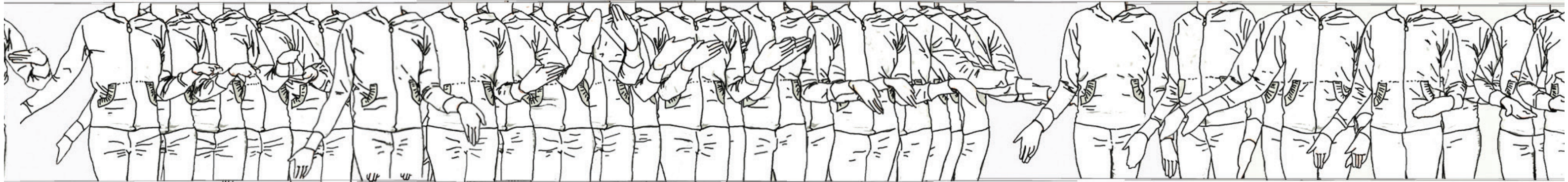


I MAKE ART

Sharlene Khan

# I MAKE ART



Sharlene Khan



It started off as a reaction to my silencing.

I had written an opinion piece in a South African art magazine critiquing the lack of racial transformation in the visual arts field in South Africa. Practically overnight I went from up-and-coming artist to art world pariah, non-existent as the White monied habitus closed ranks. What had I expected? That they would sing my praises when I opened my mouth? Over the next two years I produced *What I look like, What I feel like* in which I presented comparative images which tried to communicate the contradictions of a public-private personae: my own feelings of feeling victimised, hurt and angry set against public perceptions of me as a radical, an activist, an angry black woman — none of these meant in a positive way.

Sharon Kham,  
What I look like,  
What I feel like (2008)



Masquerade, autobiography and the use of my body dressed up in caricatures of Self and Other became the vehicle by which I reclaimed my voice, my position, the right to speak against the art industry and academia which showed in a variety of ways the long arm of power.

[PERFORMATIVE PAUSE. BREATHE. SILENCE]



It started off as a reaction to my silencing.

An encounter with a person in a position of power over me – my decision not to work with someone I didn't feel comfortable with being ignored, my concerns trivialised. Reduced to a voice I didn't recognise {LIKE ME, LIKE ME}, one that was small, weak, accommodating {LIKE ME, LIKE ME}, wanting to be liked {LIKE ME, LIKE ME} and not be perceived as a 'troublemaker' yet again.

Not again.

Not this time.

Critique us, she said. So I did, but not in written words sandwiched amongst other people's thoughts and three syllable catch-words. In my words rather, uninhibited, unrestricted, unmediated, raw

– do you believe that?

*See Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks, 1952*

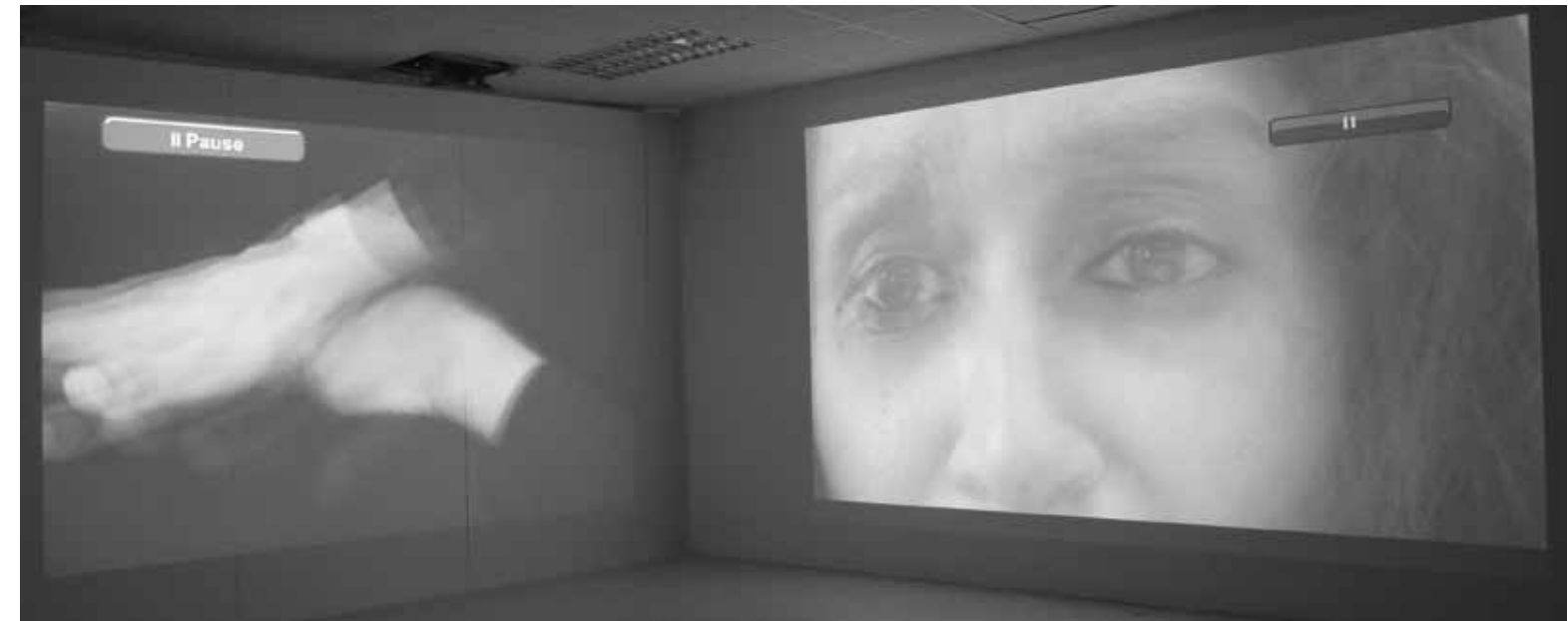
Fanon's idea of the racially epidermalised body fractured, sent on the four winds by the language of racism, essentialised, fixed in its history, its ancestors, its appearance became the chosen visual iconography: a set of eyes to gaze at, a gaze that looks back.

### I SEE YOU.



*Sartre, 'Black Orphans', 1944*

A set of hands wringing in despair, anxiety, menace? Fragments of a captive body and a maddened mind, a language, a discourse: Subaltern. Alterity. Centre. Margin. Glocal. Sartre prophesied, "What then did you expect when you unbound the gag that muted those black mouths? That they would chant your praises? Did you think that when those heads that our fathers had forcibly bowed down to the ground were raised again, you would find adoration in their eyes?"



SCREEN 2:

*And then that anger turns into a rage and it's the kind of rage you hide, the rage you have to mask, because you know the people in charge, in power can't handle that kind of rage, they can't handle your perspectives, your criticism and so you feel the need therefore to mask everything – to mask yourself –*

[SCREEN 2 VOICE-OVER: CLOSE, HIDE, CONCEAL]

*so that you fit into this structure and you end up putting on this entire performance even when it is not explicitly asked for and you hate yourself because you have become 'complicit' in hegemonies so that you can 'get through', so that you can succeed, eventually. But I think part of the fallacy is believing that it is not asked for because even if such things are never uttered, they become the unspoken and unwritten scripts that are still performed to keep up appearance.*

[SCREEN 3: DO, DO, DO!!!]

[SCREEN 2 VOICE-OVER: SHE SAID YES, SHE SAID NO]

*But what if you don't fit in and you don't want to mask it? What if you choose to challenge them, to push back?*

[SCREEN 1: NO, NO] -simultaneously- [SCREEN 3: NO, NO]

Are they able to accept this?

[SCREEN 3: NO, NO]

Can they incorporate this or is the only possibility available to shut down and disavow my blackness and my rage?

And no, my rage is not an illegible one. It is not one that I cannot articulate. It is not just symbolic violence but rather it is a violence that has been put upon us as colonised subjects. More than half of my life I was subjected to White Afrikaner indoctrination in various forms and having come out of apartheid I have had to question so much of who I am, what I am, what am I doing and why?



[SCREEN 2 VOICE-OVER: WHO AM I? WHERE DO I COME FROM? WHAT AM I DOING IN THIS WORLD?]

Why this way? For whom? What is this really about? This endless questioning in this sea of ignorance. And this questioning leads to this raging about why we have accepted certain things and why things have gone unquestioned for as long as they did; how could I not know; why did you allow this; what did you do?

[SCREEN 3: WHY?! HOW COULD YOU? YOU STUPID IGNORANT BITCH! I HATE YOU.]

And that rage has grown and it kind of starts to creep out of you because there is so much to be angry about every day... Every. Single. Day. I think what Western feminism has done is to speak of rage but in an academic manner, to sanitise and neutralise it and make it palatable so that it becomes currency, so that you can get a book publishing deal and get your paper published and people invite you to conferences and it's all nice, cause nobody wants to deal with a raving bitch

let alone the angry black woman. I mean rather than screaming at somebody and saying "this is not how I want to be treated"...

[SCREEN 3: THIS IS NOT HOW I WANT TO BE TREATED]

...and effecting a change right there and then (even them hating you openly is a change I think), noooo. You have to take it to dinner, have a polite conversation with it and even pay for supper. I mean confrontation is a part of everyday life but instead with such important issues like race we have to negotiate, we have to hear that other person's point of view and understand 'where they came from'. What you can hope for at the most is that they resort to a masquerade of their own were they pretend to tolerate you for a given time in the hope that eventually you will shut the fuck up or even better still, leave their world untouched when you finally depart.



*It's their world. It's always their world. And you're always a visitor who has to learn the house rules. And you learn this shit from the time you're born, even if you're born in a black majority country, only being exposed to other Indian people. Everyone wants a Barbie - you got to get a Barbie. She's a princess, she's beautiful. Look at her long pretty blonde hair (just like Shirley Temple's blonde curls) and you can comb it and comb it. And her sparkly blue eyes and small nose and pretty pink mouth. And look at that pretty pink pony she has and the pretty pink carriage that carries her and Ken to a happily ever after. And look at her dress, oh look at her dress. But you can't afford Barbie. You beg and plead but that stupid doll eludes you. Instead you get little baby dolls with their stupid little bonnets and stupid plastic bottles with which you can feed them and then they pee all over you as the water runs right through them. And the ugliest little doll with a horrible head of hair and a head bigger than her whole body which lies in a peanut shell. And then the hair gets matted and can't be combed and sits like this big clump which is slightly removed from the plastic scalp, and then the dolls eyelids go weird and one always hangs limply and an arm pops out and the doll looks like this thing that accuses you of not taking care of it and the stupid loop keeps saying "mama mama" and you can't turn it off and you need a stone to break the back open*



*and bang it shut, and you finally do and it stares with its half-opened eye silently, watching.*

*Always watching.*

*Not like Barbie at all who always remained posed and dignified. Even when you stripped her off all her clothes, she still stood there smiling in her nakedness. Always that smile, perfect, like Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz or Anne of Green Gables or*

*Miss South Africa. Miss South Africa always looked like a real life Barbie - beautifully White without a scar, long flowing blonde or brown hair, blue or green eyes, long White hairless legs and graceful White arms, pearly white teeth. She looked great in a swimsuit and in evening gowns and I bet you that if you undressed her she would also stand there smiling in her beautiful White nakedness.*



*I wished so much that when I grew up I would be White and every night I dreamed that when I grew up I would be this beautiful White girl named Cristina (Cris for short which would cause all sorts of delightful confusion), and I would have long blonde hair and blue eyes and a perfect built and I could sit at a pool and be White and beautiful and if I chose to dive into the water, I would rise gracefully and one day I would meet the love of my life and he would be impressed by my Whiteness and my swimming and cycling and skiing and diving and snorkelling, my singing and dancing.*

*Because as beautiful as Barbie was, she still couldn't dance as well as all those Bollywood actress - Madhuri Dixit, Sri Devi, Pooja Bhatt, Dimple Kapadia. They were flawless too, with big*

brown eyes and ample breasts and curvy hips which could shake in all directions as they danced. They could dance! And they sounded like angels. And even when they cried, it looked sooooo beautiful. I would have settled for being one of them.

But I wasn't. I wasn't Barbie beautiful or Bollywood beautiful except in my dreams. I was a painfully skinny, hairy, big nosed, crooked teeth girl with all sorts of scars on my legs left by God-knows what poor people's diseases, and when I became a teenager I was introduced to the joys of acne and the ugliest square glasses - like the ones all the scientists in 70s and 80s sci-fi movies wear. "Acne - what acne? That will stop with age. See a specialist? No, not necessary. Here's an ointment. Maybe you have too much heat in your body." And of course I couldn't run, jump, bike or swim to save my life. To top it off I had a too big attitude and not enough reverence for anything. At 16 I got contact lenses and they were coloured blue and in some small way I made Cristina come true. And when she did, I realised how stupid other people became - they would look at my eyes and were truly impressed. Guys suddenly became interested, not just in my eyes but in my lineage - "do your parents have blue eyes, did your grandparents have blue eyes? Does it run in the family?" I hated them. I hated myself.

[SCREEN 2 VOICE-OVER: HATE, HATE, HATE \*whispering\*]

And I learnt to hate Miss South Africa.

Always their house, their rules. What did it matter if I knew other stuff about the Ramayana, or the Bodhisattva Padmapani or Tagore or Lata Mangeshkar and Kishore Kumar? No, it had to be Shakespeare's Macbeth and poems about Irishmen dying and gyrating circles heralding the fall of things. I had to learn Oh Susanna, Jimmy Crack Corn, Old Folks at Home and stupid songs about yellow submarines and ob-la-di-ob-la-da. I had to hear about die "bobbejaan who klimmed die berg" and to "borsel my tande tarieps taraps" and "Ons vir jou Suid Afrika". ♪

[SCREEN 2 VOICE-OVER: TARIEPS, TARAPS, TARIEPS, TARAPS]

[SCREEN 3: BOBBEJAAN KLIM DIE BERG SO HASTIG AND SO VASTIG..., TARIEPS TARAPS..., EK BORSEL MY TANDE TAROU..., ONS VIR JOU SUID AFRIKA! ♪].

I had to learn about weird little girls covering their brother in the snow with their naked bodies and Paul Kruger's fucking thumb being shot, and the pyramids of Giza and flying buttresses in Gothic architecture, and boring Irma Stern and about Gandhi's Satyagraha campaign against the bloody British but not one word about children being massacred in Soweto or golden rhinos being forged in old fires in the south. They teach you for years to learn to sew, stitch and mend and then when the country's ripped apart and you're now having to learn Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika and the new English last part and welcome Nelson and Winnie and you're looking around thinking - how could I have not known? Why didn't anyone tell me? How? How? How?



