY SPEAK ABOUT THE PROGRESSIVE NATURE OF OUR SOCIETY. THEY APPLAUD THE BARE MINIMUM AS IF IT WAS THE "END ALL BE ALL" TO ALL OF THE ISSUES THAT ARE SO DEEPLY INGRAINED INTO OUR FUCKED-UP WORLD.**

**WHY IS IT THAT A WHITE MALE PRESENTING PERSON PUTS ON A DRESS OR ANYTHING "FEMININE," AND THEY ARE APPLAUDED FOR PUSHING GENDER NORMS. BUT WHEN A TRANS OR NON-BINARY PERSON MERELY EXISTS, THEY ARE AUTOMATICALLY PERCEIVED AS A THREAT TO THE GENDERED PARAMETERS WE CONFINE OURSELVES WITHIN?**

**IS IT BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT TO DO THE WORK?  
IS IT THAT THEY ARE ACTUALLY AFRAID?  
OR IS IT SIMPLY THAT THEY DON'T WANT TO READJUST?**

**WE WILL NOT DENY THAT THERE HAS BEEN A PROGRESSION. OF COURSE, OUR COLLECTIVE VIEW**

HAS SHIFTED OVER THE LAST 50 YEARS. THAT IS NOT SURPRISING AND SHOULD NOT REALLY BE APPLAUDED; WHAT THE FUCK IS NOT CLICKING? THEY SEEM TO NOT UNDERSTAND OR BE WILLING TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT NO MATTER HOW SLOWLY YOU BUILD A HOUSE, IT ONLY TAKES ONE BAD STORM TO TEAR IT DOWN. SO AGAIN, I ASK, "WHERE IS THE FUCKING URGENCY?"

THEY KEEP ON TRYING TO IGNORE THE COUNTERMOVEMENT, AS IF IT IS NOT REPUGNANT AND VOLATILE. ~~SORRY, WE'RE GETTING...~~ NO! SCRATCH THAT. BECAUSE THE RHETORIC THEY USE IS A HUNDRED TIMES MORE HARMFUL, BUT YOU CHOOSE TO PAY IT NO MIND.

WHY IS THAT?

IS IT BECAUSE "THAT'S JUST THE OPINION OF A FEW PEOPLE," OR IS IT THAT "THEY ARE FROM ANOTHER GENERATION...CAN'T TEACH NEW TRICKS TO AN OLD DOG," OR MAYBE, "IT'S WRONG, BUT WHAT CAN I DO?"

**WELL, FOR STARTERS, YOU COULD WAKE THE FUCK UP AND ACKNOWLEDGE OUR PRIVILEGE. IS IT SO BAD TO NOT BE A VICTIM? IS IT REALLY THAT BAD?**

**WE ALL LONG FOR SPACES TO BELONG, WE DESIRE SAFE SPACES WHERE WE CAN FULLY EXPRESS OURSELVES AND BELONG. BUT WHAT IF YOUR SPACE IS HARMFUL?**

**IF YOUR SENSE OF BELONGING IS RELIANT ON THE ALIENATION OF OTHERS; HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO TO BELONG?**

**SO FAR, YOU'RE PROBABLY SAYING; "WELL IM NOT LIKE THAT", "THIS DOESN'T APPLY TO ME" OR MAYBE "WE ALL KNOW THIS IS WRONG".**

**SO, WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOUR FRIEND IS TALKING TO A GIRL WHO IS VISIBLY UNCOMFORTABLE? OF COURSE, YOU STOP HIM, RIGHT?**

**IF YOUR FRIENDS MAKE A JOKE THAT IS SLIGHTLY HOMOPHOBIC OR CHAUVINISTIC AND EVERYBODY LAUGHS, DO YOU CHECK THEM? WOULD YOU**

**COMPROMISE YOUR PLACE IN THE GROUP AND SPEAK UP? WELL, YOUR INACTION SPEAKS VOLUMES!**

**NOW LET'S GET ONE THING CLEAR, WE DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR PERCEPTION OF YOURSELF, WE CARE ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY. HOLDING ONESELF ACCOUNTABLE CAN BE HARD FOR A MIND THAT ISN'T FRACTURED. FOR A MIND THAT ONLY SEES FROM ONE PERSPECTIVE. FOR A PRIVILEGED MIND.**

