



Documented Artistic Research Project
(Doctoral Thesis)

*This Untethered Buffoon or
the Trickster in Everything*

SQUIRM
the book

FRAGMENT
Nº 03

with-nessing W(w)hite-nesses



— Stacey Sacks

STOCKHOLM | STOCKHOLMS
UNIVERSITY | KONSTNÄRLIGA
OF THE ARTS | HÖGSKOLA

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Fragment No. 3, with-nessing W(w)hitenesses
Documented Artistic Research Project (Doctoral Thesis)
Stacey Sacks
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Cover Images
Front - still from a film experiment at Valhallavägen.
Back - a *fleshy sculpture*

'White people are scared of two things: being accused of racism, and black people.'

CHESTER MISSING

(South African ventriloquist and comedian Conrad
Koch's puppet updates his Facebook status, 2019)

white isn't the
bland thing
it's made out to
be micro-
divisions of
aggressive
homogeneities
splintering
invisible strands
of random
unspoken laws
of privilege the
white who will not
see the white who sees
but doesn't care
the self-aware white
who cares but has no
shame the utterly self-conscious
shame-burdened white perpetually
on fire
helpless in the face
of pluri-versal neo-capitalist
patriarchal power trying to frame itself as the do-gooder
watching noble intentions dissolve as
anthropologies of the ridiculous¹

¹ Poem by Stacey Sacks taken from the Research Catalogue exposition *luxurious migrant* // *performing whiteness* (VIS Journal Issue 0) <https://www.visjournal.nu/luxurious-migrant-performing-whiteness/>



Still image from stop-motion animation *exit man haunted by flies*.

South African actor, writer and performance poet Lebogang Mashile (2019) posts a picture on her Facebook wall: ‘White privilege **doesn’t** mean your life hasn’t been hard; it means that your skin colour isn’t one of things making it **harder**.’ She also writes, ‘I am more interested in white people doing the work of deconstructing white supremacy within themselves than I am interested in white people examining black identity.’ Pity it has to yet again be a person of colour schooling idiotic whiteys, but Mashile helps me keep the experimentations on track when I’m feeling utterly lost in not the fertile way.

This is where literary theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s notion of ‘critical intimacy’ comes in. It’s an intra-cultural exploration, what I’ve come to call a *narrowcasting* – doing the work of dismantling W(w)hiteness from inside the cultural canon. I use ‘W(w)’ at the beginning of W(w)hiteness to denote both systemic and structural Whiteness as well as the embodied, lived experience from within a so-called ‘white’ body. *Narrowcasting* is a zoning in as opposed to a broadcasting out, and is a methodology employed throughout the project, from ‘drive/fly-by drawings’ to daily filmic practices to the clowter Stanley Goldwater aka Stanley G. performing the role of the ‘Turd or Third Opponent’ to the project’s theoretical frameworks and ‘ars-istic’ outputs.

Stanley G.

The university uses pubic money ... PUBLIC money for this ars research! You pay taxes to have your privileges constantly slapped in your face, to have your historical and material inheritances made more visible, made to withthththththth-ness your own entitled Whiteness, to face those oppressor demons embedded in your race! MAZALTOV! Let’s drink!

Historian of science and senior curator at The Norwegian Museum of Science of Technology, Angeliki Lefkaditou, says in her Ted talk ‘Confronting race in 21st century Norway’:²

There are no silver bullets to kill race. The persistence of the concept of race has nothing to do with how it decries human biological variation. Race is a tool of suppression coming out of colonial encounters and an instrument for social stratification. We need to be explicit and open about our assumptions and acknowledge the complex discussion of human biological variation.

Lately, academics have widely turned their critical attention to the subject of racial whiteness, and to the instantiation of race as a means of structuring social relations in productive ways for the colonial and capitalist projects. Countless publications include historical accounts detailing the emergence of whiteness as a racial category, and endless cultural studies examine multiple narratives of white people. Critical whiteness is increasingly central to understanding the operation of ‘race’ as a form of social categorisation.

There are so many brilliant writers who have written succinctly and sharply on these notions of whiteness; I could point you to Sara Ahmed’s *A Phenomenology of Whiteness*, *WHITE RAGE: The unspoken truth of our racial divide* by Carol Anderson, Robin DiAngelo’s *White Fragility*, Richard Dyer’s *White*, Matthew Frye Jacobson’s *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Ylva Habel’s *LITTLE PINK: White fragility and black social death*, Nell Irvin Painter’s *The History of White People*, Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, David Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness*, and countless more.

I need to find what this project offers the dismantling or dismembering of W(w)hiteness that other texts and performances don’t already do.

At first, particularly important are the questions: what is an act of resistance and, who is resisting?

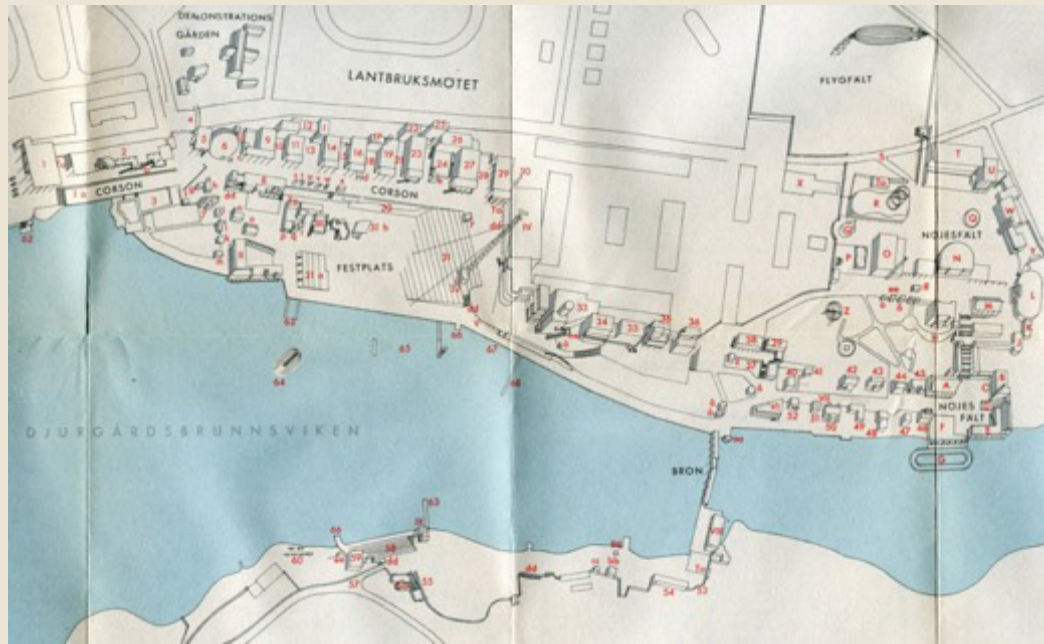
Contemplating what a non-violent and playful political protest could be on the street, on the stage, in a film or on the page, at the start of this research I encounter the absurd anti-war actions of the Kashmiri Cabbage Walker (Abrol 2016) – a re-enactment of the original protest performed by Chinese artist Han Bing, who drags around this quintessential symbol of comfort and sustenance for poor Chinese, offering a visual interrogation of ‘normalcy’. Han Bing desires to evoke freedom: ‘There’s a knot in everyone’s head, and I want to untie that knot’ (Noël 2016). The anonymous cabbage walkers in Kashmir are also poking the taken-for-granted, claiming this absurd act is as normal as the standardising of the militarised oppression Kashmiri citizens have endured for decades.

It’s January 2020 at the time of writing and amid a total communications shut-down, the situation in Kashmir is worsening. Eerily, I find nothing online about the cabbage walkers.

