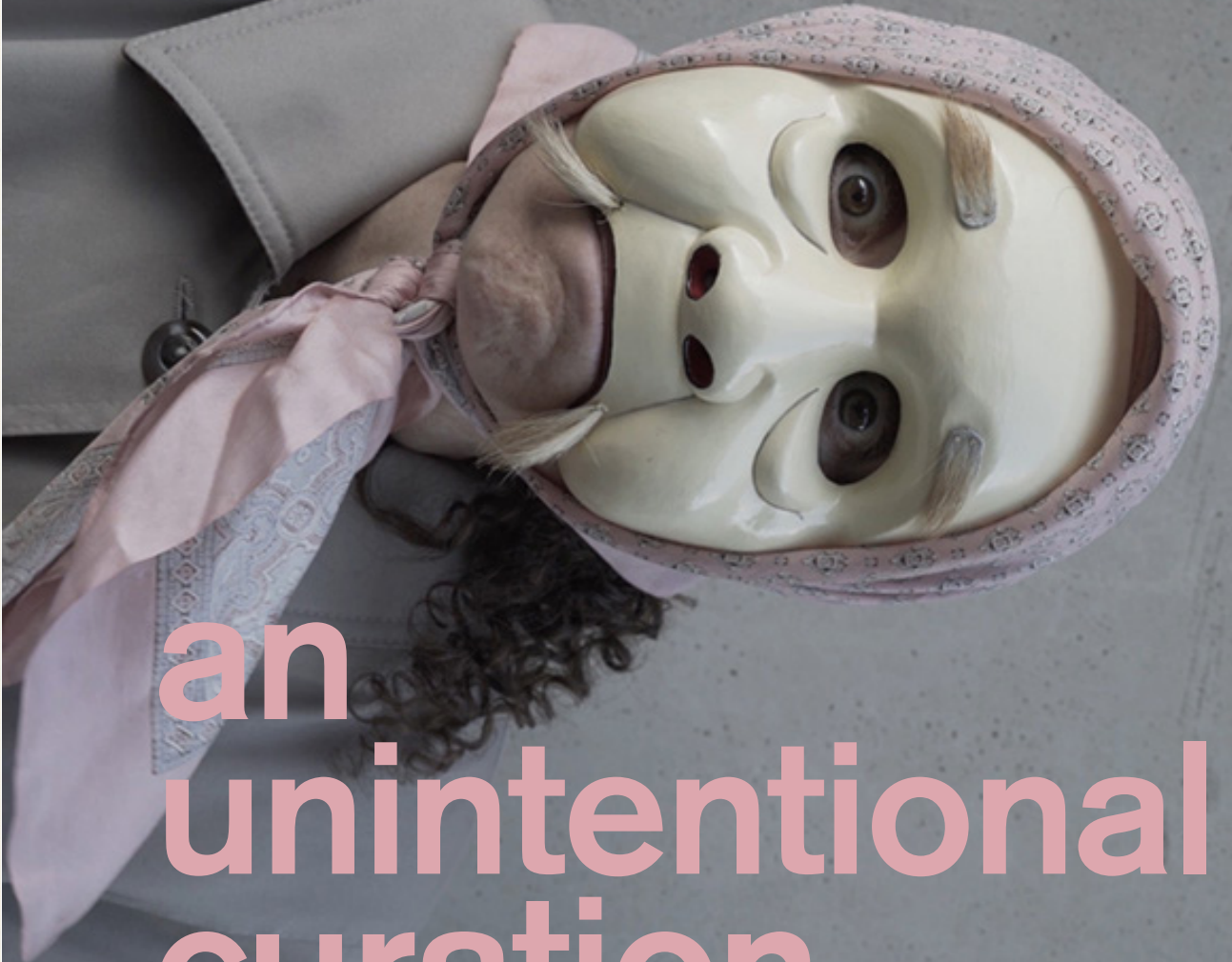


SH\*ff\*CK

...ay in discomfort + anxiety  
...generational haunting  
...section of this particular corner of whiteness in the field of consciousness that  
...may be called attention economies or neo neoliberal irony and exploration  
...of



an  
unintentional  
curation  
of clowters

# an unintentional curation of clowters

—  
Stacey Sacks

SQUIRM (the book)  
Fragment No. 7, an unintentional curation of clowters  
Documented Artistic Research Project (Doctoral Thesis)  
Stacey Sacks  
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Cover Images  
Front - Still frame of Granny in the short film *Granny does Gärdet*.  
Back - Notebook, March 2017

## September 2018 Stockholm, reflections after performing at the Museum of Science and Technology in Oslo, automatic writing.

While looking deeply into choreographer, dancer and PhD candidate Mette Ingvarstsen's arsehole in 2016 during her show *69 positions* I begin questioning more deeply how intimacy and vulnerability operate in live performance. And how the memory of that experience expands and contracts depending upon context and temporality, becoming more intense with some recollections and receding further into insignificance with others. How reliable and valuable is a memory?

Writing this to remember. Three days ago I did a performance essay entitled *skin+bones || with-nessing W(w)hitenesses* at the Norsk Teknisk Museum [the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology in Oslo], as part of an event entitled 'Researcher's Night'. The performance essay took place in the exhibition space of 'FOLK: From Racial Types to DNA Sequences', and I took the opportunity to experiment with two ongoing clowters, some transient, tactile, mobile and soft sculptures and some new and old and unexpected materials.

Stanley G. arrives in the space with a large silver tray covered with clumps of curly humxn hair and pencils sticking out of the hair in all directions. He apologises he is late and explains they're still setting up a performance installation. He's there to both curate, insert and critique the ARS research manifestations of Spacey Spanks, PhD candidate in Idiocy. These offerings are intended as mini-insertions into the day, penetrating the moment in unexpected ways.

Shortly before going into the space to start the performance, I'm warming up in a chemistry lab among stained white coats hanging above glass beakers and other lab-like pieces of apparatus – Bunsen burners, test tubes and massive anatomy posters revealing underlying muscles, flesh, veins, arteries and bones. I'm finding Stanley's voice while bouncing and shaking, staring out of long rectangular windows at the Fall sun setting through dense Nordic forests.

Decide last minute to stuff the squeaky doll down into my pants, where it makes a big bulge and funny little squeal every time I press it. Throughout the evening's encounter it gets a small laugh almost every time I remember to press it, and I use it to punctuate lines and silences with greater comic effect, depending upon accent and timing.

Along the way I'm acutely aware that slowing everything down almost always makes it better.



Let me try to truly re-member now and not invent or make up shit that didn't happen.

The audience gathers and they arrive somehow curious and expectant. It immediately makes me feel comforted but I only realise that in hindsight. Stanley G. names the first insertion as the tactile and moving sculpture *she didn't/couldn't/wouldn't/shouldn't pass the pencil test* and asks the audience who knows what the pencil test is. Most people don't.

There are a few South Africans there, Frederico Settler (Sociologist of Religion at UKZN), someone I've known from Cape Town since the early 2000s, and his partner Mari. I am totally surprised to see him and later realise what a gift to have the perspective of academics coming from a SA context to 'read' this encounter, this crazy dialogue (and it's crazy because here we are in 2018 still talking about the ridiculousness of racial categories). Rico is supervising a PhD candidate in Pietermaritzburg, Pumelela Nqelenga, who is also coming tonight; she arrives late but catches most of Granny. she recently completed a Master's in clowning at Rhodes University under the tutorship of renowned South African physical theatre guru Andrew Buckland. The intersections of our research are fascinating.