[SCREEN 2 VOICE-OVER: HOW, HOW, HOW \*in crying voice\*]



See Ama Ata Aidoo's 'Our Sister Killjoy' 1977

See Sara Ahmed's 'No Promise of Happiness' (2010)



Racism  
+ Sexism  
+ Class  
Intersecting  
Oppressions

This is based on black feminist intersectionality theories - see hooks, Collins, Cranshaw

This term is appropriated from Bhabha

Did you think that I would sing your praises when last I opened my mouth? What did Ama Ata Aidoo call us — 'Sister Killjoy'? What does sister Sara Ahmed call us — 'feminist killjoys', enders of that 'good feeling', the promise of happiness, of diversity, the ones who bell hooks says makes backs harden and brings a hush to a room of liberals and radicals. And yet they call on us to activate the angry black woman stereotype, to use negativity as a radical methodological tool which sparks a reaction, which sets people off, which is a starting point of creativity as we work out ourselves, our traumas, our otherness. Anger as a mask, a distance that affronts and still seduces, that pretends at a familiarity even as it forces back. Self-reflective emotion, neo-didacticism. Who am I speaking to? YOU, and YOU and YOU and YOU. And me. Not for the purposes of a re-wounding: I tell you my pain-you tell me your pain, I tell you my pain-you tell me your pain, I tell you my pain-you tell me your pain, I tell you my pain-you tell me your pain, but rather locating that pain within history, societies' institutions, cultural beliefs and economies, as well as one's own personal Freudian pathologies. Not as a hierarchy of oppressions...

1. Race
2. Class
3. Gender
4. Sexuality
5. Nationality
6. Ethnicity
7. Religion
8. Education
9. Disability
10. Age



... but in an understanding that in my life these positions slide-slip-intersect-interlock-interweave. South African Indian woman-of-colour artist, half Muslim-half Christian, heteronormative, poor black middle-class wannabee. Unhomed. Not White, not Black, not Coloured. Not fly. Homeless. Subaltern. Apartheid's child, post-apartheid's post-modern R&B girl-woman, neo-colonialism's visual artist. Neither here nor there, but somewhere, something, someone else. A space of uncertainty, of ambivalence, of hybridity. A journey of wandering to come back to oneself, the Self that never is without an Other — can one be one's Other? A doppelganger of creativity?

[PERFORMATIVE PAUSE. BREATHE. SILENCE]

Neither one nor the other, someone, something else. A space of ambiguity, of impurity, of ambivalence. What is this space? What is this mask? What is this postcolonial masquerade?

both-and

This term is appropriated from Niti Sampt Patel, 2001, and extended further in my own work on visual arts masquerading in South Africa.



Scene 3: Garden [EMMERENTIA]

ACT 1:

DOROTHY  
 Toto — I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.  
 DOROTHY  
 We must be over the rainbow!

[Shot in colour to represent new SA — Mandela democratic elections]

ACT 2:

Glinda, the 'Good' Witch of the North appears.

GLINDA  
 I'm Glinda, the Witch of the North.  
 Ding Dong! The Wicked Witch is dead!

[Images of UNESCO speeches and Miriam Makeba speaking to security council]

'Wicked' Witch of the West appears.

WITCH

Who killed my sister? Who killed the Witch of the East?  
Was it you? Answer me!

[Flicker through images of killed 'Communists' Che, Dulcie September, Biko, Chris Hani, Patrice Lumumba]

DOROTHY

No -- No! It was an accident!  
I didn't mean to kill anybody!....

WITCH

Give me back my slippers! I'm the only one that knows how  
to use them.  
They're of no use to you! Give them back to me!

[Flicker through images of US presidents]

WITCH

I'll get you, my pretty, and your little dog, too!

DOROTHY

Oh, I'd give anything to get out of Oz -- but which is the  
way back? I can't go the way I came.

GLINDA

No -- that's true. The only person who might know would be  
the great and wonderful Wizard of Oz himself!

DOROTHY

But, how do I start for Emerald City?

GLINDA

It's always best to start at the beginning -- and all you  
do is follow the Yellow Brick Road.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC 'FOLLOW THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD' - IRIS  
OUT]



The space of the after, the new, the crossroads of capital, history, culture, the 'chaotically pluralistic but internally coherent' – AFRICA! The space where content-meets-genre-meets-aesthetics-meets-production-meets-money, or rather the lack thereof, meets-audience-meets-foreign cultural institutes-meets-fong-kong distribution networks-meets-rampant consumerism-amid plentiful resources-amid plentiful foreign divestors-meets-poverty-unemployment-disease-illiteracy-poverty porn-and-detrimental aid. What is the postcolonial masquerade? It is a politics of the aesthetics, a politicisation of aesthetics MEETS all that intersects in the postcolonial's life. It takes not content, genre, medium, production, reception and market for granted, but examines these as they inform the aesthetics and discourses that talks to postcolonials first, to those Other people up there (up here) in the North, second. It pretends, it mimics, it seduces, it plays, it laughs, it farts, it gestures, it questions, it interrogates, it interrogates, it interrogates, it interrogates. **It speaks loudly.** To itself, to its community. Sometimes it has to shout. It whispers, lovingly. It dresses up and appears simply to disappear and emerge among ambiguities. It is, even as it is not.

From Mumba's 'On the Postcolony' (2007)

								<sup>1</sup> N		<sup>2</sup> E		
<sup>3</sup> G		<sup>4</sup> C	L	<sup>5</sup> A	S	S		A		T		
E				G				T		H		
N			<sup>6</sup> R	E	L	I	G	I	O	N		
D			A					O		I		
<sup>7</sup> E	D	U	C	A	T	I	O	N		C		
R			E					A		I		
								L		T		
			<sup>8</sup> D	I	S	A	B	I	L	I	T	Y
								T				
<sup>9</sup> S	E	X	U	A	L	I	T	Y				



All contemporary artworks function in a discursive margin-periphery framework validated and sustained by Western hegemonic practices, its colonial history and capitalist output and uptake, its sense of continuity. Globalised contemporary art discourses dislocate and appropriate counterflows of decolonial criticism, piling up the ever same and the newly acknowledged in rehashed canonising discourses. This layering opens up and calls into necessity interrogations of spaces of in-betweenness, calling into being the revenant. As an African woman artist of Indian descent, I make art not only within a specific situation where 'history' and 'education' have to be overhauled, but where works still function in relation to a Western validatory discourse of art. Colonial mimicry — which Homi K. Bhabha locates between the simultaneous success and failure of the mimetic gesture, its 'almost-but-not-quite-ness' — opens up oscillating spaces in-between the closeness of mimesis and its slippage of 'authenticity'.

*I Make Art* restages John Baldessari's *I am Making Art* (1971) following his 1970 *Class Assignments (Optional)* to "Imitate Baldessari in Actions and Speech." Spoofing the ephemerality and spontaneity of this 1970s video artwork not only acknowledges its iconic status, but — like all works in the Western art canon — reiterates its hegemonic status against which later works are compared, contrasted and evaluated. Baldessari's gestural playfulness, copied, repeated and appropriated by a South African woman artist, forty-one years later in a declarative visual statement of *I Make Contemporary Art* (2011), becomes a strained signifier of accumulated otherness in its repetitious shorthand indexing of Western art categorisations: *I Make African Art, I Make Contemporary Arab Art, I Make Craft, I Make Feminist Art, I Make Performance Art, I Make Digital Art, I Make Protest Art, I Make Interdisciplinary Art, I Make Deconstructive Art, I Make Public Art, I Make New Media Art, I Make Optical Art, I Make Multi-media Art, I Make Occupy Art, I Make Art History.*

Artist's statement





## Claiming Territory

Or: Being a Woman of Colour Artist from the South

Nicola Lauré al-Samarai

### **Intro 1 (Audacious Take)**

We should think from our epicentres of agency, looking for what is meaningful, progressive and useful to us as Africans [...].

*Molara Ogundipe*

### **Intro 2 (Vigorous Take)**

Sometimes we are blessed with being able to choose the time, and the arena, and the manner of our revolution, but more usually we must do battle where we are standing.

*Audre Lorde*

### **Intro 3 (Tenacious Take)**

Every bush of memory hides a ready shot.

*Édouard Glissant*

Summer 2011. I visit an alternative art space in Berlin as it offers the rare chance to see a group exhibition of South African visual artists off mainstream. It takes a moment for me to realise that *after the butcher*, the ghoulish name of the gallery, isn't some fancy attempt to lure visitors but refers, instead, to the previous use of the location. While I try hard to focus on the artwork so as to smother an incredibly discomforting chain of thought — starting off with the slaughtering of bodies and spirits and unfurling into the imaginative thicket of something named 'post-/colonial condition' — I hear the soft yet permeating sound of an apparently female voice.

I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art

I follow the sound into the back of the rambling premises, fervently hoping that the rear part isn't tiled in white. It is not. The voice becomes stronger.

I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I r

I enter a dim room with a flat screen. A video-loop features a woman in a hoody, her face and lower legs not visible, across her chest the word

## CON TEMP ORARY

The woman performs in two different sequences and two different settings: an inside one against a plain wall with no ambient noise, her voice close and reverberating; an outside one against a lively park scenery with plenty of noise, her voice still sound and coming across clearly.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I am referring to the sequences *I Make Contemporary Art* and *I Make Public Art* (both from 2011).



I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I make art I m

The on-liner is supported by gestures. The movement of hands and arms, as well as the sparse sidesteps, follow a careful choreography of one-sentence-one-movement, similar in both sequences. The hands that perform the gestures are dark.

I watch the videos again and again. To me, a female viewer of colour from the North, the expression 'I make art' neither conveys a romantically idealised (read: privileged) work activity nor a universalising (read: white/male/western/elitist) inventive stance. It is an existential statement of being in the world, of claiming territory, of the inalienable right to create. It's about doing and taking position 'in spite of'. It's about agency in *present/tense* of a sister from the South.



Spring 2014. A work-in-progress, *I Make Art* by Sharlene Khan has impressively grown, to date, to include a sixteen composite video-sequence and a storyboard-like 'gestural' drawing on a ten-metre canvas. Although every single component of the composition offers an autonomous point of entry for negotiating contested terrains, their deeply interactive and interrelating character unfolds into a vast post-/colonial topography. This topography is signified by three words organised into a sentence and mapped by the individuality of the statement, but it is dimensioned by the inherent histories of ideas.

# I

The western concept of 'I' — of being an individual and a subject — was never made to include folks of colour. One, of course, could dismiss this philosophico-existential ban as being the wacky pipe dream of antediluvian western historiopaths, if it wouldn't represent a major constituent of a globalised matrix of domination which severely determines, impacts and (de)forms the personal and the collective. As *I Make Art* indicates, the real-world space of artists of colour is a depersonalising one: straightjacketed between disavowal and being put in a category, barricaded with suffocating identity labels and the pressure for authenticity, and supported by the racist commonplaces of colonial histories that are re-enacted in capitalist scopic regimes and tied to an overpowering international art market.

If one sticks to these annihilating pre-settings of fixed differences where artists of colour, both structurally and symbolically, are repeatedly consigned to their 'proper place' in the regnant order of things, then a 'composite I' cannot exist at all, for it receives 'meaning' only through antithetical demarcations. In the individual case of Sharlene Khan: not 'male' / not really 'South African' / not really 'African' / not really 'Indian' / not really 'diasporic' / not 'Black' / not 'white' / not 'Hindu' / not 'Muslim' / not really 'Christian' / not '(ab)original' / not 'authentic' / not... / not... / not...

If one, however, dares to roam the intricate tracks of invisibility and silence, of unhomeliness and denied existence, of unnoticed contact and relation, then a 'composite I' grows into a world of its own. In such a world, it becomes possible to ponder the devastation of being-out-of-place-out-of-time-out-of-sight-out-of-sound, to appreciate opacity and to think the unthinkable which, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot reminds us, "one cannot conceive within the range of possible alternatives, which perverts all answers because it defies the terms under which the questions are phrased."<sup>2</sup> In such a world, owning time and space and history and voice and being a unique 'I' is birthright.

## Make

'Make' is a weighty, almost intimidating word if one considers its many nuances of meaning: build, compose, construct, craft, create, fashion, form, formulate, generate, manufacture, originate, produce. On a conceptual and a material level, 'to make' connotes 'to bring into being', carrying subliminal yet distinctly coactive notions of capability, intellect, talent, skill, inventiveness, originality, agency, strength, potential and potency. It doesn't take a genius to figure out the predestined bearers of these inherently testosterone-driven quality characteristics, let alone their geospherical home base.



<sup>2</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995). 'An Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non-event.' in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 82.



The counter-concept 'to unmake' follows less subtle rules, albeit not necessarily in semantic terms, for the corresponding paraphrase 'take out of being' offers equally multifarious nuances: annul, cancel, clear, delete, demolish, efface, eliminate, remove, undo, wipe out. It is rather futile to ruminate about suitable competences that would meet these resourceful facets of destruction because 'to unmake' de facto requires just one basic prerequisite, namely, power.

Quite obviously then, the statement 'I make art' — pronounced by a woman of colour artist from the South — brings into view a broader context where everything related to the act of 'making' is embedded in hegemonic standard procedures of 'unmaking' and 'being unmade'. Given the primary reference of *I Make Art* — John Baldessari's video-work *I am Making Art* (1971) — Sharlene Khan's insistence upon the 'making' can thus be read as a progressive process to not only repossess the 'creative doing' itself, but to transmogrify it into a deeply inclusive concept of creativity. By re-staging an iconic artwork and spoofing the white/male/western/elitist phantasmal equation of (artistic) individuality and universality, she becomes a 're-maker' who, in Coco Fusco's words, is "appropriating and recontextualising elements of an established or enforced culture in order to estrange, recode or ensnare them in new contexts of meaning".<sup>3</sup> These new contexts disrupt dominant orders of perception and relevancy as they bring into being floating spaces of ambiguity wherein which the many ventures of (artistic) 'making' can be imbued with authorship and authority.

## Art

If 'art' were an impartial conceptual term to define human creative skill and imagination and/or works produced by such skill and imagination, the statement 'I make art' would be a tautology. Unfortunately, though, 'art' has always been a localised and hence geopolitically contaminated idea: pieced together from a conglomerate of arbitrary standards and values, manifested by discriminatory discourses and canonisations and translated into a(ttra)ction by serious wonga.<sup>4</sup> Considering the realm of a western-centric 'economy of attention' with its narrowing parameters of taste, recognition and saleability — indeed, the most reliable entry control system feature to prevent unauthorised folks from waltzing in the main gate to the imperious State of Art — there aren't too many options left for artists of colour, except, of course, for arrangements of regimented access.

In *I Make Art*, Sharlene Khan 'visibilises' this unsettling predicament and its effects. She brings into view the many disfigurations of hegemonic naming and classificatory strategies that are in use to not only label, compartmentalise and



<sup>3</sup> Coco Fusco (1995), 'Passionate Irreverence: The Cultural Politics of Identity' in *English is Broken Here. Notes On Cultural Fusion in the Americas*, 33.

<sup>4</sup> Romany for "money".



dislocate the work of artists of colour, but to also allochronise it by placing it in a time other than the present. Against the background of what Johannes Fabian has termed the “denial of coevalness”,<sup>5</sup> her simultaneous quest for and spoof of ‘contemporariness’ could be interpreted as a wilful rejection of both the still vital, evolutionary concept of the Politics of Time that was imposed during colonialism and a current, equally exclusionary notion of being ‘up to date’ that follows a similar track.

Furthermore, by activating the power of gesture and emotion, *I Make Art* de-conditions and de-conventionalises an understanding of ‘art’ that owes its definitional supremacy to the continued imbalance between marginalised art forms and a dominant art history which, depending on perspective, simultaneously obscures and elucidates the fraught nexus of inclusion and exclusion. Accordingly, the statement ‘I make art’ — pronounced by a woman of colour artist from the South — reveals an uncanny double bind of action and foresight: making space and trying to get out of it. Within such a framing, ‘art’ must be perceived as a highly vulnerable, seesawing territory of in-betweenness where definitions fail and demarcation lines turn invalid the moment they are drawn.