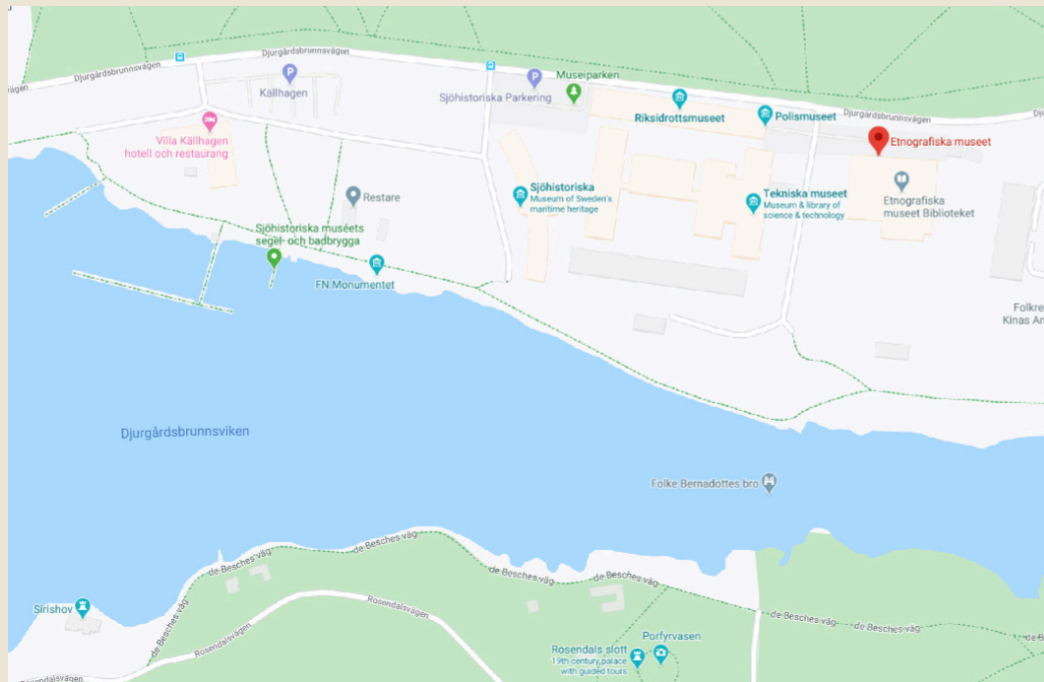


Cabbage walking in Kashmir. Photo courtesy of Kashmiri Cabbage walker

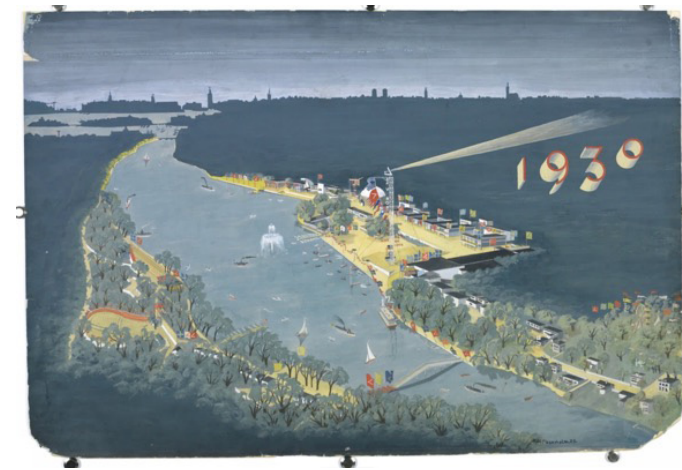
² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M68SGuMLdZI> (accessed 3 November 2018).



Map showing the site of the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition.



Google map showing position of *Etnografiska*, 2020.



Birds eye perspective of exhibition site. Gunnar Asplund, architect; renderer unknown.

What is a political encounter?

Perhaps a better question to begin with in this context is *where* is a political encounter?

My studio is located close to Strandvägen, one of the most prestigious addresses in town, built at the end of the 19th century to impress white Europe for the Stockholm World's Fair of 1897.

The fair was also known as the Great Art and Industrial Exhibition. Strandvägen and our University are close to the site of the grand Stockholm Exhibition of 1930, a world exposition showing off Swedish industrialism, architecture and promoting Sweden's special brand of social engineering, the forebearer of contemporary modern Swedish democracy. At the Stockholm 1930 Exhibition, according to Whidden (2016), Sweden's architectural avant-garde promoted 'a comprehensively rethought "lifestyle" including better nutrition, recreation and housing, and new thinking about the organisation of society'. This Exhibition is widely thought to have brought Modernism to the city.³ This site is positioned almost exactly in the same position where Stockholm's Museum of Ethnography, *Etnografiska Museet*, now stands. This Museum is where the final PhD public performance essay entitled **SQUIRM (live at the Museum 2020)** is presented on 18 March 2020.

³ <https://theswedishrugblog.wordpress.com/2016/09/13/the-stockholm-exhibition-of-1930/> (accessed 14 July 2017).

I wonder, how are any of the embodied experimental probings I'm engaging with in this context political? At my 50% PhD seminar *luxurious migrant// performing whiteness* in the TV-studio at the Film and Media Department on Valhallavägen, writer, poet and professor of Fine Arts Mara Lee Gerdén (2017) speaks of how an important feature of colonial temporality is its spatialising of time demonstrated by major colonial events of the 19th century such as the worlds fairs or exhibitions taking place in urban metropolises like London, Paris and Stockholm. With these exhibitions, history could be consumed as spectacle; world history from the margins of the globe could be consumed at a glance, transformed into a picture, an image. Cultural artefacts, human beings, ancient knowledge were stripped somehow of their history, there to be devoured by the gaze of white spectators. Gerdén continues: 'This erasure is one of the founding stones of how whiteness can conceive of otherness so easily as dehumanised, depleted of humanity, with all its consequences that reverberate in our time.'

I'm interested in this historical interplay between social, scientific and artistic forms. One of the first modern public exhibitions of humans was the exploitation in 1835 by showman, politician and dodgy businessman P.T. Barnum, of Joice Heth, an elderly African-American slave who in the last year of her life was exhibited with the false claim that she was George Washington's 161-year-old nursing maid. Barnum was the founder of the Barnum and Bailey Circus, in 1871.

There are points of connection between histories of scientific racism and exhibition practices focussing on the spectacle, such as world fairs and the circus. Minstrelsy emerged also around this same time, in the 1830s. The history of the American circus came into being through racist acts of appropriation and the fetishism of black bodies and those 'others' termed 'freaks'. Barnum's act was not an innovative thought, however. He'd likely heard of Sara Baartman who was exhibited as a freak show attraction in 19th century Europe. The clashes and synchronicities of these histories, I believe, helps me reflect in my performance essays on the way in which geo-politics are presently unfolding, with rising fascism revealing the deep entanglement of colonialism with racial capitalism.



Stanley G. performs at Researcher's Night in the FOLK museum, Oslo, 2018. Photo: Håkon Bergseth/ The Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology

On 28 September 2018 at 'Researcher's Night', an event at the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology in Oslo, geneticist Dr. Adam Rutherford explains that although genetics have demonstrated beyond doubt the scientific invalidity of the concept of race, legitimately removing science as a weapon of racists, he confirms there has been a radical upsurge in the quantity of people desiring knowledge of their DNA, particularly white supremacists who, in his experience, are flocking to genetic ancestry tests attempting to justify their racial purity and superiority. 'White supremacists are obsessed with DNA', he writes in an online article in the Guardian (2020).

Categories of Whiteness must always be approached with specificity. When I excavate Whiteness must I centre oppression? Sometimes the *shmerzpunkt*⁴ is best approached from the skew or upside down. Best to discover other angles, other methods of approach.

⁴ From German, literally 'pain point'.

If we constitute, after Hannah Arendt, a political act as being the place that is constituted between people through words and deeds (1973, p.xxi), the in-between space between performer and audience emerges as a fruitful space for political encounter. But then, is every performance political? Does politics always involve ideology? And are political acts only between people? ‘Can the clown be ideological?’ I ask renowned Swiss clown Gardi Hutter in casual conversation once in Lucerne (2013). She replies, ‘I think the clown rejects any ideology’, but then does that mean clowns can’t do political satire? Does this reside solely in the fields of the Trickster and buffoon, or the *TRICKOONS*, whose mandate it is to speak truth to power?

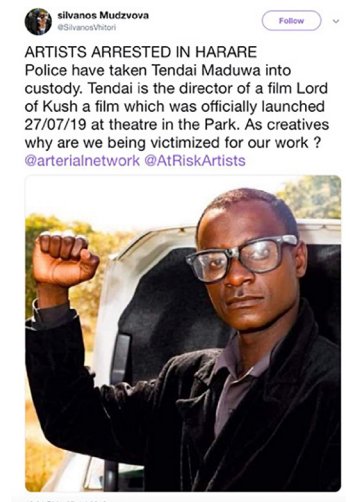
In 2016 in Zimbabwe, theatre producer and actor Silvanos Mudzvova was arrested outside Parliament in Harare for staging a one-man play, *Missing Diamonds, I Need My Share*, a pop-up performance motivated by revelations made by then-President Robert Mugabe that the country had lost US\$15 billion raised from diamond revenue. After his arrest, Mudzvova lamented the use of ‘colonial pieces’ of legislation such as the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act, saying it stifles artistic creativity (Antonio 2016). This archaic censorship law was enacted in 1967 to oppress black artists by the white regime led by Ian Smith, who enforced it to deal with artists protesting after a poetry performance by the late vice-president Simon Muzenda.

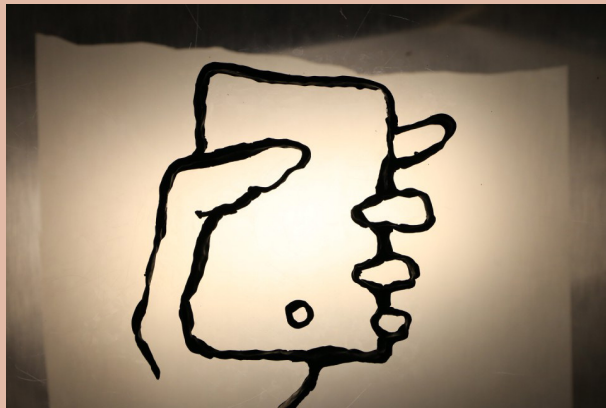


Police officers take Silvanos Mudzvova to a guard room in the Parliament buildings in Harare.

Two police officers dragged Mudzvova off mid-performance and he spent five hours without charge at Harare Central Police Station. The actor claimed that in a free and democratic country, government was supposed to protect artists, not intimidate them, though he’s absolutely aware that freedom of expression in Zimbabwe is notoriously censored. In an online pro-Zanu PF publication *The Patriot*, an article entitled *Foreign interference through art* (Guvamatanga 2017) frames Mudzvova as a regime-change art activist, a puppet of Western powers. When an oppressive government perceives this act of theatrical civil disobedience as potentially harmful to its power as a totalitarian state, my belief in the power of performance to create justifiable effects is strengthened. It’s not difficult to locate performance of this sort in the realm of activism.

Mudzvova has been described as a master of what he calls ‘hit-and-run theatre’, publicly performing his plays unannounced and then leaving before police arrest him. For him, provocation through art is a necessity, a matter of life and death, and he continues to create despite his theatrical challenges to oppression leading to torture and political exile. He and his family live in exile in Manchester from where I had the luck to converse with him via Skype in August 2019. We spoke about the ongoing persecution of artists in Zimbabwe. As long as the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act exists, there seems little hope of it subsiding. Luckily Mudzvova maintains a good spirit and is committed to resisting oppressive tactics and human rights violations through his online presence as well as through his theatrical manifestations. He uses social media as a call-out mechanism, as a means of continuing the dissent, spreading information, as well as a tool for agitation and education.





