

*ma,*

**performing the White, Afrikaner Woman back to self**

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**VLJKAN001**

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Date: 11 December 2020

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mammie  
ek het gedog  
as ek eendag huis toe kom  
sal dit onverwags so teen skemerdag wees  
met jare se opgegaarde rykdom  
op rûe van ysterkoeie

dis nog blouerig  
ek maak sjuut en saggies die agterplaas-hek oop  
ou Wagter knorblaf  
maar stert-herken my dan  
Fritz Kreisler sal soet op sy viool speel  
ma weet mos  
sulke Weense walse  
en verbaas begin die vensters luister

mense wat ek nie ken nie  
of net nog van baie ver  
leuen uit met nagrokke vol glimlagte en elmboë  
mense op wie se skote ek gepee het kleintyd  
binne staan ma se hart stil  
(en waar is die bril?)  
pa skrik wakker verdwaas so deur die wind  
maar mammie is reeds buite  
met 'n kamerjas en rooi wange

en daar staan ek lewensgroot  
op die lawn naby die sementdammetjie  
waar die nuwe buitekamers aangebou is  
effens verweer deur die verre reis  
'n keil op  
'n deftige pak  
angelier in die baadjie  
nuwe Italiaanse skoene vir die okkasie  
my hande vol presente  
'n liedjie vir my ma 'n bietjie trots vir my pa

maar mammie weet mos dis ek  
en agter my my karavaan  
soos dit 'n reisiger van oorsee betaam  
my vrou en kinders gestrikdas  
elkeen met drie bolandwoorde in die mond  
my musikante  
die geweerdraers  
vriende kamerade  
politieke raadgewers  
en road-managers  
'n skuldeiser of twee  
net duskant die wingerd groei 'n mak roos  
mensig maar die lug is knypskoon

*daar kom kyk pa ook wat skort  
so op sy nugter maag  
die berge het grys geworde  
en die akkerbome dik  
maar wat  
mammie  
ek het gedog ek sal sommerso daar wees  
soos 'n Kleurlingkoor met Kersoggend  
mammie  
ek het gedog hoe ons dan sal huil  
en tee drink*

*blinde Wagter kon glo nie wag nie  
en is glo-glo dood...  
Fritz Kreisler hou dalk nie van so 'n verre reis...  
maar as hy nie kan kom nie  
dan huur ek vir Paganini...  
slaap gerus met die een oor oop:  
anders as ou Dog  
waar ék 'n veertjie plant  
kom 'n kêk-kôk hoender op!<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Breyten Breytenbach's poem, *'n hand vol vere*, published in *Groot Verseboek* (1983: 473 – 475).

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## ABSTRACT

*ma,*

*ek probeer 'n verwoording van iets skryf wat ek nie regtig van myself kan losmaak nie  
dit is net.*

*soos die tortelduiwe op die stoep wat jou op 'n Sondagoggend wakker sing en warm  
somersdae waar jy al vier van ons strand toe gesleep het om bruin te bak en die  
Oupahorlosie wat in jou huis se gang staan en om elke uur slaan en Liewe Heksie en ons r'e  
wat brei omdat Ouma hulle al die jare in Malmesbury gewoon het.  
Hoe moet 'n mens daarvan sin maak, daardeur argumenteer?*

This research project seeks to understand myself and my position within South Africa. The position of a young, white, Afrikaner woman. This is a position that, one could argue, inherently carries a sense of a tragedy within it. The project seeks to understand how the elements of tragedy, such as conflict and transgression, in turn, can be employed in my performance-making practice to question the very identity I hold.

The research recounts the histories and narratives that have been constructed around the white, Afrikaner woman in South Africa, specifically with regards to a paradoxical positionality in the white, Afrikaner woman's 'role' in the construction of the white, Afrikaner identity. Furthermore, it seeks to understand how narratives and histories embed themselves within nostalgic objects that centralise around the white, Afrikaner woman. Utilising the very narratives and objects that have constructed the white, Afrikaner woman, I create performances that seek to use these objects, including the Afrikaans language itself, and my own body, to transgress and abject the notions of the border, my body, and subject-to-object and object-to-subject relationality within this very identity I hold. During these performances and moments of transgression and abjection, I argue that liminal moments in which I can re-imagine myself are encountered and experienced. These moments are often fleeting and exist as attempts at re-imagining myself, but so too hold the ability to affect and shift something within my own understanding of self.

Finally, the research seeks to understand how these very positionalities and performances are related to the tragic and tragedy; catastrophe and the notion of the wreckage, as theorised by Walter Benjamin (1968), Hans-Thies Lehmann (2016) and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016) and how these theories might speak to an understanding of my identity and positionality in South Africa, my understanding of self.

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To all,

dankie,

dankie,

dankie.

## ‘N BEGINPUNT | A STARTING POINT

*Ek weet nie waar om te begin nie, so nou begin ek maar by Ma, nes Antjie en Breyten en die talle ander. Dalk omdat Ma nog altyd ‘n beginpunt was? Dalk omdat ek Ma in myself kan sien, intiem ken?  
Herken?  
Erken?  
Dalk omdat dit ‘n gepaste metafoor is.  
Ek weet nie?*

I am a white, Afrikaans speaking, or Afrikaner<sup>2</sup>, woman. Born a couple of months after South Africa’s first democratic election. A born free - the popular term used to describe South Africans born after the collapse of the Apartheid government. It’s a term I often think of, ‘born free’, it holds a lot of promise, a lot of potential, a sense of expectation, to be born free. Free of, free from, free to...

As my mother once said during an argument, “*Ons het gestem sodat julle nie meer met hierdie nonsens hoef te sit nie. Dis veronderstel om verby te wees.*”<sup>3</sup> Yet, over the last twenty-five years, it has become desperate, a term unravelled. A term that has left the generation baptised with these words lost and angry and attempting to re-negotiate themselves within the country at large. It has often left me lost and angry and moving between a feeling of belonging and (un)belonging. As I have grown up, I have become increasingly aware of the complexities around me and the complexities my own body holds, not only within itself, but as it engages with other bodies and spaces.

I, the white, Afrikaner woman, carry within myself a multitude of pluralities and contradictions, histories and narratives that struggle to position themselves within a larger South African postcolonial discourse. As a white, Afrikaner woman I create performances that start from a place I know intimately, *die baksteenhuis, my Ma se baksteenhuis*, and in

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<sup>2</sup> The reference to Afrikaner identity in this paper is specifically to the white Afrikaner identity, and as such, I will use the definitive description of ‘white’ throughout this paper, as there are many other Afrikaans identities throughout South Africa (see Swart, 2001). This specifically relates to South Africans that speak Afrikaans and would identify the Afrikaans language as their home language. The term, Afrikaner, has been a debatable term within critical thinking around identity, and alternatives such as Afrikaan, Afrikaanses, Suid-Afrikaan, Boer and Wit Suid-Afrikaners are often used. As I am discussing a particular history and identity formation in this explication I have chosen to use the term Afrikaner, as it is often understood as a group of people that were politically, socially and economically advantaged by the apartheid government.

<sup>3</sup> The choice to write certain phrases and words in Afrikaans was made for various reasons. This includes the un-translatability of certain expressions in the language; the disruption and stubbornness of the language not only in my own vocabulary, but in my thinking; the performativity of the language; and the attempt at presenting the language as object that continues to “talk back” (Fleishman, 2012: 90) as will be argued throughout this explication.

turn these works often seek to understand, question, disrupt, re-imagine and re-write my own body, and my own understanding of myself. Throughout both my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, I have become aware that I often return to certain objects, sounds and spaces to create these performance pieces. This includes the use of bathroom spaces, fluorescent lights, porcelain crockery and childhood sounds and songs. The more I was provoked to think through my practice, the more curious I became about my relation to these very objects and my own relationality to my body, as well as the way in which my body and the objects relate to one another. Why do these small fragments of my childhood home become synonymous with the Afrikaner culture? Why do they hold such an immense presence in the performances I make? Why do I feel that they encapsulate the very frustration and loss I so often feel in a post-colonial/ post-apartheid South Africa? Why do these performances feel like a necessity to my own identity? The research, therefore, seeks to understand my own position as one that holds a tragic conflict within itself. A tragic conflict of identity, or necessity, of being born a white, Afrikaner woman in South Africa, and the freedom to act as myself, beyond the markings of my body. This search for freedom of self, in turn, is the space from which I create. During these performances I make use of the very objects, narratives and histories so closely linked to the white, Afrikaner woman, as well as my own body, to employ the elements of tragedy, such as transgression and conflict, to create moments of abjection and moments of liminality as theorised by Julia Kristeva (1982) and Victor Turner (1979) respectively. Abjection refers to the moments in which the body becomes 'cast off' or 'expelled' in order to define self, for example by acts such as vomiting or spitting. Liminality, in turn, refers to the notion of "being-on-a-threshold" (Turner, 1979: 465), a space and time that is neither here nor there. Both of these concepts form core moments during the performances I make and produces moments in which I can re-imagine and re-articulate myself as a white, Afrikaner woman. However, throughout these performances, I become aware that these performances remain attempts at transgression, often falling short, or falling back into my own daily existence. That said, these performances continue to allow me to perform myself back to myself, allowing for a cathartic moment in which my own understanding of myself, shifts.