The South Africans nod their heads regarding the pencil test. Others look blank and confused. Stanley G. explains: it references one of the pseudo-scientific methods employed by the apartheid regime to determine racial identity. A pencil is stuck into someone's hair. They shake their head and if the pencil falls out they are white. If the pencil sticks, they're determined black.

The hair on the tray is the artistic researcher's own, collected over the entire course of the PhD, the pencils are very much stuck and entangled in the hair, the researcher would most certainly have failed the pencil test.

The installation served on a silver tray is clearly intended as a mockery, a parody of ridiculousness, though is it perceived as such? And as Stanley G. continues to explain he walks towards the audience on one side (they are gathered in a very unstable semi-circle, a porous standing audience body, the border of which shifts a few centimetres now and then as people walk forward, backward, turn around or attempt to hit the *shitfuck stick* on the ground or enact *privilege on a stick* but i'm getting ahead of myself).

Stanley G. walks with the silver tray and trips and all the hair goes flying on a few audience members. People half-shriek. And then titter a bit, someone may have snorted.

As he gets on his knees after commenting that maybe that's exactly where the absurd test belongs – close to the dirt, he suggests the technician play a film while he cleans it up which he does.

*A welcoming screens.*

Stanley continues: 'That was a welcoming. And so is this. But before we get into the meat of the bones, a bit of housekeeping' ... The fire monologue goes down quite well, though people don't laugh that much, especially compared with the audiences in the theatre in Stockholm. Perhaps it's because the idea of a fire in an intimate theatre space is a much more scary prospect than in that spacious and slightly clinical museum space with its shiny cold concrete floor. Without flammable velvety material and seating, the danger doesn't seem quite as present.

People seem to enjoy the *Shitfuck stick* (which I hope introduces this idea of unplugging, of purging and plunging out racist muck). They especially like it when it really sucks onto the floor and I seriously can't pull it off and Stanley G. utters under his breath, 'Who designed this fucken floor,' (laughter) and when it comes off there's an undeniable release, a loud 'BUK!' (more laughter). I send it around – quite a few are giving it a go, shouting 'shitfuck!' (albeit a bit feebly) and always some laughter when that happens.

Stanley G. hurls into his whiteness shtick, which is interjected unexpectedly with oddly timed 'shitfucks!' One man really hurts his wrist while doing it, and when Stanley G. offers help, he says 'No I did it to myself.' Talking about whiteness Stanley G. becomes angry and indignant, which people seem to enjoy, especially when he acknowledges this fascistic tendency. After the show the photographer/documentarian comments that it would have been nice if Stanley G. spoke Yiddish (he asked me if I'd heard of the book *Joy of Yiddish*, which is sitting on my desk at home). I realise I forgot to incorporate all the usual Yiddish phrases: *tochus, vos veisse chazar von lokshen, kuss mir im pupik!* Wonder why they disappeared this time?

*Privilege on a stick* goes down much better than I anticipate. People think it's hysterically amusing and want to take selfies with it after the show. They seem to enjoy enacting it. The golden blonde doll head erected on a stick from the forest,<sup>1</sup> sent round with a golden whip.

Though Stanley G. suggests no one actually use the whip, many people do. He comments the museum is not insured should someone get hurt and gets a half-hearted snigger.

When Stanley G. pulls the jesmonite tongue out from under a furry cloth, one man's jaw literally drops open – he's in the front with glasses, his mouth drops wide open for a long time. It's as if he can't believe what he's seeing, a massive cracked tongue, severed and waved around the space. Or maybe he's always like that and I'm projecting an affect that didn't actually happen.

While going through the more theoretical critical whiteness section, I feel I lose the audience a bit. Frederico has expressed a desire to continue a conversation, in a Facebook message yesterday he writes:

Hi Stacey Great to see you in Oslo and to see your performance. We really enjoyed it both the theory and the characters. We wondered if you are around for a few days or if you likely to be back soon. We would love to sit over a coffee and talk about our common interest in critical race and critical whiteness studies.

The prospect of being able to engage with Rico and Mari in this discussion is so exciting. Will definitely follow this up!

I wonder how the curators of FOLK feel about me making so clearly obvious the hidden and not so hidden western intellectual biases and aesthetics of such an installation:

The reification and iconising of instruments of oppression and humiliation, each classified object given illumined prominence, mystified and untouchable. Glass-encased, as history always kept at a distance from us seems to be. I guess what I'm trying to re-member here is a VISCERALITY (capitals are for capitalists), a re-sensitisation of history which is being made in each moment. A re-remembering of what it means to choose, to be responsible, here and now. But I'm not on a fucking crusade, not the martyr signaling through the flames, don't want to be full of righteousness and didacticism.

<sup>1</sup> The stick I so desperately wanted to bring back to Stockholm but my friend Lars thought I was a total lunatic for wanting to – 'I'm into fetishsticks,' I say. He's not amused. But it's seriously one of the straightest sticks I've ever gleaned and I haven't found one as perfect in Stockholm forests since.

# I'm going to be in your face like a gefilte fish on Pesach!

Stanley G.

I remember this moment happened: Granny keeps pulling plastic packets out of her pockets, throwing them on the ground and suddenly – unexpectedly – the bag of sweeties that Xico bought for the *Granny does Gärdet* film experiment flies out of her pocket and onto the floor.

Granny goes into ecstasy at the idea of chocolate. She asks open-mouthed with glasses guy in front to pick it up for her which he dutifully does, and, in reward, she offers him one which he happily takes. Granny pops one in her mouth too and immediately complains that it's stale. Is it stale she asks him? No, no it's not. Mine is stale, she says, and spits half of it out, a perfect half-laugh disgusted groan from some in the audience.

When Granny tells the story of how 'they' killed her dog on the farm, and how it just lay there on the ground: 'my *Chaka Zulu* lying lifeless on the floor,' the South Africans totally crack up, the two so-called black South Africans, the only obvious people of colour in the room. They almost double over for an instant. Or at least, they do in my memory, and I quite like it that way, so will choose to retain that remnant of possibility. After the show, the first thing both Rico and Pumelela reflect: 'Chaka-Zulu!' and laughter. They are the first to comment on the name in this Nordic context. Need to ask Rico what makes it so funny, for him? I understand intuitively it's terribleness/abjectness is what's needed for the humour to happen.

Don't think right now to write much more since my memory of the performance wanes. But since I didn't document the performance in any re-playable way, didn't sound record or film, feel this need to quickly write this out automatically now, relying on memory as method to document some moments.

Performance essay at FOLK: 'From Racial Types to DNA Sequences'.  
Photos: Håkon Bergseth/The Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology, 2018



# ‘A true politics of identity consists in constantly nourishing, fulfilling, and refilling the capacity for self-invention.’