5 Johannes Fabian (1983), *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, 31.

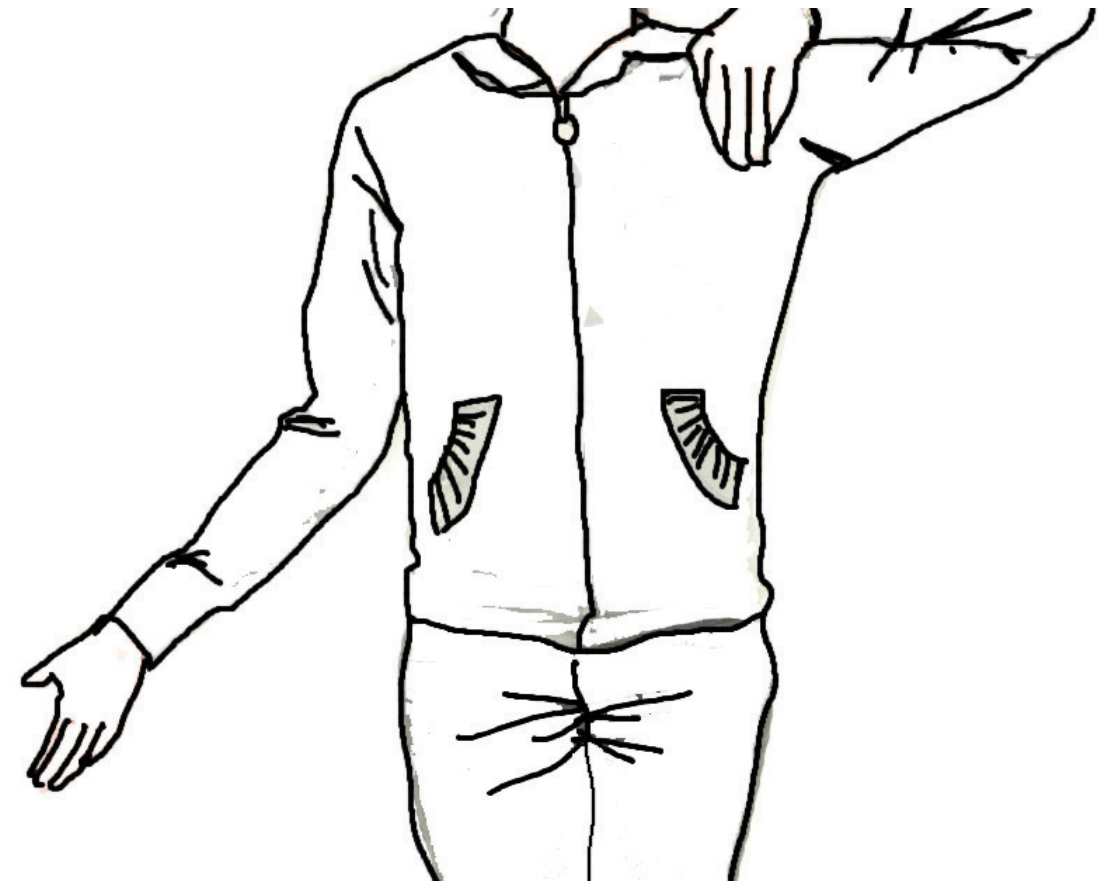


2014 and beyond. *I Make Art* offers a rare combination of conceptual sophistication and informed humour. The use of spoofing as creative theory, the unperturbed dealing with cultural looniness, the mimicry of typified image production, the ridiculing of western-centric and post-/colonial notions of relevance are important elements to contour an opaquely floating, relational position-taking that ties geopolitics to experience and the other way around. Reading the work as both a cultural text and a performative event, its declared state of unfinishedness is indeed consequential.

*I Make Art* provides us, as viewers, with three different yet intertwined terrains of autonomy, whose different, yet intertwined, ‘unfinishedness’ emblematises a complex poetics of being and becoming. Including spaces and times, as well as real and imagined geographies along with their erratic overlaps, Sharlene Khan’s statement ‘I make art’ — both literally and figuratively — re-members present and presence. It thus confirms the realness and vision of something very basic: I am. I do. I continue.











**KILLJOY**



**SHE SAID YES**  
**SHE SAID NO**

**WILLFUL**

**SHE SAID NO**  
**SHE SAID NO**

**PROBLEM**

**HOMI DON'T  
PLAY THAT**



Malcolm X interviewed on the television show *City Desk* by journalists Len O'Connor, Floyd Kalber and Jim Hurlbut, 17 March 1963.

Hurlbut: Mr O'Connor.

O'Connor: What is your real name?

**Malcolm X: Malcolm. Malcolm X, ah ...**

O'Connor: [interrupts] Is that your legal name?

**Malcolm X: As far as I'm concerned it's my legal name.**

O'Connor: Have you been to court to establish that you're...?

**Malcolm X: I didn't have to go to court to be called Murphy or Jones or Smith – excuse me for answering you this way...**

O'Connor: That's alright.

**Malcolm X: If a Chinese person were to say his name was Patrick Murphy, ah, you would look at him like he's insane, because Murphy is an Irish name [Hurlbut smiles, folds his arms and shifts in his seat back and forth, and then keeps looking down], a European name or the name that has a Caucasian or white background. And a yellow person, a Chinese is a yellow man [Hurlbut lifts his eye brows] and he has nothing to do or no connections whatsoever with the name Murphy. And if doesn't look proper for a person who is yellow or Chinese to be walking around named Murphy or Jones or Johnson or Bunch or Powell, I think it would be just as improper for a black person or the so-called Negro in this country, as we're taught by the honourable Elijah Mohammed, to walk around with these names, and therefore he [cut to O'Connor who looks down] teaches us that during slavery, the same [O'Connor looks up] slave master who owned us, [cut back to Malcolm X] ah, put his last name on us to denote that we were his property. So that when you see a Negro today, who's named Johnson, if you go back in his history you'll find that he was once, his grandfather, or one of his forefathers was owned by a white man who was named Johnson. If his name is Bunch, his grandfather was owned by a white man ...**

O'Connor: [interrupts] I get the point, uhm...

**Malcolm X: ... that was named Bunch.**

O'Connor: Would you mind telling me what your father's last name was?

**Malcolm X: My father didn't know his last name. My father got his last name from his grandfather and his grandfather got it from his grandfather who got it from the slave master. The real names of our people were destroyed ...**

O'Connor: [interrupts] Well was there any ...

**Malcolm X: ... during slavery.**

O'Connor: ... was there any line, any point in the genealogy of your family when you did have to use a last name, and if so, what was it?

**Malcolm X: The last of my forefathers...**

O'Connor: Yeah ...

**Malcolm X: ...was taken from them when they were brought to America and made slaves. And then, the name of the slave master was given, which we refuse, we reject that name today and ...**

O'Connor: [interrupts] You mean, you mean ...

**Malcolm X: ... we refuse to ...**

O'Connor: ... you mean you won't even tell me what your father's supposed last name was, or gifted last name was?

**Malcolm X: I never acknowledge it whatsoever.**

KTLA 5 Morning News entertainment reporter Sam Rubin interviewing Samuel L. Jackson for his role in *Robocop* (2014), 10 February 2014.

00:07 **Rubin** Tell you what, working for *Marvel*, the *Super Bowl* commercial, did you get a lot of reaction to that *Super Bowl* commercial?  
[1.8 sec silence]  
**Jackson** [looks up, to the right, then back straight] What *Super Bowl* commercial?  
[2.8 sec silence]

00:13 **Rubin** [looks to the side] Oh, you know what, I didn't real [turns back to the camera] . . . my mistake . . . I, you know what . . .  
**Jackson** Tell you what, see, you, you're as crazy as the people on Twitter.  
**Rubin** [laughs] Right . . .  
[loud laughter in the background]  
**Jackson** I'm not Laurence Fishburne!

00:20 [loud laughs in the background continue]  
**Rubin** [nods] That's my fault, I know that, that was my fault, ah, my mistake . . . you know what . . . [lifts his hands in surrender]  
**Jackson** [shouts] We don't all look alike!

00:26 [loud laughs in the background continue]  
**Rubin** [nods, inaudible] You're exactly . . .  
**Jackson** We may be all black and famous,  
[male voice from background loudly] You are guilty.  
**Jackson** but we don't all look alike.

00:29 **Rubin** [nods] I am, I, I am guilty . . .  
[female voice from background] Next question!  
**Jackson** You're busted.  
**Rubin** [continues] I am guilty . . .  
[male voice from background] He thought you were Bob Dylan!  
**Rubin** Right! [laughs]  
**Jackson** [shakes his head] You're the entertainment reporter?

00:38 **Rubin** I know! How dumb am I? [laughs]  
**Jackson** [shakes his head] You're the entertainment reporter for this station . . .

00:41 **Rubin** Right! [slaps his face] Flog!  
**Jackson** . . . and you don't know the difference between me and Laurence Fishburne?  
**Rubin** I know! My, my mistake!  
[male voice from background] Awww

00:44 **Rubin** My mistake. I apologize, really, my big mistake [eye blink] Let's talk about . . .

00:47 **Jackson** There must be a very short line for your job outside there.  
[male voice from background] Awww

00:55 **Rubin** I'll say, huh, it'll probably not be hard to get another person to sit right here.

**Rubin** [focussed] Let's talk about *Robocop*.  
**Jackson** Aww, hell no.  
[everyone laughs]  
**Jackson** Really?

01:00 **Jackson** Really?  
**Rubin** My, I apologize . . .

01:04 **Jackson** I'm the other guy.  
**Rubin** Pardon?  
**Jackson** I'm the other guy. The other one.  
**Rubin** Ah, yeah.  
**Jackson** What's in your wallet?

01:09 **Rubin** [laughs and nods] Right, that's him.  
**Jackson** I'm that guy.  
**Rubin** [continues laughing and nodding] Exactly right.  
**Jackson** There's more than one black guy doing commercials.

01:14 **Rubin** There's no question about that.  
**Jackson** I'm the 'What's in your wallet?' black guy. He's the car black guy.  
**Rubin** There it is!  
**Jackson** Morgan Freeman is the other credit card black guy. You only hear his voice, though, so you probably won't confuse him with Laurence Fishburne.

01:28 **Rubin** You're exac . . . you're out . . . you're a hundred per cent right. Ah, to *Robocop* . . .

01:32 **Jackson** There's a heavier black weight guy, that's like, putting cash down in a seats in a baseball stadium, but he's also the black guy that turns off the house, the water, and the lights when the kids tell him the house is cool. I'm not that guy either.

01:45 **Rubin** Do we wanna do a list with all the people that you're not?  
**Jackson** And I've actually never done a McDonalds or a Kentucky Fried Chicken commercial. I know that's surprising.

01:55 **Rubin** [nodding] Right, fair enough, fair enough.  
[male voice from background] Awww, oh man  
**Rubin** [nodding] To the original . . .  
**Jackson** [interrupts] And I'm the only black guy in *Robocop* that's not a criminal.

02:04 **Rubin** [nodding] Okay . . .  
**Jackson** Except for Michael K Williams.  
**Rubin** [and male voice from background, hearty laughter] Hahahaha . . .

I was plodding and plodding,  
just plodding along.  
The Steigerwald kids and Hochan,  
the butcher, the girls,  
as they jumped like grasshoppers  
when Irimias hugged me  
and asked "How's it going, Kelemen?"  
And bought a round and told me everything  
and they were drinking rum and brandy.  
Even then I was plodding and plodding  
and plodding and plodding along.  
They'll be here!  
They'll be here at the farm!  
They'll be here. The Toth kid...  
Irimias and Petrina...  
and they've been at the Steigerwalds...  
And as I was plodding along,  
when it became clear  
they were leaving for the farm,  
then I knew everything.  
Irimias and Petrina are coming  
toward the farm.  
I met Hochan, the butcher  
and I bumped into the Toth kid...  
And as I was plodding along...  
for I had to plod,  
I saw them by the road,  
revelation...  
which way... why... where to...  
and the plodding, the why,  
the where to and the which way,  
the Toth kid, the Steigerwald kids...  
Irimias and Petrina  
and the gunpowder at the Steigerwalds'...  
And the Steigerwald kids talking  
of gunpowder, and me plodding and  
plodding and plodding ...  
And the Steigerwald kids  
were talking of gunpowder...  
And the Steigerwald kids...

were talking of gunpowder...  
But the Toth kid... he was there...  
at the silo.  
And I was plodding and  
plodding and plodding...  
the Steigerwald kids...  
Gunpowder's not gun-powder.  
They were talking about gunpowder.  
No gun-powder, gunpowder.  
I was plodding, plodding along...  
Gunpowder's not gun-powder!  
Gunpowder! It's no gun-powder!  
He hugged me... The waitresses  
jumped like grasshoppers...  
They were drinking rum and brandy...  
And I was plodding and  
plodding and plodding...  
As you plod along you learn everything...  
the Steigerwalds and Irimias hugged me,  
the girls jumped like grasshoppers,  
and bought a round,  
drinking rum and brandy...  
and he told me everything  
and I'm plodding, plodding,  
plodding, plodding  
plodding, plodding,  
plodding, and plodding along...  
but there's a huge difference  
between plodding and plodding.  
I knew exactly when I saw  
them at the junction,  
why, how which way, why and how...  
I'm plodding, plodding...  
and how am I plodding?  
How am I plodding?  
The gunpowder, the Steigerwalds,  
the Toth kid...  
The whole street was talking about  
them hiding gunpowder.  
Why, why and why they're coming

and why they're coming.  
And I'm plodding...  
For I was plodding and  
plodding and plodding along...  
I saw them on the road...  
and they're coming...  
Irimias and Petrina  
are coming toward the farm.  
Gunpowder, Steigerwald...  
They're coming toward the farm!  
I was plodding, plodding, plodding along.  
Irimias and Petrina...  
Irimias hugged me...  
The girls jumped around  
like grasshoppers...  
And I was plodding, plodding  
and plodding along...  
When they started toward the farm  
at the junction, I knew everything.  
Irimias and Petrina are  
coming toward the farm.  
I met Hochan, the butcher and bumped  
into the Toth kid at the silo...  
Which way, why, where to...  
and the plodding, the why and  
the where to, the which way...  
And plodding, plodding and plodding...  
The Steigerwald kids were  
talking about gunpowder...  
the gunpowder's no gun-powder...  
The waitresses jumped like grasshoppers.  
They were drinking rum and brandy...  
In a little while... I was  
plodding and plodding...  
The Toth kid, the Steigerwalds...  
and Irimias hugged me...  
The girls jumped like grasshoppers...  
he bought us a round,  
they had rum and brandy.  
He told me everything.

And I keep plodding...  
why, how, which way, why and how...  
Plodding and plodding and plodding.  
And how am I plodding?  
The gunpowder, Hochan,  
the butcher, Steigerwald, Toth...  
Everybody was talking about  
the Steigerwald kids hiding gunpowder.  
Why?  
And why are Irimias and Petrina  
coming toward the farm?  
I know why they're coming.  
Because I had a revelation. A revelation.  
I know why they're coming.  
Because I had a revelation.  
They're coming at the junction.  
I know exactly why.  
They have stopped, yet they're coming.











