

DECLARATION

This dissertation is submitted to the faculty of History of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in fulfilment of the Degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg, March 15, 2017

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Student: *Nisha Merit von Carnap - 974930*

I declare that this dissertation is my own work. It is submitted for the Degree of the Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and has neither been submitted before to any other degree or examination at any other University, nor prepared under the aegis or with the assistance of any other body or organisation or person outside the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Name

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

“We are the sum total of our experiences. Those experiences – be they positive or negative – make us the person we are, at any given point in our lives. And, like a flowing river, those same experiences, and those yet to come, continue to influence and reshape the person we are, and the person we become. None of us are the same as we were yesterday, nor will be tomorrow.” **READ ONLINE: NEBLETT 2009.**

Reflecting on what B.J. Neblett speaks about above, my own experiences are shaped in, invoked by and shared with the environment in which I find myself in, informed by people around me. I had the enormous fortune to be accompanied, guided and interrupted by wonderful people who taught me life, seen and lived through their eyes, which enabled me to live my own.

I have a great number of people to thank. Experiences that will travel with me further through my life and form a unique memory of my time in South Africa, especially in Johannesburg. When it comes to this master dissertation in particular, I want here to acknowledge those that helped me on this path, to whom I convey my deep respect and gratitude.

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Andrea von Carnap

- mum - for the support, home and freedom she always gave me.

Mary Sibande

- artist - for her wonderful narrative of Sophie, sharing her thoughts and dreams, and for answering all my questions with an open heart and mind.

Rory Bester

- supervisor - for teaching and guiding me through this complex dissertation. Moreover, for encouraging me to find my own way of expressing thoughts and ideas.

Gallery MOMO

- for the access to the gallery archive and interesting discussions about South African art.

Abel Siminya

- designer - for the interest and the excitement my ideas and our collaboration.

Andrew Thsabangu

- photographer - who showed me his favourite streets of Johannesburg and opened my view to this unique city.

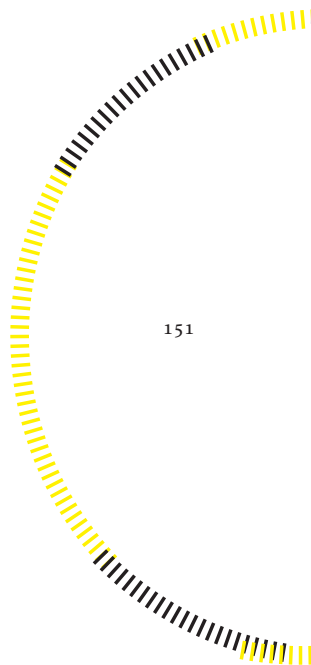
Johannesburg

- city I fell in love with - for its complex beauty.

DISSERTATION

**CONS
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THE
SELF**

Sophie AND THE NEGOTIATION OF SPACE



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These illustrations build the dissertation's visual argument and are represented in chronological order, the repetitiveness of some of the images show their importance for the reference and the focus what the text describes. They tell a distinctive narrative of their origins' intention but also create broader stories when read in relation, juxtaposition or in opposition to each other



FEATURING ARTISTS & PHOTOGRAPHERS

Is an overview of all artists and photographers represented on the following pages through their works. It serves the purpose of acknowledgement of their works, as I do not state the source and title of the image directly with its presentation. Text and visuals are strictly separated, in avoiding captions it gives a visual reading, uninterrupted by the images' name. The images including caption are represented in their chronological order; as an appendix called Courtesy.

MARY SIBANDE
SANTU MOFOKENG
SUSAN WOOLF
SABELO MLANGENI
ERNEST COLE
SIMON GUSH
DAVID GOLDBLATT
PETER MAGUBANE
AI WEIWEI
ELI WEINBERG
SUE WILLIAMSON
YINKA SHONIBARE
NAN GOLDIN
MUSA NXUMALO
TRACEY ROSE
WENDA GU
SIEMON ALLEN
JANE ALEXANDER
KAY HASSAN
THABISO SEKGALA
LERATO SHADI
ZANELE MUHOLI
GISÉLE WULFSOHN
SENZENI MARASELA
LALLA ESSAYDI
HENTIE VAN DER MERWER
LEBOHANG KGANYE
MIKHAEL SUBOTZKY
DILLON MARSH
ANDREW TSHABANGU
MPHO MOKGADI
JO RACTLIFFE
GUY TILLIM
IMRAAN CHRISTIAN
ALF KUMALO
HAROON GUNN-SALIE
PAUL WEINBERG
OTHERS
MEIDA
RHODESMUSTFALL

This user manual gives an explanation for the specific design I used and the interaction between reader and dissertation it should spark. The design follows a function that creates a space between the dissertation and the reader, as for example, the lines used point to the very connection between words and images. This space refers to Foucault's concept of the 'here and there', in time and space, which will be discussed on a later stage in this dissertation. This plays with the phenomenon, where, the body may be physically present while the mind is somewhere else, carried through the words into past times and situations. Hence, the lines as well as the yellow and grey chapter symbols give grounding, while the the images and words open a playful imagination of pushing and pulling from page to page. On the same token, the use of the hashtack refers to the the concousness of disembodiment, as a hashtack mostly sets a pin to something that is not physically represented. Thus, this symbol especially through its use in digital social platforms became a reflection of one's own location in respect to time and space.

Envelope. The envelope is made out of a domestic worker's uniform. Everyone knows this kind of garment, this kind of uniform that hides the individuality of a person behind its label. The 'maid' provokes inevitably the attendant

subject of the 'madam', as a concept of labour and relationship of employer and employee as well as private and public space. As the soldier requires the uniform to become visible as such, the woman becomes visible as a domestic worker by means of the apron and the headscarf. I argue that the haptic perception of this creates exactly its objectness and elevates it from the mere words it carries. It allows you, as the reader, to connect, to touch and feel. Now, that the dissertation is revealed from its uniform, there is a story to discover.

Magazine. The design, and consequently the materiality of the present dissertation is a conceived construct of its visual and haptic appearance. A magazine presents itself to a specific audience, whether covering the pertinent aspects of news, fashion, art, sport, or food. It is consumed and thrown away as product or collected and stored as nostalgia and 'authentic' window into the past. It constitutes a blueprint of the society back then, like the DRUM Magazine that stands for a distinctive South African past. A magazine is a information device, and reflection of the time and space the content covers. A magazine comes usually in issues, published repetitively, in a sequence. Thus, it makes itself obsolete as soon as it appears, as the next one is already in production to cater for the endless striving for 'the next'. Hence, I use the concept of the magazine for design purposes, and representation of images, but also to visualise the cycle of time and space, which will later in the text be called 'autobiography', 'death drive' and 'archive fever'.

Magazines are often delivered to the reader directly, entering the private space in a plastic envelope to protect the object, as its cover remains visible, teasing at the highlights to be found inside its pages.

The removable wrapping of this dissertation thus is not transparent at all, rather a strong garment that reveals not a glimpse of what it contains. The hands have to discover before the eyes can perceive what it contains. This gives a mystic aura of protection and hiding of unpacking and exposure of secret and narrative.

Images. The study focuses on the work of Mary Sibande. Her narrative is understood through a personal reading that connects my origin to the experience made in South Africa through the engagement with Sophie, and is accompanied by pictures I have identified as relevant for the conversation and understanding of the dissertation. Pictures are used in three different ways; firstly, as a specific argument with a detailed contemplation. Secondly, as part of a series or a wider argument, but not referred to directly, and thirdly, as visual extension without a without a specific recognition within the writing. The numbered reference boxes determine this structure of reference and are used for the order in the list of images titled Courtesy.

Beginning and End. The dissertation starts at the last page, and ends at the first. This is a pointed critique of the diachronic, where life is taken to be best understood as a perpetual flow of events. As mentioned, the pictures are always on the left, whereas the text is always right. That comes from my own experience of browsing through magazines. Flipping through the dissertation from the “new” beginning to the “new” end creates a visual argument, as the images are set into motion, like the use of a flicker book that enables the mind to bring the imagination to life and explore the pictures as a flowing story. Nevertheless, the construction of my writing started with the introduction

and ended with a reflection, where, during research and writing, the development changed the reflection as I went along. Hence, the document itself has a beginning and an end, without a narrative structure.

Interview. After all, it is Mary Sibande’s story that is recited here, and because I am very thankful for the personal conversations we had, it is important to present the artist’s voice. It represents not only her, but especially her artistic alter ego, Sophie. The ‘maid’, the identity, the space, the woman, the dreamer. For these conversations I met with her in 2015 and 2016 in her artist studio at August House in Johannesburg. The interviews were focused on Sophie without denying my own thoughts and and reading to manipulate questions I wanted to be answered. This methodology follows the approach that actively includes the interviewee and interviewer in a so called biographical narrative, which is explained later in the dissertation.

Collage. Some pages show pictures that are overlapping, from a background and a foreground as they ‘physically’ meet. The purpose of this is not to present a whole new picture but rather emphasize a distinctive relationship I want to carve out in using that method. Hence the focus is on the tangible rather than the wholeness.

Transparent Paper. Between text and picture is a transparent paper. It is disruptive and connects at the same time. It is for you to make notes to do the academic commentary and interact with the object. Everything is allowed on this paper, only in red, though. However, be mindful which side you use or why both sides? Because it reflects on the pages you are interacting with.

AUTHORS' NOTE – ON THEORY AND PRACTICE

This somewhat unconventional list provides a guide for a specific reading, and reveals the operational questions of the study. Opening a printed document is a simple act, something one might not consciously engage with. This simplicity although becomes a complex act when approached the opposite way. To start at the end means to think another direction. As you opened this dissertation from the back to start reading is the outcome of a product made in a non conformist way. Why this is quite difficult to manage, becomes clear how fixed it is and how the system works against those who use it, namely those who should be in charge of the system. MS Word, the programme in which this dissertation is written, and I are at odds as I structure what I want to present, so that it becomes a test of self-reflection as it is a challenge to the 'norm'.

.blank pages give time to breathe.

.images give a focus and the foundation of the written word.

.images can be confusing – not answering questions – but raising uncertainty, which is good.

.blank pages rupture the flow of words.

.lines are pointing towards somewhere or something.

.references give structure of the argument but lose focus – searching for the bigger picture.

.is it understandable what lies behind?.

.is it enough?.

.lines that are drawn oblique on the page are there to interrupt the eyes.

.questions are not necessarily there to be answered, they point to my way of perception.

.is it understandable?.

.location, location, location; and the relation of signs.

.amplified questions stand for Sophie's presence in the absence.

.knowing and understanding are two different things.

.yellow pages expand the frame of reference to visual discussion of greater depth.

.avoiding chronology.

.does a generic formular exist of what the self is, how it is built?.

.reflections are everywhere, but not always visible as such.

.can there be a beginning, an end?

.argument is fragmented – life is not a linear experience.

.this magazine is not only a medium – this dissertation is not only a purpose – I am not only a student – Sophie is not just a ‘maid’.

.this is an object with a subject – this is an experience – this is a testimony.

.the grey pages are important, but stand for themselves - explaining what was spoken about.

.identity is a praxis.

.is it liberty or resignation to accept the past?.

.stories need to be told in order to be believed.

.more like a slippery slope.

.the words on the dark pages are the reasons Sophie’s story is told.

.hashtags refer to the location in a non-physical world, in which this dissertation was conceived.

My approach is about hope, dreams, aspiration, about the identification of something we can hold on to, which is not coming from an external place, but rather from within ourselves. After all, we need an explanation for all this, life. We need guidance about where to go, what to feel and who to be. This is why we visit the past to build ‘the now’. Yes, it might be logical, but this is not about guidance or a formula. It is much more about getting lost and realising the ever-moving self to be the only stable variable.





THERE WAS NEVER ANY MORE INCEPTION
THAN THERE IS NOW

#wheredoIgofromhere





Mary Sibande creates the missing reflective procedure between reflecting on past experiences and the contemporary search instigated by questions such as: “who am I?”, “where do I come from?” and “where do I go from here?”. To use Bourdieu’s words: “the categories of perception, the schemata of classification, that is, essentially, the words, the names which construct social reality as much as they express it, are the stake par excellence of political struggle, which is a struggle of vision and division.” **READ: BOURDIEU 1989, PAGE 21.** This path is perceptible when looking at the change between the blue series of *Long Live The Dead Queen* to *The Purple Shall Govern*. The latter depicts *Sophie* in very strong, what may even be called overtly aggressive positions; in negotiation with herself and the creatures she bears, which become more clearly articulated through the uncanny in their appearance as the series wears on. This marks the next level of the continuation of the blue series, where *Sophie* seems to be introverted, dreaming, hoping but still caught up in the memories of the past.

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This raises a question that was asked in *Selves in Question* on the concept of *autre-biography*, where Paul de Man is cited thus: “he points out that when one tries to put the historical self into writing, what emerges, inevitably, is a substitute for that self,” **READ: LÜTGE-COULLIE 2006, PAGE 216.** which is embodied in *Sophie* being Mary Sibande’s alter ego. This persona is not real, she never was and probably never will be, but she also does not pretend to

be. What is important instead, is that she quotes reality of experienced past, and forms a ‘non place’ **READ: MALCOMESS & KREUTZFELDT 2013.** where everyone that knows that reality can relate to as they know how to decipher the signs of which *Sophie* is constituted. To support this, I argue with the seeing and respectively not looking back of the Lacanian tuna can, as understanding comes with knowledge of space, and relevance.

Codes of spatial understanding apply their influence within the habitus in which one is raised, and they resonate with or against the visual manifestation of the class in power, thus forming individual memory and narratives, that become utopian places articulated in a statue, or in a document. To be able to re-visit these in an archive or gallery, makes them real, but also re-definable, and questionable, depending, on who interprets them. So is my own auto-biography woven into this text, as my reading is constitutive of it also, and *Sophie*’s stories of dreaming and aspiration provide me the body or canvas from which to begin to read from. Cahun has noted of Sibande’s work that “self-representation here does not suggest a definitive statement, or revelation of an inner truth. It is instead an open-ended dialogue between maker and viewer, challenging us to think again when we see our own likeness next reflected in the mirror.” **READ: CAHUN IN KENT 2006, PAGE 20.** To anchor oneself within time and space seems immensely important in the digital age of social media, where

the constant reminder of our own mortality reflects from the never-ending stream of self-representation, that thus becomes a reassurance of life. Self-representation can be reduced to an individualised, self-centred act, but I would argue for another reading. Namely, that it is a chance to see identity as the construction it is, and to play with it as *Sophie* does when she creates her dreams. It is constructed as history and the archive are, where it is important to acknowledge that there is no beginning and no end in the endless stream of life. Even though I only have a limited view on the depth of *Sophie*’s narrative as my background gave me limited tools to ‘decipher my habitat’, according to the Lacanian expression of the fish can floating in the water - ‘you can see it but it does not see you’. There is art’s possibility to open up something we might not know, but from which we can learn, and therefore, gain another thread in the collection of histories, if already lived or in the making right now. This dissertation ends with the following, in the hope to continue with a debate, as I argued Mary Sibande started with *Sophie*. As Brink, cited in Nuttall and Coetzee writes: [...] not just the versions of history but history itself, not just our perceptions of the world but the world itself, is text; or one may guess that, whatever the variety and the extent of versions available to one in any situations, and however mutually exclusive many of these may appear to be, this does not mean that nothing happened. **READ: BRINK IN NUTTALL & COETZEE 1998, PAGE 42**



This is a reading of the artwork with tools of theories and concepts translate the proformative act of her narratives. As Coombes writes:

The concept of translation is helpful here, both in the Benjaminian sense of supplemental meanings which necessarily transform the original through the act of translation but also in the sense of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggests of an active reader as translator, capable of performing a reading against the grain and between the lines even in circumstances where the raw material reproduces a set of fairly standard colonial tropes. **READ: COOMBES 2000; PAGE 175.**

The 'surplus meaning' was already discussed above, that leaves the 'reader as translator', which makes this written dissertation as a record of my interpretation of Sibande's artwork, which I predominantly tried to understand through a reading against the 'here and now', in juxtaposing *Sophie* with many other relevant artists in relation to this particular topic. Most of them capture Johannesburg as a complex and contested space, lingering between the past and the present, still inhabiting the structures from another time. This reading of their artworks brings the focus onto the social space **READ: LEFEBVRE 1991.** memory, access and movement, as well as the relationship between

the body and the space into play, which is supported by Bunn, cited in Nuttall and Mbembe as follows:

But the question of the surface is also the problem of the sign in a time of historical change: it is as though with new meanings being born, the older structures of reference are dying. These very suggestive remarks speak of the skin not only as a surface of emergence, but also the inchoate forms of citizenship associated with white and gendered identity in the last two decades of transition. **READ: BUNN IN NUTTALL & MBEMBE 2008, PAGE 149.**

The dialectic of surface and depth take place in the case of Sibande's alter-ego in the form of multi-layered Victorian dress dress ^(ill.19) which is adorned by the dainty white apron and headscarf of the domestic worker's uniform, and the peat-black skin of Sophie. By combining these distinctive symbols of superiority and inferiority, the artist takes ownership over them and sews them together, which brings about another reading, as Bunn above suggests as possible. It is also to actively taking part in the shaping of history, much as Lerato Shadi ^(ill.91) does with her performance, repeating the violent act of erasing distinctive female names from history, or indeed respectively, from the gallery wall. Whoever takes the paintbrush and erases one name also attends to

its reality, and becomes a carrier of this story. The mannequin's skin embodies the metaphor of the shadow, of a ghost from the past that seems to haunt the artist, but by giving that ghost a name and a face, and to be able to allocate someone or something to the position of being the next one to continue the family's story makes the ghost controllable. It reflects the relationship I draw between Mary Sibande and Senzeni Marasela, the latter who writes: "(...) when I staged rebellions, it was to reclaim my childhood, my fantasies, and learn how to wonder about some things other than your demons, I wait for the day that you will take them down because they haunt us and steal our time." **READ: MARASELA, 2006.** The ghost also stands for a constant liminality, of never quite being - other than in a limbo between the city, where one is only tolerated when working for the supremacists, and the invisibility of the 'madams' home. Sibande relates:

For me she is never real, she is a shadow, and I decided to dress a shadow. For me to illustrate or to make a shadowy object means to paint the figure black. The body is not important but the dress, the environment, the story. Same thing, maids are not important but what they do is important. But of course they are important. **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE, 2015.**

107	115
123	87
19	72



This is because, as Achille Mbembe describes it, the archive is an architectural space that he also describes as an act. While this is inevitably connected, the act of archiving serves the structure in place, which mirrors through its selection the state power. **READ: MBEMBE 2002, PAGE: 21.** This refers not only to the power over knowledge and space, but also to the visual power that defines space itself, and that reflects onto the body, which moves through the space and is as if a vessel that incorporates and acts to the the presented information. As Sibande notes, "if you tell your child you are not anything, you grew up thinking that you are not anything, all that is not yours and that is why a lot of people are not taking care of their environment, because: "It is not mine." **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE, 2015.**