Notebook. August 2019, Sunday in Årsta.

White man in the konditori tells a man of colour at the next table to keep his voice down while he's speaking on his phone. The man nods and immediately quietens his voice. For the rest of the conversation, he doesn't say a word. After a few minutes he leaves the café, but not before bowing obsequiously to the white patrons who silenced him. After he leaves, I stare at them and shake my head in disapproval at their behaviour. They smirk back at me, a look of, 'I know. They're everywhere?' They completely misunderstand my affiliations. I feel dirty and complicit. I look down and continue writing in this notebook.

Everyone suffers from the colonial wound, the whole of humxnity and Nature are still in recovery while simultaneously dealing with the latest onslaught of the climate crisis, heteropatriarchy, neo-colonial surveillance capitalism, gentrification, and all the rest. Giving a Keynote address at the Guggenheim Museum, Suely Rolnick, a Brazilian psychoanalyst, art and cultural critic and curator speaks of the '*colonial unconscious*' which 'is still here and is still everywhere. And it goes on structuring our subjectivities, our desires, and the production of our thinking (2014).'

There's a lot of talk about decolonisation these days, it seems to have become a widely and rather indiscriminately used term across academia, along with other popularly trending words like hauntology, liminality, entanglement and so on. So many conferences, symposia, and seminars under the wide umbrella of its name, so many air-miles travelled to have rich conversations. I have urgently desired this project to be participating in the decolonial movement and find myself in a central paradox.

What drives decolonising methodology is not only, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) reminds us in 'Decolonizing Methodologies', about giving voice to the voiceless, but it is also about preventing the dying of indigenous peoples, cultures and ecosystems. My impulse from inside this culturally White canon is to contribute in an inverted way. That is, to be an earnestly hopeful agent of decomposition and decay, to trigger processes that aid the acceleration of the dissolution of White hegemony. Instead of being burdened by the baggage of white privilege, can I discover ways to transform it into a force for redress, solidarity and justice? Can I relieve people of colour from the burden of having to educate whites?

And can I be willing to witness my good intentions sometimes going terribly wrong?

This idea of decompos(t)ing emerges in the summer of 2019, as I watch carpenter ants swarming on the exposed roots of a slowly decaying tree, deep in the Årsta forests. Carpenter ants benefit from the situation of a dying tree but are not actually the cause of its demise, much like whites continue to benefit from Whiteness, generations after their settler-colonialist ancestors. I film the ants as part of my daily filmic practice, contemplating how these poles of the living and dying are dual faces, mask and counter-mask operating simultaneously.

Beyond binaries, I like to think of the possibilities of decolonial gestures or pushes as being multi-surfaced, offering polyphonic possibilities for engagement. Perhaps the way Brazilian artist Lygia Clarke uses the Moebius strip to demonstrate the ongoing-ness of multi-topological options.⁵ As Suely Rolnick (2014) shares.⁵

Imagine that the world, or every world, is a Moebius strip. The world, or every world, is a topological-relational surface made of bodies of all kinds - of course, not only human - in diverse and variable connections. And this feud, this topological-relational surface, this composition of bodies in different connections, in movement, constitutes a Moebius strip. And what I propose is that one side is forms, and the other side is forces. So, our world, the world, every world, is this topological-relational surface made of bodies of all kinds, that has two sides that are totally inseparable.

Masks have these multiple surfaces too and should not be constrained and reduced to the oppositional and inseparable options of mask and counter-mask; but I would need a well-financed postdoc to research fully that train of thought.

Since clowning has to start from what is given, as a playful attempt to excavate W(w)hiteness from within, making the invisible visible from this vantage point, the project begins with *hello Karlaplan*, photographic explorations of locality, somehow ending up with lots of images of dogs, odd pipes, drains, fountains and rubbish bins in the Östermalm and larger Stockholm regions. *hello Karlaplan* becomes a clownish urban ethnography of sorts, documenting manifestations of Stockholm Whiteness as the exotic other from the perspective of an invisible other, that is, me. It is an opportunity to turn my camera's gaze towards the invisible, the overlooked and the unseen. Though taking a completely different approach, perhaps the photographs reside in a similar cultural and visual anthropological world such as anthropologist filmmaker Jean Rouch's 'Chronique d'un été' or 'Chronicles of a Summer' (1961).

While questioning how or if an image can speak alongside a whole history or culture, always the issue of subjectivity surfaces. How subjectivity emerges is difficult to put one's finger on – it's slippery, there is no stable identity. But the particular situatedness of this body's unique topography, its distinct experience, stories and memory with its particular ancestral trajectories and resonances cannot be ignored. That could be another kind of erasure. Locality being key to this research, I'm deeply embedded in and curated by my personal encounters with the immediate environment, a self-endowed Benjaminian *flâneur*. Placing my explicit and tacit history, knowledge and experience in a discursive landscape of intersectional inquiry allows me to critique colonial thinking from a situated place, which in itself is a signature of my class, race and privilege.

In *Pericles and Verdi: The Philosophy of Francois Chatelet*, Gilles Deleuze (2005, pp.720-721) writes:

... all that exists is the singular, only singularity. 'Singularity' is not the individual but rather the case, the event, the potential, or better, the distribution of potentials in a given matter. ... An individual ... is himself just such a field of singularities which obtains a proper name only in and through the operations he performs on himself and his surroundings, in order to produce a durable configuration.

What operations am I performing on myself and my surroundings? I am trying to understand in finer detail the logic of escalating racism prevalent in the global North, while simultaneously coming to terms with my own biases and blind spots inherited from an ancestral trajectory of unintentional settler colonialism in the southern African context.

Besides the locality in which I find myself, I'm wondering how best to explore whiteness in countries with colonial legacies. For example, I belong to the immigrant consciousness that doesn't have a kind of country to claim, that is: I was born in Zimbabwe but am I of Zimbabwe? Here I'd like to think alongside University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) PhD candidate and Johannesburg-based activist Leigh-Ann Naidoo (2016), who claims: '[O]ur time is disjointed, out of sync, plagued by a generational fault line that scrambles historicity.' I would add a continental fault line to this idea, the line across which the research consistently pulsates, back and forth, ping-ponging between diverse historical, social and cultural scenes of production.

⁵ https://post.at.moma.org/content_items/1028-part-1-affective-geometry-immanent-acts-lygia-clark-and-performance (accessed 24 January 2018).

TACTICAL POO

shit-flinging, satire and parody as strategies for resistance

When Chumani Maxwele threw humxn poo at the statue of imperialist Cecil John Rhodes on the University of Cape Town campus in March 2015, I'm not sure if he was aware that the gesture could be read as a re-enactment of ancient practices of Native American clowning. William Willeford (1969, p.82) in *The Fool and his Sceptre*, writes:

In the Pueblos, 'contrary behaviour' was an important element of ceremonial clowning and was often sexual and scatological in character, as in sexual jokes, exhibitionism, transvestitism, and mock sexual intercourse and in eating, drinking (and throwing) excrement and urine.

I incorporate Maxwele's revolutionary act here to situate my own investigation temporally in the broader context of decolonisation processes occurring in southern Africa. Maxwele's shit-flinging is often cited as the initial activation of one of the seminal moments of the decolonisation movement in South Africa so far: the Rhodes Must Fall movement, or #RMF. Kealeboga Ramaru's (2017, pp.90-92) article sheds light on the exclusion of those who have been historically erased from movement-building and liberation movements:

The story of the Rhodes Must Fall (#RMF) movement is widely contested. Many people believe that #RMF began when a student threw faeces at the Rhodes statue as a form of protest against what the statue represented and how it contributed to the exclusion of Black students. ... Many others argue that #RMF is the result of the prior intellectual work of several other students, years before. ... It is important to note that Black feminists, Black queer people, and Black womxn did not ask to be in the movement. We *started* the movement.

#RMF resulted in the removal of White supremacist and genocidal colonialist Cecil John Rhodes' statue from UCT's Upper Campus. Subsequently, #RMF segued into the Fees Must Fall (#FMF) movement, which, broadly and insufficiently explained, has been an attempt by students in South African universities to decolonise educational institutions that have historically excluded the country's disadvantaged poor.



Chumani Maxwele hurls excrement at the Cecil John Rhodes statue at UCT. Photo: David Ritchie.

In 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom', Walter Dignolo refers to the specific context of the colonial matrix of power – the imperial colonial structure as being a complex state managing and controlling, organising and interlinking the economy, authority, gender, sexuality, rationalisation of ethnicity (which is racism), knowledge and subjectivity. For him, de-linking is to delink from that colonial matrix of power, but how do we delink from one ethnicity's power that has controlled most of life since the 1500s? The matrix doesn't only create and control knowledge but delegitimises all other kinds of knowledge. Dignolo (2009) claims decoloniality must exist across all disciplines, and that de-linking is a conscientious, political and epistemic process, which entails delinking from these colonial categories of knowledge. So the decolonial option 'means to engage in *epistemic disobedience*' (2009, p.15).

Does mocking colonial logic actually undermine the knowledge it continues to propagate? What does it mean to mock colonial thinking in Sweden, where the projection of colonial innocence generates a sense of Swedish exceptionalism? In a chapter entitled 'Challenging Swedish Exceptionalism? Teaching While Black', anti-racist writer and professor in Film and Media, Ylva Habel (2012, p.112), describes teaching white students in Sweden:

One of the most difficult aspects of approaching White students' resistance is the sense of contentment enabling them to distance themselves from engaging in, for example, critically discussing racial stereotypes. Similarly, some students in the class are prone to dismiss straightforward stereotypical representations as 'old' ('Come on! We're beyond that!'). It should be added that when they start the course, most of them, especially the youngest, are already acquainted with the basics in feminism, antiracism, and queer theory, but realizing that critical thinking does not exempt most of them from the privilege of being White in the world is far more difficult for them. ... If, during lectures or seminars, I screen clips from actuality footage from colonial territories, world exhibitions, or racist images from imperial advertising – such as Pears Soap – more than just a few students will always respond with unconcealed laughter. The cruder the images, the greater the mirth.