## “when I felt like I just wasn’t being heard”: Sharlene Khan’s *Nervous Conditions*

Yvette Greslé

*What then did you expect when you unbound the gag that had muted those black mouths? That they would chant your praises? Did you think that when those heads that our fathers had forcibly bowed down to the ground were raised again, you would find adoration in their eyes?*

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Orphée Noir*<sup>1</sup>

*When my half-closed eyes slid open and my ears popped open what did you think my mouth would say? [Third screen overlay: Thank you, thank you, thank you]. Did you think that I would sing your praises? Did you expect me to thank you for knowing you fucked me over?*

Sharlene Khan, *Nervous Conditions*<sup>2</sup>

A woman (not fully visible) rubs her hands together without pause. Her hands (their repetitive action) registers, and then performs, psychic unsettlement. There are temporal displacements as the phantom traces of hands, their movements, linger. Sometimes it seems as though a hand detaches from the body to which it belongs. As I look, I hear a woman’s voice and background noise reminiscent of analogue radio and television static – *white noise*. The woman speaks as if on the telephone. We neither see nor hear her interlocutor. Sometimes her speech trails off or breaks before the completion of a sentence or a thought. She begins: “Yeah so I’m not sure the meeting went very well [pause]. Well she doesn’t like the direction I’m taking.” A formal conversation is implied: a mode of address familiar to institutional environments: “I understand, but I really don’t think we share a common, you know, kind of methodological or conceptual approach. It’s just, you know, we’re different people.” A conversation about university pedagogy perhaps. Spoken words, phrases and sentences (how these are delivered) suggest the anxieties attached to the precarious position of speaking critically and forcefully to an institutional power.

The wringing hands are the opening sequences of *Nervous Conditions I*, a three-channel digital video installation by Sharlene Khan, which runs for 30 minutes, 7 seconds.<sup>3</sup> The title derives from the novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Zimbabwean author/filmmaker Tsitsi Dangarembga.<sup>4</sup> The woman whose body and voice figures in Khan's *Nervous Conditions* is the artist herself. Filmed in black and white, the video suggests a material relationship to histories of documentary film or photography which attach objectivity and truth-telling to the absence of colour: of course, the artist's deliberate displacement of history's relation to objective detachment, evidence and truth is rendered unstable.<sup>5</sup> Ambiguity is threaded through the experience of the work rendering obscure the borderlines between what is staged and imagined and (through devices reminiscent of autobiographical narration, memoir or testimony) actually known and experienced by the artist herself.

In the second filmed sequence only Khan's eyes are visible.<sup>6</sup> She speaks as if reading from a text: she variously looks down, looks up, faces us, moves in closer, frowns and tilts her head. The presence of the addressee is ambiguous: it is not necessarily clear whether he/she/they exist solely in the imagination of the artist, or as a public to be mobilised and called into being.<sup>7</sup> In the audio we listen to the artist trace and retrace her meeting (real or imaginary) with an authority figure. Her narrative, at first, performs a seemingly matter-of-fact analysis of this occasion which forms the departure point for this work: "During the meeting I found myself even more carefully trying to convey my feelings. And then starting to stumble over my words when I felt like I just wasn't being heard."<sup>8</sup> But this performed (apparently rational) self-analysis is fragile. This sequence is linked both visually and affectively to the filmed hands: the same temporal displacements are visible – again we see phantom traces and overlays, as movements linger. The first sequence of the twisting and turning hands reiterate and reinscribe the work's affective and bodily relay of the psychic and emotional trauma of *not* being seen and *not* being heard.

The 'authorising' figure is unseen and present only through the medium of Khan's voice and body. Khan performs the moment at which traumatic memories are ignited: past and present blur and overlay, becoming indistinguishable.<sup>9</sup> As Griselda Pollock writes of trauma's no-time-space: "Psychic trauma knows no time. It is a perpetual present, lodged like a foreign resident in the psyche."<sup>10</sup> The artist's staging of psychological distress (within the context of psychiatric containment) appears on a third screen. But this staging makes visible, depending on who looks and how, the historical incarceration within psychiatric institutions of women who transgress the boundaries of what can or cannot (shouldn't?) be spoken.<sup>11</sup> More specifically, through her deliberate, knowing enactment of the signs and symptomologies of psychological distress, Khan brings gender, race and power-laden institutional discourses into a critical relation.<sup>12</sup> From the staged locus of a padded cell in the third screen the artist deploys mimicry and repetition as a disruptive strategy.<sup>13</sup> Khan mimics, in a parodic





sense, symptoms associated with human subjects of psychoanalysis and psychiatric assessments that relate – even in popular knowledge circulated by film, literature and the media – to states of exhaustion and sleep, infantile behaviour, dishevelled hair, the potential for self-harm and so forth.<sup>14</sup> These stagings are viewed simultaneously and we have to turn to see the performances on the first and second screens, the anxious hands with their ghostly residues and the eyes that look either at us or at what we cannot see. The artist's monologue tells of the traumatic, repetitive and insidious inscription of racial Othering in everyday life in apartheid South Africa as a subject designated, quite literally, in the language of racial erasure: 'non-white'. As the camera scrutinises, in the third screen the deliberately dishevelled hair of the artist as she performs knowingly the imagined symptoms of psychic disorder and emotional unsettlement, we hear a narrative of childhood by a subject classified 'Indian': blonde-haired dolls, fairy-tale characters, beauty queens, and state-sanctioned history lessons haunt the artist's narration, and speak affectively and powerfully to the particularities of different kinds of women's trauma in conditions of white supremacy and its particular ideological construction of femininity.

Khan's performance is ambiguous: imagined lines between entrapment and agency are not necessarily distinct. The artist's imaginative, strategic excavation and re-staging of available institutional-historically constituted vocabularies (and symptomologies) run the risk of re-inscribing pervasive and often insidious and opaque power relations. In conditions of systemic institutional racism, for example, to what extent can agency be enacted and exerted in sustained and meaningful ways within the parameters of institutions which embody and perpetuate historical relations and vocabularies of power? The troubling psychoanalytic juxtaposition of femininity and hysteria, which Pollock notes is inscribed in the work of Freud and Jung, is revisited in Khan's enactment: "a body in trouble with language as the offered terms of being sexed and gendered, or a body whose phantasmatic elements become a kind of corporeal alphabet displacing words onto feelings, pains, anaesthesias, physical symptoms."<sup>15</sup> *Nervous Conditions* deploys inherited languages and vocabularies bringing them to the body of the artist who stages a performance that appears to oscillate between self-conscious enactment and the more opaque territories of actual embodied, lived experience. The performed, although fragile, rationality of the work's opening sequence develops into anger and a narrative that moves backwards and forwards between memories of South Africa (the anxieties of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa) and the performed disillusionment with Western pedagogy. A spectre of whiteness takes shape in the post-traumatic encounter with historical, sedimented prejudice from which there appears to be no escape, and recalls Frantz Fanon's mobilisation of a psychological condition circumscribed by narcissism, although his vocabulary (grounded in the social-historical conditions of his time) is lodged in the idea of man: "The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness."<sup>16</sup>

Khan's *Nervous Conditions* speaks to Pollock's analysis of arts by woman artists affected by traumatic pasts or their residues.<sup>17</sup> The historical trauma foregrounded by Pollock's work focuses primarily on the Holocaust.<sup>18</sup> In doing so, it opens up strategies for thinking through the relations between woman artists and histories that emerge out of a number of conditions of historical, political and personal trauma. Pollock writes, "The artist or, rather, the artworking as a space of encounter between art and the world and the viewer of that world mediated via the art is a 'transport station of trauma'. This is a sign of our times that are never pre- but indelibly post-traumatic."<sup>19</sup> Of relevance to Khan's *Nervous Conditions* is Pollock's conception of the post-traumatic art object's

tribute to the shattering of existing means of comprehension and representation resulting from real historical outrages by a constant fidelity, by working towards a phrasing – not merely linguistic, but gestural, sonic or graphic – a touching or encountering of some affective elements capable of shifting us both subjectively and collectively that do not arrive at containing the event in finite forms.<sup>20</sup>

Khan brings lived and embodied outrage – personal, cross-generational and historic – to her practice as an artist. This is not a didactic staging offering a finite and resolved explication of events. Khan explores the particular capacities of her medium which allows for the critical and affective possibilities of temporal displacement, and the insertion into the world of the work itself of her own body and voice. Time slows and collapses in the ghostly residues of movements and gestures. Khan's performances encountered on three screens oscillate across registers of emotion, staged appropriations of institutionally scripted psychic symptomologies, and the artist's ambiguous embodiment-enactment.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Khan's racial trauma intersects with women's histories and experiences, but there is specificity to her trauma as she mobilises her embodied experience of apartheid South Africa, and its relation to histories of colonialism and slavery that preceded and overlaid it. Khan's personal history as an apartheid subject classified via systemic erasure informs her work and her intellectual and political life.<sup>21</sup> Importantly, for current debates about the meaning and significance of feminism and indeed the notion of global feminisms, is the political struggle not only against phallogocentric orders, but also between feminists not necessarily alert, outside of the ambit of theoretical abstraction, to the lived, embodied power dynamics of race, class and the heterogeneity of woman's experience.<sup>22</sup> Just as the Western notion of universalism predicated on the historical enlightenment figure of the European property-owning white man is to be critiqued, so is the re-inscription of feminisms that assume the universality of woman's experience. This has particular meaning to Khan whose unambiguous lived experience of undisguised violent Othering disallows the complacency of a universal 'we'.<sup>23</sup> *Nervous Conditions* deliberately counters the idea of a singular authoritative narrative in various ways. For instance, each of the filmed





sequences appear and disappear at different intervals and there are sonic overlays. Sometimes sequences replace each other, e.g., the hands replaced by the padded psychiatric cell, upsetting the structuring sequencing. Within an exhibition space, the three separately filmed sequences are projected from floor to ceiling on three interconnected walls. The spatial disjunctures between the height of the viewer and the scale of the work are overwhelming in relation to the bodies of viewers. *Nervous Conditions* is imagined as a work-in-progress, always in a process of *becoming*:

a work-in-progress is something unstable, a state that feels akin to my thinking process about my identity, my politics, my creativity. As an artist it's also an immensely creative space – I can still change this completely, I can completely scrap this, I can still make mistakes, this is still mine to chop and change as I choose as the producer – I can change my mind, what you see now might not be what you see one year from now.<sup>24</sup>

This disruption of the linear, causal narratives and historical processes are commonplace in the history of twentieth century experimental film, the critical lineages of which encompass avant-garde and feminist film-making.<sup>25</sup> But these have particular and continued significance to artists who, similar to Khan, are grappling with their own lived and embodied experience of late twentieth century authoritarianism and the continued re-inscription of race and gender-related violence into the present. Apartheid's grand project of erasure, woven into the very fabric of everyday life and social relations, along with its iterations in the present, is not simply a theoretical or historical abstraction to Khan. In the video she performs her relationship to history in apartheid South Africa and its ideological erasure of narratives and voices that ran counter to the state-sanctioned construction of white Afrikaner narratives and Eurocentric epistemologies: "I had to learn about weird little girls covering their brother in the snow with their naked bodies [...] But not one word about children massacred in Soweto."<sup>26</sup> *Nervous Conditions* embodies the post-traumatic aftershock of historical and authoritarian conditions founded on ideologies of racial hierarchy. But this is not the only critical work that the video performs: it is also a critique of the post-apartheid Rainbow Nation and epistemologies and pedagogies experienced travelling and studying outside of South Africa. The violence of race enacted specifically upon women in South Africa and more particularly those classified Indian, overlays and disrupts the artist's performed narration of a meeting between a postgraduate student and her advisor in another place and time.<sup>27</sup>

The work offers no closure or resolution. The anger it performs is the political and historical rage of voices still fighting to be heard despite the theoretical work, and social and political activism of innumerable twentieth century figures who responded with such critical insight and force to the historical conditions that slavery, colonialism and apartheid produced. Khan's performed narrative reiterates this important literary

and scholarly work (a critical strategy that underpins the performed traumatised talking-back). Figures to whom she refers include Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Toni Morrison, Mahmood Mamdani and Chinua Achebe.

*Nervous Conditions* speaks to political and personal exhaustion and the traumatic aftermath of historical monoliths founded on the assumption of racial and epistemological superiority: "I have centuries of anger in me and you want me to sit down and talk to you about it?" Khan's *Nervous Conditions* draws affect, performance, memory and the devices of narrating the self into a relationship with history. It leaves us with questions to which we should remain alert. The political subjectivity which Khan brings into view through her devices of personal memories and her performance speak to epistemic violence and invisibility, and invite further, self-reflexive and engaged inquiry:

What do you hear?

Can you hear?

Can you?

Can you hear us speak?

Haven't we always been speaking?

Here.

And here.

What do you hear?

Listen.

What do you hear?

What did you expect to hear?

Did you think I would sing your praises when last I opened my mouth?

## Notes

1. Published as preface to Frantz Fanon (1968) *Black Skin. White Masks* (trans. C. L. Markman). The citation accompanies *Nervous Conditions* on Khan's website and speaks both to the themes of the work and its scripted narrative which makes reference to significant figures, and theoretical work, subsumed under the category postcolonial. The 'nervous conditions' invoked in the work's title and Khan's staging suggests the post-traumatic temporal collapse of this historical periodisation.

2. Extract from Sharlene Khan's script written for *Nervous Conditions* (Part 1).

3. Two other video works complete the *Nervous Conditions* series.

4. The idea of education is at the centre of Dangarembga's text as the novel's protagonist Tambu struggles against the determinations of race, gender, sexuality, class and poverty in conditions of colonialism. The novel is set in the 1960s in what was then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) but written after the country's liberation war and its subsequent independence from British colonial rule. Khan mobilises Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* relationship to gender, race and experiences that emerge out of geographically particular conditions of colonialism.

5. The idea of colour and video art emerging out of post-apartheid South Africa, and the question of how South African woman artists enter historical events through the medium of video is engaged in my PhD thesis (the provisional title is *Video Art, Traumatic Memory and the Historical Event in the Work of Four South African Woman Artists*) where I am looking closely at videos by artists Jo Racliffe, Penny Siopis, Berni Searle, Minnette Vári. See also T. Garb (2011) *Figures & Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography*.

6. Khan's visual strategies enter into a dialogue with discourses, which are located in literature, visual culture, film and art, scrutinising historically sedimented modes of thinking, representing, and imagining the bodies of black women. See C. Sharpe (2010) *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*. See also texts of relevance to Khan's emphasis in *Nervous Conditions* on race, gender and pedagogy, notably: bell hooks (1989) *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. On South Africa, race and gender more broadly see the work of Pumla Gqola, Desiree Lewis and Yvette Abrahams.

7. See M. Warner (2002) *Publics and Counterpublics*.

8. Neelika Jayawardane draws attention to prejudice, scholarship and personal/professional relations 'Taking Things Personally, and Publicising the Private: Encountering Erasure on the Frontlines of Academia', *Social Dynamics* 33:1, 2007, 31-51.

9. See Griselda Pollock (2013) *After Affects/After Images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum*. This text, grounded in psychoanalytic theory, feminism and art history, informs my reading of *Nervous Conditions* and the work's embodiment of psychic trauma, particularly temporal displacement and post-traumatic conditions.

