

CANT FLUSH DOWN  
IS THE TURD YOU  
OWN RACISM  
ADMITTING YOUR

Documented Artistic Research Project  
(Doctoral Thesis)

*This Untethered Buffoon or  
the Trickster in Everything*

**SQUIRM**  
*the book*

FRAGMENT  
**Nº 13**



**the spectre  
and  
the sceptre**

**The Ghost and the Power**

*an inconclusive conclusion*

—  
Stacey Sacks

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# the spectre and the sceptre

—  
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SQUIRM (THE BOOK)

Fragment No. 13, the spectre and the sceptre

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

Back - Notebook, November 2019

**‘To find a form that  
accommodates the  
mess, that is the task  
of the artist now.’**

SAMUEL BECKETT  
(Interview with T. F. Driver, 1961)



this pervious epilogue is posing as a beginning of the drawing towards an end, attempting to tie-up this malleable compendium, this elastic **SQUIRM**. the unfinished constellation is a fragmentary portal, a slippery worm hole connecting temporalities, encountering spontaneous poetic bodies, which could be plastic (for want of a better word) and I mean fragile or soft structures (Emilia Kokko 2019), objects as bodies as porous and trans-corporeal (Stacy Alaimo 2018). a sketchy and fabricated collection containing graphic traces, dis|embodied clowters, tongues, insertions and concoctions evoked, dreamt and assembled over five years of making, listening, seeing, thing-king, dancing, provoking, apologising, note making, penetrating, capturing and gleaning (Agnès Varda 2000) experience, objects and encounters, working with what i have, who i meet and what i find. hacking through the thick white veneer i've had the privilege of being paid in a castle, in a fortress, near a tower, to splice into privilege through ars looking for ways to rewire the imperial mind but of course the questions still remain, which imperial and whose mind?



the ghost and the power  
 these are the poles and shadows of my clowters and trickoons  
 closures and openings

portals  
 ping-ponging between continents  
 and histories a  
 trans-generational haunting and flimsy po(o)king  
 of colonial logic and cis-gendered hetero-patriarchal  
 surveillance capitalist neoliberal white power.

or not.  
 a small crack or  
 thin split will  
 do for now  
 a hovering and a flopping  
 a rising and falling  
 a gaping and hopefully  
 an exhalation  
 let the inhalation  
 take care of  
 itself

at the end of all this  
 this is what i know  
 my clowters engrave and carve  
 characters of their own  
 bringing more voices  
 towards the always shifting core of  
 this carnage-ival.

not only bad people are racist.  
 if humxns don't know and face our histories, if we don't trace the past into  
 the present we cannot engage with geo-political conditions in ways that are  
 transformative  
 maybe  
 perceiving whiteness as a splintering of non-static categories has  
 transformative potential  
 but there is a huge messiness inherent in enacting an anti-racist practice, it's  
 slippery and easy to fall  
 as a white

you'll likely have to extract your foot from that mouth several times  
there's no doubt you're complicit and culpable in some way  
continuing to benefit from un/acknowledged privileges  
sub/conscious racism and all other kinds of suppressed-isms  
*[speaking to herself]*

even eternally volunteerist whites should know this about themselves  
yet not to let that paralyse them from acts of solidarity and ally-ship  
one paradox is there's this urge to say something – to actively use the voice  
i'm freely given for what i think is good which leads to taking space and  
simultaneously the necessity of shutting up and shrinking very small and  
becoming marginal a long while  
the practice of shutting up is not conceding to some kind of failure just  
as diving into the blind-spot is necessary sometimes  
perhaps even a productive spot to be stuck  
staring tongue level into the muck  
a short while. best to  
climb out while  
still having  
energy to  
do so.

getting stuck too much in the loop  
may just keep you there.

is this getting too didactic for you?

well fuck off

i've got the mic

this writing is selective, intuited, automatic and not, taking full advantage of  
its precarity as research in the academy where so much is soaked in often  
unacknowledged privilege which may just eat itself up and cough itself out  
as a fur-ball or lick its own balls like a dog lounging on a shaggy carpet in  
Goldcity on a thrusty windy Thursday.