The connection between body and visual space is important, because *Sophie* might never have come into being without the history of colonialism and apartheid that distinctively drew on visual power and its spatial implementation of segregation and oppression and with the possibility of an overt discussion on self-reflection without the change of government and ideology in 1994; This distinctiveness brings Heidegger's concept of 'Dasein' into Sibande's approach of creating an alter ego in this point in time. To define one's own 'Dasein', requires a knowledge of the immediate world and a conscious relationship with it. This relates to habitus and locality, which define a shared sense of the world for a given group. "Points of view depend on the point from which they are taken, since the vision that every agent has of space depends on

his or her position in that space." **READ BOURDIEU 1989; PAGE 18.** Bourdieu points here to important positions regarding South Africa's history, as under apartheid law, the body was pre-defined and classified within space, identity and wealth. This does not mean 'Dasein' was not possible during the apartheid era, only that being granted by the 'master' or 'madam' brings about a dichotomy of power and mutual dependency. Thus, space and its reading becomes a crucial part of ensuring power for the 'white man', as well as preventing a reflection of the black body, which would embrace it rather than dismiss it within the structures of spatial design. 'Dasein' bears witness thus - similarly to the archive - to the interior and exterior of the self and the space, the secret and public. This unveils Sibande, with her use of signs, and designs of the 'maid' and the 'madam', respectively, and thus works as mnemonic device, showing the hybrid dress as a distorted picture that reflects the past of her maternal family, and her present being. To remember means to appropriate a corner, a street or a bench as though to own it. With the liberating of space and power as stated above, another structure of state power became applicable, as another part of a newly won structural freedom: the certificate of an institute, namely Mary Sibande's fine arts degree, that, which officiated her democratic right of pursuing her very own aspiration. As has been cited here, Sibande put it in the following terms: "the piece of paper that's called a 'degree' saved me but it saved me because time allowed that paper to save me. Unlike my mother, she could not become whatever she wanted to be, because of her colour and her background." **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO:**

SIBANDE, 2015. Sibande's research into her family past can be seen as an attempt at redemption with respect to the cruelty of time that gave her forebears no possibility to change their own biographies. This reading connects the physicality of *Sophie* to a monumentalising of these women, but also of the autobiography of her own path. As Mary Sibande states that this story is not an isolated experience of her family, but the very common past of the majority population of South Africa, and turns *Sophie* into a narrative that grows beyond the gallery walls, and the archival instinct, as it proves to reflect the current debates of the nation's youth. These are mostly students, articulating that their own reflection does not particularly resonate with the spatial signs around them, and these statues, names and buildings do not tell their history, but still glorify that of their oppressor. These demonstrations form an act of liberation as spatial practice **READ: GOODEN, 2016.** as they contest the visual power still in place. This narrative *Sophie* is carrying in her postures, in her garments, and in her skin, makes Sibande a chronicler of an entire whole generation.

Sophie appropriates space through her physicality that makes her visible and accessible, serving the structure of the archive, through the label of an artwork. She unites historical antagonisms that transform the ghost, the secret, into readable codes of an (un)common history. Her dress and gestures bear the absent of the ever-presence of the male patriarch, and works as the memory thread that brings the 'there-then' into the 'here-now'.





REFLECTION

#wheredoIgofromhere

What does it mean? Where does it lead to? This text has no beginning no end in the sense of academic writing, even though it operates at an interface between academic structure and personal experience. The research forms a complex and multi-layered approach to Mary Sibande’s *Sophie*, on body - including fashion as the surface of social plastic - and space, paying attention to aspects of physicality and ontological location.

The process of elaborating her artworks in relation to different theories and artworks made around the defined issues, is, in its complexity, an object itself, something produced in the emergence of a distinct moment in time. The going back and forth through the chapters - the adding, deleting, re-writing - during my studies is therefore not only a revisiting of researched thought and the written, but also a reviewing of the lived past, one and a half years of being in South Africa, appropriating my own bit of space within the society, and the city of Johannesburg. *Sophie* is therefore an entry point to understanding the current debates in their connection to the country’s past within an alternative life-writing, which arguably could be called a counter-archive. The conversations with *Sophie*’s narratives, I felt, demanded somehow a statement from me addressed to myself, hence, she prompted me to look back to my geographical and social background and in that, using what Nuttall and Coetzee have written about:

The individual constitutes and invents her/himself through the constant editing and re-editing of memory; the confluence of innumerable records and recordings of memories determines the publicly sanctioned account, which debouches into history; facts, remain forever inaccessible except through our versions of them and these versions are dependent on memory. And the workings of the imagination are at the very least inspired by memory. **READ: BRINK IN NUTTALL & COETZEE 1998, PAGES: 30-31.**

It is this invisibility Mary Sibande works with in her presentation of *Sophie*. The monumental sculptures she creates are impossible to turn away from, especially when presented on the steel, glass and concrete inner-city facades of Johannesburg, as when *Sophie* was exhibited as massive billboards in 2010. I therefore argue, that with her alter-ego *Sophie*, the artist creates a possible counter-archive for the collection of documents regarding South Africa’s past, in particular, but also for the act of history writing at large. In creating an autobiography that spans back three generations, Sibande articulates a search of her own origin. It also constitutes an ‘uncommon history’ of the female black body from the perspective of the black female as it is often written about as written from. At the same time, a common history of the majority of the country’s population. This makes the fusion of the ‘maid-as-madam’ in *Sophie*’s dress a

powerful mnemonic device, as it contests the symbols and structures inherited from the apartheid era.

This research is an excavation of space and of the textual signs inherent in Sibande’s work. Sophie provides a frame of reference, something that gives a visual language, which can be read in connection with the space surrounding her. This ‘frame of reference’ **READ: MALCOMESS & KREUTZFELDT 2013.** is crucial, because it visualises a distinctive duality, which itself becomes readable through the presentation of an artwork, as well as through its exposure. In a space like the gallery, it becomes a supplementary value, namely that, which is: “a differential value, carried by the ambiguity of a sign that does not cause the work to be seen but to be recognized and evaluated in a system of signs.” **READ: BAUDRILLARD 1981, PAGE 102.** Within structuralism, I hence argue that *Sophie* is a classified, commoditised, singular document - collectable and archivable in its purpose of being. It ultimately serves the archival fever Derrida is describing through Freud’s death drive, as the artwork becomes privileged by the institutions of the art that hold the power to select it **READ: DERRIDA 1995.** By the same token, what Mary Sibande creates, is a narrative that demands a counter archive. As I said, the act of presenting an artwork is the same as the act of archiving, it is made credible in the way of institution, may it be through the gallery, museum or archive.

25	146
27	106
79	48



As Said has noted, “the act of representing others almost always involves violence to the subject of representation.” **READ: SAID 1985, PAGE 4.** Self-representation is also a method of distancing oneself from one’s own biography, which enables one then to relate in another way to one’s background and to the environment one lives in. Connecting this to the surroundings can create a consciousness about the relatability of biographies, which creates a base for a collective identity. As Sibande related:

The story that I am talking about is not unique my own but belongs to the black community. Sophie is either your aunt or your mother or grandmother or your neighbour. Sophie is all these women and that is why people can actually relate to the work because they have seen this before. If Sophie is not your mother your grandmother your neighbour or your aunt she is the woman that cleans for you. **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015.**

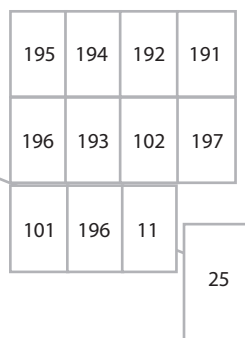
It has been noted so far that a way of self-representation in constructing one’s own identity must be accompanied by the relation of the past, and the collective. This is an organic web of narratives that causes the self to be as if a construction site, under question. This acknowledges the self and history as unfinished, always in

transition, and, as Hal Foster writes, “no-place of an archive becomes the no place of a utopia”. **READ: FOSTER IN MEREWETHER 2006, PAGE: 146.** This means that history is the utopian par excellence, where indeed, it never happened in the way historical narrative relates, but it is merely the qualified ‘proof’ of the past we have. In displaying Sophie, making her accessible for an audience, Mary Sibande makes herself vulnerable, as she is author and artwork at the same time, blurring the distinction between subject and object, but meanwhile creating a dichotomy that makes lived history negotiable in contemporary discourses.

To name her alter ego *Sophie* instead of Mary, Sibande is able to constitute a distance between the mannequin and herself, thus being able to trace back, and build up her own identity in a conscious space. Sibande as master over *Sophie*, embodies the empowerment of her own identity, both visible and tangible for the audience. Sibande explained, “it was important for me to know where I am coming from, to know how I became, why I am what I am.” **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015.**

Sibande was the first one in her family able to study, and when she was preparing the final task - a story of herself - for her Fine Arts degree completed at University of Johannesburg in 2007, *Sophie*

‘came on the scene’ as it were. As Khan writes, “Sibande, herself, found that *Sophie* represented a wealth of accumulated stories that she unearthed from her mother and grandmother about the conditions of their lives, and how they had managed to succeed despite the limitations imposed on their lives” **READ: KAHN 2015, PAGE 98.** Sibande’s salvation from these limits was the time that changed apartheid to democracy, and a paper, as Sibande puts it - the paper of a study degree, that saved her from continuing her family’s chronology. What resonates here is the arbitrariness of time, and the powerlessness to change anything that lies in the past. This reflects in many of the other artists’ work presented here. They reveal a kind of search to understand the intangible, and the burden of being ‘the first one’. Since then, Mary Sibande created a blue and a purple series, and is currently working on her next step in the development of manifesting her own identity in a red series. Shown in exhibitions in South Africa at Gallery MOMO, art fairs of Johannesburg and Cape Town, and abroad, as at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011, or the Armory Show in New York, 2016, the exhibition *Long Live the Dead Queen* is a homage to the black female body, as the artist Mary Sibande created numerous monuments of uncommon history named *Sophie*.





The biographical approach on both sides, namely on the side of the artist is drawn from a narrative perspective in the distinction to the realist and the neo-positivist, as outlined by Robert Miller. It is not concentrated on 'facts', but rather builds a narrative around an individual's processes and changes in life, along with the perspectives, comprehension and relationship of the individual's biography in relation to their social surroundings. **READ: MILLER 2000, PAGE 82.** As the three approaches cannot sharply be distinct from one another, they overlap from time to time, where in the process of the research conducted for this study, so does the narrative and the realist approach, because this dissertation is also grounded, ultimately, in theory of the archive and the post-colonial. As Lütge-Coullie writes:

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The collective identities we create through weaving our auto/biographical accounts into those of others are tied to issues of association and disassociation, power, and social action. When we address an audience - testifying about our personal and collective identities through auto/biography - we enter into communicative relations in public spheres and engage ourselves in struggle for justice. **READ: LÜTGE-COULLIE 2006, PAGE 2.**

Mary Sibande is performing her own autobiography through *Sophie*, but also a biography many can relate to. Through the appearance of the artwork as life-sized sculptures, *Sophie* is also accountable through the performative story-telling of someone or oneself, that is known

in the tradition of 'Izibongo', which are "formulated and performed self-representational composition, the most notable of which are rather misleadingly referred to in English as 'praise poems' (Izibongo)". **READ: LÜTGE-COULLIE 2006, PAGE 10.** Here, the body and the site are important. Without that, it would not be possible to collect the narrative *Sophie* is performing in a personal, social and political manner. Especially as a visual memoir, her biography is not unambiguous, but rather, it leaves room for interpretation and a self-reflection upon the spectator. That places Sibande's artwork in a line of life writing, as she tells the story from her maternal family under apartheid, to her own experience of democracy, as well as the transition between the two, in which the "auto/biographical subject attempts to adjust to the new political dispensation." **READ: LÜTGE-COULLIE 2006, PAGE: 35.** As Sibande herself points out and which has previously been cited, "the piece of paper that's called a 'degree' saved me but it saved me because time allowed that paper to save me. Unlike my mother she could not become whatever she wanted to be because of her colour and her background." **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015.**

In order to sharpen the vantage point from a common history towards an uncommon history, as experienced and written evidenced in the bare life of ordinary people, this dissertation examines Mary Sibande's *Sophie* in terms of the aspects of 'life writing' or biography. 'Common' refers here to history that is available and disseminated at large, stored in

archives and libraries, told through education, visible and accessible; whereas the 'uncommon' refers to a lack of pervasiveness or access. With *Sophie*, the South African artist Mary Sibande tells such an 'uncommon' story, cast from the biographies of her maternal family, and moulded on her own body, embodying the lives of South African domestic worker. Johannesburg is a city of arrival and has, especially through the apartheid era, a crucial relationship to domestic work. Since its foundation 130 years ago the 'city of gold' attracted people in their search for gold, aspiration for a better life and dreams of the future. As Sibande, cited here again, puts it:

Jo'burg is made out of immigrants, everyone in Jo'burg is an immigrant, is not from here. They are from the homelands, because the apartheid system created homelands. [...] And you come to Jo'burg to work [...] Jo'burg has always been that place of gold, that place, if you want to do something, Jo'burg is that place for you. As long as you work hard you will get something. **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015.**

Gold, that shiny little precious metal, not easy to find, holds the promise of everything in it. Gold has nowadays many different manifestations, but is fundamentally a symbol of money, freedom and movement. **READ: ASMAL & TRANGOS 2015, PAGES 14-38.** The city as a palpable space, and the act of moving through the architectural pathways, the walking in a pedestrian republic, are of great concern, both historically and artistically, from today's perspective.



Lerato Shadi reverses the act of erasure in her performance piece *Seriti Se*; 2015 ^(ill. 91-94), where she wrote the names of females PoC (People of Colour) on a white gallery wall, just to ask the audience to paint them over again. It is a violent act against these women and their achievements to be deleted once again, as an act of responsibility towards a particular name and the person to whom it belongs, and the legacy that a woman was never allowed to pass on publicly. It also politicises the person who erases the name in a way that is memorable.

This negotiation of space and history, happening through the student protests, determines the present, and is inevitable a spatial practice of liberation. A poster from the #RhodesMustFall protests stated: “dear history, this revolution has women, gays, queers and trans. Remember that”, as a testimony so powerful that shows the awareness of the discriminatory tendency of history writing and knowledge transfer. These few words profoundly stir up the past, in the present, for the future. To come to terms with the past of a society is not easy. It is rather painful and sad, it is a struggle with oneself and the space, with the body and the mind. This development can be followed by the stages Sophie undertakes, from the blue dress in the series *Long Live the Dead Queen* to the purple dress of *The Purple Shall Govern*, where she collects the memories and stories of her family, thereby enabling herself and others to decipher the space in which she lives.

I am angry at the system, I am angry at loyalism, angry at racism, angry at [myself], at: “why am I talking about maids? Why is that?” It is like this black body has become a thing of experiment. It is that thing, that the black body has become a playground for everyone to actually do whatever. That for me is very problematic, looking at the history of South Africa. “How did we get to this stage?” Of course, in society there has always got to be the rich and the poor. But why should be the poor only be this kind of people, it should be all races. I am angry at [myself] talking about a maid: “where is it coming from, why?” **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015.**

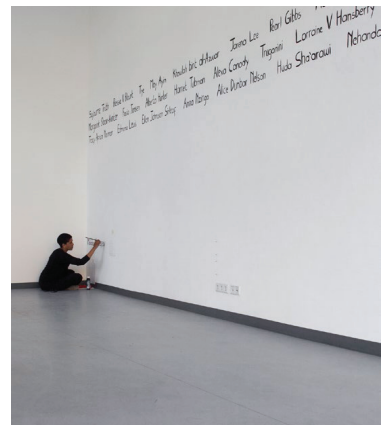
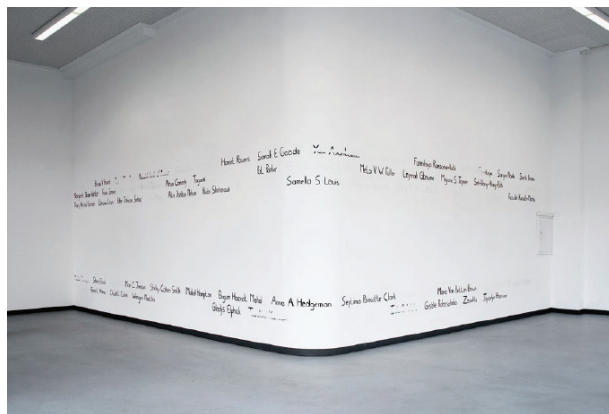
Sophie is the analogy for the black female domestic worker in South Africa, in particular, it stands for Elsie, Merica and Velucia, Mary Sibande’s great-grandmother, grandmother and mother respectively and Ntombikayise, herself. Hence, it is her genealogy, embodied in various media including life-sized sculptures and photographs. In this way, she is at once casting her autobiography, and telling the story of a nation of women. An auto/biography is usually made retrospectively in the manner of past stories re-told out of memory. Mary Sibande instead goes further, relating not only her own family history, but also the process of seeking out an identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Nuttall and Coetzee have noted, “one typical mode of autobiographical writing practiced in South Africa at the moment is to write life stories that proclaim one’s liberation from the

bonds of the past.” **READ: NUTTALL & COETZEE 1998, PAGE 6.** The multiple scenes in which her artwork appears are built from narratives around aspiration and emancipation, either moulded on her own body, or performed by Mary herself. *Sophie* is also an identity in the making, mirroring all the questions of a young woman about the past and the future in ‘the here and now’. That process of a constant transition is told through *Sophie*, as the alter ego of Sibande. At the same time, it is also the process of dealing with the past as expressed by the German term ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’, which roughly translates as ‘the struggle to come to terms with the past’. The term is most notably, of course, connected with the time after WWII, hence with a state that politically and socially confesses the atrocities made in the past, but it also describes the reappraisal on an individual level, as well as on the victims side, and is thus tightly bound up in what in German is referred to as the culture of remembrance, or ‘Erinnerungskultur’.

In Sibande’s work but also in the protests by the students, the body itself stands as a site of memory and a site of evidence between the past and the contemporary that makes one’s own story, a powerful tool of recognition, as people are able to relate to one another in and through autobiography. Thus, “memory recovers time and space in a synchronic gesture, streamlining and unifying some of its diversity and contradictions in order to create viable and cohesive collective images in the present.” **READ: LOVELL 1998, PAGE: 11.**

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182	183	184
186	185	187
188	189	100



Achille Mbembe is a vociferous analyst of colonial power and critic of neoliberal capitalism **READ: ENWEZOR 2013, P. 25.** and notes the heritage of colonialism, with the question of how to build an identity on the basis of what was created through oppression and struggle, which is not organically grown through social structure.