FACTICAL POO

other techniques for decolonization

"The Politics of Poo + other decolonising tales"

Once pooped twice shy once bitten twice poo

The Poo crucible

Indiana Jones + the Temple of Poo

The Poo Monologues

The good phase is stuck
You may say im stuck in the good but your horse but your horse

A poo reenactment without the poo.

In my project, what am I to do with this particular brand of Swedish mirth? This smug laughter that emerges out of exceptionalism is not the kind of laughter I want to generate. Reflecting on this *White laughter*, Habel refers to Lena Sawyer (Kamali & Sawyer, 2006, p.67) who argues:

by laughing and making eye contact with other people in the audience, Whiteness is at the same time made visible, negotiated, and I would also say, being re-established ... this White laughter, in its effort to distance oneself from racism, sidesteps the ways in which these racial stereotypes and sexualised meanings are actually painful for many people today ...

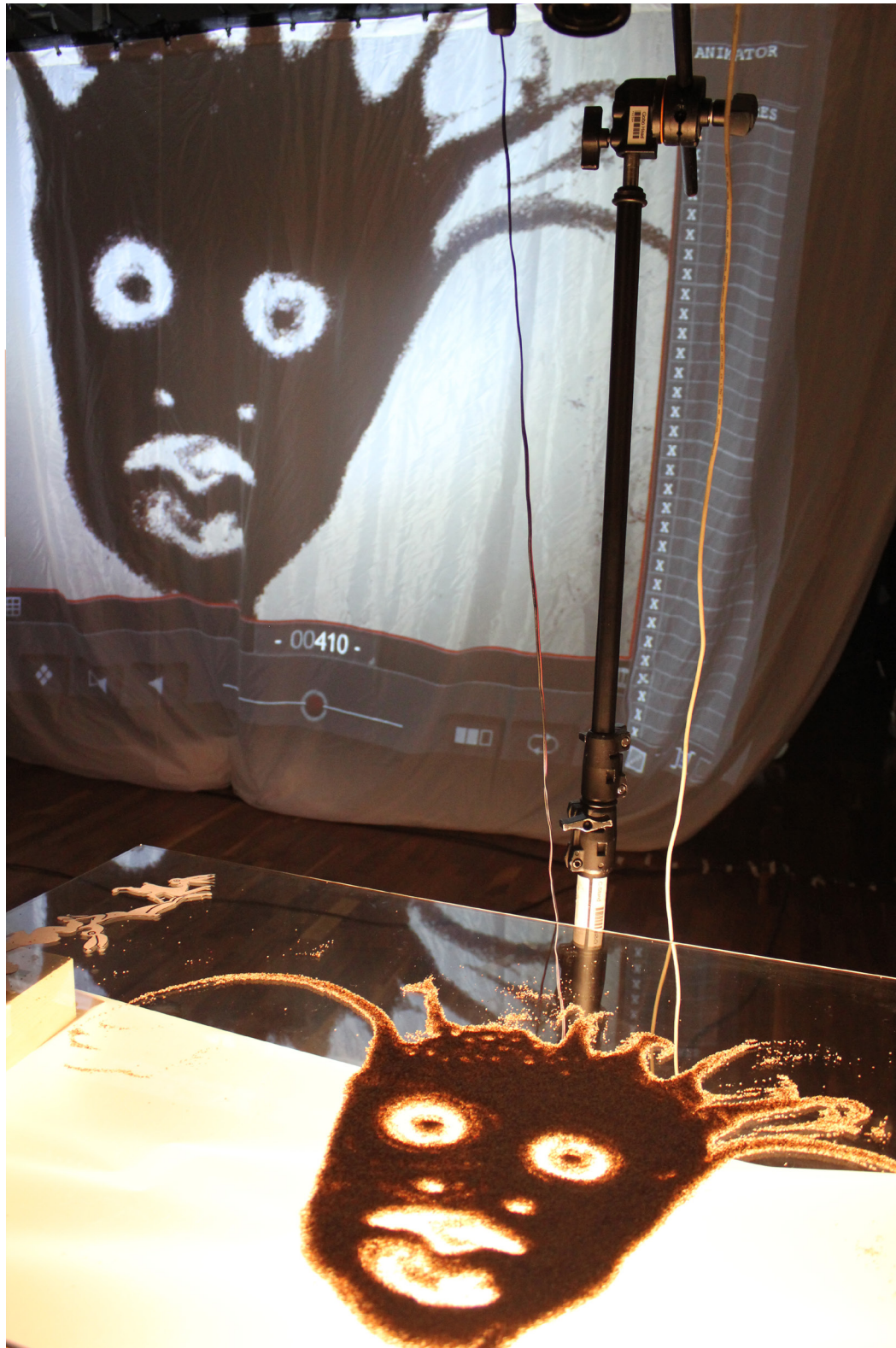
The comedy I'm keen to spur through mocking exists in a totally different register to this scene of cultural production. I don't want to de-dramatise racist images by laughing at them, but rather to stir a sense of uncomfortable complicity and implication as through the encounter, audiences confront their own problematic histories and subconscious racism.

My clowny Granny is a racial stereotype articulating a position of whiteness, a very familiar trope in a southern African context, yet in Sweden the comedy she stirs is initially due to her fragility. When she reveals her deeply racist side, I don't want audiences to laugh based on their feeling, 'I'm not that kind of White.' Perhaps what I'd rather have them feel is, 'I recognise that, it's painful. People in my family say those things. I have to laugh.'

I'm wondering, what shit does my project potentially throw at the pristine walls of the Academy's and Whiteness' façade? How can I move this research out of the institution? And, what shit can I fling into the public realm given the recent upswing of white supremacy on Sweden's (and much of Europe's) streets and governmental bodies?



Granny. Live Drawing by Jenny Soep.



Making of *Melancholic G*wog* or *The Road is Long*, Room 31, Valhallavägen, 2016.

The questions continue to proliferate: what is an act of resistance and protest during these particular times? And in contemplating acts of resistance can I include movements towards solidarity? Solidarity with whom? Where? What does solidarity mean right now, given where I find myself? What if, in this context, just creating vulnerable spaces and breathing deeply together in a room is enough? Training fragility is perhaps key to decolonising modes of thinking; feeling connected, responsible. Being in a state of readiness to receive, listening as an active state. Is listening activism during these accelerating times, and, how multi-modal can listening be? Perhaps in this context we need to develop ways of *with-nessing*, ways of giving attention, ways of noticing each other and being alongside, yet without losing sight of the explicit aim of disturbing the comfortable in the appropriate contexts.

As an artistic researcher in the field of performance, particularly clowning, I draw from Donna Haraway's *Situated Knowledges* and 'partial perspective', knowing I have to argue for 'politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims' (1988, p.589). The view from this complex and paradoxical body is the condition from which any claims emerge. And, as Haraway says, 'location is about vulnerability; location resists the politics of closure' (1988, p.590).

At the outset, my research attempts to problematise the politics of representation, questioning what bodies this performer's body is entitled to inhabit, taking into account my relationship as a performer to my situatedness as a so-called white African now based in Stockholm. I begin interrogating issues of power and authority, exclusion and otherness, who is entitled to a voice, who is forced to take one, who is silenced or simply ignored. But the questions always emerge: how to ethically approach the ongoing victimisation of others without engaging a voyeuristic narrative? And, is that where my attention should be for the purposes of this investigation? What if I shift to gazing upon the inheritances and ongoingness of privilege following its gestation in centuries of colonial violence?

‘On stage you must not invent, but receive and discover ...’

*Arianne Mnouchkine teaches on the island of Fårö, Sweden
(August 2015)*

While researching privilege through performance in this supremely privileged University, in 2015 I have the great fortune to witness an acting workshop offered by French theatre doyenne Arianne Mnouchkine and a few core members of Théâtre du Soleil on the Swedish island of Fårö. Every day we spend at least five hours in a tent on the grounds of the Bergman Center, the cultural center focusing on the life and artistic achievements of legendary Swedish director and writer Ingmar Bergman. In the tent, a stage and auditorium are constructed to host the 60 performers who applied and were hand-picked to participate in the workshop. Each performer will receive anything from approximately zero to 15 minutes on stage each day under the astute eye of the theatre guru.

Mnouchkine is overwhelmingly sharp and wise. ‘You didn’t accept to have a moment when nothing came. Sometimes you have to stop and wait. Let things come to you.’ She’s also intimidating and fearless, once calling a room full of Swedes ‘psycho-rigid’ and starting off the workshop shouting out, ‘There is no place for intellectualism! If you look for this, leave!’ And, ‘Your art is not to avoid expression, it’s to ENTER the theatre, like in the middle of a battle!’ She calls players out on their numbness, ‘It was too monotonous, there was a change in the music but not in you. It was too abstract. Simplify. The possibilities are infinite when you listen and play together!’ Or, ‘I see a destructive narcissism in young actors, it limits you to what you think you are.’