10. Ibid. 2.

11. There is extensive literature on this. See the classic text by S. Gilman and S. Gubar (1979/2000) *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. See also L. Appignanesi (2009) *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present*.

12. Harriet Deacon's historical work *The Island: A History of Robben Island, 1488-1990* (1996) presents some historical context for this in South Africa and the relations between psychiatry, gender and race. Zuleiga Adams' PhD dissertation includes a historiography of madness in South Africa. See also D. Tsafendas (2011) *Race, Madness and the Archive*.

13. Khan's PhD research is of importance to *Nervous Conditions* which explores performance and postcolonial masquerading and encompasses concepts such as mimicry and repetition. Her thesis, which focuses on the work of South African women of colour artists is titled *Postcolonial Masquerading: A Critical Analysis of Masquerading Strategies in the Works of South African Artists Anton Kannemeyer, Tracey Rose, Mary Sibande, Nandipha Mntambo and Senzeni Marasela*.

14. My exploration of these performed symptoms are based on psychoanalytic approaches to film and history of art, cited in this essay, which engage in a critical dialogue with the work of Freud.

15. Pollock (2013), 25.

16. Fanon (1967), 9-10. While Fanon's work is important here I am flagging the critical work of Françoise Vergès, engaged in my forthcoming PhD thesis. Her text draws attention to the specificities attached to different geographical-historical conditions of race, and in particular, opens up a critical space that thinks about how foundational texts are themselves constituted and brought into being. She complicates Fanon's relationship both to Algeria (and to his birthplace Martinique), troubling both his political narrative and the ground from which his psychoanalytic methods of analyses are formed. Vergès also reflects critically on Fanon's own masculinity conceived of in a traumatic relationship to race, to France, and the experience of colonialism. See her article: 'Creole Skin, Black Mask: Fanon and Disavowal', *Critical Inquiry*, 23:3, 1997, 578-595.

17. Refer to Pollock (2013).

18. See her preface, *ibid.* xxii.

19. *Ibid.*, 25.

20. *Ibid.*, 26-7.

21. Of course, this erasure is at the centre of the historical work on race and Fanon's foundational text *Black Skin White Masks*.

22. See, for example, Tracey Rose's performance, drawing attention to critical perspectives on race and feminism at the curated exhibition *Global Feminisms* at the Brooklyn Museum (2007). The exhibition was co-curated by Maura Reilly, Linda Nochlin and Lila Acheson Wallace.

23. Important sources for Khan's intellectual position on gender and race include the work of bell hooks and Audre Lorde. See also Sara Ahmed (2014) *Willful Subjects*.

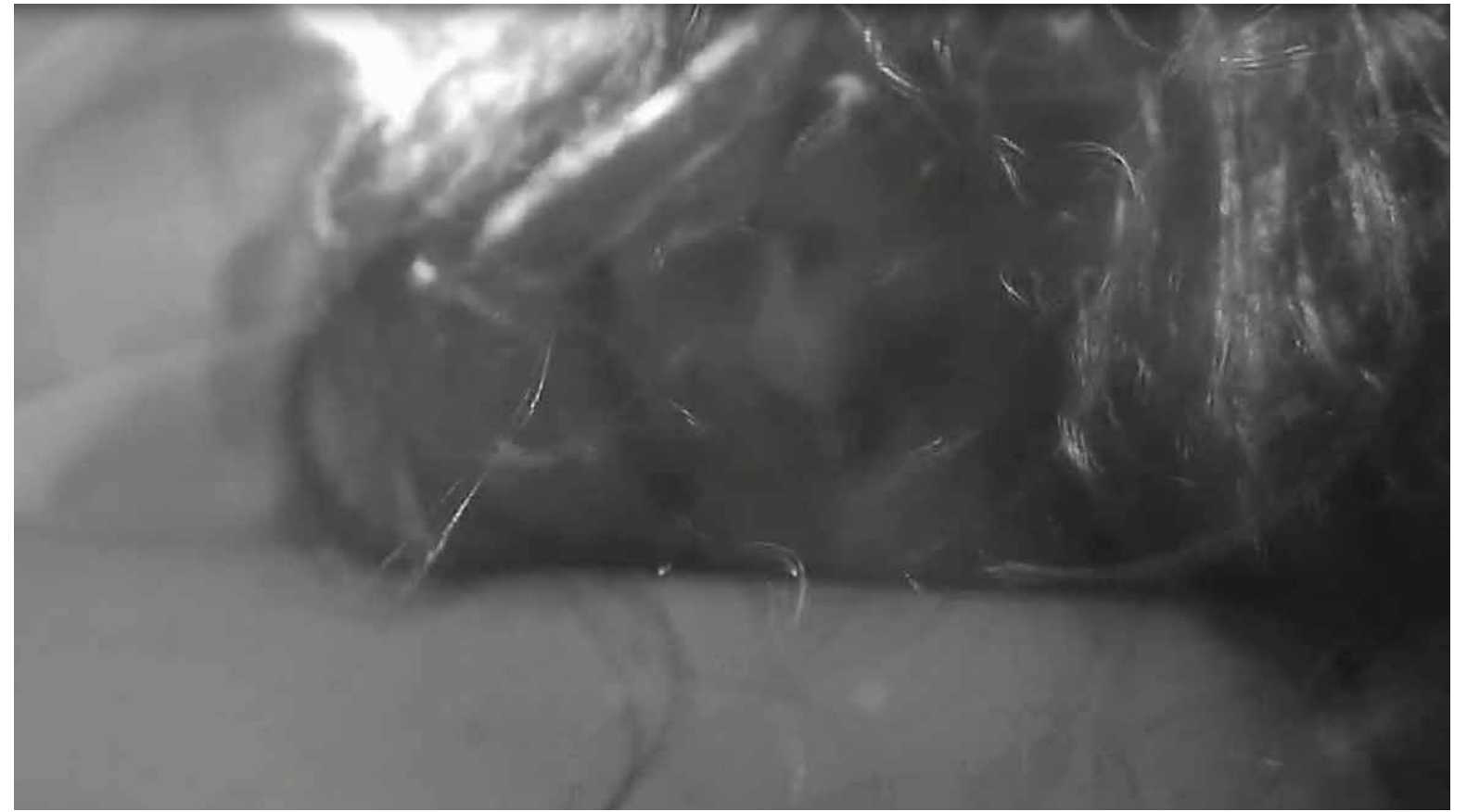
24. From an email conversation with the artist, 8 July 2014.

25. T. Leighton (2008) *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*.

26. Khan refers here to the Great Trek heroine Racheltjie de Beer. The massacre of children in Soweto refers to the events of 16 June 1976.

27. See N. Jayawardane (2012) 'Everyone's Got Their Indian', *Transition*, No. 107, *Blending Borders*, 51-65.





Betty Govinden

## FOR SHARLENE KHAN CONTEMPLATION

From the seashores  
incarnadine  
yesterday  
and  
yesterday  
and yesterday  
you are cassandra  
washed in by the endless tide,  
seaweed sand and matted hair  
clogging your mouth  
flotsam and jetsam of history

captive only of your  
liberty  
you are nongquase  
your mouth filled with wind  
rising to walk amidst the  
embattled shores  
deformed and mangled  
your ochre breasts  
heaving with terror  
with desire

to mingle  
on the streets  
museum without walls  
outstretched  
bare life  
bereft

luminous masks walking the streets  
metamorphosis of the gods  
amidst the squalor and barbarism of  
poverty

tearing off the bit from your mouth  
tongues of fire  
playing in the half light  
drawing the black blood  
of black souls  
fingering on the sand  
plantation stories  
scattered cries  
insurgent  
under the pitiless noonday sun

yesterday  
and  
yesterday  
and  
yesterday  
today  
and  
today  
and  
today  
to the last syllable of recorded time

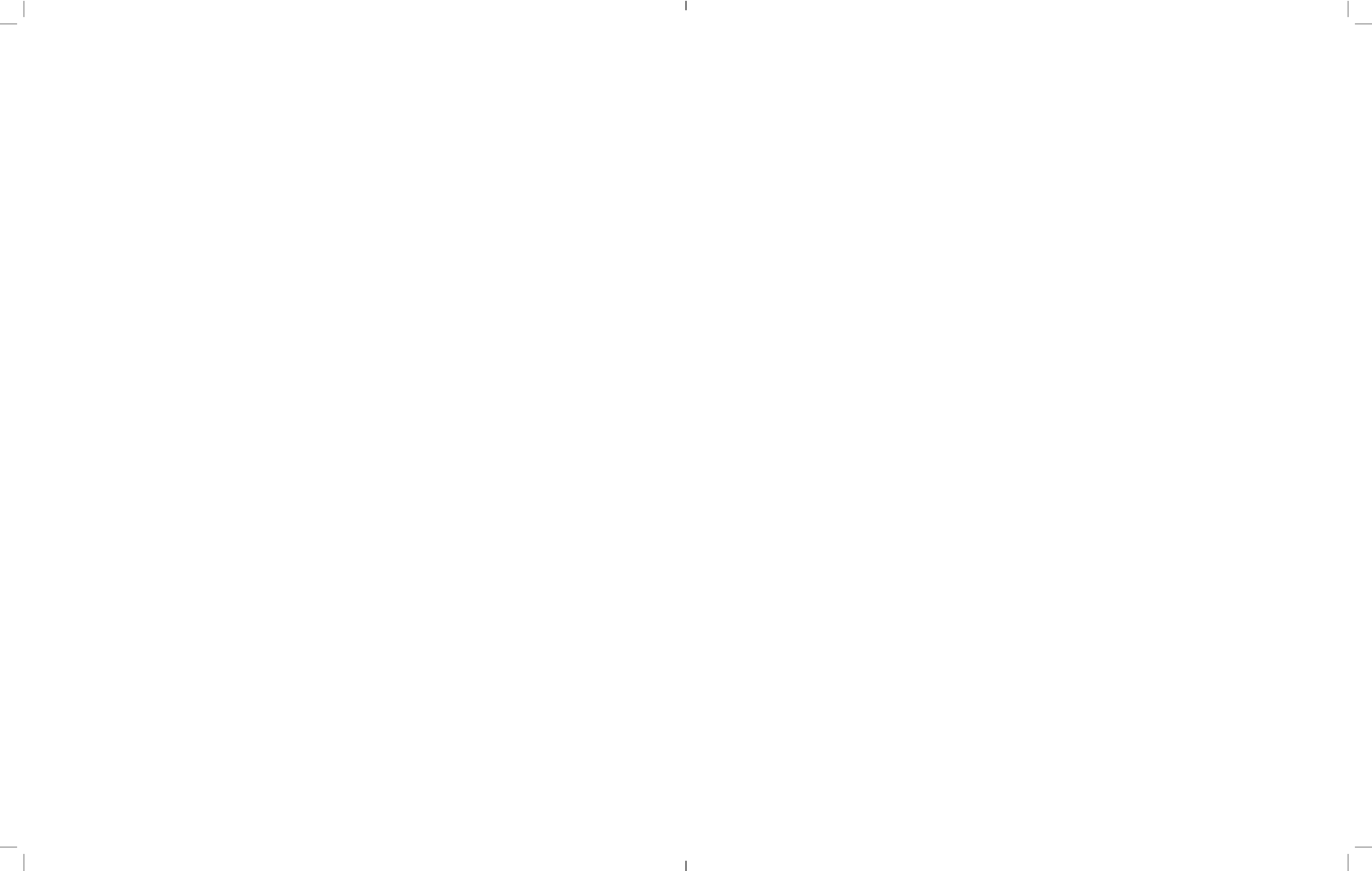
warrior princess  
unacknowledged legislator of the world  
oracle of our time  
prophetess  
seer  
searing with rage  
for the hungry  
walking the pavements  
for truths  
mirrored  
and etched  
in lines of agony  
agonistic

over arctic icescapes  
primordial forests  
you are  
ariadne's thread  
intertwining the ancient atlantic  
and  
the streets of egoli  
where the moon waxes red  
and you refuse the totems of sacrifice  
silence  
fluttering in the breeze

yesterday  
and  
yesterday  
and  
yesterday  
today  
and  
today  
and  
today  
to the last syllable of recorded time

lifting the orphans  
from the shackles of identity  
to the promise of transcendence  
above the dusty streets of time  
your eyes are watching god  
goddesses  
as you command the double sun  
to stand still...







## Postcolonial Entanglements:

Psycho-social Reading of Race, Gender and Nation in Sharlene Khan's *Nervous Conditions* and *No Place*

Peace Kiguwa

In her collective work, Khan provides a biting commentary on the collisions and wounds of racial colonisation in the form of apartheid as well as the post-utopia and realism of post-apartheid South Africa. These themes are especially evident in *Nervous Conditions* and *No Place*. In *Nervous Conditions*, Khan enacts a series of performances that evoke a multiplicity of, and contradictory psychic states embodying her personal negotiation of racial difference. The performance commences as a personal encounter with a different racial 'other' and is further marked by hierarchical relations of power reflected in the traditional supervisor-supervisee relations of the academy. Against this backdrop, Khan reflects on the deeper and broader racial dynamics implicated in moments of encounter and participation in knowledge domains that have historically assumed racialised re-enactments of power and legitimacy. Khan's story, her emotive performances of psychic states are indicative of the psychic injuries of colonised peoples more generally. Importantly, there are moments we are sharply reminded about the heterogeneity of racial subjectivity and experience of oppression and disturbance. The tendency to assume homogeneity of race remains one of the fallacies of much black feminist critiques that posit an almost universal shared experience of racial and gendered oppression. Khan highlights aspects of shared racialisation of colonised peoples, but is also at pains to document intersections of this process with other categories of oppression and exclusion, such as via processes of ethnicisation.