## ‘N VOLKSMOEDER | A VOLKSMOEDER

*ma,  
as ek aan ons huis dink, dan dink ek eerstens aan die tafel wat in die sitkamer staan. Die  
groot, geelhouttafel, met die ses stoele wat om dit rus.  
Altyd geduldig.  
Altyd gereed.  
ek wonder hoeveel gesprekke daardie tafel al aangehoor het, hoeveel leuens? Hoeveel keer  
is politoer nie ingesmeer nie? Hoeveel afvelknieë is op daai einste tafel nie afgewas en  
skoongewas en met 'n bietjie spoeg weer weggesoen nie? Die tafel waar ons almal leer lees  
en skryf het. Waar ek julle bevraagteken het? Waar gebede soms te stil geword het en die  
antwoorde nie altyd eenvoudig kon wees nie. Die tafel waar soveel trane van geluk en  
frustrasie en hartseer gehuil is. Waar wegkruipertjie gespeel is en maniere aangeleer is.  
Daai tafel, met die dik bene wat bly luister  
generasie na generasie,  
bly saamdra.*

When thinking through the performance of myself, the performance of the white, Afrikaner woman, it is imperative to contextualise the manner in which the historical narrative around my identity, my body, has been constructed. Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that “identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)” (202). These identity narratives are at once singular and plural, individual and collective, the one informing the other. They are reproduced from one generation to the other, but this reproduction in itself carries within itself selection, remembering and forgetting. Furthermore, Yuval-Davis states that these narratives can both “relate to the past, to a myth of origin; they can be aimed at explaining the present and, probably above all, they function as a projection of a future trajectory” (202). The narratives formed in and around the white Afrikaner identity seem to oscillate between a deliberate remembering and a deliberate forgetting, combined in an attempt to create a collective consciousness, a collective history. This is nowhere more evident than in the narrative around *Die Groot Trek* (The Great Trek) as an attempt at an origin myth. Lize van Robbroeck (2011) argues that The Great Trek, along with the figure of the Voortrekker, is generally accepted as “the hallmark of Afrikaner origin and identity” (108). The centrality of this historic event in the Afrikaner’s identity narrative and consciousness was only established in the 1930s and 1940s, during the fervent and carefully orchestrated nation-building campaign and the creation of an imagined community (Anderson, 1991). What is evident is that the white, Afrikaner identity so clearly carries a contradiction, a paradox, within it. Remember that you are not truly of this place, but also that

this is the *grond* promised to you. Remember that we have fought hard for everything that we have, but forget the various injustices done to others in the process of building *Volk en Vaderland*. Remember that you come from there, but that you are also here, born here, belong here. These fragments of narratives recall Achille Mbembe (2002) and his description of the post-colony as a “...time-space characterised by proliferation and multiplicity...an era of displaced entanglements, the unity of which is produced out of differences” (n.p). I experience the white, Afrikaner identity as a quilt of fragmented narratives, one often displacing the other, but always with a sense of bitter nostalgia. It is a collection of attempts at origin myths, histories, stories told at dinner tables, by teachers and in picture books, Sunday church services and hazy drunk sentiments next to the *braai*. Multiple narratives and multiple constructions of who we are, all held in Afrikaans. As Melissa Steyn (2004) so evidently observes:

What is it that binds those who belong together as Afrikaners; what is the core from which Afrikaners should start as they rebuild themselves? By far the strongest sense of a unifying, defining ‘essence’ is their language, Afrikaans.[...] Afrikaans is valued as the repository of Afrikaner heritage, Afrikaner creativity, Afrikaner soul, Afrikaner power; the fate of Afrikaans is seen to be symbolic of the position of Afrikaners. (158)

It is well documented that the Afrikaans language formed a part of the nation-building project of the white, Afrikaner. This is evident in both the First and Second Language Movements which propagated Afrikaans as a characteristic part of the Afrikaner identity (Huigen, 2011: 131), which in turn, led to the Afrikaans language’s central position within the National Party and the formation of the Apartheid government and systems. Another tactic employed in the construction of the white, Afrikaner identity is the use of nostalgia. The cultural anthropologist, Kathleen Stewart (1988) states that “Nostalgia is an essential, narrative function of language that orders events temporally and dramatizes them in the mode of ‘things that happened’, that ‘could happen’, that ‘threaten to erupt at any moment’” (127). The nostalgia around the white, Afrikaner identity can often be found slipping into conversations, *ja, die goeie ou dae*, or into daily media. Nostalgia is not only found within the language used in the collective narrative identity, but this narrative, in turn becomes projected onto various memory sites, writings and objects, and debris to be picked from the wreckage. Stewart (1988), in her discussion of a collapsed mining town, Raleigh County, in West Virginia, claims that nostalgia could also be viewed as a process of melancholy for what has been lost that then searches for adequate objects “on which to stare itself out” (Stewart, 1988: 235). The

sense of loss becomes painstakingly relevant to the Afrikaner identity, when one considers that, as Sandra Swart (2001) argues, the Afrikaner identity “has moved over the short space of a decade from a hegemonic, indeed exemplary, identity, to a socially marginalised and, in many sectors, an actively dishonoured identity” (77).

Siegfried Huigen and Albert Grundlingh (2011) argues that collective memory “crystalizes around certain points of attachment to the past that develop into symbolic figures. In this way the past develops into a reality that has a persistent formative force” (3). Following Stewart, Huigen and Grundlingh’s statements, I would argue that white, Afrikaner memories do not only crystalize around memorial sites, such as the Taal-, Anglo-Boereoorlog- and Voortrekkermonument and the narratives that accompany these sites, but, that these memories are crystalized around the teacups in our mothers’ and grandmothers’ kitchen cupboards, the *doilies* crocheted and stored in *trousseau* chests for the day the girl-child is to marry, or placed on armrests of the couch, awaiting the arrival of guests. It is the guns passed down the patriarchal line, *Die Huisgenoot* that every house has stacked somewhere in a corner that every child will use in primary school to learn their alphabet from. The collective attachment to the past is in the knitting, the stuffed animal heads crowning the walls, skins lining the floor. It can be found in khaki pants and *ordentlikheid*, going to the Spur on a Friday night, the *braai*, *7de Laan*, Riaan Cruywagen, *My Sarie Marais* and *Noot vir Noot*. Crystalizing around the family Bible, the fake, plastic flowers bought from Pep, tea and *’n beskuitjie*. These little-memory-sites are passed on, collected, preserved, exhibited. Scattered around our homes, piling up, fragments growing. They form again and again, not only in objects, but in action, in the performative dimension which constructs belonging. As Yuval-Davis (2006) states, “Specific repetitive practices, relating to specific social and cultural spaces, which link individual and collective behaviour, are crucial for the construction and reproduction of identity narratives and constructions of attachment” (203). It is going to church, the *basaar*, the school’s *sokkie*, rugby matches and ATKV (*Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuur Vereniging*) *redenaars*. It’s *vakansie-by-die-see*, it’s *kinders-moet-gehoor-word-en-nie-gesien-word-nie*, it’s words around dinner tables with your parents’ friends and your mom looking towards you, warning you to stay silent. It is the *moffie* jokes and *hoërskool-orientasie*, *kamp-in-Jonkershoek*, always staying in line, in place, being *ordentlik* and *oulik* and *op-jou-plek*. These objects and repetitive practices, rituals, become precarious artefacts that are not only left by one generation to the other, but pertinently constitute and construct the white, Afrikaner identity. It is a kind of wreckage left over from the past that continues to affect a new generation in the present.

These objects and repetitive practices are things that have constructed me. I too crystalize memory and identity-understanding around these objects. I have grown up singing *volksliedjies* and reciting *rympies*. I was *ordentlik* and silent when I needed to be (and possibly still am). I was the ATKV representative at school, would debate (but only a subject that was approved for debating by the school's debate panel) and play piano in church, would make the tea and carry the teacups into the lounge when my *ouma* visited, learned to knit sitting at her feet.

The understanding and identity of the white, Afrikaner woman itself is further constituted not only in narrative, but in object and image. In 1907 Anton van Wouw cast a bronze figurine, *Nointjie van die Onderveld, Transvaal, Rustenburg, sijn district* (fig. 1). The little bronze figurine portrays a woman with her feet neatly together, her hands gently



Figure 1: Anton van Wouw's *Nointjie van die Onderveld*

wrapped in front of her *voorskoot*, her shoulders slightly drooping forward under her neatly arranged shawl. Her face carries a sweet expression, her lips and nose small and fine, a somewhat unruly piece of her hair falls out from underneath her bonnet. Her eyes are softly downcast. The first time I saw her I remember thinking how patient she looked, how soft, polite. I could see my mother and grandmother, some of my aunts, I could see my teachers, women in the church, hear my mother's voice echoing to my sister to straighten her posture and to become less *bombasties*. My sister is tall and a bit clumsy and when we were younger she was the one who enjoyed rugged and rough play. I, on the other hand, was smaller, shorter, the daughter who was well-behaved in ballet classes and therefore never got reprimanded about how I stood, or walked or laughed. But sometimes, sometimes I would become excited or enraged or confused and I would

lift my head to speak, raise my voice, only to be told that I was very loud and that I needed to quiet down. To become the figurine woman? An object?