The workshop utilises both Commedia Dell’Arte masks as well as Balinese masks and ornate Balinese costumes. Mnouchkine cautions, ‘Masks punish you if your bodies are not connected with the feelings. Stop thinking! When you think it’s because you’re not courageous enough to act.’ I’m in awe of the immediateness her teaching demands from the participants, the profound transformations she expects them to achieve. Of the Balinese masks, she claims they are ‘looser, less pedagogical’ than the Commedia masks. One day, during the daily question and answer session, I ask about cultural appropriation and whether it’s politically correct to be utilising Balinese masks and costumes in this context. She scoffs slightly and dismisses the issue as irrelevant, saying, ‘Theatre is much more difficult than politics. Art is spoiled by politics. Flesh, blood, complexity, ambiguity. The liberal left doesn’t like us really. It’s not politics that will save the world but beauty!’ I’d like to fully enjoy her response but feel this perspective doesn’t help address the disastrous geo-political state the world is currently in. I’m too intimidated to pursue the question, so keep *shtum*.⁶

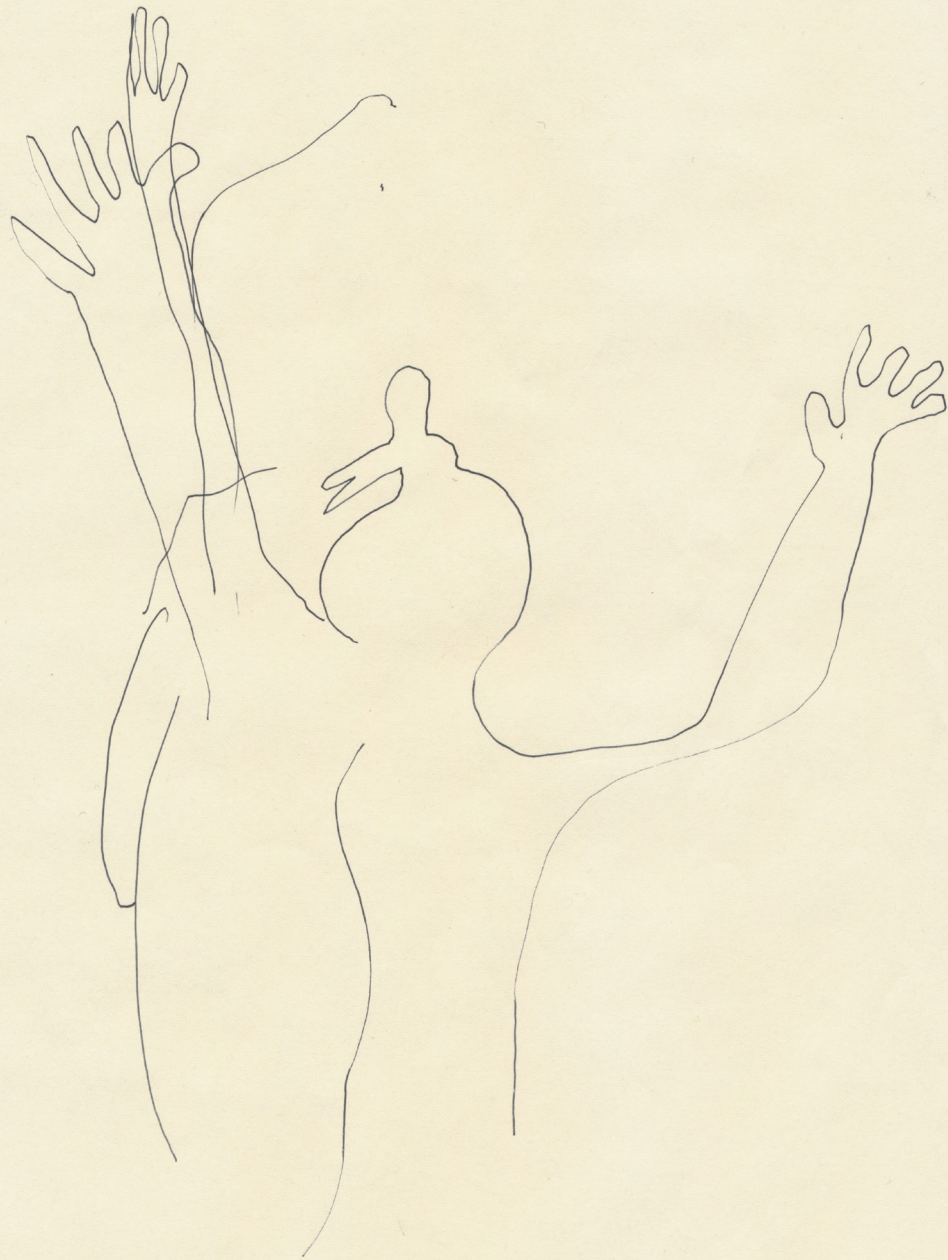
In early 2016 while researching shadow-puppetry in Bali, I attend religious ceremonies while observing and contemplating what a community receives from their witnessing of theatricalised rituals in the temple. Humorous enactments, specifically by the Bondres (half-mask/clown) performers, serve particular purposes besides merely entertainment. The humour revolves around subjects that are abject and taboo – rampant sexuality, violence, vulgarity and menace. People laugh hysterically, in the temple. Humour is an altar, the clown the priest. The encounter between performers, musicians and audience enacts the ritual itself, with satire and comedy performing a cohesive role for the community in that moment.



Masks at Newman’s Commedia Mask Company, Bali, 2016.

Shadow puppeteer Wayan Mardika performs in Sukawati, Bali, 2016.

⁶ *Shtum* - a Yiddish word meaning to be quiet, implying a shutting oneself up, suppressing the impulse to speak.



Notebook. Stockholm, February 2016

After Bali, Wednesday on the train the day continues way past its middle via Slussen. thinking hard about entrances and exits, rituals of birth and death, inhaled exhalations. controlling the unfolding aboard structural symbols of domination and acquiescence. writing on the train beats scrolling the brain-dead thumb dance. tongues move up and down in all languages; humanity should hang its head and let its eyes be eaten out by flies since the cycle began before the beginning begun before it started to stun. poetry on a train without a cause.

luxurious migrant. pig coloured winter sun sets time backwards to the future.

banana trees and palm fronds no longer peek into the sanctuary of my bedroom. arriving back in this grey brown pasty-skinned limp-faced place is a challenge after the green sunburst childhood-conjuring insect-filled deity-ridden explosion of Penestanan, Ubud. Nästa Karlaplan. Moving into grey the disaster will not be named but will spell its own end, post trust post truth. wet downturned faces cradling phones eyes closed accessing deep awareness of the shapes possible from the inside. to breathe life into character, inhabiting an other, requires warm flexibilities of body, mind, imagination, soul. a limber-ness not excluding brittle-bitter-ness. strong yet surrendering malleable gentle elastic core, directed yet capable of being interrupted, even distracted a short while. Mine the kind of thinking that rings tree true – the gap of the slap to reality's map. rhyming is so past the post. when destinations clear it's easy to navigate queer fragmentations. finger consumed by exzema eczsema excema (how the fuck do you spell it) is the ugliest sight and I mean that in the least self-loving way. a scaly monster slowly transforms this body into its parasitic twin from the fingers in.

I'm hoping my artistic research project can perform a disruption, undermining White authority and potentially dislodging Whiteness from positions of centrality and power. I'm also prepared to see it fail. Inspired by Genderqueer South African artist Dean Hutton who uses their art-work *Fuck White People* (2016) as

a catalyst to start everyday conversations around white supremacy, racism and privilege, and as a decolonial gesture with an aim to destabilising predominantly white spaces, to make whiteness visible, to reveal its centralised position and to perform visible allyship to anti-racism efforts to advance social justice.⁷

As Hutton says: Learn to fuck the white in you too. Fuckwhitepeople.org
#fuckwhitepeople

Hutton's artwork originates after Zama Mthunzi, a student at Wits in Johannesburg, wore a t-shirt to an Art Activation protest in the wake of #FeesMustFall with 'FUCK WHITE PEOPLE' smeared on the back in black paint. As a result of that shirt he was kicked out of Wits and reported to the South African Human Rights Commission for hate speech (Pather 2017). Next to their artwork at the Iziko National Gallery in Cape Town, Hutton writes:

None of the complainants [against Mthunzi] said anything about the front of the T-shirt, which read 'Being Black is Shit'. ... But I can do it – that is white privilege.

When questioned why he made the shirt, Mthunzi defends his action saying: 'The system has been violent to us, so in response we are using violent language' (Chernick 2016). And later, in an article appearing in a collective decolonial document compiled by the Publica[c]tion Collective (Mthunzi 2017, p.20), he claims

I meant what I said because at that time, there was no vocabulary for me to express how I feel about waking up black every morning. I had no political language to express the centuries of suffering and pain that we have experienced as black people at the hands of white people.



Dean Hutton displays their artwork at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town, 2016
Photo: Courtesy of the artist

⁷ <https://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/mail-guardian/20170127/283162903314655>
(accessed 7 September 2017).



Photos: Zimasa Mpenyane, Wits Vuvuzela.

Though this is exactly the point Hutton claims to be making with their work, Mthunzi (2017, p.20) does not perceive it as an act of solidarity, but rather as one of appropriation:

Recently a white liberal has done a gallery exhibition on 'Fuck white people' and goes around wearing a 'Fuck white people' jumpsuit. This also continues to show that white people and their existence is to disrespect, misappropriate and steal from black people.

So yeah, Fuck White People.

This story is far more complicated than I can do it justice here, but it's important to know that Hutton's work at Iziko was vandalised by members of The Cape Party, a political party mobilising for a separate Afrikaans-speaking country in the Western and Northern Cape provinces. Claiming the artwork was hate speech, they took Hutton to court and lost as the courts deliciously declared the words 'Fuck White People' to not be hate speech. At an interview with Hutton in Johannesburg (30 January 2020) the first thing that happens is their dog Comet sticks her tongue in my mouth. Hutton exclaims, 'That is so rude! She operates without consent, it's horrible. Consent is so important in my whole life but this dog ... it would be fine if she just asked!' Asking about their relationship with Zama Mthunzi Hutton reveals

Publically Mthunzi was angry and vocal about it, but not when we met, he's a very professional revolutionary and politician ... it didn't matter so much to him what I was doing, as long as I was being responsible in it. He wanted to know if I believed in what I was doing. He wanted to know what I thought about white allyship. I feel very actively that white allyship is not enough, we have to get involved which is why I put on the suit. We have to put our bodies right there in the front, not accidentally.