*Nervous Conditions* tackles more directly the narcissistic wounds incurred from living in a racially divided, gendered culture that provides us with differential experiences of inclusion and exclusion. This performance brings to the fore the coercive nature and aspect of subjectivity – racial, gendered and classed – and wounds incurred in the practices of negotiation. Traditional psychoanalytic theory tends to downplay or outright ignore the political nature of identity, the psychic effects of the socio-political contexts that we may live in. More recently, critical psychoanalytic theory has begun to engage this 'psycho-politics' of racial subjectivity – engaging the psychosocial effects and ramifications of power hierarchies in society and the intersections of material, discursive and psychical embodiments of

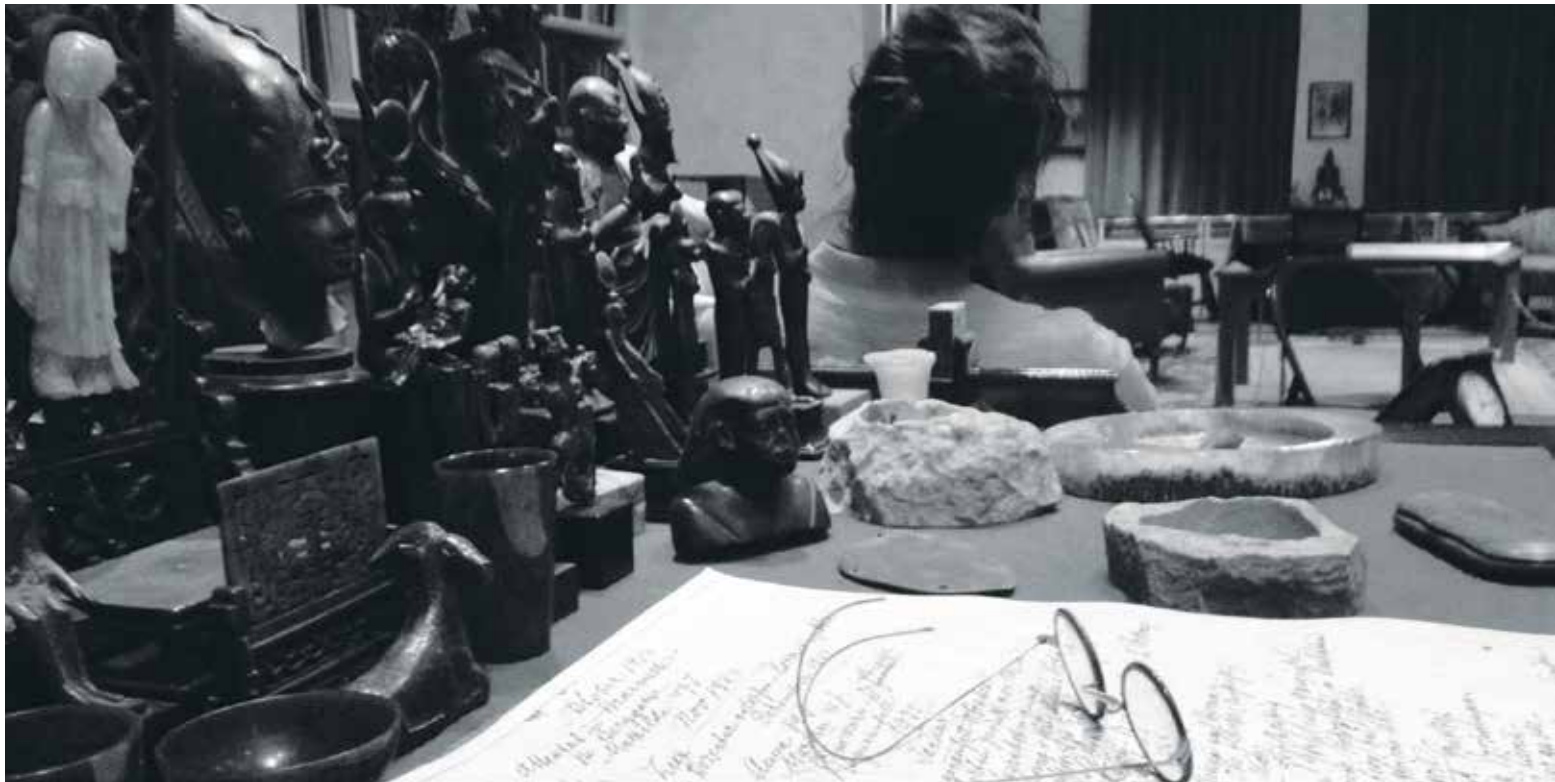
racialisation. Traditional (black) feminist and postcolonial literature has engaged both the ideological and discursive processes that characterise the politics of racial difference. What has sorely been missing from the majority of these narratives has been an in-depth analysis of how the subject may internalise these cultural contexts of difference. Psychoanalytic accounts have increasingly come to be seen as a critical and insightful lens by which such subjective processes may occur. The work of Frantz Fanon, in particular, has been especially useful in exploring the intersections of racial subjectivity with social power and difference. Social psychoanalysts describe as the 'normative unconscious' that part of the unconscious that is produced by social hierarchies that, in turn, also works to reproduce and maintain the hierarchical status quo (see Layton, 2006 for example).<sup>1</sup> Through processes of defensive splitting off of parts of the self from oneself, and also from the other, the individual distances him/herself from particular experiences. However, that very splitting creates a haunting anxiety that is ever-present and simultaneously vigilantly guarded against. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1995) writes a similar analysis on the melancholy of gender that attests to this ambiguous and anxiety-provoking state of awareness and vigilance.<sup>2</sup> Khan's analysis of the melancholy of race is evident in her analysis of the dynamics and interactions between oneself and the racial other that is positioned as superior. Affective states of anxiety, shame and desire are significantly not only psychic effects of a racial order, but also discovered to be the cornerstones of social reproduction. This ambiguity is evident from the beginning video montage where we see only a wringing pair of hands accompanied by a disembodied voice. The 'voice' recounts a moment of contact and collision with whom we assume to be an academic mentor.

Foregrounding language and voice as an index of racialised subjectivity in critical social psychology work, has, more recently, become a critical point of entry into interrogating and thinking about intersections of power and subjectivity. *Nervous Conditions* here engages this materiality of language through reflections on the entanglements of race, nationality and citizenship. Language and 'voice', in both their material and symbolic effects, play critical roles in producing racial, classed and national subjects (that implicitly intersect with other social categories such as gender), that attests to the political nature of these seemingly apolitical artefacts. The discursive emphasis of language as producing subjects in critical social psychology has, in some significant ways, failed to engage the *specificity* of particular languages and voices that unfortunately removes the subject from an active performative and corporeal re/production. In this piece, we witness a return to this idea of materiality in its political and corporeal nature and function – the speaking subject fully inhabiting a particular world and negotiating particular relationships that re/produce and re-assert the socio-historic and material function of language as fundamental to producing the racial subject.

1 Lynne Layton (2006) Racial identities, racial enactments, and normative unconscious processes. *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 75:1, 237-269.

2 Judith Butler (1995) *Gender Trouble*. New York and London: Routledge.





The psycho-discursive spaces of gender performance, with intersections of race, class and nation, become even more complex contradictions characterized by a psychic embodiment of 'lack'. To further explore this performance it is useful to note Lacan's discussion of masquerade in 'The Meaning of the Phallus' (1958). In Lacan's work, both men and women may continually strive to "have" the phallus with varying repercussions. Through the notion of 'lack' Lacan discusses attempts to have the phallus by either appearing to "be the phallus" (gendered woman) or to "have the phallus" (gendered man). To go even further, gendered woman must appear to be the phallus in order for the man to be assured that he has it. Butler describes it thus:

For women to 'be' the Phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the Phallus, to signify that power, to 'embody' the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through 'being' its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity (1994: 44).

Khan's self-analytical portrait depicts a relationship that is fraught with tensions from the beginning by virtue of having placed herself in relation to her so-called lack in ways that conflict with such a psychic state. In her material and subject positioning as one who participates in the knowledge domain, she appears as one who "has the phallus". But she is also caught up within racialised, classed and gendered tensions that challenge such a positioning. Through a series of multiple and varied psychic affective states of shame, desire to be accepted, self-doubt, anger, etc., Khan engages this tension, poignantly highlighting the masquerades and transitions to "being the phallus" that most colonised peoples perform as a means of managing the tension. Similarity of genders – whereby both the advisor that is the original subject of the performance and Khan, herself, are gendered as 'woman' – is irrelevant here. We must read this encounter through a historical reality that is racialised and thus confers differential moments of "having the phallus" on the subject. As a woman-of-colour, Khan tackles how her appearing to have the phallus (by virtue of participating in the knowledge domain) is far from culturally sanctioned.

These performative pieces demonstrate the work of an artist in conversation with feminist thought, infusing this dialogue with the entanglements of race, migration, class, sexuality, nation that further complicate the boundaries of being an insider-outsider. The latter is presented through a masquerade re-enactment of Dorothy's journey into the Land of Oz, leaving the unrelenting hardships of Kansas far behind. And just like Dorothy's search for 'home' – that place over the rainbow – Khan's protagonist engages and reflects on the different meanings of 'home' for a post-apartheid generation/country that, try as it might, cannot downplay the wounds recovered from Kansas that continue to exist in different forms in the new 'Rainbow Nation', our land of Oz. Against the protagonist's initial collision with a white colonial and rigid madam figure, Khan's *No Place* is set against a haunting backdrop of social



and political turmoil – the 1976 Soweto Uprising – another racial collision of its own: the interpersonal dynamics between the madam figure and Auntie Em cannot be read outside of the hierarchical racial and colonial formations of the apartheid regime, just as the underlying social and political unrest foregrounds the insurgent citizenship contestations that even today continue to haunt the new democracy – contestations that have taken the form of new exclusions as well as re-inscribed old ones.

Against this backdrop, an even more deadly and haunting collision takes place: students are protesting the enforced curriculum of the coloniser language. We know the story, we know how it ends. And Khan leaves this remembrance with us as her protagonist is whisked away in a storm to a land that hopefully promises more, somewhere over the rainbow. Significant socio-political and economic transitions are simultaneously occurring within Kansas: the old regime is dismantled; Mandela becomes the country's first democratically elected President; and with a thump, our Dorothy lands in Oz, a new country, a 'Rainbow Nation'. Her navigation of this new land is quite simply one of the more critically reflective commentaries on South Africa's transition into democracy. In the first instance, Khan denounces the colour-blind politics that characterised the new South Africa, particularly during the early period following the transition into democracy. Taking a satiric bite at the colour-blind politics that characterised early period of democratic governance, Khan's *Man of No Colour* is lacking a racial signifier. Toni Morrison describes the fallacy of such desire of a society's over-valuation of particular race subjectivity or, in this instance, 'race-less' inscription of a colour-blind society as a danger of "skipping over something" that must deny the intergenerational traumas of race, as well as more material and structural embodiments of racialisation.<sup>3</sup>

Laying to waste the early optimism of a new democracy, our *Man with no Pockets* calls to mind the harsh economic recession that unflinchingly laid bare the hierarchies of economic, social and political power of a neo-liberal state. Into the heart of the Jungle, *Woman with no Phallus* is the third character, and like all bullies, solely lacking in courage. We are simultaneously treated to a press conference clip of former ANCYL President Julius Malema – in typical Malema fashion, pontificating on the Caster Semenya media saga, arguing the meaning of 'hermaphrodite' and its relevance for African culture. The dilemmas of an intractable hegemonic masculinity that is complicit in the continued increase of gender violence in contemporary South Africa are the focal issue in this masquerade performance. How else are we to read the recalcitrance of gendered violence and its intersections with race and class in contemporary South Africa? Perhaps we must interrogate the deeper and unconscious psychic effects of a social regime that continues to be imbricated in the practices and re-enactments of masculinities today. Incidentally, Malema's (and the ANC-led government's) ability to galvanise wider (black) support and outcry on behalf of Semenya, was predominantly made possible through recourse to a race narrative –

<sup>3</sup> Visionary Project (2008), *Toni Morrison Speaks about her Motivation for Writing*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_8Zgu2hrs2k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8Zgu2hrs2k) (accessed 7/07/2014)



and not gender (Kiguwa, 2009). Indeed, gender's antithesis to broader race politics in post-apartheid South Africa reflects deeper and complex resistances interrogating dynamics and politics of gender in this new democracy.

And so, after all this...what is home? And what of its opposite, homelessness? More than anything, what is made hauntingly clear is the impossibility and naivety of speaking of a new South Africa, without addressing the intricate and obvious ways that racial subjectivities intersect with class, gender and other identity categories.

These collections of reflective performances urge us to read our cultural and ideological influences through a more critical lens. Race enters complexly into these readings, as well as class, gender, heteronormativity and nation. Understanding the symbolic and material barriers via which subjects become racialised, as well as processes of embodiment that inform how we become 'bodies-out-of-place', remains a complex and somewhat messy undertaking – not least because of the interweaving of socio-discursive and psychical dimensions of subjectivity in general. Through this collective work, Khan begins this conversation and engagement that is only the beginning: attention to the complexities is a first and crucial phase that must also be accompanied by even more deep interrogation of disciplinary and cultural constitution in relation to the normative social order.

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From the M-G-M Picture "THE WIZARD OF OZ"  
**OVER THE RAINBOW**

Lyric by  
 E. Y. HARBURG

Music by  
 HAROLD ARLEN  
 Arranged by DAN COATES

Moderately, with expression

*p* *legato*

(Pedal throughout)

C Am Em C7 F

Some where o - ver the rain - bow way up

C/E C7 F Fm C/G A7(b9)

high, there's a land that I heard of

D7 G7 C6 Dm G7 C Am

once in a lull - a - by. *mf* Some - where

Em C7 F C/E C7

o - ver the rain - bow skies are blue,

F Fm C/G A7(b9) D7 G7

and the dreams that you dare to dream real - ly do come

C6 C F/C G7/C

true. *mp* Some day I'll wish up - on a star and wake up where the clouds are far be -

C6 G7 C

hind me, where *mf* trou - bles melt like lem - on drops, a -

Ebdim Em7 Ebdim Dm7 G7(#5)

*cresc.* way a - bove the chim - ney tops that's where you'll find me.

C Am Em C7 F C/E C7

Some - where o - ver the rain - bow blue - birds fly,

F Fm C/G A7(b9) D7 G7

*mf* birds fly o - ver the rain - bow, why then, oh why can't

1. C6 G7 2. C6 C

I? I? *p*

G7/C C6 G7

If

C Dm7 G7 C

*mp* hap - py lit - tle blue - birds fly be - yond the rain - bow, why oh why can't I? *rit.* *pp*



## Some Place where there isn't Trouble

Fouad Asfour

The video piece *No Place* opens with a countdown on a film slate – details chalked in specify the title, 'OPENING 5/76', VTR (video tape recorder) '20/0550', and take '1' – while a voice announces in Afrikaans language that this is the first nationwide television broadcast of the South African Broadcasting Corporation on the 5th of January 1976 from its landmark in Johannesburg, the Brixton (now Sentech) Tower. Two White presenters, Dorianne Berry and Heinrich Marnitz, sit on armchairs separated by a table holding a large black vase with white flowers in front of an intricately rippled curtain.

### *WHERE THE WORK POINTS OUT THAT HERSTORY IS INVISIBLE IN THE MIDST OF THE PAST*

Viewers literate in South African history associate the year 1976 as the start of yet another chapter in the fight against the White apartheid regime, which was set off by the Soweto pupils uprising on 16th of June. The happy and confident faces of the TV presenters, however, do not reflect the fact that the country is on the verge of social upheaval. The uprising was against the *Afrikaans Medium Decree*, forcing all South African pupils to learn Afrikaans additionally to English. For South Africans who speak one of the eleven African languages as their first language, this introduction of both colonial languages as language of instruction, beginning with the last year of primary school, added to the long list of acts implementing and enforcing exclusion, exploitation and disadvantaging of the Black majority population in South Africa, which was formalised in the Land Act in 1913.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the decree added to the low level service education (introduced through the Bantu Education Act in 1953), which educated Blacks merely as workers and labourers in the service industry; as well as the oppression of protests and civil disobedience by the imprisoning or banning of leaders in the second half of 1960s. Students conscientised around the topic had become the new driving force of resistance. During the Soweto student protest more than 575 people died, with at least 134 children under the age of eighteen. Many more were imprisoned, forced underground or into exile.