What is one's own, what is imposed? What should be kept, what not? It seems when Steve Biko said: "the most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed", **READ: BIKO 2004, PAGE 54.** he also formed a premonition for the post-apartheid generation. This is now part of many discussions. After twenty-two years of democracy, the signs of the past are still visible, most notably within the architecture of the city, its street names and its aesthetics, including its monuments and icons. Wendell Hassan Marsh describes the difficult engagement with the space of the city as follows: *because memory is so often developed from non-written texts, these narratives are more difficult to trace because of the scarcity of traces, but deep in the ideologies, practices, and politics of those denied history is an ethereal yet very real memory that is un-stated but nonetheless distasteful. In other words, History is the science of the state, while memory is the art of the stateless.* **READ ONLINE: MARSH IN CHIMURENGA, 2015.**

That memory and the statelessness Marsh is talking about, becomes very real through Sophie's narrative, as much as the autobiography Sibande creates with her. It also materialises through the new generation of young students that negotiate space and meaning, as the #RhodesMustFall movement brought down Cecil John Rhodes in Cape Town, they performed not only an iconoclastic gesture, but also what can be seen as the start of an ongoing demand for space, that takes place in the present. Iconoclasm is an active and violent act, destroying the representation of others, but it is also an act of taking over agency and ownership of the environment in which one lives.

Mbembe also talks about the systems that are repeated in contemporary institutions, like the University, where "education is a means of knowledge about ourselves. After we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective." And when his statement of "a negative moment is a moment when new antagonisms emerge while old ones remain unresolved" **READ SPEECH AT WITS UNIVERSITY: MBEMBE 2015, PAGE 2.** is reversed it might come to, what Derrida calls an 'event' as the structure of a rupture and redoubling, hence it is both a break and a repetition at the same time. **READ: DERRIDA 1978, PAGE 351.** Thus, it is both original and repeated, and even though that ought to be contradictory for something fixed or determined, it is not contradictory for something as fluid as the mind. As Derrida tries to unravel this with the linguistic system, as language is conceived with the mind, creating the new is made precisely possible through using the old, to the advantage of breaking it.

The young artist Haroon Gunn-Salie developed, in the series *Soft Vengeance* (2015) (ill. 186-189) his own strategy for deconstructing the visual language of the public monuments of Cecil John Rhodes, Jan van Riebeeck, Carl von Brandis and Paul Kruger. His installation mounts blood-stained hands onto the wall, where the rest of the body is "implied by the ghosted presence unseen beyond the drywall." **READ ONLINE: GUNN-SALIE AT GOODMAN GALLERY: 2015.** As shown, there is a dichotomy of overrepresentation of masculine power through public monuments, and the biographical conquering of space and striving for their demise, as there is a perpetual absence of the father figure in Sibande's work (also, notably, in the work by Zanele Muholi and Senzeni Marasela). *Lovers in Tango* (2011) (ill. 63-65) is a performance piece that speaks to the relationship between Sibande and her father.

This installation includes a group of soldiers, in reference to her father who works in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), in addition to *Sophie* standing in front of them. Tango tells the story of love and desire, and the interplay of acceptance and rejection. The soldiers and *Sophie* bear the same face, their poses all a form of 'dance' in the absence of something - a dance partner for *Sophie's* tango, and guns for the soldiers in a 'tango' with war. "Tango is a very intimate and close dance, the man takes the lead and

Sophie as act of iconoclasm of female stereotypes?

the woman follows. But in [between] the figures, there is a space that will never be closed." **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2016**

While Sibande and Gunn-Salie use the symbols of colonial and apartheid history to their advantage in creating something new, without denying the old its existence, they thereby create a new event, which is uniquely theirs, connected to the time of making. The iconoclasm of defacement or removal of the oppressor's likeness is rather a physical act of disconnecting the present living body from the history it represents. Hence, the act itself tries to break with the ongoing colonial repetition, through its public recognition. Lefebvre writes, "humans as social beings are said to produce their own life, their own consciousness, their own world. There is nothing, in history or in society, which does not have to be achieved and produced." **READ: LEFEBVRE 1991, PAGE 68.** The act of iconoclasm can also be identified as an act of erasure of something that happened in history, but more importantly, of something that was accepted as part of the visual symbolism in space, by the ruling class.







NEGOTIATION BETWEEN BODY AND SPACE

#rhodesmustfall #feesmustfall #studentprotestsSA #wheredowegofromhere

The *Negotiation between body and space* bring the interpretation of the aspects visualised in *Sophie* into consideration of the recent protests of South African students, which raise the question of spatial and visual power, as well as how it connects to the question of the common history writing, and the discriminatory act of archiving. The demise of a former ruling oppressive ideology means a radical reordering of space, society and movement and ultimately the prevalent visual power. When political power shifts, as happened in South Africa in 1994, the symbolic power of common space is opened for discussion, where another appropriation of space and its meaning can commence. The negotiation between body and space is especially striking when the body disrupts a structure, which I will call 'the norm' for now, without specifying it more than identifying its repetitiveness. To act against this norm, as through the chanting and dancing protesters of #FeesMustFall in Johannesburg, where the sound of the masses reverberate in the streets against the walls of the city's buildings, builds a tangible sphere of power of the masses. Alternatively, one may consider the body in space in another context, that of the slow movement of innumerable refugees marching the widths of foreign lands that does not resonate with them, other than to render them as unknown 'Other'. Or that one person that - in a symbolic as much as in a literal way - disrupts everyday life, most notably an example of which is the act of self-immolation of Thích Quảng Đức in Vietnam, who became known as 'the burning monk' in 1963, or Mohamed Bouazizi the street vendor from Tunisia whose suicide led on to the Arab Spring of 2010. In both cases, it is the body in its presence as a disruptive and demanding entity, which proves most impressive. Marching together for or against something creates visibility through sameness, the unified and mechanical movements of an organic flock inhabits the momentum of common quest for something other than the status

quo. South Africa witnessed recent mass protests throughout the whole country, predominantly at Universities such as the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) in Johannesburg, University of Cape Town (UCT) and Stellenbosch University, Cape Town. These movements sparked a public discourse about the access to knowledge within these institutions and the meaning of public monuments representing the country's past. In reference to this context, Tshabangu stated:

The city always provided a platform for different interest groups to voice whatever they feel about if it's in demonstration, to express their anger or frustrations. The meaning of spaces changes because of the transitions and the connectedness between our actions and space. **INTERVIEW AT GALLERY MOMO WITH: TSHABANGU, 2016.** Protests such as #RhodesMustFall started at UCT in March 2015 or #FeesMustFall started at Wits in October 2015, testifies to a young society that questions the politics of contemporary life. As new generations of South Africans start to articulate that their perception of the self does not coincide with the space around them, they draw attention to a contradiction in the reflection of their own body and inherited spatial aesthetics. In the context of the protest against the statue of Cecil John Rhodes in Cape Town, he became a symbol standing for one of the great founders of South Africa ('Zuid Afrika'), to a metaphor of the bloody and horrible times of the country's past in the post-apartheid and post-colonial debate of a newly-formed society.

The Rhodes Statue at the University of Cape Town was eventually removed after weeks of negotiations and protests on the university's campus. When the students acted against this particular sign of history, embodied in a statue, it also placed Rhodes' legacy into focus for colonialists, if only participating vicariously in these events. It shows how the meaning of the sign,

statues, biographies, and legacies can shift, can be re-thought and re-written, even if cast in bronze and it challenges that "a monument is often found in situ, in its obvious finality, its commemoration of events that its contemporaries - especially the most powerful among them - judged worthy of being integrated into the collective memory." **READ: RICERU IN MEREWETHER 2006, PAGE 68.** Mbembe writes of this iconoclastic moment, "bringing Rhodes' statue down is one of the many legitimate ways in which we can, today in South Africa, demythologize [sic] that history and put it to rest [...] We are therefore calling for the demythologization [sic] of whiteness because democracy in South Africa will be built on the ruins of those versions of whiteness that produced Rhodes, or it will fail." **READ: MBEMBE 2015, PAGE 3.** This enactment against the Rhodes monument in public view is only possible when people have the knowledge of how to decode the sign existing in their environment and feeling the need to engage with them, because, as Bester argues of Rhodes: [...] *unnoticed, even invisible, until the excremental act that returned him to visibility, to a recognition that sought to break the constricting effects of repetition. But while the excremental act, as well as its ensuing debate, appealed to and rallied especially the anti-colonial position, the sequence of events that eventually resulted in the removal of the statue stopped short of addressing or engaging the specific visual languages and arguments that have been the uninterrupted bedrock of public sculpture practice since colonial times. It is these cycles and patterns of visual language and argument, of visual repetition and recognition that require renewed attention.* **READ: BESTER 2015, PAGE 73.**

These current debates in South Africa reiterate the concerns of postcolonial theory dealing with the 'Other', the gaze, and colonially-infused knowledge taught in institutions like the universities, and stored in libraries and archives.



REFLECTION

#liberationasspatialpractice #cityofgold #thearchive #contestedhistory #monuments

Space and its inhabitants are constantly moving towards change, and ultimately towards death, but at the same time, stories, memories and legacies live on, and are often built into the structure of space. This makes the spatial surrounding a constantly shifting archive, re-built and re-thought through time passing by. Hence, an archive makes itself obsolete, while building itself up into new meaning and value, as it falls away, and resurfaces again. While this metaphorical 'phoenix rising from the ashes' is perpetually consumed by the society that gives rise to it, but there are also signs that remain to tell a story, in form of monuments, statues, artworks or books from the storyteller of the great founder, leader or martyr. In that sense, the archive and the art space are both places, which constitute narratives, oscillating between fact and fantasy. **READ: BHABHA 1994, PAGE 86.**

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Written legacies of people, movements, and times affect how the future will be shaped out of the past, who and what will be remembered and forgotten. This raises the question of authorship, and of the altering of narratives through time and space. With regards to the biographies found in works of art, it is suggested that, "the relation between art and fact, imagination and truth, fiction and nonfiction became the preoccupying issues of the twentieth century's ways of thinking about biography". **READ: PARKE 2002, PAGE: 28.** In its very origin, life writing is a practice that dates back several hundred years, and was predominantly produced by or for aristocracy, spiritual leaders, and political and public figures, namely those provided with some sort of significance. **READ: PARKE 2002.** Consequently, the powerful rather than the subaltern controlled the transfer of knowledge. The subaltern, in the way in which Spivak describes, being 'below the radar', is unseen and unheard, and therefore in their own world, free from a given

power relation, although easily exposed to it and oppressed by it. **READ: SPIVAK 1988, PAGES 66-111.** The 'maid' under apartheid legislation is the personified subaltern, and though Spivak answers her own question stating that they cannot speak, I argue that in fact the subaltern she describes is better characterised as not being able to be heard. Mary Sibande elevates the women in her family, the domestic worker, to that of a royal figure, and places her right into the heart of the public sphere of a gallery.

Arguably the most monumental figure Sibande has made is *The Reign* (2010) ^(ill. 174), which shows Sophie sitting on a life-sized, rearing bronze horse. She defies natural causalities and seems nevertheless to sit comfortably on her horse, at once free and in control on the back of her black stallion. Stuart notes of this work that "the stallion [is] the most widely recognized [sic] symbol of virility and sexual power." **READ: STUART 2010, PAGE 4.** This sculpture is not only a monstrous and vivid scene, but also a critique of the transferred history embodied in the symbol of masculine heroism, leadership, and victory of the man on horseback. Sibande creates a powerful rupture in the repetitive mode of this masculinity, where women are considered passive objects of desire, she instead performs this heroic gesture of breaking free. It captures the dichotomy of a daydream, where, whilst humble and childlike, with closed eyes and power over her own history, she holds control over a violent 'beast'. Here, she is ready to break with this hegemony and fight for her own being, and notably for her own legacy. In addition, the theory of the archive comes into play, as *Sophie* is depicted in a moment of pure passion for life, as she seems to be in mortal danger. The archive as in Jacques Derrida's writing, when he turns to Freud's notion of the death drive: "there would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a

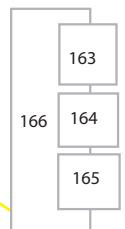
forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression." **READ: DERRIDA 1995, PAGE 19.** And what else is the act of placing monuments, other than trying to live forever in the memory of the architectural and social space?

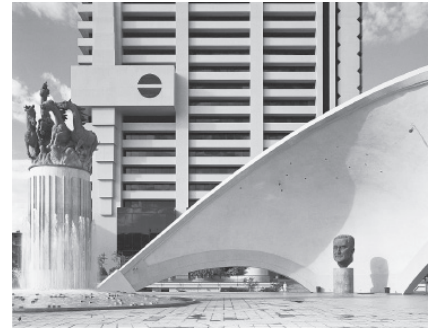
Monuments, memorials and statues are manifest heritage, and embody a certain way of nation-building, as well as a commemoration and memorialisation of the past. **READ: MARSCHALL 2010.** Monuments map and curate space, visualising absence in presence, and form a repetition of and recognition of memory. Because they inhabit signs, which confirm who is in power, they also represent ownership and the sitting ideology.

Sophie a heroin of contemporary South Africa?

The public space becomes a public archive that enhances memory in a daily realm. But the question is: who remembers, and how substantial is a story that is told and seen all over again? As the statue might vanish into an object disconnected from its own history. ^(ill. 178-181, Page: 122)

Mbembe writes, "over and above the ritual of making secret, it seems clear that the archive is primarily the product of a judgment, the result of the exercise of a specific power and authority, which involves placing certain documents in an archive at the same time as others are discarded." **READ: MBEMBE 2002, PAGE 20.** Hence, archives and public monuments are the manifestation of a particular group in power, who regulate and legitimise the historicised space and institutions, as they can also become the site for negotiation and reinterpretation of its narratives and signs. **READ: MARSCHALL 2010, PAGE: 2.**





The examination of the body and space lead to the question of ownership of space, and its meaning. While the concepts of 'social space' and the relationship of knowledge and power reveal the way in which space is constructed, the term 'habitus' implies the way in which people live in a certain environment. This 'habitus' is, according to Pierre Bourdieu, predominately incorporated into a common sense. Bordieu writes, "habitus produces practices and representations, which are available for classification, which are objectively differentiated; however, they are immediately perceived as such only by those agents who possess the code, the classificatory schemes necessary to understand their social meaning." **READ: BOURDIEU 1989, PAGE 19.**

What Bourdieu discusses in *Social Space and Symbolic Power* (1989), is that our behaviour is formed by where we come from, according to this special habitus. Cognitive processes, belonging, and value, are created within the society in which one finds oneself. This kind of common sense on a small scale of family and home, meanwhile gives the ground from which to build one's own identity, to make sense of the world. Larger spaces like cities and countries are subject to the dominant social, cultural, political group, who form the visual power within a space. What emerges, if one is not from the dominant class, I argue, is the duality of habitus, which creates a discrepancy of self-reflection in space, where the codes one has learnt do not fit anymore to the visual information one receives. This meta-level of space is only tangible when experienced through spatial practice, or through the narrative of art. Mary Sibande created with *Sophie* a possible reading of this meta-level, through offering of a code of reading. She places her alter ego amidst this dichotomy of symbols, not dismissing any given aspect, but bringing them together, in a way the Truth and Reconciliation Commission perhaps ought to have worked. As much as common sense

is informed by habitus, the notion of belonging is informed by a collective memory of a space. Nadia Lovell describes the connectedness of this in her introduction to *Locality and Belonging* (1998). Here, she emphasises the "importance of memory and active remembering as markers of identity, and [...] the significance of memory as

Is spatial liberation possible if the body does not belong to the space?

a potentially appropriative and amalgamating force where time and space become intertwined in a continuous process of unification". **READ: LOVELL 1998, PAGE 11.** This is identifiable as a core feature of *Sophie*'s narrative. As the dominant class is creating the physical and symbolic space according to their habitus, they also create a way of history writing and telling, especially through the manifestation of a symbolic order. This is part of the process of "world-making", the way in which Nelson Goodman describes it. **READ: GOODMAN 1988 PAGE 11.** Goodman refers to an active engagement in this process, which he notes does not stop once a world is created, a position resonant to the conception of liberation as "spatial practice" in the form of a constantly performable act of re-insurance.

Bordieu writes, "symbolic capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition". **READ: BOURDIEU 1989, PAGE 23.** Hence, certain signs and symbols can be made superior to others. Gender and race are only the most common examples of signs used to enforce a differential of power. This also holds visual power, and creates a common sense of society that must

be obeyed in order to gain access to it and belong to it, and to be able to appropriate space without being a liminal body, as the notion of the 'maid' performs it. As Goodman notes: *What counts as emphasis of course, is departure from the relative prominence accorded the several features in the current world of our everyday seeing. With changing interests and new insights, the visual weighting of features of bulk or line or stance or light alters, and yesterday's level world seems strangely perverted yesterday's realistic calendar landscape becomes a repulsive caricature.* **READ: GOODMAN 1988, PAGE: 11.**

Mary Sibande is hence not only revisiting her maternal history of experience in each generation's particular time, she is also, by all accounts, at once performing an act of world-making, and in so doing provides a tool by means of which to question the symbols that constitute the world around us. She combines the duality of definition and accomplishes a sort of freeplay, through the performed dreaming and aspirational scenes in which *Sophie* is presented to us. Derrida examines structural linguistics in his work *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science* (1970), where there is no centre, because all signs are determined by their relationships with other signs, and meaning is arbitrary. The 'freeplay' of meaning thus lies outside the system of analysis. This transforms all epistemes into discourses of sign systems, which are not based on a truth or centre, but in which the signs are related to one another in an integral system based on difference. Mary Sibande incorporates a counter-memory into her alter ego, as she takes over the symbols that were predominantly reserved for her white male superiors, and thus de-territorialises belonging, without forgetting her origins, but powerfully appropriating body and space, which will ultimately transform her visual power into new memories of a yet-unknown future.





The notion of not no place gets depicted in Guy Tillim’s documentation of the *Inner City Regeneration Project*, (2004) (ill. 165-170) which attempted to take over auspices of the formerly abandoned houses of the 1990s, after the white owners appeared to have abandoned this part of Johannesburg. The red dots on the exhibition photographs that state ‘bad buildings’, where people live under often severe circumstances, and are always subject to a likely displacement.