Hutton admits there was no way of monetizing the *Fuck White People* project ethically, which has led to massive debt. They also suffered many losses as a result of the artwork, saying, 'It cost me my photojournalism clients, my media practice, relationships with people and lovers. It affected my health, my mobility is affected by it because at a certain stage I stopped going out because I could not handle being recognised by weird people in Cape Town and having them insert themselves into my space and then cause the most terrible dramatic shit.'

We talk about the generic everyday racism we grew up with and the anxiety white people seem to have around being *seen* as white, what it means to racialise whiteness, and the white shame that this kind of research stirs.

Are all my performances and creations an indicator of my class and racial privilege? How can I as an actor inhabit the body of an 'other' without it being a colonisation or appropriation or imperial action? What is appropriate appropriation? How do I learn to let the body of the other inhabit me? What is a character and what agency do they have? Is it possible to get out of my own way without that very action being a signature of my class and race and privilege?

Questioning the role of art and the comic artist I'm wondering, who has the right to parody what? How does it happen that one can aim to subvert but end up reinforcing? As Ryuko Kubota (2014, p.8) writes:

Relying on Western intellectual canons such as poststructuralism as well as such notions as hybridity, syncretism, and multiplicity, postcolonial theory champions Eurocentric rational thought, though appropriated and resisted in ambivalent ways, endorsing rather than reversing the colonial relations of power.

The distinctive, privileged status I possess as an academic, and the politics of the multi/plural turn, are implicated in multiculturalism in the neoliberal era. This ouroboros is even more difficult to escape than I had initially thought. So I have to stay with it, dig deeper.

Another useful Swedish word for the vivisection.

Stannar. Stay.

Should I believe Iggy Lond Malmborg and Johannes Maria Schmit in their article ‘YWA (WWTCW) – addressing Young White Artists Working With the Color White’ – when they say, ‘Your Whiteness is untreatable. Consider yourself a disease and your artistic practice the quest for a vaccine (2019, p.89).’ Should I heed their advice to ‘[n]ever present your stuff in academia. It can’t deal with its ambivalence’ (2019, p.91), and should I be depressed to only encounter their advice in my final year of this exploration? Lond Malmborg and Schmit claim their performance series ‘White on White’ is ‘sealed’, and I wonder, why at this point seal an excavation about W(w)hiteness? Does this not reinforce its impenetrability? Are their white bodies so contaminated by this untreatable disease that they need to be sealed in cement just as contaminated bodies were disposed of after Chernobyl?

Perhaps this project tries to let more air into the discussion, desiring to enter a state rather of discursivity. Instead of sealing off the space, or escaping from it, how about airing it out, maybe burn some sage and then, rather than evaporate as the authors of the article suggest, ENTER THE CONVERSATION and find ways through it all TOGETHER, ALONE. I know the capitals are really pompous and point towards the totalitarian but

**ADMITTING YOUR
OWN RACISM IS
THE TURD YOU
CAN'T FLUSH DOWN**

While researching histories of blackface and minstrelsy early in my project, I’m encouraged by my colleague and fellow researcher in the animation department to make a ‘no-no’ film, the film I’m not allowed to make. I accept this challenge while reflecting upon why it is somehow easier, or more palatable in some way, to animate images of blackface as opposed to performing or seeing them live. In the animation entitled *Melancholic G*wog or The Road is Long*, I couldn’t stay too long with those images that emerged. Drawing from deep childhood memories of dolls commonly strewn on southern African children’s beds in the mid-1980s, I’m transforming memory into a temporary image, something to be with a while, to stay and play with, on the animation table. I choose sand as a material to work with, and this sand happens to be from a beach in Tel Aviv.

Thankfully, sand as a material moves like everything. Through incremental articulations on the light box it necessitates constant transition and gradually the animation becomes a sad self-portrait of sorts, a melancholic clown pecked apart by a raven, transforming into fire.

With hindsight I notice an abundance of fire in my animations; it emerges without any conscious doing on my behalf. Perhaps setting things on fire is the easy way out and, since everything is burning – a metaphor bandied about regularly these days – as an exit strategy it works with the times. Besides climate change, fire has resonances in multiple gendered and ethnic histories of oppression, torture and genocide. The burning of witches at the stake, the crematoria of the Nazi regime, the burning in South Africa’s streets of ‘foreign nationals’, the ‘necklacing’ prevalent during apartheid. Fire is also a signifier of purification, of creation, destruction and transformation.



Animation squence, *Melancholic G*wog or The Road is Long*.

This animation resides in the space with several productive failures that have emerged at various points of this research process. By presenting black anger, injury and trauma with the aim of making some anti-racist point, I have unwittingly ended up perpetuating imagery of people of colour as angry, emotional, violent, victims or bodies to be fearful of. I'm questioning how to express anti-totalitarian and anti-colonial outrage without delegitimising the unique violence experienced by people of colour. How can I as an artist who happens to be a white African express my outrage with the way 'foreign nationals' are murdered in South Africa, with the ongoing waves of xenophobia that sweep the country, the violence from which I am exempt thanks to the colour of my skin?

During a spate of xenophobic violence in South Africa (in September 2019), Julius Malema, leader of the Economic Freedom Front, reinvigorates the often-asked question: why are white foreigners in South Africa seen as 'investors' while black people deemed 'foreign nationals' are perceived as violent criminals, drug dealers, competitors for jobs and ultimately a drain on the system? How can I approach the suffering that enrages me without instrumentalising already brutalised and oppressed bodies, without appropriating black trauma and engaging a voyeuristic narrative? Yet isn't remaining silent about atrocity also tantamount to being complicit?

While animating *Melancholic G*zog* or *The Road is Long* I was simultaneously editing documentary material from an experience in Paris where I'd attempted to see South African theatre-maker Brett Bailey's *Exhibit B*, a human installation performance consisting of a series of 'tableaux vivantes' depicting horrific images of colonial domination and abuse via performers of colour who sit or stand utterly still, given the sole direction to objectify the spectators with their gaze.⁹ Instead of seeing the show, however, I find myself in the midst of a protest outside the theatre, which I document:



REPRODUIRE ≠ CRITIQUER



J'SUIS PAS UN OBJET



LE BALCON

Earlier that day, 27 November 2014, I'd had the luck to interview Berthe Tanwo Njole, the Company Stage Manager, who says:

The ones who have the power in this installation are the performers, and the audience become actors. That is what *Exhibit B* is all about. We as performers ... because I was a performer too, three times, and now I am the Company Stage Manager. And I can tell you, I felt empowered while I was performing. I never had the feeling that what I was doing was bad, was degrading or all that stuff I can hear about this controversy. I am a grown up, educated, Black and proud woman. I decide for myself and I have the choice. As a human being I have the choice. As an artist I have a duty. As an artist I am here so that the people who have suffered, who have been injured by racism, indifference, intolerance, rejection and stuff like that ... I as an artist can help them regain the dignity that has been withdrawn from them. I can speak for the speechless.

⁹ <http://thirdworldbunfigh.co.za/exhibit-b/> (accessed 3 October 2019).



POLICE NATIONALE



DÉCOLONISONS LES IMAGINAIRES

Stills from documentation of a protest outside Theatre Gerard Philipe in St.Denis, Paris, 27 November 2014.
Photos: Stacey Sacks

That same morning I speak to director Brett Bailey who shares:

I'm just a scapegoat for much bigger problems. It's the huge problems of frustration, anger, humiliation, etc. that is suppressed here in Europe in this fake utopia of the multicultural society that they like to believe they have. Of not admitting to the colonial horrors that were committed, they sort of packaged it as benevolent enterprise of colonialism. That's not the fact at all, and now people are living with such anger, so when a work like *Exhibit B* comes here it's like a razor blade, it cuts into a very bursting skin and the pus sprays, and it sprays at me because I bring the lance along. ... It's also ... I think there's a difference between activism and art, unfortunately. It is, and people imagine that I'm an activist. Actually, I'm an artist. I'm an artist that deals with themes that I feel are very important. But activism is ideological so it works very much in black and white, and unfortunately what's happened with the controversy around *Exhibit B* is it becomes a media sensation and they also like soundbytes in black and white. So rather than saying 'I'm exploring racism,' I've got to take a stand, 'This is anti! This is anti!' Actually, it's an exploration. But the media's not interested in any shades of grey, they want black and white, because that makes a good story. It's Old Testament shit.

Through the processes of coming to terms with and facing my inherited prejudice there have been times I've failed dismally when it comes to appropriating black trauma to make some anti-racist point, instead perpetuating imagery of people of colour as either victimised or angry and violent bodies. I include the experience with *Exhibit B* here to reveal how representing the thing you're trying to expose can end up reinforcing those values you're attempting to critique. This 'backfiring' ironically ends up offending the very people you aim to show solidarity towards. Through mimicry, the work becomes a re-inscription of the violence and humiliation imposed by colonialism, a perpetuation of the horror and brutality. By depicting the terrible atrocities of colonialism, *Exhibit B* critics claim Bailey does not succeed in exposing the horrific realities of the so-called 'civilisation' of Africa by Europe, but rather, reinforces them (Odunlami & Andrews 2014). One of his critics, South African author and essayist T.O. Molefe (2014), suggests:

If there is a lesson for white artists and the institutions that host their work from these recent imbroglios, it is that the intention behind a work is secondary to its impact. And that means they're responsible for engaging with those who object on the grounds that a piece of work is racist, or bigoted in some other way.