can i be intrusive on the page  
 can i poke your imaginary space  
 a literary pest or fly in the ear?

current multicultural and diversity projects seem to map the world according  
 to a rigid science of surface appearances with little room for nuance or  
 complexity. i'm all for separating the layers, slowly peeling back simple  
 complexities, simplicities

or

complex simplicities  
 complicities

spinning on the idea of vivisection, it feels a distinctly visceral way of  
 contributing to the decolonial project via intimate incisions into white power,  
 slicing into the ungraspable ongoing aliveness of it all  
 sticking a pin into the puffed up importance of it all  
 deflating it all

it all

all that  
 deeply rooted rotted ancestral muck  
 faced and  
 finally  
 fully  
 removed.

*[audience claps wildly, they think it's over but the author continues]*

this is a removal.

this is a try.

this is acceptance

of failure.

this is an apology.

there's something about trying too hard that can destroy things.

i know i try too hard.

i know when playing with masks that the masks themselves do a lot of work.

me doing less gives the mask space to do more.

there's something about letting things develop and  
 unfold without getting in the way, without interrupting,  
 especially if you have nothing new to offer.

at the end of the phd this writing process has felt horribly reductive, the way squeezing performance onto the page can be. yet here it is, finished in a thing. these performing essays are a way of making reflection explicit, allowing both an analytical distance from the material yet hopefully and simultaneously a deeper and alternative intimacy that live performance doesn't always allow. etched into these pages are traces and remnants of polyphonic animaterial experiments in the studio, forests, graveyards, heaths and streets  
shreds of histories and testimonies  
labour made present.  
i'm hoping the multi-modal  
generates polylogues.  
but who knows.

this work/play will never be ready, never finalised, neither set nor stable. these narratives are slippery, pulsating between memory and imagination; history, fable and the everyday.  
in relation to time, all feels laced with contradiction and paradox; the stopping of motion to understand action, the excavation of pasts to forge fertile futures, the facing of ancestral histories of sublimation, migrancy and domination to reflect on the same present histories-in-becoming, the covering up to uncover truths to make people laugh so it's easier to cry.  
do I need to find some red-thread (vomit) gold thread (better?) coherence to synthesise and frame all these privileged experiments? perhaps this cluster of confusions, moments saturated with spontaneous circuitry, are exactly where these experiments need to be. there's an immense sediment that remains, mulchy debris that could be compostable  
piles of accumulations potentially generative to look at for research purposes.  
or not.  
set them alight.  
let's watch them burn.

after all this  
this is what i know.

i come from a family of Nuts, Sacks, Kings and Gold Mountains.

i make people laugh so it's easier to cry.



thing-king alongside the abstract for the 2019 Bergen Assembly titled *Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead*:<sup>1</sup>

In his 'hauntology' (*Spectres of Marx* 1993), the French philosopher Jacques Derrida argues for a 'being-with the not presently living': a being-with the spectre, which adheres to a different temporality, a 'non- contemporaneity with itself of the living present'. It is about the recognition of and responsibility to the past (no longer) and the future (not yet) – as precondition for a more just world. For Derrida, this justice-to-come (*a-venir*) lies in the permanent breaking open and changing of the existing order, that is, in a genuinely parodic act. ... This attention to the dead - to our responsibility toward those who are no longer or not yet here - is also understood as an act of rejecting reigning necropolitical conditions: the subjugation of life to the power of death (Achille Mbembe).

perhaps these performances and worming texts are me finding ways to articulate porosities between the living and the dead. i'm hoping they thread together, however loosely, the poetic, the political, the erotic, the personal and the humorous. is writing performing a haunting of the future? is this how the historical, the imaginary, the everyday and the literary interact?

i've been writing and performing all this while simultaneously navigating my own journey through grief, facing racist inherited belief and PTS. a perfect cocktail for comedy. what at first seems a generous amount of time for investigation, documentation, encounter and analysis, the whole body of work, somehow needs at the end to be constrained into these thin slices of time. how deep is the crack? is it big enough to contain and expose the depth of the enquiry, can it contain all those imaginative hunches, cul-de-sacs and lost meanderings, and should it?