Van Wouw's figurine, in turn, became a trademark of the first successful and widely read Afrikaans women's magazine, *Die Boerevrou*, as well as a short-hand of what an ideal

and appropriate Afrikaans woman should aspire to be. The motto of the magazine was an extract by the Afrikaans poet, Jan F. E. Celliers which reads ‘Ek sien haar win – want haar naam is – Vrou en Moeder’ (‘I see her triumph, for her name is – Wife and Mother’). Elsabé Brink (2011) argues that both Van Wouw and Celliers were “involved in the postwar project of visualising the *Volksmoeders* as ultimate victors in the struggle for life and survival” (7). The narrative and object construction around the white, Afrikaner woman remained one in which the suffering of women was equated with, and portrayed as, a sacrifice towards a future ‘nation’, a duty, an act of bravery, hence the concept of the ‘*Volksmoeder*’ developed during this period of time. In 1918, the women of the Free State Helpmekaar Kultuur Vereniging commissioned Dr Willem Postma to write a book, *Die Boervrou, Moeder van haar Volk* (The Boer woman – Mother of her Nation), which was published in 1922. Elsabé Brink mentions that:

Dr O’Kulis<sup>4</sup> devotes a chapter to the ‘Character of the Boer Woman’ in which he describes in detail her sense of religion and of freedom, her virtue, self-reliance, selflessness, her housewifeliness and her inspirational role. She has noble and enviable qualities. She is brave, friendly, a hard worker, honest, hospitable, frugal, peace-loving and content with her destiny in life. (Brink, 2011:7)

From the moment of its creation, the image and narrative around the white, Afrikaner woman, is laden with contradiction. The white, Afrikaner woman should turn her gaze downwards, be proper, humble, chaste, but should also be active in the future of the so-called ‘Boer-nation’. She should be willing to endure suffering for the greater good of the Boer, should work hard and fight when called upon to do so. She is both active and passive, holds authority and succumbs to it, speaks and remains silent – she is both subject and object. A subject-object? Existing, but only in relation to the role she is to play? This is nowhere more evident than in the development of Afrikaans as a written language which historically has been intricately linked to the white, Afrikaner woman and her role in the narration of the white, Afrikaner identity and memory. For example, most of the books, reflections and memoirs written about the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), were created at the hands of white, Afrikaner women. Lou-Marié Kruger (2011) argues that the “creation of memory [by white, Afrikaner women] becomes a focused, almost aggressive project” (99). One of the many extracts of writing that Kruger quotes is E.N. Neethling’s, *Should we forget?*. In Neethling’s account of the war it

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<sup>4</sup> Dr O’Kulis is a pseudonym used by Dr Willem Postma, the priest that was commissioned to write *Die Boervrou, Moeder van haar Volk* (1922).

becomes evident that the notion of the white, Afrikaner woman, even in her own writing, is one that is manipulated, a conscious act of imagery formation. The extract reads as follows:

The patriotism, the patience, the endurance of the women, has been wonderful. To many a one there was no loss, no hardship, no disappointment she feared so much as that her husband would disgrace his men and surrender. We know of a woman in a camp who had lost her only two children and had suffered much; but when her husband came in, instead of welcoming him, she burst into tears, exclaiming, 'O, this is the hardest blow of all'. (Neethling, 1902 quoted in Kruger, 2011: 102–103)

Once again, the white, Afrikaner woman stands as contradiction to herself. The passive woman becomes the active instigator of shame on her husband when he surrenders himself instead of continuing in the war.

To some degree, this is who I am. Somewhere in me this woman exists. I know her, her stubbornness, her refusal to fail herself. I see her emerge at me through my mother when I refuse to perform at the eisteddfod. I see her when my grandmother berates my grandfather for forgetting to brush his hair, although she knows his memory is failing. I know her. Moreover, I belong in and amongst the Afrikaans language, the objects, the narratives. A nostalgia and sense of home swells in me when I think of them. I understand and participate in and replicate the white, Afrikaner community, up until the point I open my mouth, question, point to the fact that something doesn't make sense, or that the argument is flawed, or that a statement, a belief, is problematic. Dinner tables and kitchens become spaces where *ordentlikheid* collapses, where parents become violently angry at my opinion, my view about the world around me, and where numerous conversations lead to tears and vomiting and climbing back in my car and driving away from the community that has raised me. It's being thirteen and trying to understand why my queer aunt has to hide who she is seeing and when I ask my mother the answer is simple, *daar is goed wat reg is en goed wat verkeerd is*; sixteen and receiving a Mxit message that was sent around asking for support for the AWB (Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging) and once reading up on it becoming violently upset and calling friends telling them that sending this around is *nonsense*, consequently losing many of them; eighteen and refusing to be confirmed by the NG Church, leading to my father not speaking to me for many months an event which to this day remains an immensely sensitive topic; eighteen and refusing to study at Stellenbosch University only to be met with, '*Haai jinne, daar in die Kaap waar hulle so staak en goed? Hoekom wil jy soontoe gaan?*'; twenty and trying to explain the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements, only to be told

that we won't be discussing any of these things at home, *daar sal nie 'n gesprek hieroor wees nie*; and twenty-one when images pop up over the news of students being shot with rubber bullets, my mother's response, '*ja, dis wat hulle verdien, hoekom is hulle nie in klas nie*'. I scream at her and vomit again. I question, kick back, not necessarily with the conscious knowledge or understanding of the need to stubbornly refuse to participate in the practice, conversation, language, only certain of the fact that it doesn't 'feel right'. This often leads to a rupture in relations, family and community members. A rupture within myself, the physiological response being to 'bring-up', vomit, rupture the very body that contains the identity. An (un)belonging.

Finding myself both on the inside and the outside. Sitting at the *groot, houttafel*, but increasingly aware that the position could be stripped, the table disrupted, if I choose to bring up certain topics; and sitting in my *ouma's* kitchen, but knowing that I myself have turned around and broken the *teekoppies* and *porselein* she has so carefully gifted to me. And over the years I start to feel like I (un)belong, there is an inherent conflict and tension in the position I hold. There is the history and understanding of the narrative created around the white, Afrikaner woman, and there is me, Kanya, the person who *is* a white, Afrikaner woman, but understands that these elements forming a part of myself do not define the whole self. My identity is constructed for me, but also is one I construct for myself. It is one read and written. It is one made and created. It is both unconscious and conscious. It is within this tension, this conflict that a need, a desire, to continue to create emerges. It is from this space, from this conflict in identity, that I create, and from which I make.

## ‘N POGING | AN ATTEMPT

*ma,  
ek probeer. ek probeer my bes doen.  
maar soos Antjie skryf, die ang van besdoen ontglim my  
die ang dat bes nie tel nie dat bes niks  
bring of uiteindelik tot niks lei nie dat  
bes ander se beheer oor jou is en veral  
dat jy dalk net ‘n gewonde dogtertjie is<sup>5</sup>*



Figure 2: *Die Skrif Is Aan Die Muur* at the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (2019)

Over the course of the research process, I created two performance works that explored and helped to clarify the research question I would eventually focus on. These pieces include *Die Skrif Is Aan Die Muur*

(2018, 2019) and *As Oupa So Sê* (2020). In both of these pieces two elements stand central in the making process and performance. Firstly, my own body, that of a white, Afrikaner woman, and secondly, the use of nostalgic, narrative objects, which includes *doilies*, *pap*, *teekoppies* and *soetkoekies*; songs and sounds central to the Afrikaner collective memory, including Carike Keuzenkamp’s *As Oupa So Sê*, Riaan Cruywagen’s reading of the news and folksongs such as *My Hartjie, My Liefie Die Son Sak Weg*; and, the Afrikaans language as material, malleable object that can be written, re-written, disrupted and interrupted. As I reflect on both of these pieces, and the final research production, *ma*, it strikes me that with each piece I create during the research process, the ‘subject’ I am directing the conversation and conceptualisation towards, moves closer to me, to ‘home’. With *Die Skrif Is Aan Die Muur* (fig. 2), the concept very strongly talks to South Africa, the larger community of people

<sup>5</sup> The final lines of this extract are taken from Antjie Krog’s poem, ‘om in ‘n dogtertjie se kamer te slaap’ (2014: 37).

that exist around me, the country as a whole. With *As Oupa So Sê*, the piece was conceptualised to talk to my grandparents, my *oupa* and *ouma*, and the final project, *ma*, locates itself in conversation with my mother, the Mother, 'n *moedertong*. In all three of these performances these subjects are not necessarily embodiments of South Africa, my grandparents or my mother, but rather function as metaphors and figures that I can situate myself against, or in dialogue with. The metaphors become an unspoken ghost or presence that I can project onto the objects around me, someone I can hear in the sounds and songs that accompany the performance.