### POPULAR CULTURE AS SOURCE OF ARTISTIC KNOWLEDGE I

This opening can be seen as an implicit, albeit obvious political statement, which introduces from the onset a subtext for the video work, giving the viewer reading instructions for the inauguration of nationwide TV broadcasting in South Africa. The decolonial struggle on the African continent and the worldwide call for self-determined cultural identity stands in sharp contrast to the application of canonic devices of Western TV broadcasting services, borrowed from Western cinema standards, as a propagandistic tool of the apartheid government. It is also informative of the artistic strategy of *No Place*, which is both a re-enactment and simultaneously a 're-remembering' of the 1939 Hollywood classic movie *Wizard of Oz*. Indeed, the process by which Khan has set about making the video work oscillates between actively scavenging bits and pieces remembered from the movie, and acting while directing the piece itself. Her creative approach is shaped by black feminist thought and theorisations on black feminist creativity which insists on the political dimension of the private and the public,<sup>2</sup> claiming image-making practices for oneself and challenging 'controlling images' produced by others.<sup>3</sup>

In *No Place*, this struggle is made visible by drawing attention to the medium used, actors and places involved as well as the process of *making art*. It also shapes an independent aesthetics informed by both a shared South African visual culture and private preferences. Performatively opening up the tension between autonomous and committed art, Khan's work points out that for a liberation of *making art*, one cannot separate everyday struggles against racism from artistic practice, but rather that the former permeates the personal, just as public discourse the artistic field. This way, the artist actively replaces a Western canonised *aesthetiCs* by a *decolonial aestheSis*<sup>4</sup> which "is geared toward undoing a particular kind of aesthesis of senses, that is the sensibility of the colonised subject."<sup>5</sup> bell hooks speaks about this decolonisation of artistic practice in her book *Art on My Mind*:

Indeed, with respect to black political life, in black liberations struggles – whether early protests against white supremacy and racism during slavery and Reconstruction, during the civil rights movement, or during the more recent black power movements – the production of art and the creation of a politics of the visual that would not only affirm artists but also see the development of an aesthetics of viewing as central to claiming subjectivity have been consistently devalued. Taking our cues from mainstream white culture, black folks who thought there could be some art for art's sake for black people, well, they were seen as being out of the loop, apolitical. Hence, black leaders have rarely included in their visions of black liberation the necessity to affirm in a substantial manner creative expression and freedom in the visual arts. Much of our political focus on the visual has been related to the issue of good and bad images. Indeed, many folks think the problem of black identification with art is simply the problem of underrepresentation, not enough images, not enough visible black artists, not enough prestigious galleries showing their work. Representation is a crucial location of struggle for any exploited and oppressed people asserting subjectivity and decolonisation of the mind. (hooks, 1995, 3-4)





*No Place* raises questions about the claim for 'political' work to be outside of mainstream and popular culture and, at the same time, operationalises a particular aesthetics of one's own, emphasising the subjective dimension of both the work and the use of its medium. To engage the viewer, *No Place* successfully employs referencing and parodying not only of widely known material from popular culture, but also the language of 'self-made' video-making, inviting an active identification of the viewer with the work. This way, it frames the question about the politics of image-making and creative engagement with visual arts in political struggle in a different way, away from a limiting and instrumentalising approach, but rather employing a strategy built on hooks' observations around the audience's involvement through the known/unknown.

We must look, therefore, at other factors that render art meaningless in the everyday lives of most black folks. Identification with art is a process, one that involves a number of different factors. Two central factors that help us to understand black folks' collective response to art in the United States are, first, recognition of the familiar – that is, we see in art something that resembles what we know – and, second that we look with the received understanding that art is necessarily a terrain of defamiliarisation: it may take what we see/know and make us look at it in a new way. (hooks, *ibid.*)

Khan's work, however, refuses to be head-collared to a reductive dichotomy between evacuated meaning and social applicability and does not settle for sloganeering or pleasing the audience by strategically sprinkling semiotic elements in a balancing act on the brink of the signifiable. Rather than playing with the indeterminate, it seriously engages with the "determinate oscillation between possibilities",<sup>6</sup> thus insisting on "undecidability". Undecidability based on a demand for a social role of art which is, however, chained to the jetsam of colonisation, and so necessitates a significant shift towards a liberatory artistic practice developing "an aesthetics of viewing as central to claiming subjectivity".

*USING MEDIA: MAKING A 'BAD VIDEO' AND TECHNIQUES OF DEFAMILIARISING*

The need to work in the tension between 'recognition of the familiar' and the recognition that art is a 'terrain of defamiliarisation' strikes true also in the context of South Africa. Visual art has been framed by a canonised Western understanding, with art education not only operating on the basis of the strict separation between 'high' and 'low', and between 'art' and 'craft', but also informed by European schools of appreciation and critical art writing. With the arrival of colonised education, the inherent connection between art and its use in missionary teaching eclipsed from the onset the recognition of artistic practices outside of the canon. This is not to deny the artistic value of the many outstanding works by visual artists who were schooled by missionaries, but rather to recognise this initial distinction as basis for framing any art historical narrative. Contemporary art practices come flat-packed, not only with knowledge and ways of reading the work, but also reproducing its social functions of





distinction. Therefore, decolonisation of art requires not only a defamiliarisation of the learned and looking at art “in a new way”, but a revisitation of the institutional field of contemporary art too.

*No Place* experiments with a decolonising artistic language, which at times is exaggerated and mocked by exchanging performative roles through self-insertion, use of personal narratives alongside references to popular culture, anti-colonial or anti-imperialist struggle heroes, as well as narrative disruption, masquerade and parody. The original 1939 movie is easily recognisable in the work through references imitating visual elements of its opening sequence, using the classic Hollywood typeface for the title *No Place* and accompanied by the well known Metro Goldwyn Mayer lion’s growl. Over the backdrop of passing clouds from above, the melody *Somewhere over the Rainbow* is heard while credits are shown. The viewer might ask, why would the artist choose to parody this particular movie?

#### POPULAR CULTURE AS SOURCE OF ARTISTIC KNOWLEDGE 2

Based on the book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum, which was published in 1900 and has become one of the best known and most referenced children novels, both movie and novel are widely referenced and enjoy a continuous presence in popular culture.<sup>7</sup> And while only few have read the book, many have watched at least parts of the movie simply because of its continuous and global broadcast on TV. Not many people might remember details of the story, but most will be able to give a cursory account of Dorothy’s adventure as she meets other characters that are (not) helped by a Wizard. The multivalence of the story, paired with a catchy adventure story, offers itself not only to different interpretations, but shows how satire functions as political commentary.

One of the first interpretations which points out parallels between Baum’s book and political and economic developments in the US was published by a high school teacher, who used the book as an example of how satire and parody mock populist rhetoric of politicians at that time.<sup>8</sup> The author details the satirical references employed in the film, poking fun at the Roosevelt administration and the depression-rocked USA of the New Deal (1933-38). Both book and movie’s continued presence in academic discourse is testimony of its impact. In her book *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children’s Literature*, Margery Hourihan recognises that Baum’s work does not in any way dismantle male codes of writing,<sup>9</sup> as “a whining Dorothy spends her entire time in Oz wanting to get back to Kansas and her Auntie Em” and maintains that although gender stereotypes are seemingly challenged by casting a girl as protagonist, “in fact it reinforces them and establishes an essentially American variant of the basic pattern: the girl-woman of Hollywood.”<sup>10</sup> However, she recognises more depth in the cinematic figure of Dorothy “played by the clearly post-pubescent Judy Garland in a pinafore and bobby socks” who “is the precursor of the American cult of youth, of the innocent, vulnerable but sexually enticing screen sirens, of Lolita.”<sup>11</sup>

The success of the 1939 movie has made it a prime example of a hegemonial globalised mass-media event, with quotes and songs being referenced in global popular culture. The movie was re-released several times, first in 1949 and then in 1955 in a widescreen 1.85:1 aspect ratio, and, after its first broadcast on TV in 1956, has been aired every year in the US and subsequently released for virtually all newly developed audio-visual home media formats, from Super 8 in the 1970s, VHS and Betamax in the 1980s to Blu-ray 3D, and UltraViolet on the 90th anniversary of Warner Bros and as part of the film’s 75th Anniversary.<sup>12</sup> According to the American Film Institute, the line “Toto, I’ve got a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore” ranks number four in the 100 top film quotes of all time,<sup>13</sup> and references like the mantra “there’s no place like home” or houses flying in the whirlwind can be traced into a range of images referencing 20th century crises and fears, from nuclear disaster to global warming. In this way, it can be seen as one of the first examples of a globalised, industrialised mass media production that shaped popular culture and the cultural political economy of mass communication.<sup>14</sup> More recent studies investigate the impact of similar fairy tales (for example, written by J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis or J. K. Rowling) as world-building devices that are used to build transmedia franchising or influence consumer design.<sup>15</sup> Discursively, the film branches out to further paratexts, such as the making of the film, when the person in charge of the 1939 movie adaptation, E. Y. Harburg, faced political pressure and blacklisting during the McCarthy era.<sup>16</sup>

#### SPOOFING AND MAKING USE OF DEFAMILIAR MEDIA TECHNIQUES

The 1939 movie lends itself to spoofing because of the ambiguity of its story, its symbolism and tropes, the narratives’ focus on the role of experience (making use of the protagonist’s travel, encountering difficulties, etc.), and familiarity. In *No Place*, the artist pieces together scraps from memory, interwoven with her biography of growing up in apartheid South Africa, transposing the hopes and imaginations about the land ‘beyond the rainbow’, i.e. post-apartheid South Africa to the Land of Oz. The re-staged narrative is cut together with found material referencing the political context, at the same time highlighting the use of different filmmaking, editing and cutting techniques such as *montage*. The interspersed short movie sequences and still images thus function as comment or – equivalent to a literary metaphor – as poetic allusion, but also as didactic elucidation. This way, *No Place* references and mocks montage techniques of early Soviet cinema, which were employed by Sergei Eisenstein<sup>17</sup> or Dziga Vertov to convey a message.

For instance, when Miss Gulch threatens to take away the dog from Dorothy, a short clip from 1961 pops up, with Hendrik Verwoerd (South African Prime Minister in 1958) defining apartheid as a ‘policy of good neighbourliness’. Dorothy’s house whirling through the air is cross-cut with newsreel clips of police shooting at anti-apartheid protesters, while inside, in Dorothy’s room, characters of children cartoons, like *Heidi*, *Maya the Bee* and the *Gummi Bears* frolic happily outside the





window. Highlighting the synchronicity of political unrest in the middle of nostalgic and seemingly happy personal memories emphasises how the enforced division between racial groups by the apartheid regime created a sense of 'order', which was maintained by governmental control, censorship and disinformation. The montage of disrupting clips thus reveals the cultural political economy of apartheid South Africa. These continue in the form of contradicting memories even after dismantling apartheid, with people living in the same country in physical proximity, but having exclusively different access to basic human rights (freedom of movement, speech, housing, education, etc.) based on their skin colour. Thus, these seemingly 'innocent' TV broadcasts turned-to-childhood-memories are revealed as part of a comprehensive mind control that aimed to obscure and stifle any knowledge about the simultaneous upheaval against injustice and oppression.

The departure to Oz is signalled by SA Prime Minister F. W. de Klerk's speech from 2 February 1990, announcing the unbanning of the ANC, the Pan Africanist Congress and the South African Communist Party and that imprisoned party members will be released from jail. Correspondingly, the new SABC1 intermission appears (with the song *Weeping*<sup>18</sup> performed by Vusi Mahlasela) followed by Nelson Rohlilahla Mandela's 1994 presidential inauguration and Brenda Fassie's iconic song *Vulindlela*,<sup>19</sup> indicating that Dorothy has arrived in the post-apartheid rainbow nation. By cross-cutting further material – when the Good Witch Glinda announces the death of the Wicked Witch, anti-colonial freedom fighters like Che Guevara, Salvador Allende, Fidel Castro, Samora Machel, Dolcie September and Ruth First flash up in rapid sequence, whereas the Wicked Witch of the West is accompanied by a series of US American presidents – the video continues to suggest the parallel reality of the narration of Oz and post-apartheid South Africa set against late 80s decolonial movements and the Cold War, making value judgements such as 'good' and 'bad' misnomers in this complex global constellation. In this way, *No Place* makes use of the *recognition of the familiar* while at the same time rejecting a canonised aesthetics of a 'contemporary art look-and-feel', which is based not only on a professional use of the medium and equipment, but explicitly uses a set of different formal criteria which oppose the visuality of globalised contemporary art. This activist use of media makes visible not only the technology used by producing low-tech imagery – rough-cuts, badly executed special effects and the use of poor quality material ripped from Youtube – but this method of explicit use of image-making techniques also goes back to the early days of media criticism of avant-garde cinema.

Weaving images from global history, visual culture and the infiltration of the world wide web into the narration, it seems as if they shine through the fabric of the video material, referencing a somewhat hyper-real backdrop formed from a 'Visual Encyclopaedia Of The 20th Century', flashing highlights of internationally broadcast visuals, indistinguishably mixing political events from the Cold War and popular culture events. The blank surface of a TV screen or video monitor is turned into a slate similar to Freud's *Mystic Writing Pad* (1925) where images pile on top of each other, layer over layer, simultaneously and without distinction.

#### DEFAMILIAR ELEMENTS IN A VIDEO PIECE AS PARATEXT I

*No Place* is shot in stop motion, making visible the fact that the moving image in film results from the rapid succession of still images, and at the same time mimicking amateur and home film-making technology of Super 8 film material. Sergei Eisenstein posits that an image sequence is not to be seen merely as building blocks unrolling an idea, but rather as the collision of independent images which can be opposite to another. Montage aims to approach "cinema from its technical (optical) basis", exposing that "the phenomenon of movement in film resides in the fact that two motionless images of a moving body, following one another, blend into an appearance of motion by showing them sequentially at a required speed". In this way exposing the underlying mechanical process at work, where "each sequential element is perceived not next to the other, but on top of the other. For the idea (or sensation) of movement arises from the process of superimposing on the retained impression of the object's first position, a newly visible further position of the object."<sup>20</sup>

As a result, the moving image is constantly out of synch with the audio signal of the character's voice (except for the audio channel of cross-cut video sequences), beginning with Dorothy lip-synching the title song of the movie in the black-and-white context of her parents house in the sub-tropic surrounding of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. For South African viewers this adds another layer, referencing the simulcast, which was a common practice when imported series and movies shown on TV were dubbed in Afrikaans, with the original sound track made available in simulcast over radio transmission.<sup>21</sup> As an effect, the voice and the image were never quite in synch, and became a source of ridicule and subversive comments for the viewer. In an interview, the artist pointed out the role of oral comments and interruptions while watching TV in family settings in South Africa. She suggests that the continuous remarks about the programme or the broadcast, pointing out not only the ridiculous effect of lack of synchronicity in simulcast, but also the joy of pointing out holes in the plot, continuity errors or any other elements, which became available for ridicule. This tendency of ironical distancing can be observed across the world in Third World cultures, where oral narratives about media perception practices are employed to mock and poke fun at (however not exclusively) Western mass media products, for example when US American movies are dubbed using the rather cursory translation by an appointed translator and commentator.

Indeed, the audience's response to the materiality of cinema, its technical glitches or other imperfections, can be considered as the paratext of cinematic experience, which is formed by stories around the event of watching movies in cinemas, and the viewers reacting to the screened film, surpassing and undermining the immediacy and supposed enveloping of cinematic experience. In this context, Keyan Tomaselli points at the fact that "reconstitution into a communal subjectivity may come across as paradoxical to Western film scholars and audiences."<sup>22</sup> Khan, coming from a South African Indian culture, in *No Place* references not only this practise of movie watching, but also the engagement with the 'bad quality' of Bollywood movies or Indian television series depicting the *Ramayana* which she watched avidly on Sunday mornings.