**THERE WILL NOT BE A REDEMPTION ARCH, NOT FOR YOU, NOT FOR US. WE DON'T GET THAT. THIS IS NOT A STORY. THIS IS NOT A DRILL. THIS IS THE REAL WORLD. A CAUTIONARY TALE OF WHAT IS TO COME AND WHAT HAS BEEN. YOU CAN NOT ACCEPT THE VILE ACTIONS OF YOUR FELLOW MEN WITH SUCH APATHY. WHY DO YOU ACCEPT IT? BECAUSE IT DOES NOT AFFECT YOU? BECAUSE YOU WERE BORN WITH A COCK BETWEEN YOUR LEGS OR IS IT AS SIMPLE AS HUBRIS? WHY PUT A DENT IN YOUR SHINY ARMORED PRIDE BY LOOKING INWARDS, WHY RISK YOUR SEAT AT THE TABLE FOR ACTIONS WHICH IF WE ARE TO BE PERFECTLY HONEST**

**YOU COULDN'T CARE LESS ABOUT. ENOUGH OF THE  
PERFORMATIVE! ENOUGH OF THE GOOD WILLED  
GESTURES. JUST DO SOMETHING ANYTHING.**

2. *He was 20 and careless, he was 18-15 and  
longing...*

**DO NOT BE SO QUICK TO ADMIRE YOUR BOYS,  
CAUSE IF A GIRLS IS A GUN, THEN A BOY IS A POWDER  
KEG.**

*“We destroy just about everything, for that is the nature  
of trauma”* these were the last words my best friend said to

me before he ripped my heart out between my ribs, killing me (metaphorically speaking). He did something worse; he broke my perception of him. My soft-spoken friend who wouldn't hurt a fly...strangled a girl and then went on to lie.

Yes, he was drunk. Yes, he apologized, and he even cried. But he still did it.

This is the hardest part to write because I don't get to make excuses. This part is about accountability, fragility and most importantly it's about being afraid of what you might be capable of and addressing this fear.

They say that the company you keep says a lot about you, so who am I if I don't distance myself from him? Who am I if I forgive him? Who am I if I don't deal with the loss? Who am I if I don't want to talk about the deeper meaning? Who am I if I don't care anymore? Who am I if I look the other way?

In a "perfect" world everybody who commits any act that is immoral would be exiled to a small island somewhere, but this

isn't a perfect world, not even close.

Life is not black and white, it's not even shades of gray.

It's all just murky brown, like a puddle.

What are the scales in which we use to balance rights and wrongs? Talking accountability doesn't absolve you of what you've done, but can I forgive you now? because a part of me really wants to. That's the part I struggle with, the love I feel for you vs the hate I would feel if I didn't know you. I don't know where to go from here and that scares me.

So can we just cut to the next scene

*“The room is lit by big bulbs with an orange-yellow tint. Filled with people, and a buzzing sound as all the chatter becomes one. It's 03:07am.*

*A man leaves”*

## **ACT III**

## **“EGGSHELLS: A DISPLAY OF AFFABILITY”**

WE LAY OUR SCENE

IT IS LATE, IT IS DARK, IT IS NIGHT.

THE ONLY SOURCES OF LIGHT ARE THE LIGHTS FROM  
LIGHT POSTS AND THE CARS THAT DRIVE BY FAST AND  
INFREQUENTLY.

RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT.

HE IS MAKING HIS WAY HOME, HE WALKS FAST, WITH  
LONG STEPS, BUT HE FEELS SAFE. HE WALKS; RIGHT  
FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT  
FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT.

HE SEES A FIGURE AHEAD. HE KEEPS WAKING, BUT HE IS  
VERY AWARE OF THIS FIGURE WALKING AHEAD. RIGHT  
FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT



FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT  
FOOT, LEFT FOOT.

HE LOOKS UP FROM HIS PHONE AND SLOWS DOWN,  
RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT.

THE FIGURE IS NOW CLOSER, WAS HE WALKING TO  
FAST? RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT...

HIS PULSE IS INCREASING, HE IS GETTING NERVOUS. THE  
FIGURE IS NOW A CLEAR SILHOUETTE, A PERSON.

RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT.

HE WONDERS IF HE SHOULD CROSS THE STREET.  
IMPACT IS IMMINENT. AS HE WALKS, HE LOOKS ACROSS  
THE STREET, CLEAR.

RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT,

HE CONTEMPLATES SLOWING DOWN EVEN MORE BUT  
IS CONCERNED THAT THIS WILL BE SUSPICIOUS. AS HE

CONTINUES WALKING, HE IS NOW PAINFULLY AWARE OF HIS GATE. HE FEELS UNCOMFORTABLE IN HIS OWN BODY, HE CAN FEEL EVERY JOINT AND MUSCLE OPERATE AS HE LIFTS HIS KNEE TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP. RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT.

HE IS NOW UNCOMFORTABLY CLOSE TO THIS PERSON WALKING IN THE SAME DIRECTION. HE SLOWS DOWN TRYING BUILD THE GAP BETWEEN THEM. HE NOW FEELS UNSAFE, HE CONTEMPLATES WALKING PAST THE PERSON. HE SPEEDS UP, HIS JAW FEELS TIGHT AS HE BRACES FOR IMPACT, BUT AS HE GETS CLOSER THE SIDEWALK SEEMS TO SHRINK BEFORE HIS EYES. SO, HE RETREATS, HE SLOWS DOWN AGAIN. RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT, ONE FOOT, OTHER FOOT.

WHAT NOW? WALKING IN THIS IRREGULAR PATTERN AND WITH HIS SHIFTY MANNERISMS. HIS SKINS STARTS TO CRAWL. HE TRIES TO SHRINK, BUT HIS BODY FAILS

HIM. HE TRIES TO APPEAR LESS THREATENING, BUT HIS  
HUE DEFIES HIM.

RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT.

HE STEPS OF THE SIDEWALK AND SPEEDS UP,  
RIGHTFOOTLEFTFOOTRIGHTFOOTLEFTFOOT.

HE LOOKS DOWN AT HIS PHONE AND BURIES HIS EYES  
INTO THE SCREEN REFUSING TO LOOK UP. HIS  
FOREHEAD IS GLISTENING WITH TINY BEADS OF SWEAT  
AND HE CAN SENSE THE PERON NOW CLOSER THEN  
EVER. HE CAN SENSE THEM SENSING HIM. HE IS NOW  
WALKING IN HIS NATURAL PACE, BUT IT FEELS LIKE HE IS  
RUNNING. THEY ARE SIDE BY SIDE; HE CONTINUES TO  
WALK AS HE CREATES EVEN MORE DISTANCE BETWEEN  
HIM AND THE PERSON ON THE SIDEWALK.

RIGHTFOOTLEFTFOOTRIGHTFOOT(ALMOST  
STUMBLED)LEFTFOOT

HIS HEART IS RACING, BUT IT IS OVER.

RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT. HE  
MERGES BACK ONTO THE SIDEWALK AND LOOKS UP. AS  
THE DISTANCE BETWEEN HIM AND THE SILHOUETTE  
BEHIND HIM BUILDS HE FEELS SAFE AGAIN.

RIGHT FOOT, LEFT FOOT, RIGHT FOOT and onward.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Wojnarowicz, David and others, *Weight of the Earth: The Tape Journals of David Wojnarowicz* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2018)

Wojnarowicz, David, *Memories That Smell Like Gasoline* (New York: Artspace Books, 1992)

Baldwin, James, *James Baldwin: The Last Interview and other Conversations* (New York: Melville House, 2014)

Solanas, Valerie, *SCUM Manifesto* (self-published 1967)

Rodger, Elliot, *My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger* (self-published, 2014)

Rainer, Yvonne, *No Manifesto*, text work, 1965

Rosefeldt, Julian, *Manifesto*, film, 90 minutes, 2015

Knowles, Solange, *When I Get Home*, short film 33 minutes, Apple Music, 1 March 2019

Håstad, Jonatan / Yung lean, *Warlord*, album, 66 minutes, Apple Music, 25 February 2016

Hynes, Dev / Blood Orange, *Negro Swan*, album, 50 minutes, Apple Music, 24 August 2018

Sumney, Moses, græ, album, 66 minutes, Apple music, 15 May 2020