Bailey clearly does not support the dehumanising of people of colour, yet *Exhibit B* reveals the severe limitations of mimicry or reproduction/representation/re-enactment, particularly when images are taken out of their theatrical contexts. Most of the protestors have not seen the show and are reacting to still publicity images, disconnected from the visceral experience the confrontation generates in the live moment. This is not to say the problematics of the politics of representation don't remain. Multiple accounts exist of (mainly white) people walking out the show with tears streaming down their faces. In being forced to face the violence from which they come, to be confronted by horrors of the past in its uncompromising, shocking and accusatory way, perhaps the installation is made only for white people to face the demons of their historical past? But then why present the show in St. Denis, a suburb of Paris comprised predominantly of Middle Eastern and African communities?

The theatres' and Bailey's approach to calls for censorship I would describe as 'the being rightness of Whiteness'. When I meet him in Paris ahead of the opening of *Exhibit B* at Theatre Gerard Philippe de Saint-Denis in November 2014, I learn that Bailey is firmly attached to his honest and good intentions; that this work decries the brutal policing of Fortress Europe, yet as a result of the protest he is overwhelmed by the irony of how it now has to rely on the machinery and apparatus of its police and security forces to protect his cast and audiences. He resists the opinions of some 23 000 people of colour in London calling for the censorship of his work at the Barbican Theatre (Bailey 2014). Deeming the show offensive and grossly humiliating, protesters sign a petition on change.org spearheaded by activist and self-professed 'Black African mother from Birmingham', Sara Myers.¹⁰ As an artist, Bailey says, he can never celebrate nor condone censorship (2014). The petition works and the show is pulled.

This remains an ongoing question, whether the censorship of a potentially offensive piece of art can be considered a victory? What happens when art is considered offensive? Isn't offence one of art's prerogatives and imperatives? Is offence only acceptable when it 'punches up'? And, what harm does offence actually cause?

There are, of course, certain lines no one should ever cross, one being blackface performance, and by this, I mean actual 'blacking up' to perpetuate racist innuendo. You'd think by now blackface would be a thing of the past but there have been so many scandals concerning blackface and casual racism between 2014 and 2020 over the course of this PhD, from the global clothing retailer H&M apologising for an advertising image featuring a black boy modelling a hoodie with the slogan *Cooldest Monkey in the Jungle*, to Gucci's blackface sweaters, to ongoing debates every year over Holland's tradition of *Zwarte Piet*, to Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in September 2019 apologising for having inappropriately dressed himself up in blackface several times in his youth. The revelations of Trudeau's blackface past are politically timed to coincide with elections and are obviously designed to dirty his pristine good-boy image. Personally, I think that squeaky clean needed a bit of a smudge.

¹⁰ <https://www.change.org/p/withdraw-the-racist-exhibition-exhibition-b-the-human-zoo>

These issues are far from over, and besides, I'm not artistically exempt from having participated in unintentionally perpetuating all kinds of dodgy stereotypes. Perhaps there are some stories artists should not be digging into? Perhaps it is impossible to speak for the speechless and, in some cases, maybe the best thing to do would be to ghost, to evaporate? Or to just fall silent and listen? Does the world really need another white artist's voice? Have I made myself redundant? Perhaps White redundancy is key to a truly diverse society? Maybe white people just need to shut up for the next 100 years, at least?

The initial impulse for my doctoral research was to dive deeply, through the archetypal trickster and contemporary clown, into post-colonial narratives and the politics of representation in a world fragmented by race, gender, class and other divisive classifications.

My questions were triggered by the reaction of a childhood friend, Tsitsi Jaji (now Associate Professor in English at Duke University) to a clown show I created as part of my Master's degree with Clowns Without Borders at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Art in 2011. Entitled *I Shit Diamonds*, the show was a comedy about dictatorship, enjoying successful runs in Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, Finland and South Africa.

The two protagonists I play are Shimmie the teacher-turned-cleaner and also the homophobic/homoerotic dictator Victor Mugabatokwe, the Glorious General ('blessed-be-he may he not rest in peace because he is not yet dead'). Six months after watching the show in Johannesburg, Tsitsi emailed me her feelings, expressed in a poem entitled, 'You Shit Diamonds', and we enter a supremely uncomfortable dialogue. Her essay about our exchange of letters, the show, and friendship, appears in a collection entitled *Ties that Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa* (Walsh & Soske 2016).¹¹ The conversation has been fruitful; our encounter and exchanges continue to grow and enrich us both.

I've had to investigate deeply not only what my good intentions were with *I Shit Diamonds*, but also to take responsibility for the way it was received. I have to engage with my own subconscious bigotry, on all levels, to look closely at the sense of entitlement I experienced while creating this show.

I stop shitting diamonds while contemplating these questions. Is it enough, by virtue of coming from a country with a totalitarian homophobic mode of government, to satirise dictatorship and homophobia? Is parody enough? Does the enactment of power and mockery of it, imply a kind of resistance and, is this resistance activism? Where exactly in the art is this resistance located? If one of the functions of parody is to distance, is it then an evocation of notions of estrangement and alienation? Is it possible to push back totalitarianism through critical engagement and play? How can I avoid reproducing the thing I'm trying to critique? How can playfulness be construed as dissent/resistance/transgression? How do satire and parody function as activism?



Shimmie the teacher-cleaner at the Clownin' Festival, Vienna 2012. Photo: Carolina Frank

¹¹ https://www.dropbox.com/s/xh7zvxu1sx96j1o/Chapter%2011%20ties-that-bind-pages-4.pdf?dl=0&fbclid=IwAR0OXt715o4NTv69j68Je7Cj_6fe2xwHZ364TAiJVT3zTOdnF4ghS0ZZZHY (accessed 3 October 2019).



Victor Mugabatokwe the Glorious General, Clownin' Festival, Vienna 2012. Photo: Carolina Frank

During the PhD 30% Seminar in 2016, Mugabatokwe makes one last comeback, only to colonise a portion of Stockholm University of the Arts, momentarily inverting the colonial impulse, an African colonising Stockholm. In a sudden moment he spontaneously and materially creates a territorialising gesture with masking tape, and people must make decisions whether they are 'in' or 'out', and then, when someone hesitates, he just takes a piece of their body, a foot. Unintentionally, in that moment, Mugabatokwe draws attention to the arbitrariness of colonialism. The audience member's long foot sticking out into space was a gift from the clown gods, as *Nalleslavski* (Laanela & Sacks 2015) would say, and, in the heat of the moment, I received it gleefully and played with it to great comic effect.

On 20 April 2016, during a documented lunch after the 30% Seminar, discussant professor Daniel Peltz contemplates this very moment:

It had a certain funny visual violence. It was a deep signifying gesture, fundamentally accurate on many levels. In one gesture are centuries of history and the future probably. I'm still processing what was so poignant about it. It gets to this question: how do you expose a specificity within the notion of colonialism? To find a way of embodying it as a gesture. It's this perverse consumption of space, and the creation of this kind of fiction of propriety and property.

With Viktor Mugabatokwe I have to ask: what prejudices am I catering to? Does the dictator clown enclose himself too successfully in a predictable caricature of brutal African Dictatorship, unintentionally providing so-called 'civilised' Europe free alibi to laugh at his barbaric and ridiculous antics, thereby potentially reinforcing racist tropes and fetishistic phantasms of the violent and corrupt Black body? Is the parody of homophobia and rampant greed and sexual appetite playing right into the hands of fascist belief? After the 30% PhD Seminar I completely stop performing Mugabatokwe and have never again found my way back to *Congolababwe*, the fictional African country in *I Shit Diamonds*.

Notebook. Karlaplan, February 2016

At a bus stop earlier, I witness a man's xenophobic vitriol when two young men of colour push into the queue ahead of us. He turns to me, shaking with rage, muttering, 'Dessa jävla invandrare!'. With experience of being placed by other people in such compromising situations before and having endlessly come up against the stubborn refusal of others to enter into the conversation about race, or having conflicts go round and round reaching no acceptable mutual understanding, I chose to first respond with silence, simply staring blankly at him. But then, by not actively disagreeing with him, I feel complicit in allowing this kind of attitude to be perpetuated without resistance. I simply answer, 'I'm an immigrant too'; double take and emphatic turn away. I allow myself to fantasise: How would he respond to me standing before him kitted out in my full military dictator gear, swearing at him for being a 'Bloody bastard racist pig' in my thick pseudo-African accent?

This project began with my fervent desire to discover methods for exorcising the imperialist in the head (I think I even used the word *murdering*), but, as my supervisor Kristina Hagström-Ståhl astutely points out right at the beginning, the fantasy of being able to exorcise the colonist within you is actually a privileged position; one doesn't get to decide to be free of colonial history. She points out the project should be about staying with the difficulty, staying in the trouble, sticking with the questions and contradictions.

Stannar.

I've witnessed in Stockholm a distinct yet unspoken and perhaps unconscious assumption that what happens *there*, will never happen *here*. This is Swedish exceptionalism at work. People have privileges they're not aware of until called to attention, such as having street lights that actually work, or tap-water you can drink without getting cholera, or roads that can be driven on without a 4x4 vehicle to navigate the potholes. Even the privilege of walking at night and alone in forests is taken for granted and rarely acknowledged. It's weird to be constantly in awe, but I never take it for granted.

Things work here, people wearing reflective gear come to fix things. The government pays people to mow the grass on the side of the road and to plant and maintain beautiful flowerpots in cobbled squares. Yet the moment something destabilises the environment, everything feels shaken. In 2017 there was a terror attack in the centre of Stockholm. A truck mounted the pedestrian street Drottninggatan before crashing into an Åhlens department store. Five people were killed. I remember the day clearly since all metros were shut down, forcing thousands of commuters up onto the streets. I've never seen Stockholm so animated yet communally sad. It felt like a terribly somber and nervous street party. I remember thinking it would be nice if things could be more regularly like that, without the trauma. Walls of flowers graced the city centre for weeks. The entire Western world's media flocked to the scene.