ACHILLE MBEMBE  
(2017, p.178)

This documented artistic research project offers a series of what I call not normal encounters, allowing each clowter the opportunity to explore an element of *Clown Alone*, connecting to the aforementioned notion of *narrowcasting*. For the purposes of this performing essay, I will focus briefly on two dominant clowters: Stanley G. and Granny and one trickoon or buffickster:<sup>2</sup> blank. This topography of beings has evolved as ways to face and encounter my own familial trajectories, as trans-generational hauntings hinging on contingency, and as cautionary tales for the future. Emerging from foolish realms, they find themselves in this Karlaplan context, stirring questions of historical and racial privilege in the midst of the gentrifuckation of it all.

The clowters have agency, a desire to be seen, to be made manifest in the world. They could be perceived as a merging of collective and individual memory, history and experience, though I'd be loathed to limit them to that. Of course, there's me and my personal experience and history enfolded inside each of them. I'm the tentacular spider sprawling between, but am also embedded within the constellation. They are trapped in me and I am trapped in them, like the skin we're in or the galaxy we inhabit together. We are vessels and containers allowing unexpected encounters to unfold depending upon circumstance. Demanding acquiescence, they allow me to explore notions of surrender, control, consent, porosity and permissibility in the threshold relationships of self, mask, audience and the moment of the encounter.

I believe these clowters have chosen me, this body, and are re-creating me just as I co-create with them in the impulsive moment of performance. We negotiate ways to speak with and through each other. I experience the masks as spaces to take refuge in, as ways of coping with my own sense of existential dislocation, as well as sites from which to discomfort and stir not only my surroundings, but the deepest parts of myself.

In this way, clowters and trickoons are polyphonic modes of articulation. From a clown-o-logical standpoint they are topological, having numerous multiply-orientable surfaces that unfold depending upon circumstance. Each evolves in its own way, each has a unique circuitry and agency allowing painfully entangled stories, biases and roots to emerge. They somehow reflect my need to mimic and mirror the complexity of embodied, twisted and prismatic relationships to racism, colonialism and fascism in the current age.

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2. Performed entanglements of 'trickster' and 'buffoon'.

Relating to the more ‘ancient and mysterious’ concept of masks, Sears A. Eldredge (1996, p.41) describes mask as

an agent of transformation or locus of the presence of an Other. In this view, the mask is the reality. The wearer’s task is to allow herself to be taken over by this presence in the mask. Like the text of a play, the physical object of the mask provides both the inspiration and the boundaries for the actor’s work on a role. In this case, however there are not words but sculptural features (hills, valleys, crevices, plateaus, intersecting planes), colors, and textures to ‘read’ in order to release the imagination. If the mask is to live and breathe, it must live and breathe in and through the wearer’s bodymind. Its face must become her face, its body her body, its mind her mind.

Mask improvisation is not solely about evoking the actor’s subjective life, however. That can be done by putting a paper bag over your head. Mask improvisation is about evoking and experiencing *redoublement*, an objective *and* subjective psycho-physical response by actor and observer to the external object of the mask.

Mazzone-Clementi and Hill (2003, p.88) claim, ‘The mask hides and reveals at the same time. To work with a mask one must be aware of its implications. A mask puts one immediately on a tightrope between poetry and prose.’ In search of new ways of listening and being alongside, I employ mask as a method for encountering otherness. I’m wondering, can masks be rehearsals for encountering alterity, both for the audience as well as for myself? With the surface of the mask as the border, the boundary between me and the world, I’m dwelling inside and outside simultaneously, like everyone behind the mask of their own face I guess. Importantly, masks allow me to viscerally explore notions of hospitality – I am both container/vessel and therefore host for the mask, yet also a receiver of its agency, which makes me a guest in its world.

Arguing for a position that perceives masks as offering methods of un-concealment, ways to peek behind the veil, I hide my face in order to highlight or illuminate something else, hoping this has the potential to reveal conduits or sluices of experience and viewpoints ordinarily challenging (or even impossible) to utter. My body and its voices become a ventriloquist’s puppet for other beings desiring expression in the world, and my task becomes that of developing techniques to get out of the way.

Through this process, I’m questioning the lines performers are allowed to cross in the service of satire, and the permissiveness afforded by masks, as they allow me to touch the taboo while mediating intimacies between the close and the closer.

Bali’s ancient mask-carving village Mas is where I have the fortune to meet Ida Bagus Anom (IB Anom) at his workshop, located on the grounds of his ancestral 700-year-old compound. Renowned mask-maker IB Anom learned mask-making, dancing and puppetry from his father Ida Bagus Ketut Gelodog, and generously shares his process of mask-making (2016):

If I make a mask, I must dance it. I must know the story behind the mask, and the music for the mask. Through knowing the movement, knowing the story and understanding the music for the mask you’re carving, it’ll be easy to get the expression from the block of wood when you carve it. So that’s guiding you. The movement, the story, and the music. ... If you put these in the right proportion when you’re carving the mask, and you’re lucky, when you finish, the mask comes alive. We call it here *taksu* ... So, like charisma. When you move the mask, the mask is alive. Why? Because you put the energy: the story, the movement there, and the music. The final test with the mask is when you put it on. Sometimes the mask doesn’t work, maybe the mask does not have *taksu*. But if your proportion is right, and you put it on, the mask is like part of the self. Like when you’re dancing, you’re dancing with that energy, it unites with you and it flows very well.

The masks of my clowters Stanley G. and Granny are intertwined with my personal and scholarly pursuit of knowledge and biographical journeying. Each have their own dance, music and story. Both are made from wood from the Pule tree. IB Anom (2016) explains:

This wood is very light, when we put it on, not so heavy. And second, this wood is elastic. Elastic I mean the wood moves a little bit. I need that character because when I finish carving one mask I must paint it with 40 coats of paint, with 40 layers. So that’s 40 times in the sun. If the wood is hard, not elastic, the wood will crack in the sun.



Being elastic, this is the key. If, as actor, playwright and professor Anna Deavere Smith says, ‘The spirit of acting is the travel from the self to the other’ (1996, p.150), I could add that masks allow the reverse experience, travel from the other to the self. Taking on character as allowing, as acquiescing, being soft, porous, as listening in expansive ways, as just shutting up if nothing is coming. Waiting.

*Just breathing with the audience means everything is happening.*

Masks provide opportunity for total transformation – total flight into another psyche/body/being. How can I support the idea that the mask (or puppet or sculpture or drawing or film or animation) is not simply a surrogate for the performer’s own fears, projections, anxieties, hang-ups, shames and private trajectories? How do I explain this intuitive and unintentional constellation of clowters that have evolved in this moment, in dialogue with personal history? These clowters are composites, they ricochet off auto-ethnographic experience but are far from autobiographical.

Obviously, artists cannot subscribe to censorship or creative fascism. As an actor I don’t need to have experienced mental illness to play it, or alcoholism to play an alcoholic. If such were the case, not a single novel, play, film or fiction could be written. But are my performances and creations an indicator of my own class and racial privilege? Can I as a performer inhabit the body of a so-called other without it being connected somehow to my personal subjectivity and without it being a colonisation/appropriation/imperial action?

Masks help me understand how it feels to inhabit alterity and how to let difference, or the body of an ‘other’, inhabit me. I’m interested in how these masks, as my supervisor professor Rebecca Hilton suggests, temporarily dislodge a power landscape and how they offer opportunities for reflection on what an encounter with otherness can be. This spectrum of dislodgement could lead to the kind of destabilisation the project is after.