### **Die Skrif Is Aan Die Muur**

*ma,*  
*ek praat met jou oopbek en sonder skaamte. ek praat van jou Huisgenoot en jou kunstefeeste*  
*en jou T-shirts met die quotes op: 100% Boer*  
*praat Afrikaans of hou jou bek*  
*trots Afrikaans*  
*beste pomp op die dorp*  
*brandewyn het nie brieke nie*  
*hoe's daai vir kultuur? hoe sê jy? beter as niks*  
*ek neem foto's daarvan met my selfoon en hang dit agter my toilet se deur. vir inspirasie<sup>6</sup>*

*Die Skrif Is Aan Die Muur* is a postdramatic performance piece that seeks to question the notion of belonging in South Africa. *Die Skrif Is Aan Die Muur* has had many iterations throughout the last two years, including performances at Arcade (2018) in Observatory, Cape Town Art Week (2019) at the V&A Waterfront, the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival (2019) in Oudtshoorn, and the Institute of Creative Art's Infecting the City Festival on Hiddingh Campus, Cape Town (2019). The performance consists of various elements, including the use of a public bathroom, often one that is tiled with white, porcelain tiles. Before the performance starts, the space is installed with various extracts of poems and public writings about South Africa, written onto the tiled walls. Most of the writing is in Afrikaans and draws on poems that form a part of the Afrikaans literary canon. This includes poems by Tertius Kapp, Loftus Marais, Danie Marais, Leon de Kock, Bibi Slippers, Willem Anker, Marius Swart, Marlene van Niekerk, Erns Grundling and Jitsvinger. These poems are often moments of complete abjection in which the poets lament and curse, question and negotiate

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<sup>6</sup> This is an example of extracts written against the bathroom walls during the performance of *Die Skrif Is Aan Die Muur* (2019).

themselves in relation to South Africa. In these texts themes of gender, violence, race and privilege become evident. Furthermore, the bathroom stalls are installed with various nostalgic objects, including doilies, *soetkoekies*, an excess of toilet paper, framed crocheted, inspirational quotes and rooibos tea (fig. 2). I then place myself in one of the bathroom stalls, with multiple bowls of white, mieliepap in front of me. Throughout the performance the sound of Riaan Cruywagen reading the Afrikaans news bulletin can be heard as I attempt to eat as much of the *mieliepap* as I can, often to the point of nausea which leads to me regurgitating the *pap* back into the toilet, and the audience is invited to write their own letters, stories and thoughts against the bathroom walls. The piece usually takes place over two to six hours, bathed in a flood of pink light, as people move in and out of the space.

### As Oupa So Sê

*ma,*

*Onthou Oupa die boerboel daar in die agtertuin van die groot huis in Tulbagh. Die boerboel wat so onder die boom gelê het, ons dopgehou het terwyl ons onself in stof toegespeel het. En iewers in die agtertuin was daar 'n grot waarin ons verdwyn het om in die donker te gaan krap vir stukkies hout, stukkies teëls, stukkies weggooi goed. Ons mag dit nooit die huis ingedra het nie. Behalwe die teekoppie. Die teekoppie het ouma onthou en vir my afgewas. Tee in gemaak. Petro wat ons badkamer toe jaag want ons mag nie vuil aan die tafel kom sit nie.<sup>7</sup>*

*As Oupa So Sê* was conceptualised and created during the global COVID-19 pandemic at a time in which most of South Africa was placed under a strict lockdown. I was isolated in my flat in Cape Town and turned towards memories, photos, recordings and videos of my grandparents, more specifically of my grandfather. Materials I had with me, either stored on my phone, or in my kitchen cupboards. *As Oupa So Sê*



Figure 3: A Screenshot of *As Oupa So Sê* (2020)

<sup>7</sup> An extract from the video-performance piece, *As Oupa So Sê* (2020).

collages various elements over each other, including recordings of notes I wrote to my grandfather about memories I have shared with him; recordings of my grandfather recalling his own history and the places he had come from; video footage of my grandparents making tea in their home in Hermanus (fig. 3); video footage of myself drinking, washing, spitting from the tea set gifted to me by my grandparents; as well as video footage of letters I attempt to write back to them on the porcelain tiles of my bathroom floor. These collaged elements were compiled into three videos, varying between one to three minutes; a soundscape of a chorus of children reciting a poem about tea in Afrikaans, intercut with Carike Keuzenkamp's children song, *As Oupa So Sê*, and sounds of teacups being washed. These sonic and visual collages were then placed in a pdf 'book' that seeks to replicate a photo album or family scrapbook, filled with childhood photos of my grandparents, their dog, their house and the quotations and writings that line their walls. The piece attempts to explore the notion of what is passed on from one generation to another in a singular object, the teacup, and to unravel the rituals around it, including the recollection of family stories around a cup of tea; the comfort of a cup of tea; the affection one shares with a cup of tea and the sense of gathering around a cup of tea.

### **The Attempt**

In both pieces, certain elements of my performance-making practice become clear. Firstly, in both of these pieces my body, or the body of a white, Afrikaner woman, stands central to the performance, yet does not seek to call the full attention of the viewer to the body. Instead, the body situates itself peripherally, either hidden in the bathroom stall or in smaller snippets of footage amongst longer pieces of footage. Secondly, nostalgic-narrative objects are used, including porcelain, cups, the Afrikaans language and childhood songs and sounds. These objects are things I have grown up with, that, as discussed in the previous section, have constructed parts of my identity, parts of myself. Both pieces employ these very objects as remnants of a larger culture, a larger identity, that of the white, Afrikaans South African. Both pieces embody a certain Afrikaans-ness, a certain South African-ness, situating the body, of the performer and the audience, or viewer, in relation to a cultural dialogue. Yet, once established, once recognised, both pieces attempt to consume this very culture, this language, and eventually expel it, abject it, metaphorically vomiting it back onto the surface. Both pieces go through a process of remembering and witnessing the objects, narratives and histories that have been constructed by and around the white, Afrikaner woman. Then, the

work attempts to embody these ideals, to belong in them, however, the attempt falls short and the body, as well as the performance, regurgitates it back. Whether this be by the physical act of bringing up *pap* or *spoeg* or *stukkies koppies*, or by the dislocation and distortion of the objects, by using them incorrectly or altering the way in which the spoken and written language is used as object. This act of ‘vomiting back’, of ‘bringing up’ in itself serves as a cathartic act, as something that allows me to work through the conflict experienced within my own identity, the conflict between the constructed identity and the identity I choose to construct for myself.

Furthermore, in both pieces there is a sense of accumulation, not only with the regards to the objects and language that accumulates within the space of the performance, whether this be a bathroom or a kitchen filled with various objects, but also the accumulation of language, of song, of sounds and of bodies. It can be argued that this in and of itself is an accumulation of histories, narratives, and nostalgias, all of which straddle various interpretations and are multivalent, depending on each body and objects’ histories.

This sense of accumulation within self, and the performance of accumulation evidenced in both *Die Skrif Is Aan Die Muur* and *As Oupa So Sê*, is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s commentary on Paul Klee’s painting, *Angelus Novus* (1968). This philosophy starts from an image of accumulative histories and the materiality they leave in their wake, a wreckage of sorts.

## ‘N WRAK | A WRECKAGE

*ma,  
maar ons almal word groot en begin die wêreld sien  
en begin bevraagteken  
en begin eet  
aan krummelpap. Wit krummelpap. Koekies en tee.  
En ons keel is vol en kraak en kort-kort wil ek opbring en kla en kans vat om net asem te skep  
maar iets bly krap en keer.  
Weer en weer en weer.*

One of the most recognisable images the philosopher, Walter Benjamin, left in his Ninth Thesis, is his writing and commentary on Paul Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus*. Benjamin writes (1968: 257-258):

‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the Angel of History. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The Angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

Thinking alongside Benjamin's descriptor of progress, I am struck by the perception of the catastrophe and the wreckage it continues to create. It elicits a sense of years and generations upon generations that continue to create the remains of something damaged and destroyed. It is that which is left behind, which constitutes the home I know so well. It makes me wonder, where do I stand in relation to this very catastrophe? Do I carry it within myself, and do I too, pile wreckage upon wreckage around me?

The ‘single catastrophe’ witnessed by the Angel and the wreckage it has caused, and continues to cause, calls not only to mind the colloquial use of the word catastrophe as an event that causes damage, suffering or disaster, but could be viewed in the classical theatrical understanding of a tragedy's plot. Catastrophe is used to describe the denouement of the play, the downturn that leads to the conclusion, derived from the Greek roots, *kata* (which means down) and *strophien* (turn) (Rosen, 1993: 327). Hence, the question arises whether or not our, or my, daily existence in South Africa could be viewed as (a) catastrophe, an event that

perpetually creates wreckage as we, I, move forward in a post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa?

This is not a new thought and within Benjamin's image, the arguments made by decolonial theorists, thinkers and activists becomes evident. The Puerto Rican decolonial scholar, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016)<sup>8</sup>, argues that the coloniality and modernity that continue to unfold throughout civilization through knowledge, power and being should be viewed as "*an endless war on specific bodies, cultures, knowledges, nature, and peoples...*" (2; emphasis added). Furthermore, Maldonado-Torres himself compares modernity/coloniality<sup>9</sup> as "a veritable catastrophe... whereby the world populations started to be divided according to, not merely specific practices or beliefs, but degrees of being human" (11).

In the South African context, colonialism and apartheid (historically and presently) continue to create spaces and processes that produce "zones of being human and zones of not-being human or not being human enough" (13). White people continue to exist in the zone of being 'fully human' where the institutions of society regenerate and affirm their status as human beings with a broad range of potentials and possibilities. Whereas black bodies, or the majority of black bodies, exist in "the zone of sub-humanity", a zone that allows for every system, resource and person, "including oneself, to questions one's humanity" (13). The white body, my white, Afrikaner being, stands central in the creation and perpetuation of the wreckage or the "metaphysical catastrophe, by the naturalization of conquest and war, and by the various modalities of human difference that unfold in the zones of being and not-being human" (18). This perpetuation is not an active act, a malicious intent I carry within myself, instead it is an understanding of coloniality as "a logic, metaphysics, ontology, and a matrix of power that can continue existing after formal independence and desegregation" (10), one that my being will automatically continue to gain from and continue to perpetuate, whether unconsciously or consciously.