Space and body belong together; both are guided by one another, while the structure that the governing politics provides is inscribed in the form and aesthetic of the architecture. If identity is experience, then space is shaping it while it is at once shaped by the society. The consequence of the interplay of body and space is hence that “liberation is a spatial practice”. **SEEN: GOODEN 2016, PAGE: 2.** The concept of ‘liberation as spatial practice’ originates from Foucault’s reflections of *Space Knowledge and Power*, and shows the power relations are used in social and institutional spaces, but also reveals how arbitrary this can be. Foucault writes of this that “the liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them. This is why almost all of these laws and institutions are quite capable of being turned around. Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because ‘liberty’ is what must be exercised”. **READ: FOUCAULT 1984, PAGE: 245.** Liberty and freedom are a practice. They are not just achieved at once, and can be retained once achieved. In some sense similar to identity, they require to be lived in order to come into being, as shown regarding the space that needs to be visited and inhabited, that is, in order to exist. In this form of action lies activism, fed by knowledge, over the spatial system and one’s being in it. With that comes the power to react to what is given and

what is oppressive, thus to negotiate the use of space. As Sibande notes of her own context in this regard: *For me it is about protest. From day one the body was actually rejecting all. Imagine if a helper would wear that kind of big dress, no one would be able to do anything. So she is rejecting what she is supposed to do but at the same time she is doing what she is supposed to be doing because the headscarf is there, the apron is there.* **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE, 2015.**

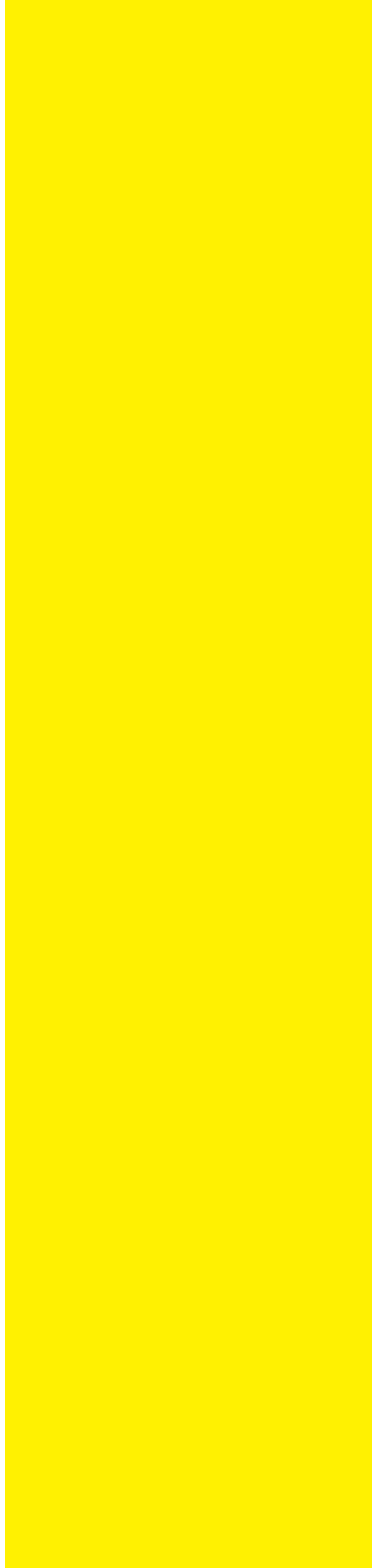
To practice liberation means to experience constructed space in time, as architecture is the materialisation of a theory, the ‘will of an epoch’. **READ: VAN DER ROHE 1922, PAGES 24-25.** And while the aesthetic of a given time may outlast the social change, it is the experience of memories in juxtaposition to the execution of contemporary life in the present that makes the conversation between the body and space possible. As Lütge-Coullie argues, “the meaning of experience is perhaps the most crucial site of political struggle over meaning since it involves personal, psychic, and emotional investment on the part of the individual. It plays an important role in determining the individual’s role as social agent” **READ: LÜTGE-COULLIE 2006, PAGE 26.** This experience enables the body to encounter the environment in the first place. Hence, spatial liberation is about the political body as a moving body. Memories of history and of space, thus, come together in the figure of *Sophie*, making the practice of spatial liberation tangible and comprehensible for a generation that did not physically experience the past, but life through history, infused architecture of the city of Johannesburg.

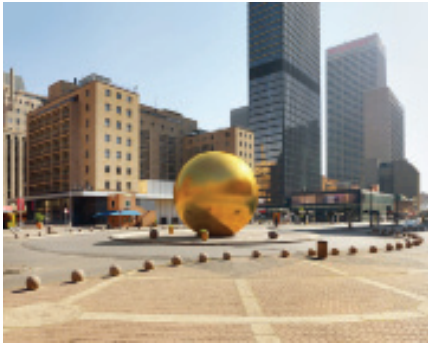
Noting in particular the conversation between the respective work of Mary Sibande and Senzeni Marasela, and their way of contesting the body in the space, Gooden has observed

“that the strategies and practices of these artists critiqued construction of subjectivity, representation, and identity in terms of spatial relationships and praxes rather than signifiers, symbols, and mimetic images suggests tactics by which architecture might overcome the burdens or representation in the address of racial identity and cultural experience.” **READ: GOODEN 2016, PAGE 44.** While Sibande and Marasela create this conversation through a physical presence, the photographs of Andrew Tshabangu and Mpho Mokgadi create a distant view of a dichotomous and topological space. The dichotomous, noting the juxtaposition of the rough bare life in the streets with the glamorous high-rise buildings of Johannesburg, which are both part of the city’s make up, and at the same time they offer only a distant gaze, in a Lacanian way. Typological, because the photographs describe a conceptualisation of space, which depict a sense of assembly, and of dissonance. Both translate to an act of standing in an architectural space that demands their reaction, as it is the ubiquitous camera lens that gives access to that moment, of standing somewhere in Johannesburg and seeing, feeling, remembering or imagining. Zevi writes: *We shall acquire a feeling for space, a love of space, and a need for freedom in space. For space, though it cannot in itself determine our judgment of lyrical values, expresses all the factors of architecture - the sentimental, moral, social and intellectual - and thus represents the precise analytical moment of architecture that is material for its history.* **READ: ZEVI IN GOODEN 2016, PAGE 26.** The way Bruno Zevi speaks about architecture, I argue, one can speak about the identity making in Mary Sibande’s *Sophie*, that is, to acknowledge the value of a conscious construction of the self, to be present and visible in space and time.

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Johannesburg is a pulsating city of desire, of dreams, and of movement. Founded over the discovery of gold in 1886, it attracted many African and European immigrants seeking a piece from the gold rush at the time, mostly working on the mines. While the notion of gold has shifted over time, contemporary Johannesburg is still what Dough Sounders calls “an arrival city as being both populated with people in transition and being itself a place in transition.” **READ: ASMAL 2015, PAGE 8.** The fact that Johannesburg came into being through its mineral treasures rather than a geographical infrastructure, can be seen as a utopian construct and that the meaning of gold and the dreams it sparks justified the city’s location. Due to this, harvesting the underground and convey the inner soil to the surface, was and still is shaping the city’s social and natural environment. Therefore, the notion of surface and underneath, the visible and the hidden, are entangled within its history and its present. **READ: NUTTALL 2008, PAGE 91.**

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This given, Johannesburg is built on the exploitation of the earth, and of people, as South African segregation in the colonial and apartheid era was not merely implemented to secure white supremacy, but also to feed the demand of cheap labour. This system was produced and conducted by a visible structure of repetition and recognition, which infused the mind and ordered the body to react according to a specific spatial behaviour. The *Group Areas Act* and associated pass laws made the space itself a transit space of ‘being tolerated’ within the realm of labour, and the signs stated a reflection between body and space, as a visual reminder of where one belongs. In apartheid South Africa, this visibility of signs saying for example ‘Whites Only’ was used to articulate the political and social status quo, that

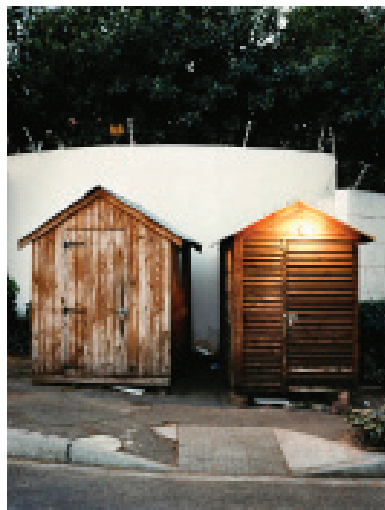
is, of racial separation, played out in the architecture of the space and the signs becomes complicit by governing the public through an environment (ill.: 11-18, Page 23). This creates a space that is accessible only for the privileged, for bodies that conform to those in power. This creates an ideology, manifested in law and carried out in the space. This, as a structure of life tolerates those who conform and those useful for its structure. The apartheid regime used an overt system of aesthetics to visualise what was constituted by law. As Enwezor notes, “a park bench that has inscribed on it ‘for whites only’ defines a structure. But it is also a picture that reproduces the conditions that secure the image of a norm” (ill.: 25, Page 29). **READ: ENWEZOR 2013, PAGE 25.** The apartheid state, through its racial classification created that environment of determined access, hence denied especially the black body an experience of space according to their own autonomy.

This movement was limited and allowed black people to work but not live in the city the daily influx of workers into the city describes a transition into a space of non-belonging other than as worker the transport system underlined this as: “PUTCO stands for Public Utility Transport Corporation. It is the “Utility” that is most startling, and, of course, most revealing. Established in 1945, it wasn’t a bus company for white people. It was carrying something useful to white people. Because that’s what utility means, right?” **READ: BESTER 2015, PAGE 80.** This utility made it possible for ‘maids’ to enter the city as long as needed in the way that labour defines it, the uniform as visible sign, reflecting within the space. This brings back Lefebvre’s notion of space as different from nature due to its construction to its purpose-driven appearance hence the space creates a grey area

where one is tolerated temporarily in a constant state of transition. The book *Not No Place* (2013) is a collection of fragments of the city, as a space and as a construct that is experienced and lived, but never really understood as a whole, as “each place contains its opposite, that which is not place.” **READ: MALCOMESS & KRETZFELDT 2013, PAGE 12.** Although this approach is vague, it acknowledges the multiple layers of the city, as a place where the past is resurfaced in the present, as it is in the sartorial layers of *Sophie’s* dress. By paying attention to these, everything seems the same – street after street, house after house, wall after wall, and as the curiosity increases to find the hidden, the unknown, the gold, one has to face one’s own reflection in the ‘not no-place’. Finding oneself in a space thus is a question of reflection and self-recognition; to be able to draw a connection between the present space and the self, one must have the knowledge of each. This theory translates into the figure of Sophie, making her a subject that is ‘not nobody’ introducing a ‘not-no identity’.

The search for gold in all its variation – knowledge, money, fame, love – is still a magnet for those arriving to Johannesburg in the post-apartheid era. With the political liberation of South Africa in 1994, the difficult process of rebuilding and reconnecting a fragmented society began. In addition, through the sudden dispersal of white people from, and the massive influx of black people into the inner city (CBD) when the *Group Areas Act* was abolished in 1991, the question of spatial liberation and ownership arose. Sibande has noted of the city that “Jo’burg has always been that place of gold, that place, if you want to do something, it is that place for you. As long as you work hard you will get something.” **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2016.**

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Kganye's work places the black body amidst a scenic representation of Johannesburg and connects the family's memory to the cities architectural representation of today. Mario Gooden, in his book *Dark Space* (2016) examines the history and construction of the relationship between the black body and the city in US America, which also relevant for South Africa, where, although formal apartheid was abolished in 1994, remains in the built structures of contemporary social space. He notes: *within this spectrum, architectural space is conceptualized as a rational, linear system of spatial projection in which privileged and honorific bodies are captured within view and all other bodies and objects that lie beyond the cone of vision are excluded from the frame of the picture plane. In architectural representation, black bodies systematically fall beyond the frame of reference for spatial inclusion (...) black bodies are either invisible, occupy unspoken spaces of colonial subjugation, or dismissed to locations of repressive difference.* **READ: GOODEN 2016, PAGE 121.** The photographer Mikhael Subotzky shows in his photographs a very personal yet documentarian way of exploring the city of today. His view is towards the structures that are based in the past segregation but still manifested in the structure of space, especially the suburban areas. He explores that architectural space in order to: "make sense of the world, [such that] photography becomes a way of attempting to do that. I don't really achieve that understanding, but the fact that I am trying comforts me." **READ: SUBOTZKY 2007.** With his work, Subotzky questions given apartheid city structure and architecture and its physical manifestation in the contemporary ideology. These photographs of walls and the security huts in front of them, called 'Wendy's' or 'Zozo's' of

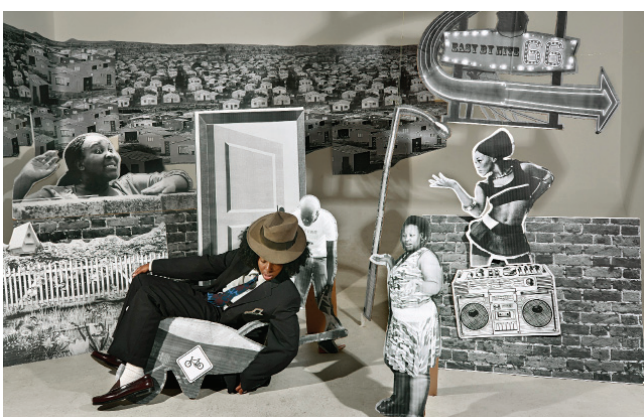
suburbia Johannesburg, examine the links between poverty, race, crime and articulate the effects of a legacy of discriminatory spatial planning. The first photograph with the street party, fringed with Jacaranda trees, points, in Trangos' view, to "this new natural order, however, represents menacingly the extent to which Imperial dominion not only hewed the landscape, but also, with less discernibility, and with racist and classist intent, subjugated society for decades." **READ: TRANGOS 2015, PAGE 20.** This photograph of a family gathering, *Street Party, Saxonwold*, (2008)^(ill. 146) seems quite disconnected from reality, almost staged in its innocent and surrealistic appearance. Simultaneously it quotes South Africa as a liminal state of democratic power, and the old codes of structure and authority. **READ ONLINE: VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM.** The whole series has a kind of innocence through the little wooden houses in front of the walls of suburban neighbourhoods, which makes it even more violent in its narrative as it shows the explicit boundary between the private and public space. It depicts not merely the juxtaposition of private and public space, but also the hidden and secret space of the domestic worker behind the walls, and therefore reveals the spatial power dynamic.

It depicts not merely the juxtaposition of private and public space but also the hidden and secret space of the domestic worker behind the walls. As stated, the body and the space cannot be examined without considering the other. They are interdependent. In this, *Sophie* tells us how space - constituted by both private and the public - is perceived, accommodated and experienced by a 'maid' and how her persistence and resistance can lead to assembling and dissonance in re-writing the

signs left over by history. Now, to actively deal with the space one is living in or one comes from means that the "practice/performance implies a physical context, a space in which to experience the materialization [sic] of that theory." **READ: GOLDBERG 1975, PAGE 3.** Mary Sibande is of course not an architect in the traditional sense of building and designing space, but she challenges the determinations made by and discrimination implicit in South African social space, whether this pertains to the physical form of a city as such, or to 'transcendent form', as for memory, dream or aspiration. The city as such is a produced space in a visual, architectural and structural sense, and is a moving and changing entity, a palimpsest. In the vicissitudes of time and space, it is re-written, thus is governed by a discourse of process. People

Is Sophie a spatial object or a conceptual object?

and their stories are moving in and out, through the streets, houses are built and demolished, street names changed. In this movement, knowledge of space and of belonging are important factors. Belonging is the reflection of the self in the structure of space, through reading and comprehension, the belonging is formed. *A further important aspect of space [...] is their increasingly pronounced visual character. They are made with the visible in mind: the visibility of people and things, of spaces and of whatever is contained by them. The predominance of visualization [...] serves to conceal repetitiveness. People look, and take sight, take seeing, for life itself.* **READ: LEVEBvre 1991, PAGE 76.**



THE SPACE

#liberationasspatialpractice #cityofgold #thearchive #contestedhistory #monuments

Here I approach defining the stage *Sophie* is acting on, where she dreams and aspires her narratives, where space, in terms of the connection of the 'body' and the 'dress', is a visible and a hidden space that she visualises. Therefore it is important to locate *Sophie* as artwork, bearing all the complexities of body, dress, labour, within the specific space she comes from, that is Johannesburg. The city is a stage for *Sophie's* narratives, but is also a contested space that combines structures of history and new ways of defining and appropriating space.

Mary Sibande disrupts the distinct boundaries of the private and the public space in Johannesburg in bringing her 'maid-cum-madam' **READ: ALLY, 2014, PAGE 45.** figure from behind the walls and closed doors into the gallery and the public space of the city. With the representation of *Sophie*, she contests the determination of body and the symbolism of the dress as signifiers in her biographical narrative but she also appropriates the structure of space. The following therefore is an examination of the 'social space' and its mechanisms, **READ: LEFEBVRE 1991, PAGES: 68-169.** which are articulated in *Sophie's* distinctive appearance. Gabeba Baderoon describes in her paper *The Ghost in the House: Women, Race, and Domesticity in South Africa* (2014) the artworks by Muholi and Sibande as depicting the private space of the house as a place "of silence, ghosts and secrets", as they reveal the relationship of the domestic worker and the madam of the house. In visualising private space, the artworks give a glimpse into the intimacy of the home, simultaneously contributing to a discussion of "an oscillation between two functions, and a constant movement between public and private". **READ: BADEROON 2014, PAGE: 2-7.** Hence, this chapter looks at the geographic structure of apartheid, manifested in the architecture of spaces like Johannesburg, and the domestic worker as a person being always in transition through such

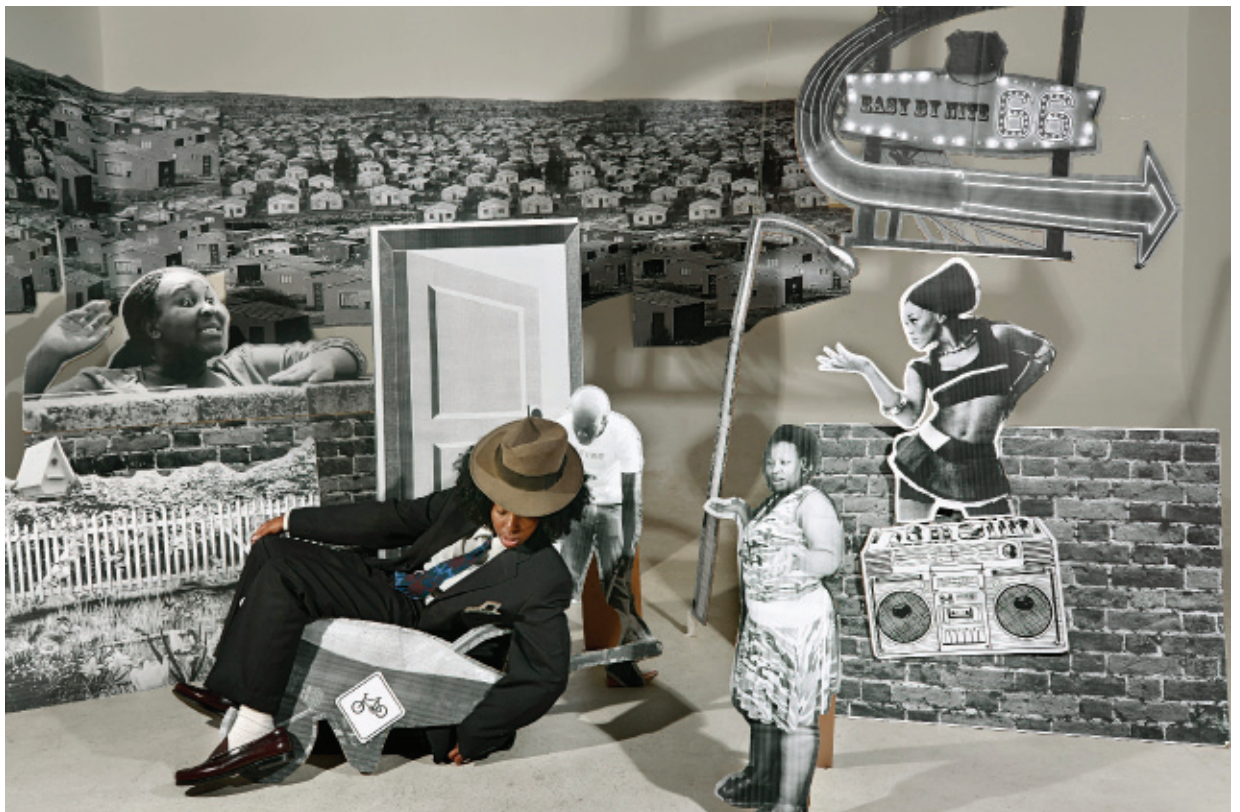
spaces. This brings back the concept of being-in-the-world as the relation of the environment to a place, also shown in the last chapter and the display of Sibande's *Sophie* in the inner city ^(ill. 109-116) of Johannesburg, and Marasela's re-enactment of *Theodora's* travel to the city ^(ill. 117-120).