The porosity of my being must be sensitised to the possibility of being changed by the encounter. In this way, I’ve been transforming my own theatre practice by opening up possibilities of encountering difference in unexpected ways. These hyper-disciplinary experiments exist as contrapuntal lines in a composition by which difference is respected and welcomed without coercion. They allow me to explore the question: what is this becoming of an other? And what if that other is a tombstone, a pink dress hung on a dumpster dancing in the wind, or a dog behind a closed car window barking hysterically but bored at the same time?

I like watching YouTube films of great thinkers, to not just read their words but hear their voices, see their expressions, hand movements, their eyes. In a video of eminent literary critic and postcolonial thinker Edward Said being interviewed in 1998, he talks of Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci:

Well Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks* says something that has always tremendously appealed to me, that history deposits in us – our own history, our family’s history, our nation’s history, our tradition’s history – which has left in us an infinity of traces, all kinds of marks, you know, through heredity, through collective experience, through individual experience through family experience, through relations between one individual and another ... But there is no inventory, there’s no orderly guide to it. So Gramsci says, therefore, the task at the outset is to try to compile an inventory, in other words, to try and make sense of it. And this seems to me at any rate, to be the most interesting sort of human task. It’s the task of interpretation, it’s the task of giving history some shape and sense. For particular reasons, not just to show that my history is better than yours or my history is worse than yours, I’m a victim and you’re somebody who’s oppressed people and so on. But rather to understand my history in terms of other people’s histories ... in other words to move beyond ... and I think the great goal is in fact to become someone else, to transform itself from a unitary identity to an identity that includes the other without suppressing the difference. That he says is the great goal, and for me I think that would be the case ... and that would be the notion of writing an inventory, historical inventory which not only understands oneself but understands oneself in relation to others, and to understand others as if you would understand yourself.<sup>3</sup>

No discussion of clowning can exclude mention of the audience. In permaculture, the space where two species connect is the most fertile, the possibilities for generating fertile soil multiply. Jacques Lecoq (1997, p.155) says the clown exists in immediate contact with an audience, ‘in a state of openness, entirely without defence’. This makes the clown ultra-sensitive to the world, ‘in a state of reaction and surprise without letting his performance be *deliberately led* ... It is not possible to be a clown for an audience; you play with your audience.’ But who is the audience in this context? What is an audience?

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd\\_Z\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd_Z_g) (33’17”, accessed 12 January 2016).

To test the boundaries of this latter question, my clowters perform clown alone on various sites, with a plethora of so-called non-humxn agents: plants, animals, stones, furniture and so on. Deepening this practice, Stanley G. performs clown alone on his *Ghetto Tour* in Poland and Lithuania. I take the opportunity afforded by contingent sets that pop up, the accommodation I find myself in, the streets and graveyards of Vilnius, Šiauliai, Warsaw and Krakow, where he dances or stands very still, merging with the landscape a short while.

In a grove of trees on the edge of the concentration camp Treblinka, outside Warsaw, Stanley G. is gently dancing. He connects with his inner tune that entangles with the soft wind and birdsong. He also dances with and for gravestones in the Okopowa cemetery in Warsaw, alongside my real ancestors' graves, with the cawing of crows and distant traffic.

Another encounter worth mentioning here occurred during the Summer Academy of Artistic Research in 2019, on the Norwegian island of Utøya, where Granny experiences a clown alone moment in the forest, before being summoned to an outdoor stage by violinist Pia Siirala, fellow PhD candidate soon completing her project at the Sibelius Academy, Helsinki Uniarts.

I remember moving through a pathless section of the forest, possibly re-tracing the exact steps of a terrorist who only eight years before had gunned down 69 people on the island.

I recall Granny feeling lost, confused, overwhelmed by the enormity of the trees, the scent of damp earth and the uneven ground. I recall the lilting and melancholic sound of the violin, experiencing it as a distant promise of care and hope. I remember the eyes of strangers on the raft of a stage on the edge of the forest, a lifeboat of humxns waiting to haul her up and listen to the looped story of her life and victimhood.

I remember wishing I'd finished the performance properly, wished Granny had walked fully away after telling her tale, disappearing behind the bungalows to the tune of 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary', a song Granny managed to convince the gathered group to sing with her (it was the first time she'd ever sung that song with an audience). But somehow as she edged towards the boundary of the stage, the mask grew too painful to bear and I pulled it off, ending the scene prematurely. I felt at the time it was wrong. I wished I could do it again.

In the moment of performing clown alone, I attempt to be at rest, to willfully open my senses in order to calibrate and receive the space and the moment as it presents itself. Can these explorations be methods for encountering otherness? Can I inhabit as well as be inhabited by 'the other'? Is becoming an 'other' as close as I'll ever be to understanding the 'other'?

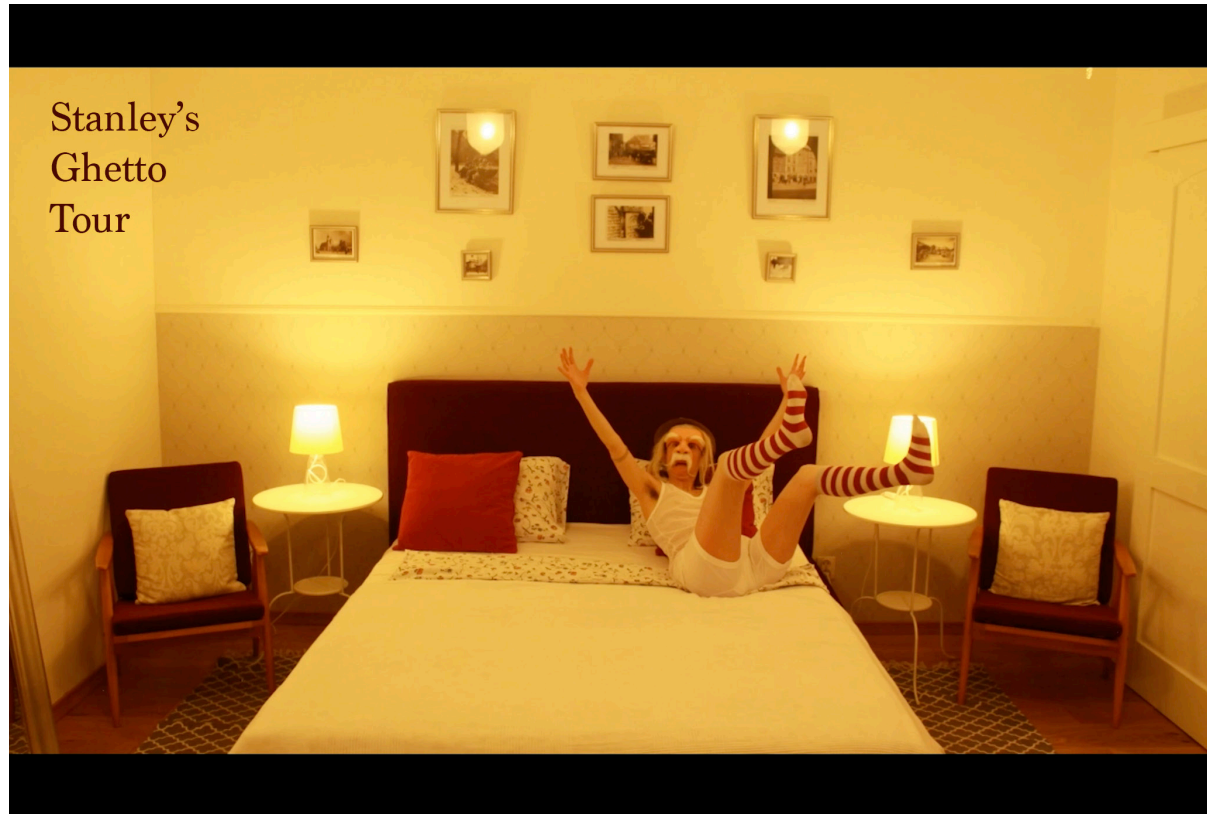
Perhaps, and what if?