parody and satire for me right now seem the only option for ethico-clowning in a world where so many leaders are clearly imbecilic and potentially genocidal troglodytes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bergen Assembly, 2019, *Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead*, <http://bergenassembly.no/news/bergen-assembly-2019/> (accessed 19 October 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Definition of a troglodyte as I mean it: i.A prehistoric cave dweller. ii. A person of degraded, primitive, or brutal character. iii. A person living in seclusion. iv. A person unacquainted with affairs in the world. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/troglodyte?s=t> (accessed 30 December 2019).



imbecile is the only word in the family of fools i'll concede to self-aggrandising narcissistic leaders and by imbecile i mean a humxn being with the mental agility of a tardigrade. actually let me take that back i don't want to disrespect tardigrades, those mythological micro-creatures have provided me with an interminable amount of awe, they're likely the most intelligent of us all. their segmented resilience has them surviving in extreme conditions from mud volcanoes to the Antarctic to outer space. let me definitely take that back. tardigrades must have some massive intelligence to have survived the ages. according to my best friend Wikipedia the Italian biologist Lazzaro Spallanzani named them *Tardigrada*, which means 'slow steppers'.<sup>3</sup> slow steppers. that's what we need more of in the world because PROGRESS IS SLOWING DOWN. perhaps then we too can survive the Sixth Mass Extinction and still exist 530 million years into the future.

let me unravel a bit here  
 memories can be shifty documents of shame  
 wobbliness and uncertainty key to unlocking  
 this poly-genre thing which could be an explosion of singularities (Deleuze 1990 via Lepecki 2015)  
 or not  
 epistemic buffoonery fraught with unruly ambiguity this burrowing spidery sprawl is not ahistorical though upside down, shifting, idio(t)syncratic and blurry it's aligned with the always already here, the ongoing dead-ends and cul-de-sacs of history's collective memory continuing to affect the vertical now  
 nowhere but here  
 haunting the future  
 anxious as ever, these interrupting techne-phantasms of splintering pasts and futures are made discomforted and alive through the sharpening web of the all-that-has-been and the not-yet-met

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tardigrade> (accessed 4 January 2020).



imaginaries of the im | possible  
 im | material engagements seducing muses and muscles of the all-of-a-sudden  
 and

and

and

and

and

now

i'm really trying too hard.

this is when seriously authentic pomposity sets in, me trying to be clever  
 queer academic clown, valiant do-gooder-white attempting ars-is-tic  
 philosophies in Sisyphean style scaling slippery epistemic ladders, falling  
 interminably to zero, to stupidity, to the fool stepping happily off institutional  
 cliffs in pure trust, after all what is fooling but footing without a crossed t?

the question is what happens after acknowledgments and apologies are made,  
 can radical subjectivities reveal vulnerabilities, as they rip off scabs to divulge  
 those deep wounds, genocidal games of mastery and servitude haunting our  
 collective pasts

can we in turn haunt delicious futures

sculpting collectivities

different alone together

and

can play and masks or clowers or trickoons or bufficksters help that  
 revelation to occur?

can we be lost together a short while

still caring for

with-nessing

each other

a long while?

witness here this uprooted trickster navigating

white panic under the comforting heavyweight beige blanket of mundane  
 safety

confronting memory and denial and erasure, sublimation and abuse

the shits hitting us all in the face

making visible invisible politics of othering and belonging

documenting the lived every-day and the poked and stirred past



an eclectic mash-up failing better (Samuel Beckett 1983)  
 on frames and on the edges  
 in awe of shapes of architecture, snails and every other body  
 at ease with collapsing trees and graveyards  
 TONGUE-ING the future, licking and carving space for soft futurities.  
 all from inside the body of this performer  
 a simplicity of  
 foolish poems and other performing essays experienced  
 through clowning in this academy.  
 have i said that before, is the aboutness getting to you too, yet?