Space has many manifestations, and may provoke an array of memories, feelings, and reactions accordingly. Space does not just exist; it is repeatedly constructed, designed and remodelled as its meaning shifts over time and according to the society in place. *Sophie's* relationship to space, how she conquers, for example, the streets of Johannesburg outside of the white cube of the art space, makes her that much more a monumental figure that contests the space of social architecture, and the space of history with its figures and archives of the past. One important aspect of Sibande's work is the notion of the body interacting with and in space. *Sophie* demands space in her appearance as a life-sized figure, and curates the surrounding in the telling of her story. The stories she presents through the postures and the dress are made of aspiration and liberation by acknowledging the past, while creating the self. To understand the meaning of *Sophie's* body, one must look at the concept of space. Space is a complex determination of something both ubiquitous and mundane. This dual aspect of space requires a focus on the construction of social space as Henri Lefebvre approaches it in *The Production of Space* (1991). Worthy of note here in particular is the use of 'production' in the sense of labour as it points to a process of creation with a defined purpose, like the uniform of the domestic worker. Lefebvre writes, "the thing [the figure], however, never quite becomes absolute, never quite emancipates itself from activity, from use, from need, from 'social being'" **READ: LEFEBVRE 1991, PAGE: 83.** It connects to the figure of *Sophie*, as the personification of a manner of labour that in a substantial way formed the

base of apartheid social fabric and is the context of *Sophie's* existence. However, it is also an analogy for what Mary Sibande says about: "the body... and particularly the skin, and clothing as the site where history is contested and fantasies are played out", as she actively uses the concept of space to place her alter ego within the ontology of past and present. This requires a discourse about the body and identity, interacting with the signs that define space especially in the city. Mary Sibande puts her alter ego in juxtaposition with space when bringing *Sophie* into the aesthetic scene of Johannesburg, while Senzeni Marasela ^(ill. 117-120) does this, with the re-enactment of her mother's arrival into the same place fifty years ago. Artists like Mikhael Subotzky ^(ill. 146-152) and Jo Ractliffe ^(ill. 160-164) meanwhile pose questions upon the city, not necessarily to gain answers, but to create a base from where they can build up a relationship that is not determined but influenced by the country's history. Lebohlang Kganye ^(ill. 143-146) is literally building a space around herself, where in her works, she recreates the environment and history of her grandfather, passed on by the women of the family, in which the city serves as a reference point to re-visit the families' history and therefore to produce one's own identity. Dressed in her grandpa's clothes and placed as the only 'real' person in the scene, the narrative stays very intimate, but expands into a larger sculptural scene. **READ ONLINE: INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTIST ON; BRITISH COUNCIL 2014.** It is not clear, whether she places herself into the past, or if she brings the bygone with her into her present. But, as memories are fluid through time and space, it is the spatial act of remembering that makes her work dynamic.

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*A COLLAGE OF ANSWERS AND THOUGHTS, TAKEN FROM CONVERSATIONS
WITH MARY SIBANDE IN HER STUDIO OVER THE COURSE OF 2015 AND 2016

LOOKING AT THE VICTORIAN DRESSES, FOR ME IT WAS A METAPHOR OF COLONIALISM, BECAUSE IT IS THAT FOREIGN THING THAT CAME INTO THIS BODY. AND ALSO LOOKING AT THESE VICTORIAN DRESSES IN TERMS OF HOW THESE WOMEN WERE CONSTRAINED BY WEARING CORSETS AND THIS LIMITED MOVEMENT, THE DRESSES ARE BIG! I WANTED TO USE THAT AS PART OF MY WORK, MAKE IT PART OF THIS CONCEPT THAT I WAS IN THE BEGINNING STAGE OF DOING.

WHEN SOMEONE IS ANGRY TO A POINT WHEN THEY BECOME A RED DOG. SO AT THAT POINT YOU ARE BEYOND ANGRY, WHERE YOUR ANGER IS BECOMING ANIMALISTIC ITS NOT HUMAN ANYMORE IT HAS TAKEN ANOTHER FORM, ANOTHER LIVE AND THESE DOGS REPRESENT THAT.

I AM ANGRY AT THE SYSTEM, I AM ANGRY AT LOYALISM, ANGRY AT RACISM, ANGRY AT ME.

“WHY AM I TALKING ABOUT MAIDS? WHY IS THAT?” ITS LIKE THIS BLACK BODY HAS BECOME A THING OF EXPERIMENT. IT ´S THAT THING, THAT THE BLACK BODY HAS BECOME A PLAYGROUND FOR EVERYONE TO ACTUALLY DO WHATEVER. THAT FOR ME IS VERY PROBLEMATIC, LOOKING AT THE HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA: “HOW DID WE GET TO THIS STAGE?” OF COURSE IN SOCIETY THERE IS ALWAYS GOT TO BE THE RICH AND THE POOR. BUT WHY SHOULD BE THE POOR ONLY THIS KIND OF PEOPLE, IT SHOULD BE ALL RACES.

I AM ANGRY AT ME TALKING ABOUT A MAID: “WHERE IS IT COMING FROM, WHY?”

IN ZULU THE ANGER IS DIVIDED INTO STAGES, THERE IS A SPARK STAGE AND THERE IS FLAME STAGE AND THERE IS FIRE STAGE AND THERE IS DESTRUCTION STAGE – IT IS SO BEAUTIFUL LIKE THESE LEVELS OF ANGER YOU CAN ACTUALLY TELL: OH SHE WAS SPARK ANGRY.

THAT ´S THE THING ABOUT ANGER IT ACTUALLY LEADS YOU TO SOMEWHERE. I WANT THIS ANGER TO LEAD ME TO DESTRUCTION TO A POINT WHERE THE WORLD IS UPSIDE DOWN. THERE IS A TORNADO, AND THIS BODY IS JUST IN AMIDST OF THIS TORNADO THAT IS GOING AROUND HER. I WANT TO TAKE IT FAR. I WANT TO HAVE ALL THESE STAGES OF ANGER UNTIL A POINT OF NO RETURN.

I WANT THAT HIGH TO BURN.

YES, IT IS A TRANSIT. AND THE GROUND IS MOVING, ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN AND HENCE NOW ALL THESE RED DOGS ARE JUMPING INTO THE SPACE. SOMETHING ELSE WILL COME IN.

THAT IS HOW SOPHIE BECAME.

MY AFRICAN NAME IS NTOMBIKAISE.

AND THE PURPLE PHASE SPEAKS ABOUT IT WHERE THE FIGURE IS GIVING BIRTH TO THESE PURPLE CREATURES. SHE IS PUSHING THEM OUT. IT IS LIKE YOU GIVE BIRTH TO SOMETHING ELSE.

THE RED FOR ME REPRESENTS ANGER.

THAT SENSE OF PRIDE IS GONE.

IT WAS SO SMOOTH THAT SYSTEM. IT WAS PERFECT. TO A POINT WHERE YOU HAD TO GIVE IT AN A+, IT WAS THAT GOOD. BECAUSE NOT DID IT ACTUALLY CLICK ONE PERSON, BUT GENERATIONS, BECAUSE WHAT YOU TEACH YOUR CHILD THEY WILL BECOME IN THE FUTURE.

IF YOU TELL YOUR CHILD YOU ARE NOT ANYTHING, YOU GREW UP THINKING THAT YOU ARE NOT ANYTHING, ALL THAT IS NOT YOURS; AND THAT IS WHY A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE NOT TAKING CARE OF THEIR ENVIRONMENT, BECAUSE: "IT IS NOT MINE."

AS SOON AS PEOPLE NOTIC[E], THAT IT IS THEIRS, THEY TAKE CARE OF IT, AND CLEAN AROUND THEIR OWN PLACE. PICK UP THE PAPERS, DON'T THROW ANYTHING AWAY.

FOR ME IT IS ABOUT PROTEST.

YOU WANT TO HEAR YOUR OWN THOUGHTS, HEAR WHAT YOU THINK. YOU ARE AWARE OF THE WORLD, YOU ARE AWARE OF WHAT YOU ARE, AND HOW YOU CAME TO BE.

I LOOKED AT SOPHIE AND I STARTED DRESSING HER AND I THOUGHT: "WELL WHAT KIND OF DRESSES MUST SHE TAKE, HOW IS SHE GOING TO LOOK [...] SHOULD I CAST MY GRANDMOTHER AND MAKE HER THE ONE TO TELL THE STORY"? BECAUSE ACTUALLY, AT THE END OF THE DAY I AM BORROWING HER STORIES, BUT I THOUGHT: "NO THAT IS EXPLOITATION, AND WHAT HAPPENS IF I JUST TAKE THE STORIES AND I BECOME MY GRANDMOTHER, I BECOME MY MOTHER, I BECOME MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER"?

I WANTED TO BE THE DIRECTOR OF THE MOVIE AND THE ACTOR AT THE SAME TIME.

I LOOKED AT IT AND IT'S THE ROYALTY IN YOUR BLOOD. IT GOES FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.

THEY SAY THAT QUEENS DON'T DIE, THEY LIVE FOREVER. AS SOON AS THIS ONE DIES, THEY REPLACE HER WITH ANOTHER ONE TOMORROW; AND THAT'S HOW I LOOKED AT THIS, BECAUSE IT IS PASSED ON FROM GENERATION TO THE NEXT GENERATION.

SO THEN I THOUGHT WHAT KIND OF GARMENT MUST THIS CHARACTER BE DRESSED IN? AND I LOOKED AT COLONIALISM, BECAUSE THIS IS THE REASON WHY THESE PEOPLE BECAME MAIDS. THE WHITE PEOPLE WHO CAME TO AFRICA AND COLONISED THE NATIVES TURNED THEM INTO SLAVES.

COLOUR IS THE CODE OF MY ART, OF MY PRACTICE AND IT PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE; THAT IS WHY IT BECOMES A PROMINENT FEATURE IN THE ARTWORK.

JO'BURG IS MADE OUT OF IMMIGRANTS, EVERYONE IN JO'BURG IS AN IMMIGRANT, IS NOT FROM HERE. THEY ARE FROM THE HOMELANDS, BECAUSE THE APARTHEID SYSTEM CREATED HOMELANDS. AND YOU COME TO JO'BURG TO WORK. THEN, END OF THE YEAR, YOU GO BACK TO YOUR HOME, AND THAT'S WHY JO'BURG IN THE HOLIDAYS IS SO EMPTY TOWARDS CHRISTMAS.

AND YOU ALSO SEE IT NOW, PEOPLE STILL DON'T FEEL LIKE IT IS THEIRS, IT IS, LIKE, BORROWED. SOMEDAY THE MASTER WILL COME BACK AND TAKE IT.

FOR ME SHE IS NEVER REAL, SHE IS A SHADOW, AND I DECIDED TO DRESS A SHADOW. FOR ME TO ILLUSTRATE OR TO MAKE A SHADOWY OBJECT MEANS TO PAINT THE FIGURE BLACK. THE BODY IS NOT IMPORTANT BUT THE DRESS, THE ENVIRONMENT, THE STORY. SAME THING, MAIDS ARE NOT IMPORTANT BUT WHAT THEY DO IS IMPORTANT. BUT OF COURSE THEY ARE IMPORTANT.

BLACK WOMEN HAD DOMESTIC PASSES, AS ACCESS TO A REGION WHERE YOU COULD GO. AND THEN IN THE EARLY 80'S WE GOT PASSES, LIKE THESE TODAY AND SHE WAS CALLED ELSIE. SO I WAS FOLLOWING THAT LANGUAGE OF THE MAID. IF I WANT TO BE TRUE TO THE IDENTITY OF THE MAID, I MUST GIVE HER A WESTERN NAME. SAME THING WITH ME, I HAVE A WESTERN NAME BUT MY CHILD HASN'T. IT IS JUST TAKING BRIDE WHERE I COME FROM.

FROM DAY ONE THE BODY WAS ACTUALLY REJECTING ALL. IMAGINE IF A HELPER WOULD WEAR THAT KIND OF BIG DRESS, NO ONE WOULD BE ABLE TO DO ANYTHING. SO SHE IS REJECTING WHAT SHE IS SUPPOSED TO DO BUT AT THE SAME TIME SHE IS DOING WHAT SHE IS SUPPOSED TO BE DOING BECAUSE THE HEADSCARF IS THERE, THE APRON IS THERE.

IN 1985 IN CAPE TOWN PEOPLE WERE MARCHING AGAINST RACISM AND INEQUALITY AND ALL THAT. SO WHAT HAPPENED WAS THAT THE APARTHEID POLICE LACED THEIR WATER CANNONS WITH PURPLE DYE SO THE IDEA WAS TO MARK ALL THE MARCHERS TO ARREST THEM AFTERWARDS. FOR ME IT IS THAT IDEA OF MARKING, OF COLOUR AND THE REASON WHY IT WAS PURPLE, NOT GREEN OR ANY OTHER COLOUR, IS WHEN YOU WASH IT YOU WILL MAKE IT WORSE, YOU HAVE TO LET IT DRY AND WASH IT SLOWLY.

THE PURPLE EMERGED FROM A PROTEST AND FOR ME SOPHIE IS ACTUALLY ON PROTEST. SHE IS SAYING THAT UNLIKE THE BLUE STAGE SHE WAS CORE, HUMBLE, AT THE CORNER, SHE WAS NOT MAKING A NOISE. BUT THE PURPLE IS MAKING A NOISE, AND DEMANDING PRESENCE, AND DEMANDING SPACE AND THE WORK IS ACTUALLY GROWING RIGHT NOW IT IS GOING TO A DIRECTION.

WHEN PEOPLE ARE MARCHING IT IS ALWAYS THAT THING THAT IS LURKING, IT FEELS LIKE SOMEONE WILL JUST JUMP OUT AND START SOMETHING, OR START BURNING THIS OR START LOOTING. SO WHEN A GROUP OF PEOPLE ARE TOGETHER SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN. SOMETIMES NOTHING HAPPENS BUT IT IS JUST THAT UNSTABLE GROUND AND THE PURPLE PHASE FOR ME RIGHT NOW IS AN UNSTABLE GROUND. ITS LIKE A BUS STOP IT IS A TEMPORARY SPACE NOT A PERMANENT SPACE.

MY WORK ON THE PURPLE AND HOW IT CAME INTO BEING IS VERY IMPORTANT.

THE VOICE OF THE ARTIST - MARY SIBANDE *

THE STORY THAT I AM TALKING ABOUT IS NOT UNIQUE[LY] MY OWN BUT BELONGS TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY. SOPHIE IS EITHER YOUR AUNT OR YOUR MOTHER OR GRANDMOTHER OR YOUR NEIGHBOUR. SOPHIE IS ALL THESE WOMEN AND THAT IS WHY PEOPLE CAN ACTUALLY RELATE TO THE WORK BECAUSE THEY HAVE SEEN THIS BEFORE. IF SOPHIE IS NOT YOUR MOTHER YOUR GRANDMOTHER YOUR NEIGHBOUR OR YOUR AUNT SHE IS THE WOMAN THAT CLEANS FOR YOU.

I WANTED SOPHIE TO BE SEEN, TO BE EVERYWHERE.

AND I WAS TALKING TO MY GRANDMOTHER ABOUT HER LIFE WHILE SHE WAS A MAID, SO I WAS COLLECTING STORIES. THE FIRST STORIES OF SOPHIE, THEY RELATE TO MY GRANDMOTHER, SO I FOLLOWED CLOSELY TO THE STORY; BUT OF COURSE I ADDED MY OWN FANTASY OF HOW I VISUALISE THINGS, AND ALSO ADD[ED] MY KNOWLEDGE AND MY EDUCATION THAT I [...] BRING[...] IN TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THIS NEW FIGURE THAT IS SOPHIE.

I NAMED THE CHARACTER SOPHIE, BECAUSE MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER HAD TWO AFRICAN NAMES, AND HER MASTERS COULDN'T BE BOTHERED, SO THEY CALLED HER ELSIE.

SOPHIE IS THE NEXT IN LINE, BECAUSE I WILL NEVER BE A HELPER UNLESS SOMETHING HAPPENS AND I END UP BEING A MAID, YOU NEVER KNOW.