From *Stanley's Ghetto Tour*, short film, 2018.



Granny in a forest on Utøya, 2019.



Stanley's  
Ghetto  
Tour

**'SH\*TF\*CK!'**

as uttered by Stanley Goldwater (aka Stanley G.)  
throughout the entire project

## Stanley G.

Enter Stanley G. dressed in full French Revolution regalia.  
dongs a bell. repetitively, almost unbearably so.  
reads:

The <<London Evening Post>> reports in Oxford on 7 July 1763 that the *Terrae Filius* / Son of the Soil / Third Opponent is to be withdrawn 'for the Reformation of Manners amongst the Academics, and for the most severe method of lashing vices, yet in Process of Time it was so degenerated, and it's excellent use so notoriously perverted, that it was become a Satyr on Particulars, and was Conduit to convey private spleen, Maline and Scandal, however unjustly founded, to the World, and rendered thereby the Office ridiculous, as well as the University itself that encouraged it'.

(Hearne cited in Backman 1964, p.46)

Within a climate of rising White supremacy and fascism, some people seem intent on reinvigorating certain principles like pseudo-race science from the 18th and 19th centuries. Stanley G. emerges as a way to reinvigorate more potentially fruitful trends from these times: 'The Third Opponent'.<sup>4</sup>

Stanley G. is first introduced to the world as a 'Turd or Third Opponent' during the 50% PhD seminar *luxurious migrant // performing whiteness*.

<sup>4</sup> See *SPLEEN 1* entitled *Third Opponents and Other Academic Jesters* compiled by Dr. Anders Sandberg.

*Shitfuck!* is both an utterance by Stanley G. as well as a reference to the *shitfuck stick*, one of the many transient and temporary sculptures and ready-mades emerging from the PhD experimentations.

*Shitfuck!* is an evocation of Alfred Jarry's *Merdre!* sprouted as the first word of his play *Ubu Roi* in 1896, a performance that opened and closed the same night, and sparked massive protest in the theatre, leading poet W.B. Yeats, who witnessed it, to later write in his autobiography:

Feeling bound to support the most spirited party, we have shouted for the play, but that night at the Hotel Corneille I am very sad, for comedy, objectivity, has displayed its growing power once more. I say, 'After Stephane Mallarmé, after Paul Verlaine, after Gustave Moreau, after Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after all our subtle colour and nervous rhythm, after the faint mixed tints of Conder, what more is possible? After us the Savage God.'

(Piepenbring, 2015)

As discussant for my 50% seminar *luxurious migrant // performing whiteness* (2017), in which Stanley G. appears as a 'Third Opponent' to my own PhD material, writer, poet and professor of Fine Arts Mara Lee Gerdén perceives:

He's an embodiment of the impossibility of the task that the artist researcher named Stacey Sacks has taken on. To critically examine the very thing that she's implied by the most, to examine whiteness from within whiteness, critical intimacy. So the Third Opponent is a figure in academia who prevailed mostly in the 19th century, present during public defenses and his function was to mock the dissertation in order to amuse and entertain the audience. So this character also has historical precedence, but from within academia. So it's a more narrow scope. Stanley Goldwater. He has this thick accent, European, German, Jewish / Yiddish ... perhaps ... we are not sure. But he invokes a stereotype of an old learned white male professor. Eccentricity is one of his privileges to name but one. He's granted the dominant part of the performance, he's performing both the presentation of your research while at the same time perforating the whole research project with critique, undermining its very foundations.

He takes form as somebody who embodies privilege while at the same time trying to claim the position of institutional, political and postcolonial critique against the hegemony of whiteness and the impossible feat of this position ... He's aware of most of these double binds that comes with this research project and his position but still he insists on using his voice. Goldwater is a character that privileges word over action ... This logo-centrism is intended and furthermore, his endless speech communicates the very failure of critical performativity.

## Stanley G.

*I must say you're doing a perfect impersonation of a traditional audience, what archetypal spectators. It's just a pity you're reinforcing the stereotype!*

Gerdén points out that though the Academy is one apparatus of the system, it is not academic knowledge this project is out to parody and satirise, but colonial logic. Following the advice given in this critique, Stanley G.'s role shifts slightly in the research. His encounters move to a different register, as well as the objects he re/presents. Stanley G. loves re-enacting a good *ekphrasis*, loves to bring other worlds and times into the space. I'm hoping he invites the audience to think of history more porously, registering other times through current encounters.

Always up for a dance and a song, Stanley G. will try to find a moment to celebrate the every day. He's a hopeless romantic and angry skeptic, critical of neoliberal ideas yet reproducing white male centrality and possessing a penis that squeaks.

Liking to tell a good story, Stanley G. takes people on journeys, he fancies himself a tour guide of sorts. He guides people through both real and fabricated museums, contrived art galleries, through distant and recent histories or literally from one local place to another, like from Linnégatan to Gärdet, across the suburb, or even from one room in a building to another.

## Stanley G.

*What is this hyper-accelerationism but a series of different bullshits rubbed together under the freaky-popular title of polyphony or multiplicity, which has been utterly subsumed by neoliberal mentality! Never has multivocality been so reductionist!*

In the short film *Stanley's Ghetto Tour* (2018), while exploring ancestral journeying, Stanley G. exists out there, in the 'field', as a living sculpture.



Stanley G. in the Šiauliai graveyard. Still from *Stanley's Ghetto Tour*, short film, 2018.

Recalling my time in the decimated cemetery in Šiauliai, Lithuania in 2018, I remember Stanley G. standing alongside one of the only two remaining gravestones in the local Jewish cemetery. Standing very still, aware of the sun appearing and disappearing behind me, throwing with its light the shadows of tall trees growing long on the yellowing wintry grass. We stood there a long time, longer than I'd intended, and for all that time, I couldn't move. Even if I'd wanted to, couldn't even look to the side. In that moment Stanley G. transformed into a tombstone, the entire scene stared directly into the camera's eye. I remember becoming overwhelmed with unexpected emotion, holding in the tears at first, then turning off the camera and very suddenly bursting into heaving heavy sobs, brought down to my knees with howling wind in the deserted, vandalised grove. Close to the earth, shards of splintered glass, I was collapsed and broken.

And in that moment a thought appeared. I suddenly wished I'd stayed the whole seven days of my father's Shiva after he died. In Judaism, *Shiva* means 'seven' and is the first period of structured mourning following the death of one's immediate family – a parent, sibling, child or spouse.