In an interview with *Zeit Online*, Judith Butler (2016) talks about how those of us who live in so-called first world situations ‘enjoy our freedom and our relative safety from direct violence’. Butler continues:

For me, the ethical is not absolutely separate from the political. There are ethical principles that should inform our public policies. And that does include – and I guess what concerns me most – the way in which we dwell in our own geopolitical zone, sometimes not caring about what happens to the lives of others, not considering those lives grievable, not considering those lives equal or equally meaningful. So the obligation is to extend equality beyond our limited national and linguistic field. ... When we speak about hospitality, it is always this ‘we’ that extends hospitality to ‘them’. But once ‘they’ are inside, who is now the ‘we’? Does that ‘we’ change? Are they then part of the ‘we’?

America has exported its particular perspectives of anti-racism world-wide and I’m still trying to untangle their context from both Swedish and southern African points of view. Where you do anti-racist analysis is relevant: America addressing its systemic racism is different to Sweden and the rest of Europe addressing rising xenophobia and fascism. On a walk through the forest near my home a few months ago, I stumble across a series of rocks, one after the other spray-painted with swastikas. My friend and I are shocked, livid, incensed! We say we should return with red paint to paint over them, but don’t. Armchair activism at its best.

What would it mean to re-present images that have followed me throughout the process, blackface images of Sweden’s not-so-distant past? In Arboga, two hours from Stockholm, friends buy what used to be a school in the early 1900s for Finnish children. Among the objects and school textbooks still there, they find an extensive collection of blackface memorabilia, images I’ll refrain from reproducing here since I’m still chewing on those questions of what reproduction actually does. But without seeing the image, is it a reproduction of the violence for me to describe how they discovered tools for teaching the alphabet including letters with I for Indi*ner and N for N*g*r, complete with the most stereotypical images imaginable? Why does writing a derogatory word with a * somehow make it more acceptable on the page? Am I reproducing the tropes by re-presenting them here? Should they be censored or should these found historical documents perhaps be burnt? Where should racist history reside, its remnants and artefacts?

And, in those places where racist cleansing has decimated and dissolved communities, what kind of commemoration needs to take place when there is no perceivable trace?

In German-occupied Lithuania during the Holocaust, more than 95% of the Jewish population was annihilated. I go to a town called Šiauliai, where my father’s ancestors originate, in search of traces and to witness how my body responds to that landscape. Arriving at the old Jewish Cemetery I find it vandalised, broken glass scattered everywhere and trees lathered with building foam. Only one and a half gravestones remain, though the presence of others is palpable. Afterwards, I go to the Department of Tourism and ask the man sitting at the information desk if he knows who looks after the graveyard? He shrugs his shoulders. Can he report that it’s been vandalised? ‘Maybe they’ll fix it in the Spring,’ he says. ‘Only one and a half gravestones are left standing, it’s terrible!’ I cry. He shrugs his shoulders, ‘It is what it is.’



Still frame from *Stanley's Ghetto Tour*.

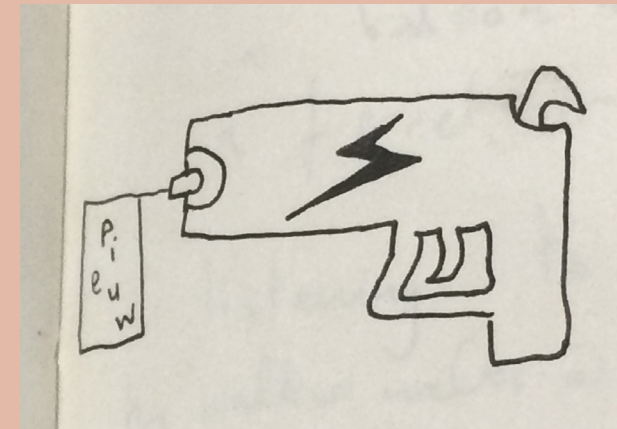
This artistic research project attempts to face the unintentional yet unavoidable complicity inherited by ongoing privilege, and questions how not to reproduce landscapes upheld by legacies of exploitation and conquest. What I'm proposing is nothing less than a deflagration of Whiteness, making it so hot that it burns away rapidly, leaving nothing but a crusty crumbling ashy trace. W(w)hiteness requires a recognition and an apology, a letting go and sharing of privilege, a becoming silent or getting used to being excluded or entering only upon invitation. It needs a louder voice when confronted with others' racism, as well as a sincere willingness to SHUT UP and listen. But let me just fall off my high white horse a moment.

Funny and weirdly ironic to me is how, at this juncture in this Nordic context, I become a poster child for cultural diversity. My project about W(w)hiteness is getting its spindly white sticky fingers onto the titles of EQUITY, OTHERNESS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY at a circus conference in Helsinki (November 2019).

Goddess help us all.

Amen.

Where is my work going now? I want to start making comfort objects for lonely people. Yeah, art you can fuck or hug. As innocent as a damp face cloth, or as perverted as a flashlight. (Hutton 2020)



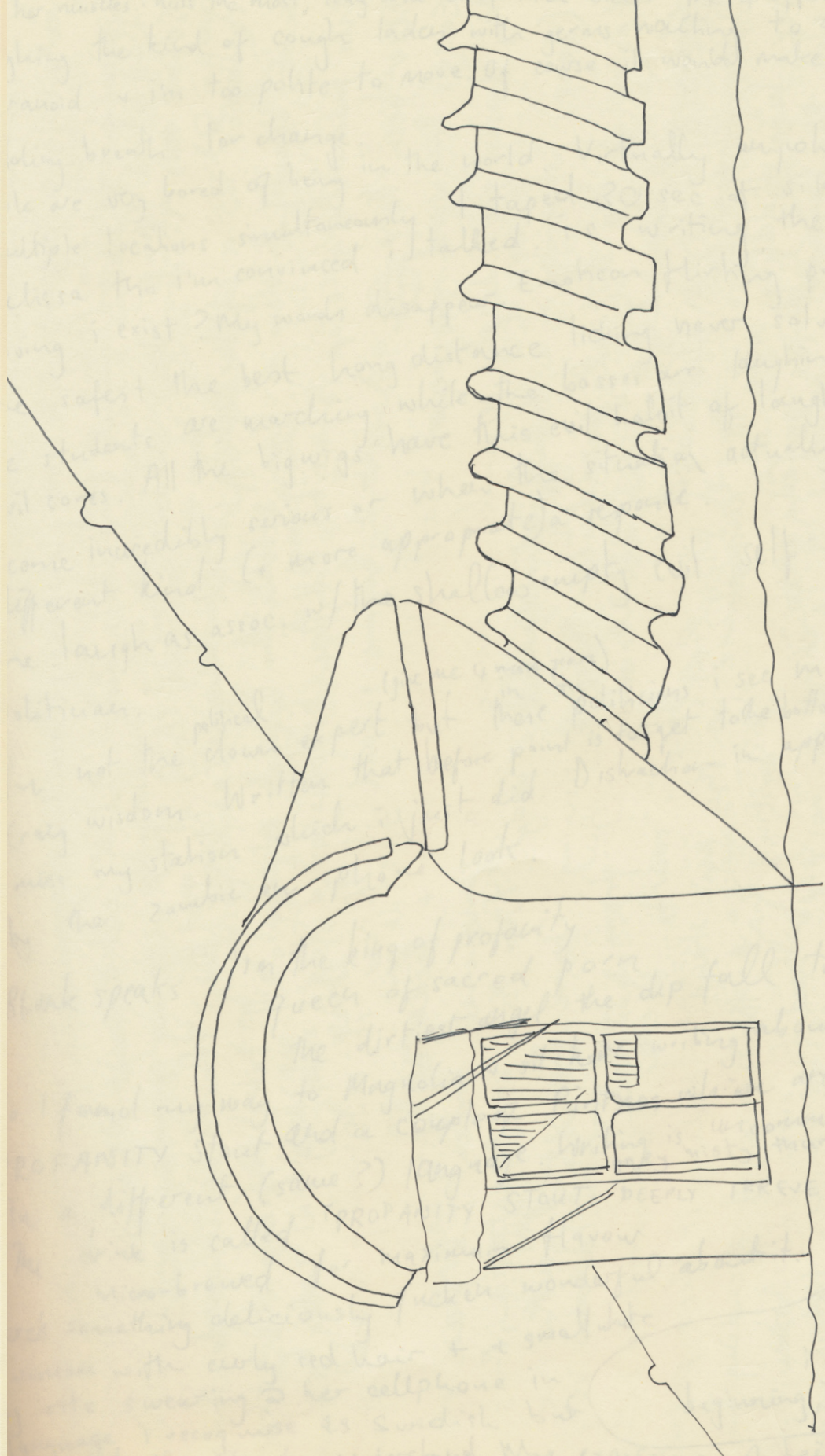
Notebook. between white and whiter :: Cph-Sthlm (2017)

Border control on the train, watching a young police woman with a shrill voice and high blonde ponytail loudly questioning an older POC who shakes and sweats profusely, averting eyes, seeming terribly worried. She calls for identification, he reaches down into his lower leg pants pocket to extract a...gun, a grenade? No. A passport. This grown elderly man shaking before the full blown hard-core ponytail force of the law. She seems almost disappointed by the identity document. Wearing reflective vests seems to infuse its wearer with an ebullient sense of authority and power.

On-board check is done, the train continues towards Malmö central.

We're all shaking now.

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New Sreavägen, 21/10/15