The question that arises then is how to look at the wreckage, at the perpetual catastrophe, how to really see it, and how to move into the future with it? Progress it? How do I start to move, speak, perform in relation to this wreckage, to this catastrophe, without

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<sup>8</sup> In reading and referencing Maldonado-Torres, I am actively attempting to engage decolonial thought and theory in conversation with whiteness, specifically my own as an Afrikaans white female in South Africa, with the hope that this could further engage thinking around decoloniality and whiteness throughout academia, as there is currently very little writing on this that I am aware of.

<sup>9</sup> Maldonado-Torres argues that the notions of modernity and coloniality cannot be viewed as separate concepts, as the very act of modernity was constituted by coloniality and thus both constitute the other (2016: 11).

perpetuation of it, *die mens wik, maar God beskik*? How do I call attention to the catastrophe the white, Afrikaner community continues to create, whether actively or subconsciously, when this very community/culture struggles to position itself with regards to the past, its present reality and its position within a future South Africa (see Steyn, 2004; Van Heerden, 2004; Matthews, 2011)? Maldonado-Torres (2016) argues that:

Metaphysical catastrophe changes the meaning and function of the basic parameters of geopolitical, national, as well as subjective and inter-subjective dynamics to the extent that it creates a world to the measure of dehumanization. It turns a potential world of human relations into one of permanent forms of conquest, colonialism, and war [...]. This means that the extraordinary behaviour that takes place in war becomes normal and ordinary in colonial contexts and wherever there are colonial subjects. (12)

Maldonado-Torres (2016) thus states that modernity/coloniality is a form of metaphysical catastrophe, one that naturalises war. What becomes evident in the statement above is that the ‘normality’ and ‘ordinary-ness’ of coloniality/modernity and the body which continues to be recognized as ‘full’ by this coloniality/modernity, contributes to the wreckage, the catastrophe, the war, and the decay. I would argue that the white, Afrikaner identity construction functions as an element of the catastrophe, whether this be to the communities and identities around it, or its very own community. Following this line of thought, I would then suggest that the nostalgic objects that I, and so many white, Afrikaners, grew up with, stand as the cumulative wreckage of the catastrophe, which returns me to the question of making. How do I, the recognized ‘full human body’ constructed, and co-constructor, of the catastrophe act? How do I move into the future with this awareness of myself and the position I hold in Benjamin’s progress? To me, the answer lies in the work I create and the reasons why I choose to create. The work I make is an active attempt at digging within myself, within my community, within the piles of wreckage, these little moments of everyday catastrophe, an attempt to question our ‘full human bodies and beings’ and the comfortability we hold within these positions. To me, the answer lies in understanding my own positionality, the harm the ‘full human body can do’ and turning it into, or onto, myself. The work attempts to use the very elements of my white, Afrikaner being to question my whiteness, my Afrikaner-ness and the relation I hold to the catastrophe. Performing the white, Afrikaner woman, back to herself, and whoever stumbles upon this performance.

## ‘N ONDERWERP EN ‘N VOORWERP | A SUBJECT AND AN OBJECT

*ma,  
soms dink ek die wit-en-blou teekoppies luister  
na elke aand se sondeval en elke oggend se vervloeking  
dat hul stilweg hulself verwalg  
elke keer as my lippe nader aan hul tree  
hoe wens hul dan nie dat ‘n klein deeltjie van hul sal afbreek en my per ongeluk sal sny nie?  
dat my bloed en hul liggaam sal saamspoel*

As is evident in both *Die Skrif Is Aan Die Muur* and *As Oupa So Sê*, through the use of my own body and nostalgic objects (which in turn could be understood as using both the catastrophe and the wreckage of that catastrophe), a subject-object dynamic is created within and during these performances. Mark Fleishman (2012) in his discussion on the dramaturgical process for, and performance of, *Onnest’bo*, a performance devised and created in collaboration with the District Six Museum, argues that mute objects, everyday objects, have the ability to “talk and act back” to the human subject, disrupting the “‘normal’ subject-object relationship” (90), specifically within the conceptual framework of the fetish (90). Fleishman, with reference to Peter Pels, argues that objects can talk back in two possible ways:

Things can talk back because they are animated by something else, or they do so because of their own “voice”. In other words, ‘things act, emit messages and meanings on their own’ (94). The first possibility he refers to as ‘animism’ - things are alive because they are animated by something foreign to them. The performer animates the object by endowing it with a life from the outside - ‘a spirit made to reside *in* matter’. The second possibility he refers to as fetishism - ‘To the fetishist, the thing’s materiality itself is supposed to speak and act; its spirit is *of* matter’. The performer is affected by the sheer material presence of the object; its ‘materiality is not transcended by any voice foreign to it’ (94, emphases in original). (Fleishman, 2012: 90).

The clarification is then made that the word ‘materiality’, should be understood not as that which distinguishes things from living beings, objects from subjects, but as the shared make-up of both beings and objects that in turn mould and shift each other (Fleishman, 2012: 91). Fleishman’s argument that objects hold the possibility to shift relationality to the performer’s body turns me back to the performances that I make. I would argue that by placing both the body and everyday objects, objects I know intimately, within a shared space, within a performative space, allows for the objects to ‘become louder’, ‘to speak, clearly’, ‘to

articulate themselves' to become subject, and in turn, my body becomes object. This argument is further complicated when thinking through the philosopher, Levi R. Bryant's statement that "Objects or substances are not a pole opposed to or standing in front of a subject. There is not one domain of being composed of objects and another domain of being composed of subjects. Rather, being is composed entirely of objects or systems" (Bryant, 2011: 13). Bryant through his theory of object-orientated ontology, argue that objects are dynamic systems, "that exist at a variety of different scales of time and space, that are entangled in one another [...]", or in other words that "'objects' and 'dynamic systems'" are synonyms (13). Thus, a *doilie*, a toilet, a *teekoppie*, *pap*, a video, *badkamer teëls*, my tongue, Afrikaans written and spoken, myself, the Afrikaans culture, whiteness, colonialism are all equally objects. These objects can and do enter into relations with other objects, including the subject-object, myself.

In the performances mentioned above these objects are pulled from the home, pulled away from the everyday roles and functions assigned to these objects. For example, in *Die*



Figure 4: An example of my body in relation to the objects around me.

*Skrif Is Aan Die Muur*, the *doilies* hang from the ceiling, rendering them outside of their use as coverings for the couch, or for the table; the *beskuitjies* line the walls and floors of a public bathroom, inedible and a disrespectful waste of food; a white, porcelain wall that should be kept clean, pristine, a hygienic display of control, becomes the canvas for writing, playing, drawing, for scratching and agitating and speaking; and the *mieliepap* is consumed and regurgitated back into a toilet at a rate which becomes gluttonous and grotesque, as it renders the food as waste, inconsumable. In *As Oupa So Sê* the *teekoppies* gifted to me by my grandmother are displayed as remnants

and fragments, things that needs to be cleaned over and over again, not allowing for tea to be made in them. Pieces of writing, including my own memories of my grandfather, and pages from the Bible, are eaten, consumed as if they were food that fed and raised me, that I could swallow away and down, not allowing them to function as scripture or stories. In each

performance the fetishistic force of the objects are not only found in relation to each other, but are encountered in relation to my own body. A body that chooses not to overtly challenge, or to assert itself over the objects, or to ‘speak louder’ than the objects it is surrounded by, and in relation to. Instead, I perform the narrative of Van Wouw’s *Nointjie van die Onderveld*, I keep my gaze downturned, only glimpsing at the objects and audience, I keep quiet, choosing not to speak or invite conversation, I stay in place, not leaving the toilet cubicle I have confined myself in, or the kitchen of my grandparents’ home. If I speak, it is soft, teary, not truly audible. I remain seated at the family’s Sunday-*middagetenstafel*. Even in moments of feeling unsettled or upset, I try to keep composure in my white dress, and I try to be *ordentlik*.

This *ordentlikheid*, this staying in place, not speaking, but also being the person that has assembled and called the objects to ‘mangled speech’, allows for a moment of dislocation, of (un)belonging. Both the objects and my body become a fetish, an ‘other thing’, “other in relation to accepted processes of defining the thing by its use and exchange” (Fleishman, 2012: 93). The body and objects become a double-ness. I am close and contingent, a reinforcement of and a threat to, an echo and a distortion of, representing and refiguring, code and anticode. It creates a moment where the catastrophe of the identity I hold becomes “reified and fetishistic so that we [I] both play with it in gleeful, cynical abandon and stand in dread of its power to seduce consciousness and empty life” (Stewart, 1988: 231). A moment of liminality, borderlessness, of familiarity and strangeness. In the moment of performance, both my body and the objects around me “[...] ‘leak’ into a ‘fluid space’ in which there are no clear boundaries, in which things overflow in unpredictable ways” (Fleishman, 2012: 92). The objects become subject-objects that ‘act’ according to their own conditions, and my body, the subject, becomes object-subject, moving according to the rules of the space in which these objects exist, in which ‘their voices’ are just as loud as mine.