There is a wealth of references both in terms of form and content in *No Place*, which can only be briefly outlined here. The strict control of media broadcast by the White minority in apartheid South Africa has brought about a rich culture of subversion and mockery of print, TV and radio broadcast which researchers are starting to excavate and write down (for instance, Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi examining radio presenters' strategies to smuggle hidden messages into radio broadcast in South African vernacular languages).<sup>23</sup> Governmental censor organs demanded that all texts were submitted in advance, and censors were present during each radio broadcast, making sure that no opposing political message was aired – inspiration enough for radio announcers and writers to slip coded messages into the broadcast text, including weather forecasts.

In terms of form, *No Place* evokes the quality of self-made movies which are copied and distributed not only in the Indian community of Durban (for instance *Too Late To Run*), which evidences global practices and conditions of production outside of heavily funded mainstream Western culture. In this context, Khan's video work can be seen as a 'neo-didactic' form of artistic practice, not only by introducing political content, imitating and at the same time mocking the media work of avant-garde, such as Eisenstein's montage, and in this way realises a self-affirming decolonial aestheis of 'bad video'.

#### DEFAMILIAR ELEMENTS IN A VIDEO PIECE AS PARATEXT II

The complexity evoked by the illocutionary force of these paratextual elements,<sup>24</sup> implies that the work addresses viewers who *know* about the practice of interspersed jokes, remarks and references. By presuming that the audience is 'in' on a certain media, the artist actively challenges two basic assumptions of the habitus of globalised contemporary art: that an art work either *educates* the Western viewer about a specific (non-Western) practise in order for *them* to be 'in' on the joke, and/or to produce the art work *for the eyes* of the Western viewer, and thus subsumes that 'everyone else' can access the art work. The salient use of these elements plays with these different possible interpretations of the viewer: while some will see it as purely autobiographical mixed with a political message (as a partial rendering of the movie through the artist's mind), others will have access to a more complex view, reading the contextual fragments alluding to the paratext of practices such as subversive ridiculing commentary by the audience.

For instance, after the title melody is over, a short clip of the South African children's TV series *Liewe Heksi* (Afrikaans for 'Beloved Little Witch'),<sup>25</sup> the main character of the series by the name Lavinia who is shown planting flowers, is a rather forgetful and incompetent witch who furthermore lacks any magical skills and confidence in her intelligence. Each episode illustrates the outstanding scatter-brained character that lives with her friends the elves in Blommeland and has to face different forms of tribulations and obstacles. Nevertheless, the heroine survives various forms of vicious attacks and assaults from the Gifappeltjies ('little poisoned apples') and the evil witch Geelheks ('yellow witch') who tries to steal the Silwerroos ('Silver Rose'), which





is the source of Blommeland's floral beauty. This fable of a beautiful garden, which is guarded by a well meaning force against an evil 'outside' suggests an allegoric reading of Bloemmeland (which is homonymous to Bloemfontein, the capital of one of the first Afrikaaner region, the Orange Free State) as a prosperous South Africa which was shaped and protected by White colonial settlers and defended against an evil outside, i.e. African indigenous cultures. In the clip, Blommie, the elf friend of the witch, remarks, "But Heksie, the flowers need to be above ground and the roots inside", an allegory to the upside-downness of the South African racial hierarchy.

#### WHERE THE WORK POINTS OUT THAT HISTORY STAYS INVISIBLE IN THE MIDST OF THE PRESENT

This reference points on the one hand towards the ignorance of communities during apartheid about the continuing injustice against the black majority, as well as the intransigent White supremacist culture and its denial of the involvement of White people in apartheid crimes. However, while during the apartheid regime's widespread efforts to deepen the imagined division between the South African population (among others by destroying organically grown multi-cultural settlements such as Sophiatown, Cato Manor or District 6) were successful, mostly due to a heavily policed spatial segregation and total control of public information, after 1994, facts about atrocities committed during apartheid were aired publicly (after 1996 partly on TV and a continuous live broadcast on radio) to inform the public. This has not transformed the current economic political condition of South Africa as 'transformation' has met many obstacles. In the arts, the struggle for rewriting the canon of visual arts and for appointing people of colour in key positions continues to move slowly and tenaciously. Khan, herself, has faced the consequences of criticising the lack of transformation in the visual art field in her 2006 text *Doing it for Daddy* in which she reports from the South African Architecture and Art Historian (SAAAH) in 2005 where the "growing dissatisfaction with the white domination of the visual arts industry" was raised in papers by South African scholars Gabi Ngcobo, Thembinkosi Goniwe and Mgcineni Sobopha, who pointed out the transfer of positions of power formerly occupied by White males to White females. Khan's article lists institutions headed still by White (women) directors, and while she points out that "nothing I have said so far seeks to disavow the individual achievements of white women in this country", the paper raises the question why the system "continues to privilege, reward and support achievements based on race" (Khan, 2006). Instead of welcoming the paper as a long needed impulse to publically discuss the lack of transformation in South African institutions – not limited to the visual arts – the paper met a wall of silence and immediate exclusion of the artist from major art activities.<sup>26</sup>

In this context, the artist's lip-synching the song *Somewhere over the Rainbow* can be seen as a tongue-in-cheek commentary on the South African art scene, proposing a counter-reading to the wish of a place 'somewhere over the rainbow' where racialised differences are not only *not ignored*, but, actually, actively address a constitutionally anchored right, set in motion with the Black Economic Empowerment programme implemented in 2003. Similar to other empowerment programmes which aim to



redress historical discrimination and to counterbalance the historical injustices on the basis of colour, religion, sex, or national origin, the programme was harshly criticised and subject to several revisions and modifications (the shocking necessity of such a requirement in a country with a 90% majority of people of colour often overlooked).

*THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE HOME*

When Dorothy arrives at the Wizard (read: the Empire) and realises that there is no help, that there is *No Place* where race, class, gender and sexuality are not deployed in social oppressive and exclusionist mechanisms, she ends up reducing the sentence the Good Witch instructed her to say "There is no place like home". In this way, turning Dorothy's fairy tale from *The Wizard of Oz* on its head, the work acknowledges "the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural and political aspects of violence against women of colour"<sup>27</sup> and that there is no place where there is *no trouble*. There might be the illusion of such a place, which is always suggested through the media, maintaining the invisible reign of white capitalist patriarchal supremacist order and relegating trouble as the individual's fault. However, the rules of these imaginary places are not only exclusive, but also restricting. The same power mechanisms which curtail the space of the 'other' by claiming zones and measures of 'safety', limit the space of imagination and of possible development: in order to stay 'safe' the Empire turns into a prison.

In the book *The Man in the High Castle*, American sci-fi novelist Philip K. Dick drafts a tale of a parallel world history developing after the second World War, superimposing a parallel universe where history ended differently where the German-Japan axis had won and the US is an occupied zone. Both co-exist, like in tilted images. In the book, the alternating reality is an allegory for the time of communist persecutions under McCarthy. In this world, where the 'prison' has taken over, the Germans and Japanese each rule half of the US, and Africa has become one huge extermination camp.

*No Place* could be seen as applying a parallel, alternative history to the fairy tale of the 'rainbow nation' offering a contrary reading of the political reality of South Africa today, which oscillates between two states of possible historical development, one where the apartheid regime persisted, where the police continues to shoot the protesting discontent disenfranchised people and the wealthy minority of the White population continues to live off the cheap work of the masses. In Dick's novel, the cultural practice of a group of people reading and discussing a book written by the man in the high castle results in materialising/stabilising one of the parallel realities. In the same vein, the work suggests that liberation and self-determination of cultural practices will, in the same way, turn about the social reality of South Africa. Thus, the mocking re-telling of the *Wizard of Oz* outlines the potential of a continued struggle towards a truly 'post'-apartheid South Africa in turning away from the rehearsed gesture "*There is no place*" towards a more empowering "*There is no place*" – with more and more people engaged in re-visiting processes which started with the TRC, re-igniting discussions around the historically legitimised oppression of people on the basis of skin colour.

## Notes

1. A history of South Africa and the fight against apartheid is made available at [www.saha.org.za](http://www.saha.org.za).
2. As noted by Michelle Wallace in 'Variations on Negation' in *Invisibility Blues* (1990), 215: "In referring to all black female creative production as black feminist creativity, I am making two assumptions. First, by feminism I mean a socialist feminism, not yet fully formulated, whose primary goal is a liberatory and profound (almost necessarily nonviolent political transformation). Second, I assume as well that black feminist creativity, to the extent that its formal and commercial qualities will allow, is inherently critical of current oppressive and repressive political, economic and social arrangements affecting not only black women but black people as a group."
3. P. H. Collins (2000) *Black Feminist Thought*, 76-106.
4. See S. Khan's *Postcolonial Masquerading: A Critical Analysis Of Masquerading Strategies In The Artworks Of South African Visual Artists Anton Kannemeyer, Tracey Rose, Mary Sibande, Senzeni Marasela and Nandipha Mntambo* (2014) and R. Gaztambide-Fernández (2014) 'Decolonial options and artistic/aesthetic entanglements: An interview with Walter Mignolo', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3:1, 196-212.
5. Gaztambide-Fernández (2014), 201.
6. J. Derrida (1988) *Limited Inc*, 148.
7. IMDB lists up to 55 movies based on or referencing the book in different languages, and the chronologic list of direct adaptations in English language include: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1910), *Wizard of Oz* (1925), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *The Wizard of Mars* (1965), *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1975), *Oz* (1976 film), *The Wizard* (1978), *The Muppets' Wizard of Oz* (2005), *Apocalypse Oz* (2006), *After the Wizard* (2011), *Oz the Great and Powerful* (2013).
8. H. M. Littlefield (1964) 'The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism', *American Quarterly*, 16:1, 47-58.
9. Hourihan here refers to French feminist critic Hélène Cixous' influential text 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (*Signs*, 1:4, 1976, 875-893) which attests "that almost all writing has been male writing (for most women learn to write like men), inscribing male values in both its content and its 'codes'".
10. M. Hourihan (2005) *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*, 209.
11. Ibid, 210.
12. [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Wizard\\_of\\_Oz\\_\(1939\\_film\)](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wizard_of_Oz_(1939_film)).
13. American Film Institute ranking '100 Years...100 Movie Quotes' from 2005, [www.afi.com/100years/quotes.aspx](http://www.afi.com/100years/quotes.aspx).
14. Raymond Williams' work *Marxism and Literature* (1977) elaborates a discourse on political economy of culture and political economy of mass-communication, taken up by in N. Garnham (1979) 'Contribution to a political economy of mass-communication', *Media Culture Society* 1, 123-146, and R. Williams (1983) *Culture and Society*, 1780-1950.
15. Stuart Culver (1988) 'What Manikins Want: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz and The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows', *Representations* 21, 97-116.
16. In: F. MacDonnell (1990) "The Emerald City was the New Deal": E.Y. Harburg and The Wonderful Wizard of Oz', *Journal of American Culture* 13:4, 71-75.
17. S. Eisenstein (1928/1969) *Film Form. Essays in Film Theory and The Film Sense* (trans. J. Leyda).
18. This anti-apartheid protest song was written by Dan Heymann in the 1980s and first recorded by Heymann and the South African group *Bright Blue* in 1987. The song was a response to the 1985 State of Emergency declared by President P.W. Botha and featured the banned tune of *Nkosikela i'Afrika*.
19. Translated 'clear the way' or 'clean the path', it was adopted by the ANC in election campaigns.
20. Eisenstein (1928/1969), 49.
21. F. Eribo and W. Jong-Ebot (eds.) (1997) *Press Freedom and Communication in Africa*, 87.
22. K. Tomaselli (2006) 'Orality in African Cinema: Reasoning, Representation and Relativism', *Encountering Modernity: Twentieth Century South African Cinemas*, 80.
23. S. P. Lekgoathi (2009) "'You are listening to Radio Lebowa of the South African Broadcasting Corporation": vernacular radio, Bantustan identity and listenership, 1960-1994' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35: 3, 575-594.
24. G. Genette (1997) *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*, 10.
25. Based on the Afrikaans children book by Verna Vels from 1961, and adapted for television in 1978. Shanaz Shapurjee suggests in her MA thesis entitled *A Historical Enquiry Into The Animation Unit Situated Within The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) 1976-1988* that across the African continent the show is one of the most well known South African puppet TV series.
26. See also S. Khan (2011) 'But What's All Dis Here Talkin' 'Bout?', [www.artthrob.co.za/Reviews/But-Whats-All-Dis-Here-Talking-About.aspx](http://www.artthrob.co.za/Reviews/But-Whats-All-Dis-Here-Talking-About.aspx)
27. K. W. Crenshaw (1991) 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review* 43, 1241-1299.





## List of Works

*Noire et Noire* (2011)

Black and white video with sound

Running time 1:02 min

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*I Make Art – Voicing Voice, Speaking Self and Doing Criticality* (2014)

Performative writing

Pages 4-19

*Anybody but Sharlene; Lonely Socialite Seeks Companion; Postgraduate Beggar; Fuck the World* (2008)

From: *What I look like, What I feel like* (2008), 24 mixed media works (digital inkjet print on Entrada, embossing, embroidery; India ink, black cloth, stick-on felt/ embossing on Hahnemuller, acrylic paint), 61 cm x 84 cm

Pages 4-5 (left to right)

*I Make Art* (work-in-progress), pages 6-7, 22-45

Black and white two channel video installation with sound, one free standing video displayed on TV and two 1000 cm x 160 cm wall drawings

Running time 2:02 min

*I Make Contemporary Art* (2011), page 25

*I Make Contemporary Arab Art* (2012), page 26

*I Make Feminist Art* (2012), page 28

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*I Make Optical Art* (2012), page 38

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*I Make Deconstructive Art* (2012), page 42

*I Make Art History* (2014), page 43

*I Make Protest Art* (2014), page 45

*A Series of 'No' Performances* (2014)

Performative writing (material appropriated from Sara Ahmed's work on 'killjoy', 'willful' and 'on being the problem'; Homi D. Clown from the TV series *In Living Color* by Ivory Wayan Productions).

Pages 47-53

*Le Dejeuner* (2012)

Colour video with sound

Running time 1:02 min

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*Nervous Conditions* (work-in-progress)

Three channel black and white video with sound, two black and white digital projections with sound, one freestanding TV DVD display with sound

Running time 30:07 min

Pages 8-15, 65-94

*No Place* (work-in-progress)

Colour video installation with sound

Running time 22:55 min

Pages 17, 19, 97-129

#### Artist's biography

**Sharlene Khan** is a South African visual artist, completing a PhD in Visual Arts at Goldsmiths, University of London. Khan's work often incorporates a range of media that generate installations and performances that focus on the socio-political realities of a post-apartheid society and the intersectionality of race-gender-class. She uses masquerading as a postcolonial strategy to interrogate her South African heritage as well as the constructedness of identity via rote education, art discourses, historical narratives and popular culture.

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**Betty Govinden** is author of *Sister Outsiders – Representation of Identity and Difference in Selected South African Indian Women's Writings* (Unisa Press, 2008) and *A Time Of Memory – Reflections On South African Writing* (Solo Collective 2008).

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#### Dedication

For Coloured girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is not enuf.

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