I will concentrate here on the topos of the cemetery as one of the most profound transcultural leitmotifs. At first site our last refuge seems to be the only space relatively immune to transgressive tendencies, transcultural and transnational journeys. Crossing the boundary between life and death we all hope to return to our ancestors and finally reterritorialise. Yet, the life/death boundary does not guarantee a final happy homecoming. In 2004 Georgy Paradzhanov made a documentary *I Died in Childhood* about his famous uncle – a film director, artist, philosopher and poet Sergei Paradzhanov. The film keeps coming back to the lost grave leitmotif and the idea of remaining restless even after death. Paradzhanov tells a disturbing story of the destruction of Tbilisi old cemeteries in the 1970s to make room for parks and to leave the dead unhomed and unclaimed. He aptly calls this an exile from his childhood and clings to the only remaining link with the erased past – the cemetery cypresses which touched his ancestors with their roots.

(Tlostanova 2013, pp.21-22)



Stanley G. in the Okopowa cemetery, Warsaw, 2018.

It is only very late in the research that I find the above quote by professor of postcolonial feminism and decolonial researcher Madina Tlostanova, and only after reading this do I begin to truly understand the solidarity, the community I felt with the trees in that cemetery. All of a sudden I can feel what it means to imagine their roots touching my ancestors, and to experience the strange and immediate sense of communion with place, with this desolate, deserted, neglected space deep in the ground of which my ancestral paternal blood found its final resting home.

Following Tlostanova (2013, p.23), I realise with hindsight how in all the experiments with Stanley G. in the field, I was ‘taking part in a peculiar ritual of remembering and reenactment and striving to carefully recreate the spatial memory of the forgotten past’. Through Stanley G., I experience ‘a bodily “merging” with this space – a palimpsest of many cultural strata and dramatic historical events’, somehow corporeally reliving this past in my ‘mimicry of natural and architectural objects’.



Stanley G. carries August Strindberg off stage during a performance of *The (unstable) Pelican* at Strindberg's Intimate Theatre, Stockholm, 2018. Photo: Anna Pettersson

The following extracts are from a working script for Stanley G. at the 50% seminar *luxurious migrant // performing whiteness*, showing his verbose discursivity at play:

## DiALOCO//DiALOGOS

Stanley G. sits in front of a sign reading Free tongue sculpting done here! Honk horn for service. He reads a book, which from one side is entitled *Being Human* and from the other side (and upside down) is called *Idiots for the Times*. He waits patiently for someone to ring the bell, which they do.

Thank you for honking my horn. Your name?  
-menacingly sharpening knife.

Choose a color for your tongue.

I shall now summon the artistic researcher, invoke the creator ...  
AYYYYYAAAAA it's a spiritual practice you know, this becoming of the original artist ...

I'm just kidding, I'm not going to conjure them that way.  
Instead, I simply remove my face.

-Stanley G. removes his mask. Puts on another hat, becomes the researcher.  
The artistic researcher silently sculpts a tongue and slips it onto a nail on the tongue board. Puts Stanley G.'s mask back on.

OK So now this encounter diaLOCO||DiALoGoS in this museum of uselessness is over ... we now enter the end of the epilogue of the prologue, the final preface before the after-face, which will soon be a remnant, a trace of our shared collective past. Remember the game is everywhere at once, sublime presence licks us into this moment.

...

Take a breath. I'm a little out of breath because it's been a long day, and I've been breathing the whole time. Feel your feet in your shoes against the floor. Wiggle your toes. Look at each other, blow a kiss to somebody you don't know. Yes, feel the discomfort. We're all in this uncomfortable moment together, suspended in this transient space academics love to call l-l-l-l-l-l-liminality, the in-between ...

FINALLY! We can begin. Or did it already start. When did it begin? Was it before we came in or long before?

For a moment, let's imagine we're in a theatre and this is a somewhat terrible and deliberate act of arranged material designed to manipulate the senses. Of course, we must consider what power dynamics occur in this encounter.

But also, what dynamics are possible?  
Who is othering who?  
Which side is the stage?  
Are you looking at me or am I looking at you?  
Who's the monkey in the zoo?

Are you aware of my arse ... arse ... artifice? Well, so am I! Who cares, we can all agree it's a fabrication. Fa-bri-ca-tion. From Latin *fabricatio*, 'a structure, construction, a making'. Can we be enthusiastic about this fabrication? From Greek: En – 'in' and theos – 'God', inspired or possessed by the deities! You gotta feel down in your *kishkas*!<sup>5</sup> The enthusiasm of being here in this moment, together.

While exploring this idea of presence, we have to ask the question, What does it mean to be here? Actors say, 'Oy, I wasn't there!' Well, where the hell were they!? What does it mean for a body to be there? What body is here? Is the tongue here? I mean is it there? Is it both here and there simultaneously? Can it be said to be TRUE, does it exist? As Hamlet never said, 'To tongue or not to tongue, that is the question'.

I Stanley Goldwater am here to present and re-present the research of STAHCEY SUCKS---SEX---SOCKS---SACKS, STAHCEY SUCKS. It is my role to do a turd ... TURD ... Third Opponent critique of and commentary on this body of work and its tiny ripples in this particular poo-pond of privilege.

-squeak doll.

In this unique constellation of tongues and people never congregating again in this particularly secular way, in this broadcasting TV studio we encounter Sucks' exploration of Professor Daniel Peltz' term *narrowcasting*, a word bound to lead the researcher right up their own *tochus*.<sup>6</sup>

I'd like to assure you that everything you've seen here so far ... is just the beginning. Now the beginning is nearing its end so we kick-off the opening of the middle, on the periphery of the smack-bang centre of the 50%.

-walk backwards, trip over the shitfuck stick.

SHITFUCK!

<sup>5</sup> *Kishkas* is Yiddish intestines or gut.

<sup>6</sup> *Tochus* is Yiddish for bum.

After Ubu Roi's *PSCHITT STICK*, this is an updated for the times SHITFUCK stick! Universal symbol of power and agency, the only valid response to our current age. SHITFUCK!

*-he throws the stick up.*

We have to figure out how to penetrate this white ceiling! If anyone here would like to grab the SHITFUCK stick and have their own throw, do it! Remember you are absolutely free, except when you're not.

*-walk backwards, trip over the shitfuck stick again.*

Now the artist imagines this encounter is a conversation, so why am I doing most of the talking? First mistake! By sound of applause, who wants audience participation? Sorry for you! The researcher is shutting you up for the next half hour!

Here's a consolation prize ... a readymade from the forest ... (he hands out a log or two).

Now here I hold a tongue in my hands. It's hard FOR LIFE, a virtually indestructible jesmonite sculpture. This thing will outlive us all – think of that – you will all die and this object will continue living. LALALALALALA ...

The researcher calls it a 'poetic object', also an 'emotional object'. Send it around, feel free to finger it and know that you are the third audience ever to fondle one of the artist's many tongues. Poke into its grooves and discover what a sculpture can do for you. Now all these tongues have been somewhat uselessly produced by Sucks as part of thinking through the sticky complex subject of whiteness and what productive disobedience could mean during supremacist times.

...

And in these hallowed halls the artistic researcher feebly attempts to engage the immediate community, through what they call Temporary Hallway Encounters, or T.H.E.

Here we see the artistic researcher's factory of nonsense spilling out of the orifice ... office.