In attempting to continuously transgress the borders of what is generally understood as object and subject, I am hoping that these performances become an embodiment of the conflicting position I find within my identity, the conflict between constructed identity, that of the white, Afrikaner woman, and the identity I choose to construct for myself. What I am proposing is that these performances become active moments in which the ‘objects’ around me serve as metaphors for larger objects, following Bryant’s argument, such as the white, Afrikaner culture and identity; the narratives around the white, Afrikaner woman; and the histories of the white, Afrikaans South African. In positioning these objects and identities in relation to the object that is my body, I am hoping that these performances, firstly, become a moment of framing this conflicting position of self, a catastrophe that I find myself both

perpetuating and attempting to dislocate. Secondly, I hope these performances become an invitation to audience members to recognise the conflicting positions they might hold, the catastrophe and wreckage they perpetuate and encourage them to perform “a kind of border violation” (Lehmann, 2016: 63), an overstepping, a transgression within themselves.

## ‘N OORTREDING | A *TRANSGRESSION*

*ma,*  
*soms as ek my tandeborsel dan borsel ek so hard dat dit begin bloei*  
*bloed en spoeg en kiem soos stroop loop by my mond tot in die opwasbak uit, 'n moeras van*  
*rooi teenoor die kliniese porselein.*  
*'I expel myself. I spit myself out. I abject myself within the same motion through which 'I'*  
*claim to establish myself'<sup>10</sup>.*  
*Waar het ek die woorde gehoor? In 'n baarmoeder waar woord en rede nie bestaan nie?*  
*ek kan nie onthou nie.*

The notion of overflowing, of running beyond boundaries or borders, returns to the theory around tragic performance and what makes for ‘tragedy’, specifically with regards to the German theatre scholar, Hans-Thies Lehmann’s book, *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre* (2016). In Lehmann’s writing he argues that tragedy and the tragic can be viewed through two predominant frames or approaches, namely the Conflict model and the Transgression model (Lehmann, 2016: 59). The Transgression model is defined as follows, “[...] the tragic does not amount to the representation of conflict so much as it provides an exemplary manifestation of the power of rupture located in and/or outside the subject: transgressive energy” (Lehmann, 2016: 61). Lehmann argues that the notions of ‘transgression’ and ‘conflict’ do not stand as mutually exclusive, but could be viewed as two sides of the same coin:

For a tragic conflict to arise, a kind of border violation is necessary; otherwise, there would remain only juxtaposition, resignation, renunciation, compromise or mourning – simply a difference that did not proceed dialectically to assume the status of opposition and contradiction. By the same token, it is difficult to conceive of transgression without a border being in place. (Lehmann, 2016: 63)

The notion that both ‘conflict’ and ‘transgression’ stand central to the theorising of tragedy returns me to the core argument of this research which is that I find myself, my very identity, within conflict. There is a conflict between the identity markings I am born with, the colour of my skin, the gender I hold, the language I speak and the culture I was raised in, and the freedom and desire to construct my identity beyond these very markers of identity. This conflict, this clashing against the border of my own body, is the space from which my work emerges. This work, in turn, multiplies the notion of ‘the border’ even further, for within the

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<sup>10</sup> Julia Kristeva (1982: 3).

performances multiple borders can be identified, including the border of my identity, that of the white, Afrikaner woman; the border of my own body and the frustration felt towards it; and the shifting border, as argued by Fleishman (2012) and Bryant (2011), of the objects and subjects within the performance. Each of these encountered borders is violated, ruptured and transgressed within the performances I create. Going forward in this section each of these borders will be unpacked, as well as how these borders are transgressed throughout the performances I create.

### **The Border of the White, Afrikaner Identity**

Firstly, the border of the white, Afrikaner body is transgressed by the very act of performing the white, Afrikaner body and identity. *Ons praat nie uit die huis uit nie*. Megan Lewis (2012), in her article on Peter van Heerden's performance art installed and performed at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival in 2008, *TOTANDERKUNTUIT*, argues that Van Heerden's work functions as a *volksveraad* ('race betrayal') as it purposefully exposes the white, Afrikaner. Lewis (2012) argues that:

Any group or nation that predicates its existence on a totalizing understanding of belonging and the active exclusion of nonconforming ideologies, sets itself up for betrayal. By betrayal, I refer to the breaking or violation of a presumptive social contract and to a revelation, the giving away too much, letting slip a secret, or the laying bare of something. (10)

Following Lewis' argument, I would argue that my own performances form a part of the violation or betrayal of the white, Afrikaner by letting slip the secret of anger with the white, Afrikaner *as* a white, Afrikaner; by letting slip the secret of terror and sadness with the white, Afrikaner *as* a white Afrikaner; by letting slip the secret of confusion with myself *as* a white, Afrikaner. Moreover, in my performances a further transgression takes place because of my age, a young white, Afrikaner, and my gender, that of a woman, '*n meisiekind*. As is evident within the previous chapters the white, Afrikaner woman is expected to be many things, but often these roles are determined by the men around her. For example, in Dr Jan van Elfen's well-known Afrikaans book for teenage girls, *Wat Elke Meisie wil Weet* (1977), the following advice, or warning, is given to young, Afrikaner women:

Maar jy sal nie geluk vind as jy te hard probeer om los te breek uit die rots waaruit jy gekerf is nie [...]. 'n Mens wat homself losmaak van dit wat sy eie is, word deur die

lewe verswelg. Dit is baie belangrik dat jy jou identiteit (die mens wat jy is) moet beskerm [...]. Die godsdienstige en kulturele waardes waarin jy gesout is; die lewensopvatting wat jy aangeleer het en die lewenslesse wat jy as 'n tiener ter harte neem, word 'n permanente deel van jou persoonlikheid. Dit is hierdie dinge wat van jou 'n goeie mens maak, 'n mens wat in die samelewing verwelkom word. (Van Elfen, 1977: 6)

The image, or warning, is clear. If the white, Afrikaner woman is to question, to break away, to step out of line, life will consequently engulf her, make wreckage of her. Once again, the *Volksmoeder* narrative nostalgically echoes in Van Elfen's words, it is religion and cultural values which define the young, white, Afrikaner woman. This is what makes for a 'good' woman, this is what makes for acceptance and a welcome space of belonging in the white, Afrikaner community. Maldonado-Torres (2016) argues that societies with a segregationist or colonial past, which continues to be upheld by present systems, expect the youth to play a major role in "sanctioning the present order and continuing its existence in the future" (2). Therefore, when the youth, whether this be a single person within the community or a collective of individuals, starts to question, or voice dissatisfaction with the present, and views the past in a different light or calls for a different future, then they are perceived as a problem (Maldonado-Torres, 2016: 2–6). Following Maldonado-Torres's argument, performances like *Die Skrif Is Aan Die Muur* and *As Oupa So Sê* transgress the borders of the white, Afrikaner by breaking down the notion of the *volksmoeder* and the role she, or I, have in continuing to perpetuate the border, the catastrophe, into the future.

### **The Border of the Body**

A further transgression is encountered in the abjection of my own, physical body. It becomes a conscious choice to use the very border that is my body, to create a moment of transgression, a moment of border violation, through abjection during these performances. Thus, I would argue that it is in moments of consuming *pap* to the point of excess and bringing it back up, vomiting it back into the toilet; moments where pages of the Bible, my own written memories and pieces of broken porcelain are swallowed and regurgitated, scraping the inside of my mouth, that the very border of my body becomes transgressed, abjected. The notion of abjection calls forth the writing of the philosopher, feminist and psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva. Kristeva (1982) defines abjection as an act of claiming the self, "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself out*, I abject *myself within* the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*" (3; emphasis added). She further argues that in this act of claiming

the self, transgression and disturbance take place, “It is thus not the lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, and order. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva, 1982: 4). Kristeva’s definition, to some degree, echoes Lehmann’s understanding of the tragic, as Lehmann states: “The tragic articulates a lack of moderation insofar as it involves immanent self-endangerment and looming or ultimate annihilation. It always concerns some kind of excess; the latter may be ecstatic and singularly intense, yet it calls forth ruin” (61).

Thinking through Lehmann and Kristeva, my body therefore not only becomes an embodiment of the border, of Benjamin’s catastrophe, but through the act of abjection, my body becomes an active border violation, enacting a moment in which I not only expel myself, but establish myself, claim myself, *for myself*.