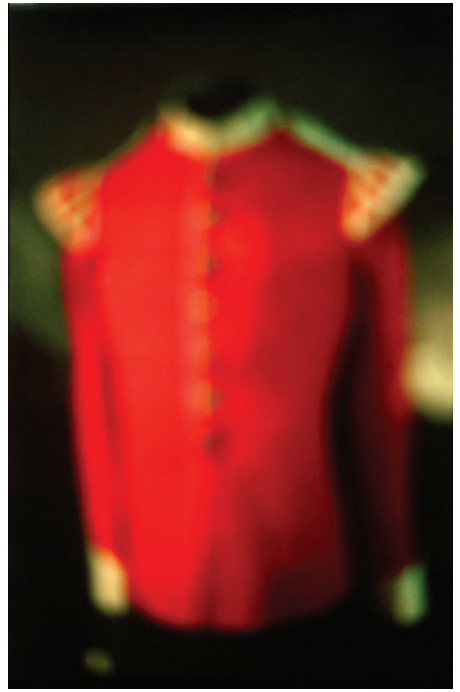
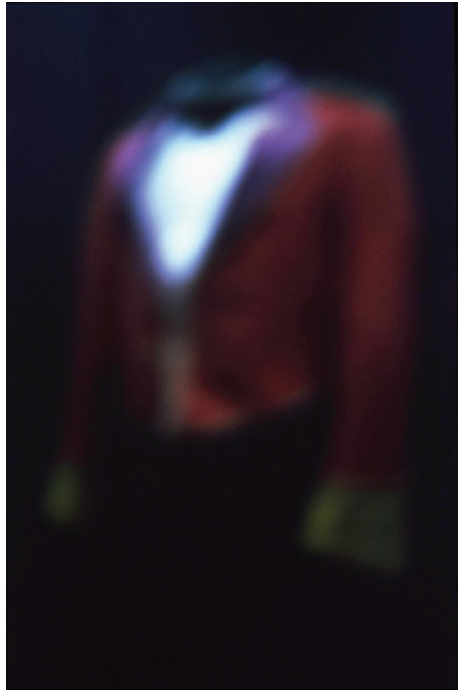
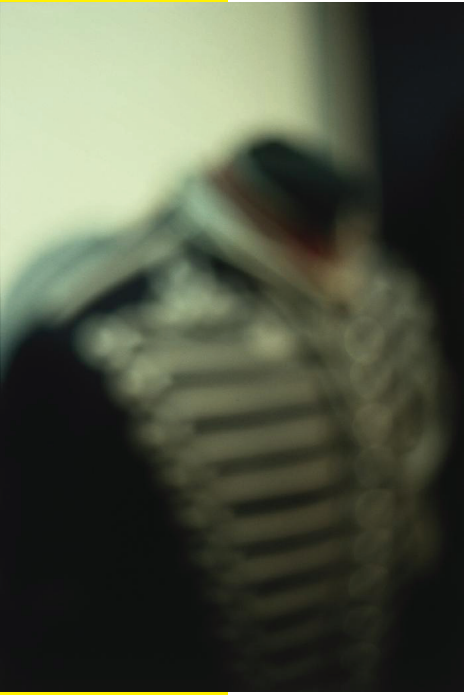
IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO KNOW WHERE I AM COMING FROM, TO KNOW HOW I BECAME, WHY I AM WHAT I AM.

BABERTON IS A SMALL TOWN.

JO'BURG HAS ALWAYS BEEN THAT PLACE OF GOLD, THAT PLACE, IF YOU WANT TO DO SOMETHING, IT IS THAT PLACE FOR YOU. AS LONG AS YOU WORK HARD YOU WILL GET SOMETHING. SMALL TOWNS, NOTHING HAPPENS THERE.

THE PIECE OF PAPER THAT I WAS CALLED A 'DEGREE' SAVED ME, BUT IT SAVED ME BECAUSE TIME ALLOWED THAT PAPER TO SAVE ME. UNLIKE MY MOTHER, SHE COULD NOT BECOME WHATEVER SHE WANTED TO BE, BECAUSE OF HER COLOUR AND HER BACKGROUND. MY GRANDMOTHER WANTED TO BE A NURSE, BUT SHE COULD NOT. BUT WITH ME, I WAS ABLE TO DO IT, BECAUSE THINGS WERE CHANGING, TIMES WERE DIFFERENT.

ART SCHOOL OPENED MY EYES IN AN UNIMAGINABLE WAY.









REFLECTION

#socialfabric #mnemonicdevice #FrantzFanon #thepurpleshallgovern #sartorialliberation #whatitmeans

When examining the sartorial shift from blue to purple, *Sophie*'s dress develops a translation of its hybridity of 'madam' and 'maid' into concepts of access and dislocation, mimicry, and agency, memory, and aspiration. The presentation of the different dresses define an act of Dandyism, as "her garments become the site upon which she reinvents herself and maps out her evolution." **READ: CORRIGALL 2015, PAGE 147.** When Baudrillard speaks of the 'semiurgy' in his book *For a critique of the political economy of the sign*, 1981, referring to the act of recreating and defining sign in their proliferation and usage, the figure of the Dandy might be the accompanying creator of sartorial semiurgy.

Dandyism originates from a male fashion hedonism. The Dandy is rejecting the cloth as a statement of social class, and therefore, being a readable code of belonging. He turns fashion into 'absolute logic', "purified of all recourse to comparison." **READ: BARTHES 2006, PAGE 62.** He appropriates the sign into his own language of dress, affording himself social mobility, where Dandyism makes the 'maid' visible. Mary Sibande makes *Sophie* into a female Dandy, by sewing the signs of differences together to create a new narrative. Although she strives for individuality as the absolute opposite of the uniform, she relies on these codifications of 'maid' and 'madam' to define what she is fighting for, which is rather to create her own biography than her unique style. The Dandy remains led in his

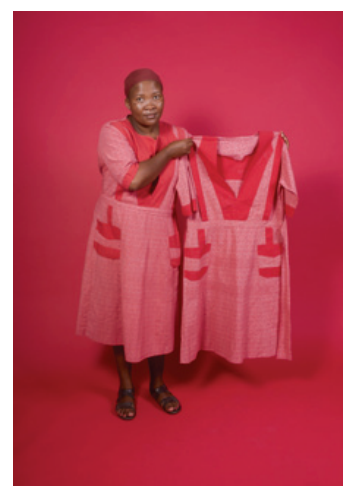
own agency by external influence.

Hence, what *Sophie*'s dressing shows is that power and mobility is determined, represented and articulated through the signs of the dress, especially when it comes to uniforms, where uniforms connote state power in the form of either the military or police. Mary Sibande thus uses signs of power as she simultaneously contests them in her body praxis, which speaks through *Sophie*'s dress with a political vernacular pertaining to the dialectic between individual and common world, the private and the public. According to Joanne Entwiste, the dress is "operating on the boundary between self and other is the interface between the individual and the social world, the meeting place of the private and the public." **READ: ENTWISTE 2015, PAGE 113.** Accordingly, this makes the domestic workers uniform conformist clothing, in the sense that the oppressor can read this body, and its purpose, because it hides no secret, as for the unveiled Algerian woman. This makes the body praxis a manner of political praxis, as it makes fashion a political language, as Bhabha explains:

The disavowal of the position of the migrant woman - her social and political invisibility - is used by her in her secret art of revenge, mimicry. In that overlap of signification - in that fold of identification as cultural and sexual difference - the I is the initial, initiatory signature of the subject; and the eye is the sign that

initiates the terminal arrest, death: as even now you look but never see me... **READ: BHABHA 1994 PAGE: 56.**

Mary Sibande takes this invisibility, and articulates it through the presentation of the dress worn by her alter-ego *Sophie*. Through the work and her discourse around it she acknowledges the women she herself comes from, and re-lives the past, to be able to build her own identity from it. The development of liberation, and transition from the blue dress to the purple dress appropriates physicality and contests social, political and historical space as "dress and fashion operate as a social skin, allowing wearers to re-claim and re-define new social territory it has proved to be the ideal vehicle for South Africans to re-determine and remap previously racial and national identities in the post-apartheid era." **READ: CORRIGALL 2015, PAGE 151.** *Sophie*'s dress forms the canvas of a self-determined identity, not one governed and oppressed by the State and wider society, but informed by the past and the legacies of Sibande's maternal family. It is also a canvas, after Corrigall, of the drama of life, finding oneself and negotiating between the body and the space in articulation with the sartorial statement of ones persona. Ultimately, *Sophie*'s dress is significant to the post-apartheid debate that arose through the 2015 and 2016 student protests most notably in Johannesburg and Cape Town, which contests the way in which the body is constructed both historically and in today's South Africa.



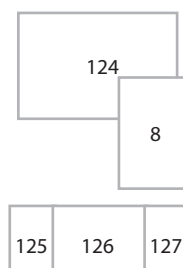
In these works ^(ill. 133-136), the mother, the 'maid' becomes the always-absent figure, in her presence, somewhere else. The mentioned artists revisit this absence when placing themselves into the history and memory that remains. Even though colonialism and apartheid were demised lie in the past, the stigma and wounds it created are still not healed, but are hidden under the surface of the dresses. By recognising the presence of the past, hope and aspiration can grow. Mary Sibande and Senzeni Marasela use the dress as a mnemonic device to connote the absent mother figure and what is bygone, as the cloths are the embodied memory of both ehr own narrative and that of her family, and it connects to specific spaces in the here and there. **READ: DODD 2010.** Whereas Marasela reenacts the path her mother went through in Johannesburg to overcome something that is long gone, Sibande seems to be in a "constant ecstasy of fantasy" **READ ONLINE: SIBANDE IN THREAD & CIRCUS 2010.** creating her own world. But in both adaptations, the dress as an object functions as a membrane between past and present, memory and fantasy, which forms a dialectic between the artists and the external world, "while the fabric remorselessly records the evidence of those interactions." **READ: MILLAR 2012, PAGE 3.**

Most striking about the purple figure that *Sophie* becomes is the tangible transition and the power she embodies. While the blue figure depicted her maternal family as passively dreaming women, with soft expression and vivid fantasy, *Sophie* now becomes an active and powerful entity that fights with herself, while giving birth to creatures

that literally take over the scene of transfiguration. Nuttall writes of this work, "something has taken over... I want the purple figure to give birth to something... the characters are trying to move away from themselves... I want to move away from the past", and talks about her 'anxiety about producing something bigger than *Sophie*." **READ: SIBANDE IN NUTTALL 2014, PAGE: 169.** This series makes overt reference to the 'purple rain protest' that took place in Cape Town, 1989 when thousands came out against racism and inequality in a mass protest against apartheid and in support of democracy. During the protests, police used purple dye in water cannons shot at protestors, in order to be able to identify them for arrest. The purple *Sophie* liberates from the blue, creating an environment that takes over, much as do the little purple monsters that strip off *Sophie's* apron and headscarf while she stands in the middle of them, both comforting and threatening. A transition is shown not to be easy and a conscious re-visiting of the past bears monsters, darkness and chaos in it. Unlike the blue stage, she [*Sophie*] was core, humble, at the corner, she was not making a noise. But the purple is making a noise, and demanding presence, and demanding space and the work is actually growing right now it is going to a direction. When people are marching it is always that thing that is lurking, it feels like someone will just jump out and start something, or start burning this or start looting so when a group of people is together something will happen. Sometimes nothing happens, but it is just that unstable ground and the purple phase for me right now is an unstable ground. It's like a bus stop; it is a temporary space,

not a permanent space. And the purple phase speaks about it where the figure is giving birth to these purple creatures. She is pushing them out. It is like you give birth to something else. [all sic] **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015.**

As much as liberation is a spatial practice, it is also a mental process, when it comes to one's own identity. A generation of young South Africans negotiates this in a public sphere, where they reclaim space, which was determined by the apartheid regime and reopened by the movements and powers which challenged that government, and played a role in its downfall, as the Soweto student protest from 16 June 1976 stands for one of the pivotal moments of South Africa's struggle. In the present day, in the streets of cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town, placards state: 'WE ARE NOT LOOKING FOR OUR OWN STRUGGLE, WE'RE FIGHTING AN OLD ONE'; 'DEAR HISTORY, THIS REVOLUTION HAS WOMEN, GAYS, QUEERS & TRANS, REMEMBER THAT'; or '1976?'. These student slogans accompanied the recent protest movements, articulating the demands and questions on the present day situation. They also show how the people connect their identity with the country's recent history. Hence, the inner struggle is expressed through collectiveness and visual statements, as it also happens in the instance of the purple *Sophie*. The placards of the protesters are as if the dresses for *Sophie*, an exterior mirror of her search for sense-making. **READ: GONIWE 2013, PAGE 26.** Power relations are revealed and questioned, not only for the public, but within history as well.





Even though Sibande is not involved in direct armed conflict in the way the Algerian women did, she is fighting a discursive and symbolic one, one that seeks ownership not only of the own body and its representation in real terms, but also the power over history and its signs that come to bear upon it. Therefore, the "sartorial access" **READ: CORRIGALL 2015.** of her artworks is so significant for the situation of today, because: "it requires a radical revision of the social temporality in which emergent history may be written, the articulation of the 'sign' in which cultural identities may be inscribed". **READ: BHABHA 1994, PAGE 246.**

This struggle is manifested especially within the many layers of *Sophie*'s dress, but becomes especially tangible with the emergence of the purple figure, in the series *The Purple shall govern*. In juxtaposition with the blue figures of the early *Sophie*, there is a powerful transformation from collecting the history of her maternal family as kind of chronologist of the common South African story, to the purple figure that in my interpretation is very much concentrated on Sibande's identity building. It marks also a phase of great uncertainty, and fear for the unknown future against the already written past. But, there is also the acknowledgment of the female body, able to give birth and the serendipity of one's own power. Hence, as I read it, the purple *Sophie* stands for the fight of the inner self, where a transformation of ownership begins. This transformation seems to start with *Sophie-Ntombikayise* (2009)^(ill.75) the life-sized mixed media installation. *Sophie* represents the great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother, while *Ntombikayise* is Sibande's own given name. The

series builds on this representation that marks the passage of past-present-future. **READ: GONIWE 2013, PAGE 26.** It has autobiographical and theatrical features of present day self-exposure, as the coverage of her identity-building process has the dynamic of seeing someone else's life developing through image representation. Also, the act of inventing an alter-ego is an established form of representation that is not only reserved for artists but for internet users on social media platforms that open up the invention of multiple identities that are all carried in one person.

In my own reading, as the purple figure, *Sophie* takes active ownership, while fighting for something that is in her but cannot be clearly articulated yet. Hence, these purple creatures, the non-winged ceiling beings appear, surround her, protective and menacing. The heaviness of comfort and captivation is no longer necessary, instead, she gives rise to creatures that strip her of the old stigma of apron and headscarf as depicted in *A terrible Beauty is born* (2013)^(ill. 77). These figures not only have a presence, but take over space, in an apocalyptic way. *Right now!* (2015)^(ill. 132) tells a story of protection and anger of loyalty and breaking free within the duality of power. Mary Sibande herself was pregnant at that time, when *Right now!* was made, which makes this picture, even more an auto/biographical piece, as it anchors a distinctive moment in the artist's life. The signs of history translated in the garment start to mutate into something yet to be defined, but to something that belongs to both Sibande and *Sophie*.

This desire for salvation through the dress and the revision of the mother's past is also eminent in the photographic series *Ibali La - Searching for Gebane* (2013)^(ill. 133-136) by Senzeni Marasela. The red dress in the work is reminiscent of the uniform of a domestic worker, becoming enormously important, and is responsible for the identity of the person wearing it, until that person seems to vanish. It stands for itself, it becomes more than a garment, where it becomes a stigma, a destiny, and a role. It is so much more than a dress, it transforms into a physicality and an intellectual space, because it defines a social status, as it defines a body and where this body belongs. The design in this sequence uses clothing called Seshoeshoe, originating from Lesotho. Marasela uses herself in representing a story of her mother, Theodora Hlongwane. The narrative of *Ibali La* tells of the search for *Theodora*'s husband, who left her in the village. She thinks only he, Gebane, can free her from that dress of the married woman, that binds her to him. **READ ONLINE: GRESELE 2015.** It is a dress symbolising hierarchy, patriarchy, and slavery. In the act of becoming a part of the past through adorning herself with her mother's dress, as the personification of her life, I interpret Marasela to be dealing with the perception of the black female body and her own physical 'going-through' in performing her mother's story.

Both artists seek to liberate themselves through imagination from a dress that binds to someone else and determines their identity. The dress becomes a literary sign, readable for the public, drawing a relationship to it and a uniform that makes the wearer invisible.



The multi-layered dress *Sophie* wears in this photograph is based again on the garment of the Zionist Church, it is stiff, and holds her posture upright in the corset of the colonial Victorian Dress of the 'madam'. In my reading, in *Her Majesty Queen Sophie* (2010), Sibande combines the complexities of South Africa's particular history and the contestation of today's picture of women and forms something new out of it, namely agency for herself. Because even though her arms are wide open, the gesture is self-reflexive, that is, not directed at the spectator, and *Sophie* becomes her own mediatrix, not dependent on anyone else because she finds herself an origin, becoming able to articulate her own standpoint regarding the self and the history by embracing her innate ambiguity, which is embraced by the many versions of *Sophie*.

In *I am a Lady* (2009) ^(ill. 19), *Sophie* sits amidst numerous layers of blue tulle with the white apron and headscarf in which she is always seen. The way she is centered in that photograph, and the white umbrella in her hand that does not have a practical purpose other than being a neat accessory, makes the dress a trap. *I am a Lady* looks beautiful, and very soft in the accommodation of the figure sitting amidst it but at the same time, one wonders how *Sophie* can possibly be able to perform her household duties in that dress? The relationship between 'maid' and 'madam' is fairly intertwined, and sometimes it seems unclear whether the history of the maid or the fantasy of the 'marquess' **READ: DODD 2010, PAGE 2** weights more heavily on her, as Sibande suggests that: "when you look at images of Victorian dresses, you realise that women found it hard to wear such big, heavy and tightened-up dresses and that their movements were limited as a consequence. I constructed *Sophie's* clothing with that 'limited movement' concept in mind."

READ: AFRITORIAL 2012. This clearly addresses the masculine power of that time, which makes the 'madam', in a way, as immobile as her 'maid', bound to the house and to the dress. The closer examination of *Sophie* and her dress shows, that the stiff unwieldy dress that ensconces her is not for her to work in, but becomes a canvas for *Sophie's* dreams, as she is depicted always with closed eyes, which becomes a transformation of reality into her aspiration, hopes, and fantasies. Sibande related:

For me, it is about the protest. From day one the body was actually rejecting all. Imagine if a helper would wear that kind of big dress, no one would be able to do anything. So she is rejecting what she is supposed to do but at the same time she is doing what she is supposed to be doing because the headscarf is there, the apron is there. **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015.**

This hybridity of the dress finds resonance in what Frantz Fanon describes the significance of the veil of the Algerian woman during the French colonialism that lasted 132 years until Algeria's independence in 1962. **READ: FANON 1965.** In my own interpretation, the veil as sartorial signifier turns a woman's body into a subject hidden, mystified and desirable, as it makes her a slave of her clothing, which subordinates her to patriarchy. My reasoning is that it makes her an subject that belongs to someone else but herself, and at the same time the veil enables her to go outside, it does so for her to become visible only as a body, but not as a person. In the same manner of doublebind, the dress of *Sophie* that keeps her captive is at once the canvas for her dreams and aspirations, and the domestic uniform that grants the women access to the city, because the dress becomes her camouflage, the mimicry that grants her mobility,

as she remains invisible. Eventually, that uniform takes over the identity of the person wearing it, and grants access to an area that would otherwise be denied through the white supremacy. Hence, the dress becomes also a tool of power over the female body, a site of political debate and cultural manifestations. **READ: BHABHA 1994.** In Algeria (1830-1962), the colonialist tried to deconstruct the country's culture to secure their power over the society in the manner of "white man saving the brown woman from brown man." **READ: SPIVAK 1994, PAGES. 99-105.** In the case of the Algerian woman, this meant to 'free' her from the veil, which was the symbol of cultural and religious oppression for the western intruders. As Fanon puts it "Converting the woman, winning her over to the foreign values, wrenching her free from her status, was at the same time achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of deconstructing Algerian culture." **READ: FANON 1965, PAGE 39.**

This attempt created an ambivalent environment in the society, and the perception of the woman's body in Algeria. This also points to the act of mimicry Bhabha speaks about as: "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable 'Other', as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite." **READ: BHABHA 1994, PAGE 86.**

Hence, the sartorial protest Sibande speaks about regarding the dress she created for *Sophie* is an act of mimicry and protest. The Algerian women who joined in the resistance against the colonial powers likewise used this mimicry to their own advantage. They unveiled themselves, which gave them the freedom to walk through the city without being recognised for their faith, smuggling weapons or secret information, observing and nurturing the struggle.