but now  
 how to end  
 this ever worming thing  
 all these accumulations proliferations and confusions maybe lead nowhere  
 which is somewhere too, everywhere and nowhere like dramaturgy (Camilla  
 Damkjaer 2016)  
 if so far this seems a handy toolkit for sensitising new  
 post-humxn white feminist queer discourse you  
 wouldn't be far wrong despite muscular desire to escape category  
 clearly there are too many holes, so many chinks in the armour  
 but that's just how the light gets in (Leonard Cohen 1992)  
 and cracks come as handy spots to hang onto when slippage is unavoidable

thing-king with Dean Hutton aka Goldendean (2018, p.216), 'I stand here,  
 now, because there is an urgent need for white people to recognise that we  
 are a product of a five hundred-year-old mass dehumxnisation programme  
 known as whiteness and to begin to address the problematics of our white  
 cultures,'  
 but

IF I'M WHITE AND A FEMINIST DOES THAT MAKE ME A WHITE  
 FEMINIST?

when the footing crumbles  
 remember decomposition  
 happens from the inside



remember carpenter ants  
 benefitting from a dying tree  
 aiding its decomposition while  
 not actually the original cause of its demise.

BREATHE<sup>4</sup>

(don't you hate being told to breathe as if you had a choice in the matter)

BREATHE

DEEPER

attentiveness is key to coping  
 with crumbling material and emotional economies  
 apocalyptic crises and political fuckery  
 hallucinatory detail prevents my devastation  
 it expands polyphonic  
 imaginaries  
 and  
 being with clouds and drawing slugs helps  
 even in awkward stops and starts  
 inserting humour has  
 its slippery consequences and  
 'Poetry is Not a Luxury' (Audre Lorde 2007)

what does it mean to redefine the meaning of civilisation, to redefine the  
 meaning of happiness, to redefine the meaning of modernity, subversion and  
 politics

in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* Donna Haraway  
 (2016, p.111) writes, 'Shame is a prod to lifelong rethinking and recrafting  
 one's accountabilities,' and it's true, this feels like a lifelong work. taking my  
 cue from Haraway, i wonder, how is it possible to produce with and for each  
 other the on-going-ness of making a difference?

what must i give more death to today  
 in order to generate more life  
 which bones must i unearth

<sup>4</sup> ©Anastasia Moonpower



then sing for  
then crush  
then re-bury

and if not now,  
when?

[t]he border between life and death is probably that utmost line  
which finally defines human belonging or exclusion.

(Tlostanova 2013, p.22)

January 2020. Johannesburg.

writing this right now near a sleeping

deep breathing dog

Pozzo

(Beckett all the way down)

Pozzo's special thing when he's awake is

licking the arm of the pinkish leather couch

for ages

i hope he doesn't mind me filming this fascinating gesture

i ask for his consent but he ignores me and keeps on at it

i take his silence as a yes and pull out the camera but

part of me isn't 100% sure

zooming in now

deeply close

the shape of his tongue is intriguing, it feels so humxn

so animal

intelligent bright pink

and agile

is this where this

documented artistic research project (doctoral thesis)