### **The Border of the Subject-Object, Object-Subject**

The shifting of the border between the subject and object(s) of the performance creates the final sense of border transgression. Returning to Fleishman’s argument, the body of the performer and the objects in the performance “leak into a ‘fluid space’ in which there are no clear boundaries” (Fleishman, 2012: 92). Not only does Fleishman’s argument of boundaryless spaces in turn echo Kristeva’s definition of abjection, but it calls forth the theory of liminality<sup>11</sup> as theorised by Victor Turner. Turner (1979) defines liminality as follows:

This term, literally "being-on-a-threshold," means a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending, preserving law and order, and registering structural status. Since liminal time is not controlled by the clock it is a time of enchantment when anything might, even should, happen. (Turner, 1979: 465)

What becomes evident in Turner’s definition, and applicable to *Die Skrif Is Aan Die Muur* and *As Oupa So Sê*, is the fact that the breaking of ‘day-to-day’ processes, for example the ‘breaking’ of the use of a public bathroom space, the breaking of the use of a *doilie*, or a *beskuitjie*, or *the Bible* or the teacup, the way in which these spaces and objects should function, firstly, constructs a liminal space or moment. Secondly, it is from within this liminal moment – a moment created by the distortion or transgression of the objects and the way in

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<sup>11</sup> The experience of, and reference to, liminality speaks to both an inner experience whilst creating these performances, as well as a theoretical understanding of the performances themselves.

which they are used in the day-to-day process - that all becomes ‘enchanted’, a space where anything ‘might’ happen. Whether this ‘enchantment’ affects its participants and witnesses in a joyous manner, in a grievous manner, or in a frustrated manner remains ever-shifting, but as Lehmann (2016) argues, within theatre of tragedy, or tragic theatre, specifically theatre that takes up what is perceived as historical matters, is a space of memory. He writes, “[...] it concerns remembering what has been lost; for this reason, it also represents the recurrent calling-to-mind of loss and passing away. Theatre is a site of grievous loss. In this sense, it represents a *non-place*, somewhere else[...].” (124; emphasis added).

Following both Lehmann and Turner, I would argue that it is in these moments of enchantment, of boundary transgression, and of remembering what has been lost, that we can reimagine the wreckage. These moments open up a space where the white, Afrikaner can be reimaged, where I can start reimagining myself. Turner’s theories of liminality originated in his research around public reflexivity, which, he argues “takes the form of performance...the languages through which a group communicates itself to itself” (Turner, 1979: 465). Turner further emphasises that these languages are not only found within discourse and dialogue, or the spoken word, but include “gestures, music, dancing, graphic representation, painting, sculpture and the fashioning of symbolic objects” (465). The performances of *Die Skrif Is Aan Die Muur* and *As Oupa So Sê*, therefore are not only attempts to communicate myself to myself, but also attempts to reflect the white Afrikaner to the white Afrikaner, and to question and transgress the very objects, language and gestures created by past white, Afrikaners, that continue to constitute the white, Afrikaner to this day. As Fleishman states: “Performance is an embodied way of engaging with the past that offers the possibility of exploring aspects of the past that are difficult to engage with through more conventional approaches. In other words, performance allows us to touch the past differently” (Fleishman, 2012: 205).

It is then within these borders of the white, Afrikaner, of the body, of the shifting subject-object distinctions and the transgressive performing of these very borders, their abjection, that we/I create moments and spaces of liminality, which in turn not only calls forth the very definition of the tragic, but allows me to reimagine, to reconstruct myself as a white, Afrikaner. In other words, I have begun to understand that I find myself in a tragic paradigm, one where my very identity is caught in conflict, a conflict of the necessity of my identity as it has been constructed, and the freedom to construct an identity I choose for myself. The question that I, then, ask is: how do I strive to construct for myself? Freely? The answer, I would argue, is by using the very elements of tragedy, namely conflict and transgression, as well as the nostalgic-narrative objects of the white, Afrikaner identity, as

tools to abject and transgress not only the white, Afrikaner identity, but to a large degree the very position I find myself in. These performances become moments of cathartic action, of truly being ‘born free’, for in these moments, the construction of self becomes tangible and therefore malleable. I choose to use that which constructs me intentionally, as a catalyst. In these moments, I can shift the very borders in which I find myself, and often these moments are witnessed and shared by an audience, who, in turn, are not only invited to locate their own borders, but to reimagine themselves in relation to myself, the white, Afrikaner woman.

This moment of transgression, of re-imagining, however, often remains only an attempt, an attempt that frequently falls short. For when I move out of the performance space, the shift within myself feels minute, and I walk back into the wreckage, back into “metaphysical catastrophe” (Maldonado-Torres, 2016: 18). Lehmann (2016) himself argues that the act of transgression falls short:

A closer look at transgression reveals, time and again, an almost unbearable paradox – which proves necessary, however, for the tragic to exist: the fact that elevation, when one looks closely, winds up being empty in essence. The drive, the impulse, the desire to violate borders – to attain what lies outside the limits of the possible – is inherently devoid of content and/or represents a space to be filled with arbitrary goals. Overstepping the limit *per se* is the object of desire. The peculiar emptiness and “indeterminacy” of this impulse has been attested over and over. (Lehmann, 2016: 74)

Lehmann thus argues that transgression, or border violation, carries only a moment of elevation. For as soon as the border has been violated, an emptiness continues to exist, and another set of boundaries, or borders, arise. I would argue, that the ‘emptiness’, the fall back into Benjamin’s wreckage, is a known reality. As I create these performances there is an understanding that they will fall back, and that they will fall short, yet, this does not mean that something does not shift within me. Often, these moments of performing myself back to myself allows for a recognition, a moment in which I consciously and intentionally voice myself, a cathartic moment that allows for a breath in, before I fall back. And within the catastrophe, we should never underestimate a breath, a moment of respite.

## MA | MOTHER

*ma*

*hier is ek nou.*

*terug by die huis maar ook nie eintlik nie. en daar is dae wat ek iets sê waar ek skrik vir  
hoeveel ek soos jy klink. en dan voel ek skuldig dat ek nie meer soos jy wil wees nie, maar dan  
weer is daar dae waar ek myself in jou sien en ek stilweg dink, dankie tog, dankie tog ek het  
jou humorsin en hardkoppigheid en aanhou-wen en niks is goed genoeg nie en baklei vir wat  
jy wil hê en praat hard  
maak seker hulle kan jou hoor  
maak seker jy weet wie jy is  
maak altyd seker jy weet wie jy is.*

Having both reflected on where the research and performance practice have arisen from, as well as the theoretical underpinnings of the research, I return to the conceptualisation of the final research project, *ma*. *ma* seeks to further the research around the use of nostalgic objects and the white, Afrikaner, woman and how both the body and objects shift within the performance, allowing for multiple transgressions to arise. Yet, *ma* seeks to explore the research using not only my own body but will use a chorus of four young, white, Afrikaans women. This chorus of ‘daughters’ will seek to ‘talk back’, ‘perform back’ to the Mother(tongue), with a specific emphasis on the Afrikaans language as spoken object. Therefore, the performance *ma*, not only refers to the specific relationship between a mother and her daughter(s), but seeks to encapsulate various metaphors around the mother figure. These include the mother tongue, Afrikaans, which in itself could be argued to encapsulate the white, Afrikaner; South Africa, as a country that has given birth to the chorus of women performing; and the various figures that have raised the chorus of daughters, including mother-like figures such as grandmothers, aunts and sisters<sup>12</sup>. The title, *ma*, could also be understood as the Afrikaans pronunciation, and Afrikaans word, for ‘maar’ (but). Often in Afrikaans the word is used as a hesitation, an interjection, a start of a disagreement with what is being said or an opening to something different.

The interest in using and exploring the form of the chorus first originated in a postdramatic production, *Antigone (not quite/ quiet)*, which was directed by Mark Fleishman and performed at the Baxter Theatre Centre in September 2019. The play was conceptualised in three parts, namely Ismene, Antigone and Tiresias. The second part, Antigone, was made

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<sup>12</sup> Another mother figure within South Africa is that of the black women that help raise white, Afrikaner women. Yet, given the scope of this study, it is one that I have chosen not to investigate, as this is a particularly intricate and complex mother-daughter relationship that would encapsulate a study in and of itself.

up of a chorus of thirteen individuals, including myself, a white, Afrikaner, woman, and further made up of twelve bodies of colour. In Fleishman's production, the character of Antigone was embodied by this chorus, a chorus that came to represent the youth of South Africa, the protest against oppression and the female body saying 'no'. In essence, a representation of a re-imagined Antigone-figure from the contemporary South African moment. My experience of the production, both the creation and performance of it, was one of constantly trying to understand and locate my body within the larger body of the chorus, and questioning what my singular white body was doing within the chorus and what it was representing on the stage every time we performed, every time we became the body of Antigone. It was an uncomfortable position, one that caused a lot of introspection and questioning within myself. There was a constant grappling with representing myself, but understanding that I formed part of one 'body', that of the chorus. The notion of the chorus, the choral voice, the collective representation, complicated my individual understanding of my body in relation to the unit, the group, and towards myself. As the process and production progressed it became clear to me that my sense of (un)belonging in the body of the chorus, was the very element that made me belong in a chorus that came to represent the youth of South Africa in the aftermath of apartheid. It became clear to me that the chorus is never homogenous. Is never singular in tone or expression or movement. The discomfort I experienced was partly due to the notion that belonging in the chorus is an impossibility, an ever-liminal state. It is at once the 'I' and the 'we', constantly fluctuating between, but never truly a unity. It is at once being within and without. It is at once past and present, here and 'not-yet-here', gathering and disappearing. It is multiple. It is a constant process of searching for coherence, but never truly reaching a place of co-existence. It was within this experience that I became aware that the chorus could serve as both a representation of the individual and the communal and moreover could represent the constant struggle of being caught between these very notions of individual and larger community, trying at once to locate oneself as an individual, yet form a part of a community, an identity.