Sucks develops this practice, these transient tactile sculptures outside the studio and intends them as minor insertions in the day, a feeble agitation of a non-verbal conversation with colleagues in the building. It has failed dimly! In spite of a sign saying 'feel free to add, change or mould', and an envelope for 'comments, suggestions, critiques', the only real encounter has been with the administrative reception staff, who vehemently insist that Bruce Springsteen appear in every installation.

I call them the Springsteen mafia. They terrify the researcher.

I read now some of the comments posted in the envelope:

'Loving all the Bruce'

'Feels safe with a young Boss watching over us'

'Why is Bruce upside down?'

In this pale environment of the university, we have to ask: what economy is our knowledge a product of? Just placing the words knowledge and production together places us in a paradigm worthy of mockery, but what does mocking the neo-liberal empire actually produce? Is satire enough?

Before D.T. came in, documentarian Michael Moore hoped the thing to bring him down would be satire. But what political statement is left for satirists to make when politicians are already caricatures of themselves? How do you cartoon a parody? It's a doubling up that cancels out. Accurately reporting on reality these days is more absurd than anything you can conjure in your imagination.

What can we do to penetrate this white ceiling? Of which I clearly am a part? SHITFUCK!

...

And now, a brief commentary upon the researcher's 30% seminar, entitled *Whitewash*. Whitewash? It could have been called HOGWASH! Socks made monumental claims such as expressing a desire to murder the inner colonialist, but it was a pseudo-critique designed to twist the research to fit the artist's open-ended agenda to do anything they chose!

First the poster. A white body wrapped in toilet paper. Right from the start we should have known in which direction the research was going!



The performer gives voice and space to a *Talking Tit*, or *The Re-incarnation of Judith Butt-ler*, to a hairy hula hooper, to a dictator who colonises Stockholm Uniarts and then gives power on the stage to a racist Granny! The show culminates in a collaboration with Japanese healer Azusa Itagaki, who finishes the performance feeling angry and betrayed by the objectification she feels by the gaze of the predominantly white hetero-patriarchal audience. Yet again, the researcher appears to be reinforcing the racist tropes they seek to critique.

After that, in an attempt to develop better ways of listening, to evolve new ways of noticing, to enter the 'where', what emerges? A series of photos called *hello Karlaplan*, or, as I call it, *I don't know who I am anymore*. Image after image of vents, pipes, dogs. The researcher says it's a tool for slowing down, an attempt to enter the attention economy more precisely, an exploration of locality and what home has come to mean to an unintentional academic in existential exile. SHITFUCK!

Look how the artist has squandered their time filming NOTHING! How kind to give oneself the generous methodology of being slow in this speeding up world. To imagine that uselessness and the repetition of futile tasks can be productive. Sucks turns to this idea of narrowcasting, to *Clown Alone*, labels it 'a spacey form of resistance, a deviation from chrono-normative values of production'. Well done! The performer has become an artistic researcher alone in a room performing for themselves, or for gravestones, animals or trees!

The artist imagines themselves as a dog, a man, a tongue, a granny and a stone. Is this what activism has become?

Let's be honest, they are a luxurious migrant lost between worlds, uprooted, disconnected, neither here nor there, swinging somewhere between. And, as a recently endowed citizen of Sverige, the artist luxuriates in a newfound sense of freedom, freedom of movement. For the first time in their life, they feel the sense of confidence a passport can instill. Freedom of expression, freedom in all the security and confidence this skin and a piece of paper gives.

...

Why fiddle with tongues and screens and moving objects and useless words while the world burns? How can we be here when over there, life screams and explodes with the pressures of poverty, deprivation and crime?

SHITFUCK!

# blank

blank starts as a healing and ends as a refusal.  
right at the beginning of the research blank is born in collaboration with Japanese healer and artist Azusa Itagaki  
and though blank disappears for a while,  
blank is always there,  
underneath all the clowters  
a troll possibly  
most likely playing them (and us) all

at Strindberg's Intimate Theatre in Stockholm, blank appears in a filmed clown alone stop-motion sequence spontaneously made while unpacking props for *The (unstable) Pelican: Excavations of Shame and Sacrifice*, a re-creation and total obliteration of Strindberg's play at his centenary celebrations at the theatre.

blank is  
a goat  
a fleshy cartoon  
blank knows  
how to deal with mess  
spreads it around  
hides it under old British flags used as doormats  
pushes it in your face  
laughs at it  
humps it  
rides it  
EATS IT

governed by drives  
blank as anything and nothing in particular  
but everything  
blank has a savage yet impotent physical violence  
is unhinged and unbothered by  
custom and convention  
blank ruptures the knowability of category

blank plays birdBitch



'I'm birdBitch and I speak for the trees! They have a message. FUCK YOU! My teeth look sharp but it's the words that bite!' birdBitch is a confrontation that lived three times on the stage: once at Dansens Hus (thank you Eleanor Bauer!), and twice at Strindberg's Intimate Theatre (tack Anna Pettersson!) as part of the play *The (unstable) Pelican*. Originally conceived as a buffoon mocking white panic and so-called civilisation, birdBitch is a hybrid bird and grumpy villain, a yet-to-be drawn graphic novel. This image is a cartoony translation of an original photograph by Elisabeth Ohlson.





blank is Viktor is Granny is you and me  
 the golden doll  
 as well as the tongues on the wall  
 an experiment with the barbarous civilised or civilised barbaric  
 blank is a mockery of colonial logic of violence of  
 democracy, peace and totalitarianism.  
 no one escapes blank's mockeries  
 not even Greta Thunberg

*blanke* as in white as in whites only  
 as in making the so-called invisible visible  
 or  
 making the absent present simply  
 to show its disappearance once again

blank is parody and buffoon,  
 fool and idiot.  
 a spectrum of traits changing  
 daily  
 hourly  
 by the second  
 it could be:  
 forgetful, horny, hungry, curious  
 and those examples are just that.



Stills from a 1-minute film collaboration with My Häggbom for her artistic research project ArtNews, June 2019.

Below is a link to a 1-minute film collaboration I created with a colleague in the Film and Media Department at Stockholm University of the Arts, My Häggbom. She has a research project combining news and art, called ArtNews. We met for one hour, looked at the day's news headlines, after which I improvised based on the concept. I chose to work with blank this day. We picked an article with the title (loosely translated from Swedish): 'The government department looking after workplace environments has a toxic working environment.'

The music is not my choice.

But it gives you a brief idea of blank in improvising action:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aF1xspujB20&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2ik7yTIU-PhVLCepWtf84jtIFd4GM9m4aiQsM\\_PsUzU\\_M34fNB\\_E5tbNE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aF1xspujB20&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2ik7yTIU-PhVLCepWtf84jtIFd4GM9m4aiQsM_PsUzU_M34fNB_E5tbNE)

blank is a shape-shifting mockery of pomposity  
 the ridiculousness of patriotism  
 a parody of knowledge and toxic masculinity  
 in all elite manifestations and  
 perhaps  
 blank must be experienced to be understood  
 and even then  
 not at all



blank is this untethered buffoon.



## Granny

Embodying both victim and oppressor, evoking sympathy and care, Granny helps us understand how vulnerability can be used to mask real power and privilege. Indifferently, Granny trashes the world. She reminds us how the planet is overheating, and she loves it. She's the character everyone loves, is terrified of, the one they all want to see again. They can't get enough of Granny. And I wonder, what does performing racism in this geo-political context do? Is it possible to re-present racism without re-producing racist belief? What affect does it produce in the audience? What does it mean to perform racism when racism is already practiced freely on the streets, where police are called out to protect hate-speakers in the name of freedom of speech?