must stop, with a dog licking a couch on a Sunday

in Johannesburg, with

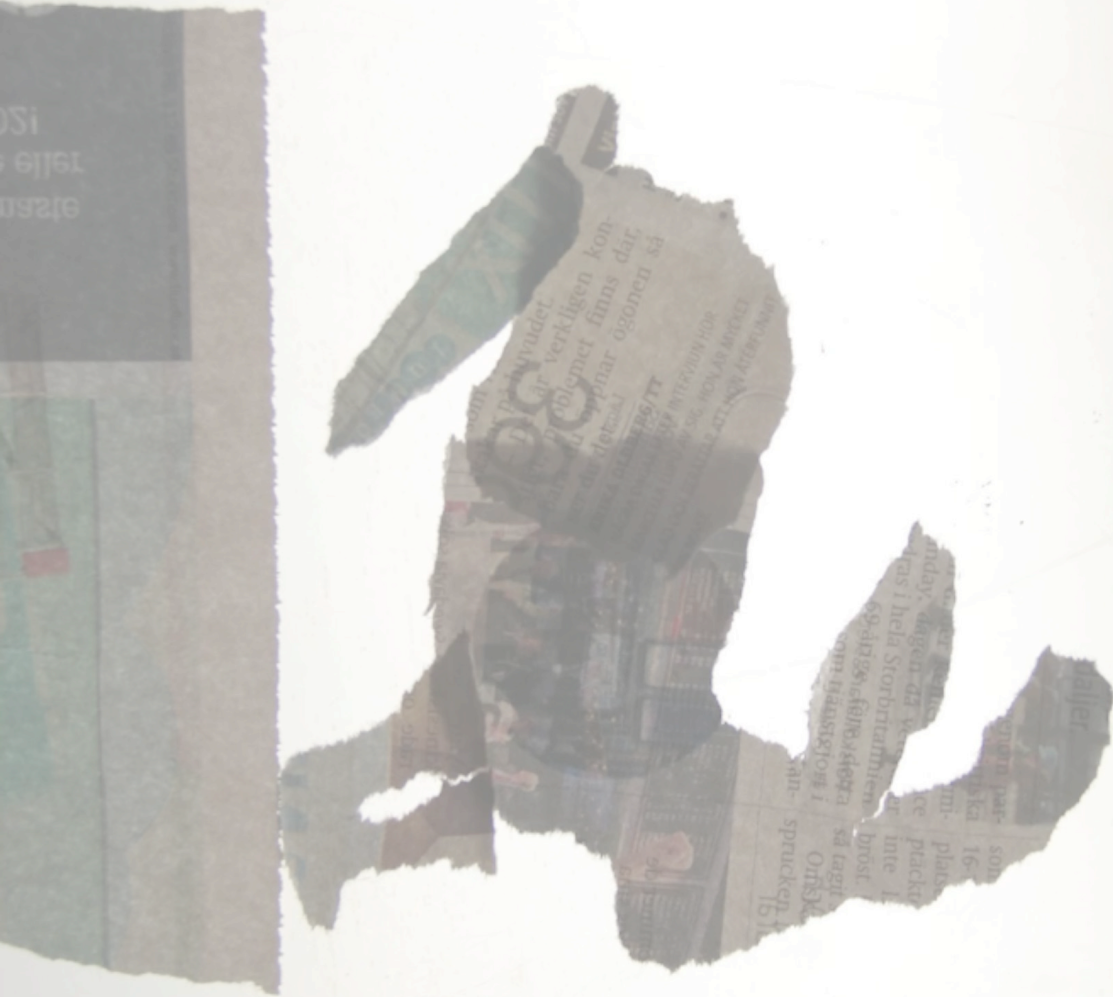
the comforting soundtrack of a not so distant cock crowing and

the neighbour's house alarm going off and on

on and off repetitively

for hours and

hours on end?



in the end, from the beginning, we're all at the mercy of the grand undeniable cosmic joke, the unspoken thing that has me howling into fires and running and screaming naked into icy Swedish forest lakes.  
sorry to end so *flummig*.

sorry.



If we look carefully, we can already see the signs of this world-to-come in the present, although it is true that they are fragile. But exclusion, discrimination, and selection on the basis of race continue to be structuring factors of inequality, the absence of rights, and contemporary domination, notably in our democracies ... And we cannot act as if slavery and colonisation never took place, or as if we are completely rid of the legacies of such an unhappy period. Although there has been great effort to mask it, the transformation of Europe into a 'fortress' and recent legislation against foreigners put into place on the Old Continent are both deeply rooted in the ideology of selection among different human races.

Until we have eliminated racism from our current lives and imaginations, we will have to continue to struggle for the creation of a world-beyond-race. But to achieve it, to sit down at a table to which everyone has been invited, we must undertake an exacting political and ethical critique of racism and of the ideologies of difference. The celebration of difference will be meaningful only if it opens onto the fundamental question of our time, that of sharing, of the common, of the expansion of our horizon. The weight of history will be there. We must learn to do a better job of carrying it, and of sharing its burden. We are condemned to live not only with what we have produced but also with what we have inherited. Given that we have not completely escaped the spirit of a time dominated by the hierarchisation of human types, we will need to work with and against the past to open up a future that can be shared in full and equal dignity. The path is clear: on the basis of a critique of the past, we must create a future that is inseparable from the notions of justice, dignity, and the in-common.

(Mbembe 2013, p.177)





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