POLITICS OF THE DRESS

#socialfabric #mnemonicdevice #fanon #thepurpleshallgovern #sartorialliberation

The body as well as the dress functions as the main device of *Sophie's* stories, and reflect the hybrid of the 'maid' and 'madam' in Sibande's work. To be able to understand the history she is sewing together in the 'new' post-apartheid South Africa, this chapter deals with some of the important aspects that can be found in the garment *Sophie* wears. The following discussion will be guided by an understanding of dress as social plastic, dress culturally significant, and the politics of the dress, in terms of its visual power to both emancipate and to oppress. Dresses are signifiers of a cultural environment, tradition or profession and conduct, hence I argue that they function as the social fabric of a specific time and place. Even though fashion never stands still, as it is constantly reinvented and reinterpreted by a society's particular style that codifies a particular time, people use sartorial codes to show their affiliation or distance from a group. **READ: CORRIGALL 2015.** As Fanon notes in another context in his introduction to the chapter *Algeria Unveiled* 1965, "the way people dress themselves, together with the traditions of dress and finery that custom implies, constitutes the most distinctive form of a society's uniqueness," **READ: FANON 1965, PAGE 35.** Sibande plays with the viewer's first glimpse of *Sophie*, dressed in her exaggerated Victorian 'madam' dress cum 'maids' uniform. This creates a moment when the seemingly mismatched apartheid iconography, which formed part of what justified the implemented separation and the imperialistic movement – *Sophie's* dress speaks volumes of the fusion of inferiority and superiority.

The peat-black figure wears the starched uniform of a maid, the collar, and apron rimmed in homely Broderie Anglais, a technique of embroidery which originated in 16th century Europe but is still widely used in the collar and apron details of contemporary South African maids uniforms readily available at local supermar-

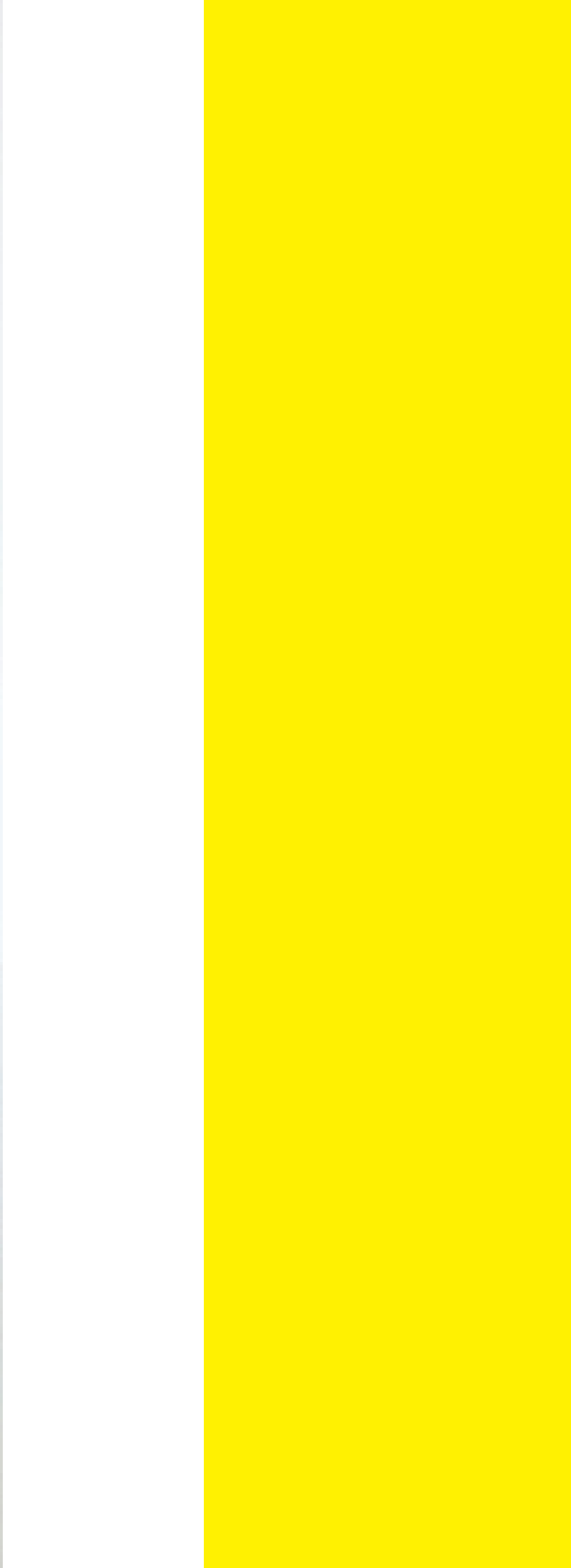
kets. **READ: DOD 2010, PAGE 468.** Furthermore, Sibande creates dresses that relate to the narrative of economic and social garments of domestic work, uniforms of workers and the Zionist church, as well as Victorian dresses in huge layers of blue, with a white apron and headscarf. The dress becomes so massive that it demands space for itself, always lingering between a playful, childish imagination and the constant reminder of the heaviness of the garment that does not relinquish itself from her. In doing so, she revisits her families past but also "commenting on social class, economic ranking and hierarchies in society". **READ: GONIWE 2013; PAGE 8.** The term blue-collar worker defines manual work, mostly unskilled low-income jobs, whereas the white collar defines the work in an office where no dirt could leave its mark. The economic division in South Africa was hereby created along the ethnic line of Black, Coloured, Indians and White that also determined an educational and economic limbo, in favor of the white class. **READ: MARX 1998, PAGES: 90-119.** Sibande notes of the consequence of the era in which she was born, that "the piece of paper that's called a 'degree' saved me; but it saved me because the time allowed that paper to save me. Unlike my mother, she could not become whatever she wanted to be because of her colour and her background." **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE, 2015.** The various gestures *Sophie* is depicted to be holding, betray the dreams of a 'maid', woven into the garment of a queen, but are also about the narrative of a society in time and space as Mary Sibande notes: "the body [...] and particularly the skin, and clothing is the site where history is contested and fantasies are played out". Especially histories of the "stereotypical depictions of women, particularly black women in our society". **READ ONLINE: SIBANDE IN ALLAN, 2009.** Looking at the blue figures from the series *Long live the dead Queen* to the development of the purple *Sophies* in *The Purple Shall Govern*, it becomes clear that the dress itself is an important

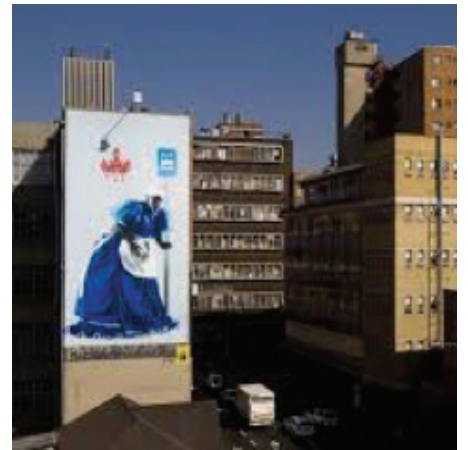
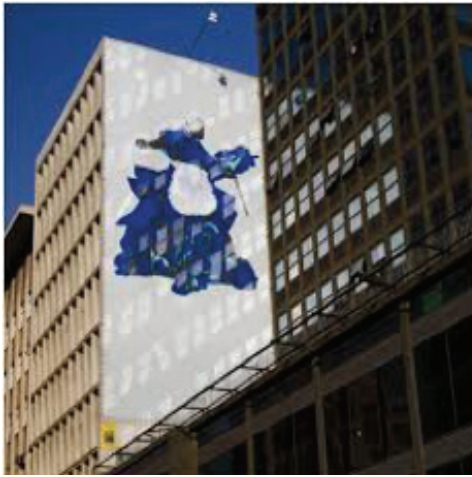
signifier of narrative as the artist and the artwork undergo a process of liberation that is formed of the stories of Mary's family, and eventually becomes her own autobiography. Hence, in my interpretation, the blue figures symbolise the memory, the loss and the nostalgia of the past, but the purple symbolises the stripping away the received symbols to start something symbolically new, something uniquely belonging to Mary Sibande.

Her Majesty Queen Sophie (2009); (ill. 69) is *Sophie's* dramatic entrance to the stage. Her 'maid's' outfit is overlaid by an array of beadwork that speaks of a prior matriarchal dignity. The halo behind the figure illuminates the gesture of a Virgin Mary-like appearance that symbolise Christian belief and the mother of Jesus Christ, in the distinctive gesture of her open palms as the connection of transcendence and worldliness. According to the Vatican II's Constitution of the Church Mary's role is defined as being a mediatrix and distributing all graces of redemption through her. She is also the advocate for the human family before the throne of Christ the King, and functions as the 'Spiritual Mother' or 'Queen of the Kingdom'. This makes the figure of Virgin Mary very strong and meaningful, also wholly dependent on the male figures of God and Jesus Christ:

This is the will of Him who wanted us to have everything through Mary [...] God has placed in Mary the plenitude of every good, in order to have us understand that if there is any trace of hope in us, any trace of grace, any trace of salvation, it flows from her [...]. God could have dispensed His graces according to His good pleasure without making use of this channel [Mary], but it was His wish to provide this means whereby grace would reach you. **READ: MIRAVILLE 2006 PAGE 114.** She nourishes and pleads, but not for herself, as she stands in the servitude of others.









REFLECTION

#autobiography #disembodiment #belief #aspiration #beingtherebutnotthere #whatitmeans

What does the representation of *Sophie's* body tell us? Through what is her narrative fabric of this monument-like body informed that makes it possible to read her appearance in a certain way?

Mary Sibande is the creator of her biography through telling the story of her maternal family and visualising the development of her identity through her alter-ego, *Sophie*. Simultaneously, she is the object *Sophie*, as she uses her own body as a stage or as a canvas to draw dreamscapes into mnemonic devices, which become the 'maid-cum-madam' dress. Her body stands as a host of cultural assumptions that accumulate a historical drama of not only her own, as well as her family's past, but as a representation of 'social markings, physical parts, and gestural signatures' that constitute South Africa's history. *Sophie* as a sculpture and Mary Sibande's reflection of autobiography can be read within two measures, as the personification of a narrative, and as the concept of the body, because she inherits the dialectic between the self and the world. The different appearances of the mannequin that *Sophie* combines relate to the autobiography, self-

representation and the 'Other', in the sense of a precise representation of the self and others' historical narrative. This physical articulation through the medium of performance and installation, forms a sustained visual biography.

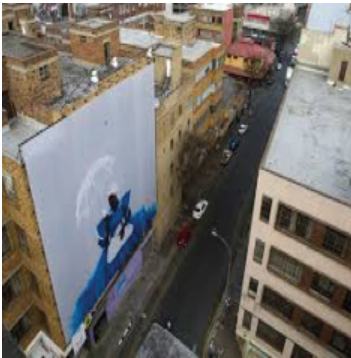
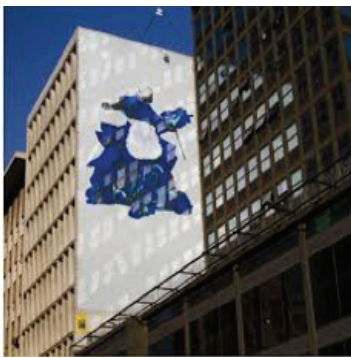
Eventhoughthestoriesareembodied, they stay shadowy, "allowing for the exploration of identities that are founded on imaginary trajectories of here and not here, I and not-I and hence on metaphors of movement and place." Emphasis is placed here on physicality since it is precisely the literal embodiment that makes it possible to be read and revisit, and has the power to collide concepts of body, dress and space against artistic representations.

The multiple personas established for *Sophie*, represented by various visual narratives and based on the artists' maternal family, demand agency by challenging stereotypes, as *Sophie* is the personified hybrid of the empowered individual and the body that is subject to external authority. In my interpretation, with her alter ego, Sibande performs an unapologetic representation of the black woman's body in gestures that are commonly patriarchal, and contest the 'western' historical

narrative of the depictions of heroins, as for example in *The Reign*, 2010. This refers to a depiction of a 'fallen hero', but Sibande does not just establishes monuments but rather tells different versions of a self-representatoin as "self-representation here does not suggest a definitive statement or revelation of an inner truth. It is instead an open-ended dialogue between maker and viewer, challenging us to think again when we see our own likeness next reflected in the mirror." She is, therefore, a mirror of history that stands for knowledge of the past, and for creating the future and a kind of personal truth contingent on time and circumstance. This comes not without contradiction, argument and struggle. All this is readable, I argue, because *Sophie* as a sculptural body is linked to Mary Sibande as an individual, which forms a rhetorical interplay of reality and dreams in the mind of the viewer/reader.

Sophie's body stands for the complexity of which a human life story is made. To see means to realise the structure of our reflection, where, ultimately, we are as if a spectator, standing in front of *Sophie*, facing our own symptomatic displacement. She demands a position and turns us into a witness of *Sophie's* account.

113	108
107	115
114	112
106	116



This shows a dichotomy between the body and the dress or uniform and informs a question of importance of the body and the dress while both depend on each other. Sibande explains that dichotomy without taking importance away from the body but rather points toward a specific categorisation one might have over people in uniform. "The body is not important but the dress, the environment, the story. Same thing, maids are not important but what they do is important. But of course, they are important."

INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO:

SIBANDE 2015. Even though now, *Sophie*, as the archetype of the 'maid', occupies public space, she stays that vague figure, where the dress remains an intransigent sign. But what the billboard (ill. 109-116) as a medium also offers is a sort of aspirational picture. It sets a certain standard with which people may identify, and may want to have for themselves, prompting the aspirational. Elevated far above the pedestrians of Johannesburg, *Sophie* is enthroned in a victory of history that is not yet acquired, but remains possible and Mary Sibande constructs a social reality many people can relate to:

The story that I am talking about is not unique my own but belongs to the black community. Sophie is either your aunt or your mother or grandmother or your neighbor. Sophie is all these women and that is why people can actually relate to the work because they have seen this before. If Sophie is not your mother your grandmother your neighbor or your aunt she is the woman that cleans for you. **INTERVIEW AT HER STUDIO WITH: SIBANDE 2015.**

Sibande has molded all of the women, including the artist herself, as she herself was woven from the stories of her maternal family. This autobiographical work creates a larger collective identity, where as autobiography, it claims space in the public sphere; as a result it either constitutes a distancing, or greater intimacy in its relation to the public. Her artworks create a space and visibility of the hidden

and the private; not only the hopes and dreams of *Sophie*, as may come to be read through the work, but she also gives shape to the domestic space. It thereby draws attention to the structure of labour that shaped so many biographies, as well as the story of Johannesburg.

By the same token, Senzeni Marasela's series *Theodora in Johannesburg* (2003-2006) (ill. 117-120)

is a physical experience performed as a re-enactment of the history in the space and with the body as moving canvas, giving rise to the possibility of multiple meanings. Senzeni Marasela is poking fun at stereotypical perceptions of the black female body. She depicts South Africa's history in a simple yet intimate gesture, referencing her mother's move to the city from rural Eastern Cape in the 1960s. Marasela wears an old dress her mother gave to her and is photographed wearing it at various locations around modern-day Johannesburg. With that, she performs a re-enactment of collective and personal memory of "a paradoxical 'reality' only of a dream, of shadow, always beyond reach, always already lost." In wearing her mother's dress, she is literally carrying that legacy through the city, where she has commented on the piece, "I believe that by revisiting the past, by giving myself a place in it, I'll be able to forgive myself for my indifference." **READ: MARASELA IN RICHARDS IN PERRIER 2004, PAGE 231.**

This statement by the artist about her work shows the importance of finding or creating her own identity through the process of coming to terms with her mother's past. It seems, in my own interpretation, that she is somehow obliged to continue her mother's life, in order, as I read it, to free herself from it. Similarity can be found in Mary Sibande's statement when she says: "Sophie is the next in line", and "I become my grandmother, I become my mother, I become my great-grandmother". **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2016.** I believe, it is a story of a generation of people who were the first of the families able to make a decision of their own without

being told what to be, not because they were necessarily fighting for it but because the political landscape changed and made the demise of apartheid possible.

In becoming the mother or in continuing the life of the maternal family in the way Sibande does, appears to be a sign of familiarity and strangeness deriving from the communication between memory and the self, as Marasela is always depicted from behind. The space *Theodora* found herself in, was one governed mostly through a spatial and systematical architecture of white supremacy of 1960s Johannesburg. While Marasela deals with the elusive boundaries of the relationship between individual memory and public space, she revisits power relations between the body - the mother's body - and the space - Johannesburg - showing that: "the colonized [sic] person is also subject to a perpetual ambivalence: of being, but never quite being, within the system of hegemonic power. This failure of never quite being, of a partiality, is thus important to the colonizer [sic] because it becomes the line of demarcation in the power system ensuring that the dialectic remains firmly as a colonizer [sic] and colonized [sic] or dominant and subordinate" **READ: SINGER 2012, PAGE 26.**

How space - private and public, home and city - informs the reading of *Sophie* can be resumed in Homi K. Bhabha's writing: "this results in redrawing the domestic space as the space of normalizing [sic], pastoralizing [sic], and individuating techniques of modern power and police: the personal-is-the-political; the world-in-the-home." **READ: BHABHA 1994, PAGE 15.** The home is a kind of micro-public, where the domestic worker is hidden away, whereas *Sophie*, through the means of her display, enters the realm of the public sphere, demanding space and scale of visibility; especially when her pictures are shown in the streets of Johannesburg, which she takes over with her sheer opulence, that can neither be missed nor ignored.