In *ma* the chorus will allow for a larger exploration of the sense of (un)belonging, not only because more voices will be echoing a shared experience, that of a young, white, Afrikaner woman, but because members of the chorus can threaten to fracture, to create a sense of (un)belonging within the very body of the chorus itself. Furthermore, the chorus allows for the multiplicity of borders to expand to the border of one body in relation to another body, or other bodies. The multiplicity of borders that can be created between bodies, in turn, allows for the multiplication of transgressions, the multiplication of the subject-object

and object-subject shifts within the performance, and the multiplication of abjection(s). The chorus, therefore, I would argue, amplifies the research that has been done over the last two years, whilst keeping it within the frame of tragedy and the tragic.

The use of the chorus to explore both the tragic, the sense of (un)belonging and language-as-object can also be located in the work of the German theatre director and designer, Einar Schleef (1944–2001), in his productions like *Katzgraben* (1972), *Frühlings Erwachen* (Spring Awakening, 1974) and *Die Mütter* (The Mothers, 1986). Erika Fischer-Lichte (2017), argues that Schleef’s chorus, “[...] functioned as a permanent battleground between individuals, who wanted to join the community while maintaining their individual uniqueness, and the community, which strove for total incorporation of all its members and threatened those who insisted on their individuality with marginalization and alienation” (317)<sup>13</sup>. Thus, my experience in the body of the chorus in *Antigone (not quite/ quite)*, echoes that of Schleef’s, for the chorus in and of itself is constantly in tension, a tension between individual positionalities and that of the community. This is a tension that never disappears into a harmonious collective, but rather continues to pull and push against one another, a daughter struggling to position herself in relation to her mother. Schleef further made use of the voice to foreground the materiality of the language, the excess of expression found within it, as well as an aesthetic quality within this expression, allowing for language to ring out, or echo into space. This choice, Fischer-Lichte argues, undermines the symbolic order of language (2017: 318). Thus, Schleef’s conceptualisation of the chorus not only conceived of a continuous conflict between community and the individual, but as a continuous conflict between language and the body. Fischer-Lichte argues that both of these elements, in turn, established a contemporary form of a tragic theatre. Both of these elements are key to the exploration I will attempt with *ma*. Firstly, because the chorus of daughters will be explored not only as individuals, but as a community talking back to a larger community, one that often struggles to listen. Secondly, because the use of the Afrikaans language will attempt to form a further element of conflict and tension, rendering the language material, futile in its attempt to speak, but one of the only objects which the chorus has access to. Finally, it is my hope that the chorus, as Schleef’s chorus and Fleishman’s chorus do, creates its own tragic form, or expression towards tragic theatre.

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<sup>13</sup> Fischer-Lichte’s argument is predominantly made in reference to Einar Schleef’s production, *Die Mütter (The Mothers)*, 1986).

Additional elements I would like to explore in *ma* include a wooden, dining room table, porcelain crockery, and the notion of excess and control. In my home, the wooden dining room table stands as a central figure in our family, to our home. It is around this dining room table, which my parents inherited from their parents, that my brothers and sister and I learnt to read. It is around this table where ‘family meetings’ are held, Christmases and birthday breakfasts are conjured up, and Sunday lunches are served. The table inherently has a sense of liminality and stability, as it is something that never moves, but yet is constantly surrounded by ‘enchanted moments’ that move through, around, with or over it. It becomes both an object of belonging and (un)belonging, for it is at the table where arguments take place, where tears rupture and from where I have stood up to leave mid-conversation. Moreover, when a meal is served, the table comprises a ritual event, one that has not only been repeated many times in my life, but has been repeated before I ever sat at the table. The performance will therefore not only explore the table as a site of ritual within the white, Afrikaner culture, but will seek to explore the multiple borders and memories that have formed around the table, as an essential representation of ‘home’. The crockery will further seek to explore the nostalgic objects as subjects, as much of the crockery used in Afrikaner homes is inherited from grandparents and great-grandparents, thus, endowing these objects with a sense of value, care and importance. The question I would like to explore is what happens when these objects are damaged, not consciously, but subconsciously, and how they become manipulative, asserting control over the subjects, the chorus. Finally, I hope to consider how the excess and control of spoken language functions within the white, Afrikaner household and more specifically around the dinner table. This is not only in direct reference to Lehmann’s notion of transgression as excess, but could further explore Kristeva’s abjection as an expulsion, a spitting out of self. What happens when you try to speak, try to voice the tragic conflict, but fail to control the way in which the words leave your mouth? The excess of language will echo and stand in relation to the Afrikaans news, as read by Riaan Cruywagen on the South African Broadcasting Corporation’s (SABC) channel two. The news not only serves as a metaphor of the country, but stands as mother(tongue) to the Afrikaner identity. Riaan Cruywagen, has been synonymous with Afrikaans television and news, since his first broadcast of the national news on the 26<sup>th</sup> November 1975. His final broadcast was on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2012, 37 years of reading the news every evening at 19:00. Cruywagen, also voiced the beloved character, Haas Das, on the Afrikaans children’s animation series, *Haas Das se Nuuskas* as well as numerous characters on *Liewe Heksie*, another beloved childhood figure that I remember listening to for hours as I fell asleep.

Hence, Cruywagen's voice becomes synonymous with the Afrikaans language, and to a larger extent the Afrikaner identity, as he was the storyteller, the bearer of news, of change, of dislocation and relocation. Cruywagen, literally, talked the Afrikaner through a transitional period, using the language that was known, the language that could hold. As Steyn (2004) observes: "By far the strongest sense of a unifying, defining 'essence' is their language, Afrikaans [...]" (158). In using an older television, with both the visual footage of the news, as well as the sound of the Afrikaans news, I am hoping to create the multivalent 'ma figure', that stands in relation to the chorus.

Furthermore, the exploration of excess could possibly lead to the over-consumption of food. Food holds great complexity with respect to women and the way in which we view ourselves. I can remember many moments in my upbringing where how much food I consumed was at the centre of a conversation or comment. Food, the consumption thereof, is not only a reflection on the daughter, but on the mother and how much consumption she allows. The paradoxical nature of the white, Afrikaner is further encountered in experiences around food. For example, as much as the daughter should watch how much of the food she consumes, it is of utmost importance that there is always food to offer visitors, brothers and husbands. When someone is feeling ill, or is going through a hardship within the community, food becomes the act of care. Yet, should you eat it too fast at the dining room table, you will be berated for your gluttonous manner.

Due to the global pandemic, the nature of this performance will shift to ensure the safety of those involved in the project. The performance will therefore be filmed, instead of performing to a live audience. Ideally, the filming of the performance will not only serve as a form of archiving, but will create an affective experience for those who view it on their screens. I am hoping that filming the performance over two days, will allow us to capture the various elements as mentioned throughout this explication, including the shifting dynamic of the objects to subject, and subject to object, as well as the micro-elements that create an atmospheric space during the performance. This includes the use and exploration of extreme close-up shots and extreme wide shots; shifting from different stabilities, angles and lenses within the filming process, to emphasise, moving between the 'real', the 'poetic', the 'watched' and 'watching' worlds the chorus inhabits; and the exploration of assemblage of sound over footage.

The final performance can be viewed at [figshare.com/s/b8b8211bce3c19b79579](https://www.figshare.com/s/b8b8211bce3c19b79579).

## ‘N TERUGKOMS | A RETURN

*ma  
ek sal altyd terugkom na ma toe  
altyd dogtertjie bly wat soek na jou oë wat dophou hoe ek loop, hoe ek val, altyd maar asem  
sal ophou as ek walshalsig teen die muur probeer uit klim  
ma  
ek dink dit is bietjie cliché om te sê dat ek jammer is  
maar ek is  
jammer  
weet dat ek altyd sal terugkom  
altyd weer by die tafel sal kom sit  
nog 'n koppie tee saam met ma sal drink.*

In conclusion, the histories, nostalgic narratives and objects that both constitute and have been constituted by the white, Afrikaner woman remain evidence of Benjamin's catastrophe, but continue to move within it, reproducing it. These things continue to exist as home, a space with walls and objects and food and people that speak and argue and write and understand themselves, not only in Afrikaans, but within the white, Afrikaner identity. The catastrophe continues to exist in the everyday, *in die porseleinkas, tussen die teëls en tierlantyntjies en die goedjies wat in sitkamer verpak is, daar onder die groot houtkas en die mat*. I continue to exist in this catastrophe, in this conflict of being written and wanting to write myself. It is from this position that I make. It is from the position of the white, Afrikaner woman, that I seek to construct the white, Afrikaner woman in performance, questioning who she is amidst this chaos, wreckage and catastrophe. I argue that this is done through the use of the very objects and narratives that have constructed the white, Afrikaner woman. Through the fetishisation of everyday objects that are integral to so many Afrikaner homes, and my own body in performance, I create a space in which these objects 'talk back' and the body becomes subject-to-the-object, and to some degree subject-to-the-narrative, subject-to-the-nostalgic-history. This, in turn, creates liminal moments in which a re-imagination of self can take place, where a sense of freedom-of-self can be experienced. I build a moment in which boundaries move, shift and transgress, allowing for a moment in which my position might be clearly articulated, not only to an audience who witnesses the performance, but back to myself. This moment, inevitably, falls short, falls back into the catastrophe, but allows for a breath, one that should never be underestimated.

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