More of Granny they always say, WE LOVE GRANNY.

But what kind of provocation is she if everyone loves her? Between the surface of my face and the mask in some places is a space, some breathing space, but other parts of the mask press up hard against me. Granny is a painful mask to wear, on multiple levels. There have been times I've been forced to leave the stage because it pushes so heavily against the same spot on my skull and I feel I might just pass out, scream, puke or all three at once. Per arrival, it's 15 minutes max with Granny these days.

I want to thank Mara Lee Gerdén for her response to my work/play at the 50% PhD Seminar, **luxurious migrant // performing whiteness**. Her comments about Granny are particularly worth repeating here:

She's very interesting in that sense that she embodies a range of conflicting power structures. First thing that strikes me is gender and age. She's old, she's a woman, she's fragile. Her fragility is stressed by the walker and by her frail voice, her difficulties in moving. At first sight or gaze she evokes our sympathy. Time has fared quite badly with her. We can immediately recognise her vulnerability, which, for most of us I presume, also can invoke our present-day Sweden where old people risk poverty and destitution because of a crumbling welfare system ...

All of us have some experience, we can relate to that, the precariousness of old age.

And then again, she's white. The way she embodies whiteness is of course paramount here. And this is established quite early on when she chooses to call the country where she's born Rhodesia ... (a discussion ensues about the fact that I didn't perform that line at the first performance – Gerdén saw two versions of the performance essay, one day after another, with two different audiences. She continues ...)

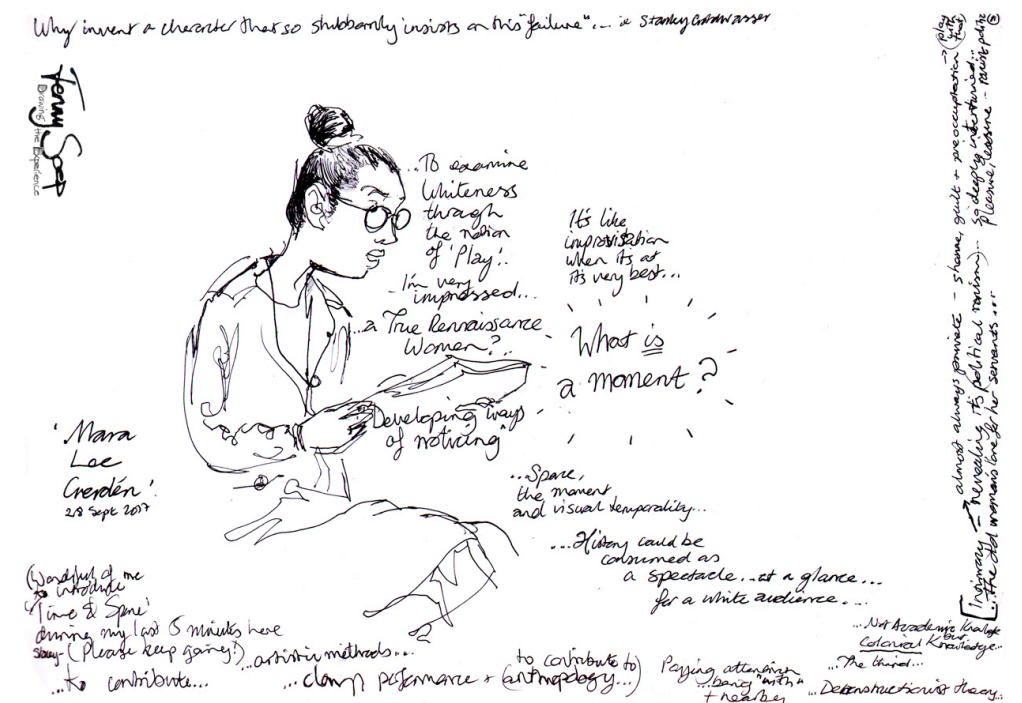
The first time I saw the performance her vulnerability lasted a bit longer. But this tension of the character is really replete with meaning. She communicates that vulnerability possesses a dangerous capacity to obscure power structures. It shows how the manifestation of vulnerability easily depoliticises every critical claim, every claim for accountability. It shows the necessity of further exploring how only some kinds of vulnerability seem legible and how in the end vulnerability can easily turn into another privilege.

In other words that white oppression can come in many forms, it's not only in Nazi uniforms.

...

The third insight she brings about is one that has to do with situated knowledge. I suppose it has to do with how the researcher here – Stacey – manages to comprise artistic skills, subjective experience, political acuteness and historicity, and all this taking form in this character as a historical and artistic necessity. What does this mean, necessity is kind of a vague word right. What I mean is that I have a hard time seeing how she could have been invented and improvised by anyone else at any other place, any other time other than here and now by Stacey Sacks. For me that's the definition of artistic necessity. She really works.

She's the ghost of the margins of the empire ... it's chilling us, it's chilling ... and her presence is a very disturbing one, defying neat categories and everything we've learnt about nice old ladies and racism ... it makes me very aware of our need to be haunted by the past. And not as a means of history in itself or archaeology but a way to pave the way for new futurities as well.



Mara Lee Gerdén as drawn live by Jenny Soep at the 50% Seminar *luxurious migrant // performing whiteness*

In Johannesburg after a presentation of *skin + bones || with-nessing W(w)hitenesses* for the Wits University Master's Pedagogy class at Drama for Life (2019), a student – Victor Kunene – says how as a Zulu man he'd felt terribly offended by Granny calling her dog 'Chaka Zulu', and also how it really hurt to hear everybody laugh at the line. This was the same line Rico, Mari and Pumelela had reflected on when they saw Granny at the FOLK exhibition in Oslo, only from their perspective, its deep sad irony is what gave it power, making it a multi-layered joke, both hurting and stirring to laughter simultaneously. I apologised to Kunene, explaining that the shit this project stirs is unfortunately likely to splatter us all in the face. We spoke about the mandate of the trickster to be in the shit, and he graciously accepted my apology and entered the conversation.

That same Johannesburg trip, I performed at the Market Theatre Laboratory and a brief moment is worth re-telling here. As Granny is exiting the stage, she's shouting out instructions to the lights and sound technician, since there's some kind of problem. Suddenly she says to him, 'I'm sorry I'm shouting at you like that, telling you what to do all the time. It's just, I'm so used to it. It's a difficult habit to give up. You can't teach old dogs new tricks you know.'

The comment received the perfect uncomfortable groan of recognition, the kind of laugh that's half pushed out the nose, a singular *snurgf* tinged with hints of discomfort and pain.

Is Granny a placation of spirits from the demon realm?

## final word from Granny

I never thought I'd end up in a country where INFART means 'in' and UTFART means 'out'. I suppose I could have guessed.

I never thought I'd end up in a country where PUSS is kiss and 'kiss' means to pee.

In a country where it's safe to walk at night, alone, even at my age and watching Donald Duck is a Christmas tradition.

When I stepped off the plane in Stockholm I wanted to cry, it was like heaven.

A sea of white faces.

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