105	113	106
107	114	108
109	115	110
111	116	112



Education is a means of knowledge about ourselves. After we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the center of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literature, things must be seen from the African perspective **READ: SPEECH AT WITS UNIVERSITY, MBEMBE 2015, PAGE 17.**

Mary Sibande depict her conversation with history in a similar way as Yinka Shonibare does through his figures or photographs, which show an African perspective as it can also be seen as an answer to what Mbembe calls: “a negative moment is a moment when new antagonisms emerge while old ones remain unresolved” gets reversed, it might come to, what Derrida calls an ‘event’ as the structure of a rupture accompanied at once by a redoubling, hence, a break and a repetition at the same time **READ: DERRIDA 1970, PAGE 351.** What follows onto these visual and academic arguments, is the acknowledgement that disrupting the perception of history lays bare, that the relationship between sign and signified is fundamentally arbitrary. This can be discovered through *Sophie*’s dress and the narrative she represents as well as through the debates of the student movements of post-apartheid South Africa. The key might lie in a constant negotiation between these powers, which creates the event and being, between the mind and the body because: “If she opened her eyes, it would be back to work – cleaning this, dusting that. Her dress would become an ordinary maid’s uniform” **READ ONLINE: SIBANDE ON ARTTHROB 2014.** As Sibande states, the mind is ready, but the body is still caught in the ‘grey area’. I would argue that a similar manner of engagement with the presence of the self can be found in the photographs of Zanele Muholi, specifically in the series *Massa and Mina(h)* (2008) ^(ill. 96-99). Focusing similarly on the intersubjectivity between the domestic worker

and her employer, Muholi draws a storyline of tenderness, desire and sexuality between the two women depicted. Her photographic narrative strongly relates to the physical component of ownership and agency of her own body, and the freedom of choosing one’s personal sexual orientation. Muholi plays with the spectator’s perception of the norm, and with the sense of what belongs together, basically, with the ordering of society. She brings, like Mary Sibande, symbols together that historically does not belong together. This paradoxical intimacy and strangeness compose the foreground of her series. Her photographs appear as film stills taken from a movie, which lead one to fantasise about the next scene that occurs, if only according to the desire of the spectator’s mind. The mentioned artists deal with the body and the mind by creating scenarios, fantasies and questions of ownership and agency of the body and the mind, forming a physicality from the contested history they currently live in. This is an artistic translation of a conscious debate between the body and space, where elsewhere Fanon has put it, that: *all these movements [of the body] are made not out of habit but out of implicit knowledge. A slow composition of myself as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world – such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world – definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world.* **READ: FANON 2008, PAGE 83.** *Sophie* is not just the mimetic alter ego of Mary Sibande’s maternal family embodied in an artwork, she is a demanding political body as well. In the gallery space, as a controlled environment with the assembly of people it brings together to interact with the artworks. But enthroned on billboards throughout the inner city of Johannesburg, she claims visibility and space. The Soccer World Cup in South Africa 2010 brought about a huge debate

about the country’s rather desolate political and economic condition, but it also brought South Africa back onto the international world map. At the same time, Sibande brought *Sophie* out into the public sphere right into the heart of Johannesburg Central Business District, as giant billboards displayed at the walls of high rise buildings with their walls becoming a stage simultaneously a metaphor of the house wall, where she as the ‘maid’ would normally stays behind invisible in the privacy of the ‘madam’s’ empire. These billboards are strongly reminiscent of fashion advertisements, where luxury clothing adorns beautiful women. The model becomes a mere mannequin for the dress. This draws attention to the commodification of desire or fetish akin to that described in another context by Karl Marx **READ: MARX 1867, PAGE 27-60.** exploration that desire is produced, staged and designed as would be any other tangible object on the market. *Sophie* presented as giant billboards, wallpapered the city space, it may be argued, stands for: *the signifying desire, ‘she’ [Sophie] is the obsessive emblem of representational fantasy – we see her body everywhere, selling a dream of future real to a present always as ‘lack’. Yet even as she is ubiquitously given to be seen, she simultaneously signifies a flirtatious impossibility of access, a paradoxical ‘reality’ only of a dream, of shadow, always beyond reach, always already lost.* **READ: SCHNEIDER 1997, PAGE 5-6.** This leads interpretation back to Santu Mofokeng’s work on the billboards between Johannesburg and the township periphery. This is of particular interest as *Sophie* swaps position in this case, where, as domestic worker, she is the body in transition par excellence when it comes to the space Mofokeng’s photographs depict. But as representation on billboards she becomes the signifier of the space of transition, it is as if she announces boldly and self-confidently that she is here to stay.

96	100
97	103
98	187
99	101 102







I was talking to my grandmother about her life while she was a maid, so I was collecting stories. The first stories of Sophie, they relate to my grandmother, so I followed closely to the story but of course I added my own phantasy of how I visualize things and also adding my knowledge and my education that I am bringing it there and construction this new figure that is Sophie. INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015.

Mary Sibande's and *Sophie's* bodies are inevitably entrenched with each other whether as the replica of the sculpture or the reflection in a photograph, as Sibande herself becomes the alter ego when dressing in the outfit that merges maid and madam. Hence, the artist becomes subject and object through the alienation of the representational self. It is an autobiography many can relate to, because this presented body becomes a greater good, as it is the experience of many South African women. When *Sophie* appears as a sculpture, she is present in the room as a body that attracts people's gazes, she is there to be looked at, to be examined, and to be read. *Sophie* as a sculpture not only works as an installation but also within the frame of performance art, when she is exhibited in galleries or museums. On the one hand, this is because she is performing stories within her rigidness, but on the other, because it is clearly the artists' body used as a canvas, and as an author, in a vivid scenario. In South Africa, performance art has grown tremendously over the past twenty years as many young (South) African artists use, as many other artists elsewhere do, their own body to provoke a discourse of the politics of the body, gender, race, history and the own background with the questions of where to go. This presenting of one's own body is an act that can be described as an artistic statement of 'Dasein', of temporary

being-in-the-world. As Heidegger explains this phenomenon: "temporality is also the condition which makes historicity possible as a temporal kind of Being which Dasein itself possesses, regardless of whether or how Dasein is an entity 'in time'." READ: HEIDEGGER 1962, PAGE 41. This physical being-in-the-world is relating to the here and now and is based on the consciousness of 'Dasein', which is so vividly translated into Mary Sibande's *Sophie*. Being-in-the-world or Dasein, also gets translated in the numerous debates, happening in South Africa, North America and Europe regarding the body and the confrontation with history. As much as *Sophie* is an amalgamation of symbols, she is also a disruption of the norm of an almost industrial-working process of lives that are chained to a status rather than being an individual, whether it is the next generation of a queen or a domestic worker, as Sibande depicts these sequential biographies in her series *Long Live the Dead Queen*. A queen never dies, she said in a conversation, because it is just a reproduction of a functional body – a queen, a worker, 'the next one in line'. Sibande was able to bring this condition of being away from a structural repetition when she was able to attend university and to start shaping her own future, due to the political situation in post-apartheid South Africa.

Yinka Shonibare's re-enactments of British colonialism is likewise a form of disruption of a certain colonially instigated continuity, by creating scenarios of the black aristocracy, as he puts on the uniform of a dandy in his staged theatre-like photographs of *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, (1998) (ill.91-95). The dandy, as a social figure, is a figure centred upon the self, and self-representation in the public sphere, where an attempt status and importance are garnered through mere appearance.

A flamboyant mode of dress gives him a certain kind of access to a place and especially to a position in which black people are usually not pictured in the visual testimonies of history. Standing always in the middle of the scene, he is admired by white people surrounding him under the ubiquitous watch of a man who appears to be his butler. This tableau-like exaggeration goes so far that the gaze of his guests becomes intimate, sexual and fetishising towards the main character. being: *between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, the civilizing mission is heartened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come. What they all share is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry almost the same, but not quite does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence.* READ: BHABHA 1994, PAGE 86. Shonibare causes with that a rupture in history writing but also exposes the arbitrariness of a dress itself in its simultaneous importance. In that act, he controls the racialised Gaze historically directed at the black body. Shonibare is a disruptor of a visual structure and narrative that usually imposes a hegemonic identity politics of the protagonist, where the black and the white body exist as symbols of a history of domination and inferiority. The ontology of Heidegger's 'being and time' connects *Sophie* with the complexity of history being relived in the present in the way of repetition of knowledge, tradition and memory as her kind of re-enactment of the own body in conversation with history forces a rupture in the known order, which is infused with colonial and apartheid knowledge. Mbembe talks about this dichotomy of past and present as the systems that are repeated in contemporary institutions, like the university:



Sophie a body or an idea?

Although closed eyes might protect one from the reality around, they do not change it, but they also open up a pathway to the transcendence of being, in the sense of dreaming or inhabiting the realm of religion. Sibande notes of *Sophie's* closed eyes, "that is when she is not herself; she could be anything that her head is telling her to be. When you close your eyes, either you are sleeping, dead or praying." INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE, 2015.

I put a spell on me ^(ill. 10) is a sartorial approach to the Zionist Church, READ: DODD 2010, PAGE 468. a dominant religious group in Southern Africa that combines Christianity and African traditional beliefs, where *Sophie* personifies this sartorial allegory as she declares the goddess in herself, where, submerged into her own religious, signs she becomes her own fetish. READ: BAUDRILLARD 1981; PAGE 88. The practice of religion follows practices of traditional and repetitive ceremonies, to open the pathway to the transcendent world, hence to the state of disembodiment. Worshipping God, Holy Ghost or the ancestors all figuratively and narratively acknowledged by the religious act itself, through movement, prayer, dancing, the ubiquitous turquoise, blue or white uniform, and often accompanied by a wooden staff which characterises the Zionist costume. READ: PEWA, 1997 PAGE 13&14. The dreaming plays a crucial role, as it is believed to be "the direct medium of communication between the living and the ancestors" READ: PEWA, 1997 PAGE 50. and is an entry point of the celebration of the preceded, the striving towards spiritual elevation, and ultimately the salvation of the suffering body.

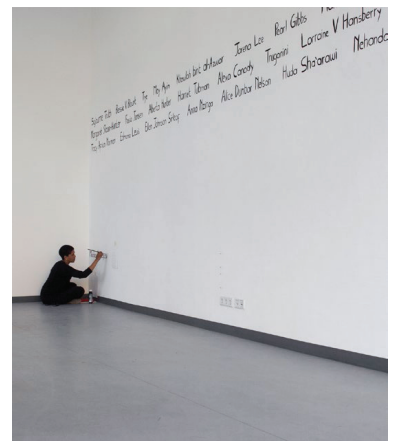
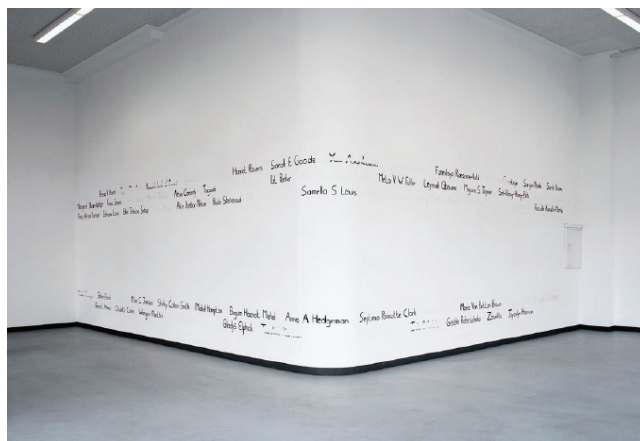
Churches, but also schools, university, companies often conform themselves. Wearing the same uniform subordinates the individual body. The collective body is part of

a system of belief and belonging, which means access to sacred space, such as the family home. READ: BADEROON 2014, PAGE 178. Domestic work is by its very nature something invisible from the public sphere, because the private home is an enclosed private space: "hidden away in the homes and kitchens of suburbia, they are an open secret – such a normalised part of South African life that they are hardly noticed". READ: ALLY 2010, PAGE 2. The domestic worker gains access only when taking on an identity that is given to her with the workers' uniform, and an English or Christian name like *Sophie*, that is familiar to the culture in which she works, where necessarily at the same time, she is physically absent in her own home. Another important feature of *Sophie's* body is that she is painted as a shadow. She does not lose her 'blackness', as the context of the story provides it, but the visual articulation is not needed here, because this monumental artwork is rather about the making of identity, moulded out of personhood as Mary Sibande describes it as follows:

I come from these women; they build what I am right now. Actually, it's their construction, it's their doing and I feel like that shadow will always follow me. (...) For me, she is never real, she is a shadow, and I decided to dress a shadow. For me to illustrate or to make a shadowy object means to paint the figure black. READ: KAHN 2015, PAGE 105. The aspect of shadowiness translates into the aspect of invisibility that inhabits the figure of the domestic worker. The domestic worker, the 'maid' is the personification of the "savage of no sensational paint", or as the poet Adil Jussawalla describes it, the missing person whose body is denied any agency for itself. READ: BHABHA 1994. PAGE 45. These thoughts, theories, and questions are dealt with in a "sartorial access" READ: CORRIGALL 2015, PAGE 146. of the massive uniform and the dress of the 'maid' and the 'madam'. Mary Sibande's work is conceptually so powerful, and complex, because she plays with these concepts like the

"savage of no sensational paint", in order to obliterate them by making them hers; deconstructing them, only to sew them back together. This performative act gives the body of *Sophie* the power to articulate the invisible past by telling stories of dreams and memories. *The image - as a point of identification - marks the site of an ambivalence. Its representation is always spatially split - it makes present something that is absent - and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition. The image is only ever an appurtenance to authority and identity; it must never be read mimetically as the appearance of a reality.* READ: BHABHA 1994, PAGE 51.

The storyline of *Sophie* creates a momentum by clashing with the 'normal' representations of (art) history, when repetitiveness of her dress gets normal, common in her appearance, because the image as a point of identification was made according to a structure carried out by white supremacy, which is now taken over by Sibande's alter ego *Sophie*. It is the event that creates a rupture. *Sophie* is not only a domestic worker, that person that is as familiar as invisible in South Africa's history. She is a personified Utopia, a 'maid-cum-madam' READ: ALLY, 2014, PAGE 45. a domestic worker and a queen, which elevates these women to royalty and acts as a tribute of some sorts. *Sophie* is cast when appearing as sculpture, but as a photograph, it is Sibande herself who turns into that mannequin, as she dresses in one of these huge, floating Victorian-style dresses with the details of a white headscarf and apron of the blue body of work *Long Live The Dead Queen*. This series is dedicated to Mary Sibande's family history and mirrors the her quest to understand where she comes from, where her roots lie, because she is not only the first one able to break with the sequence of domestic work, but also the first who is able to question the past in reference to her own present. Hence, *Sophie* was born out of her family memories as she explains that:



THE BODY

#autobiography #disembodiment #belief #aspiration #beingtherebutnotthere

The concept of the body is the canvas for Mary Sibande’s narrative of *Sophie*, therefore this chapter deals with its visibility and its absence. It describes the skin as the site where social critiques are played out in the connotation of superior and inferior, the body as demanding and disruptive presence in public space as well as the (bodily) uniform as significant for belonging and conformity, especially when it comes to institutions like the church or the university. The body is something self-evident, always present, the lowest common denominator of the human life, while it is at the same time constantly contested, reshaped and renamed. Hence, its physical, natural being stands against its social and cultural construction, which together define the makeup of one’s identity. David Goldblatt’s photo-series plays with the presence of the body as physically absent. This visual narrative points to the importance of the specification of time and space as a crucial factor inevitable for the picture’s understanding. Goldblatt was revisiting this connection of here and there and ‘not quite being’ in 1998, four years after the official demise of apartheid, in a black-and-white photo collection entitled *South Africa: The Structure of Things Then* (ill. 85,24,86). Much as the three photographs, the collection shows mostly a literal structure of architecture, buildings, and landscapes, which is only readable as “Era of Baasskap” or white domination, **READ & SEEN: GOLDBLATT 1998, PAGE 15.** when locating the body as being ‘here’ not ‘there’ within the state of history. This collection reads as an way to find closure by chronologically revisiting the depiction of what was but is not anymore in place. It seems to be a distant look into the ‘there then’ that makes the absence of the body in most of the photographs immanent, and turns the pictures into a nostalgic chronology of repetition and recognition through

the familiar structure they depict. The question that arises here is as to who was enabled and respectively disempowered by the normative. While Goldblatt was collecting the past, but not forgotten structures in early post-apartheid democracy, artists and scholars were discussing the text *Grey Areas* regarding the transformation of representation and structure in art physically and conceptually, of the black and white narrative. Ten years after this debate, Mary Sibande starts to represent herself within the agency of her own body, wrapping a history of structure around herself. She collects her own possible closure, while transforming white domination into a momentum of autobiography, by creating her alter ego *Sophie*. *Sophie* is figure who is independent from her surroundings. Her presence occupies any space – a gallery, street or book page – according to the narrative she is presenting. Hence, the concept of the body is ubiquitous and eminent in Sibande’s work, even though the physicality of her mannequin-like being stays vague and shadowy in its presence. Cast from Sibande’s own body, *Sophie* is a life-sized fiberglass mannequin, at once an incarnation of her maternal family. Her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother were domestic workers in a time when pursuing one’s own dreams and aspirations was beyond dispute. *Sophie* hence represents Sibande’s forebears, and occupies an alter ego of her own story. “*Sophie* is the next in line as I become my grandmother, I become my mother, I become my grate-grandmother”, **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015.** when dressed in the uniform of a domestic worker, carried by the Victorian emblem of a ‘madams’ dress.

Always depicted with closed eyes and a humble physiognomy, *Sophie* is dreaming, building up stories and fantasies of the mind, where the connotation of the body itself does not matter, and the uniform becomes

the dress of aspirations. In fact, the body is the only thing that connects her to the physical world in which she is caught up. Her own reflection is a constant reminder of who she is, and where she was told to belong. The closed eyes seem to protect her from that reflection, which reminds

Did Sophie vanquished the savage of no sensational paint’?

of Frantz Fanon’s own experience, which he describes as follows:

I sit down at the fire and I become aware of my uniform. I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly, I stop there, for who can tell me what beauty is? Where shall I find shelter from now on? I felt an easily identifiable flood mounting out of the countless facets of my being. **READ: FANON 2008, PAGE 86.**

While Fanon describes his bodily uniform, in *Black Skins White Masks* (1952), South Africa already defined this within its *Population Registration Act* of 1950, which classified people by race, into black, white and colored. This shows that the allocated place in society was not a question of the personality, but of the simple appearance of the body and its exposure in a lifelong category. The body in connection with its visual presence becomes a signifier to the identity and to the spatial belonging. The bodily uniform could only be ‘hidden’ under another uniform of a (domestic) worker, as an act of mimicry. While dressing in a domestic worker’s outfit, removing personal identity and becoming suitable for the ‘madams’ house, there but not there, leaving no trace of being a human being – as in the whole of the emptiness of the romanticism in Goldblatt’s photographs.



Sarah E Goode Yaa A
Lara Wobere Fanny Coch Smith
Nebaa Nyabakoro Samella S







The photograph by David Goldblatt (ill. 88) shows how it began, namely with the division of land when Jan van Riebeeck ordered the plantation of a wild almond hedge, which later became a norm inscribed in the law of an apartheid state. As Foucault states in a French context:

The operation of the new disciplinary mechanisms of power is ensured not by law, but rather by normalisation. The discourse of discipline has nothing in common with that of law, rule or sovereign will. (...) It is through the repetition of normative requirements that the 'normal' is constructed and thus discipline results in the securing of normalisation by embedding a pattern of norms disseminated throughout daily life and secured through surveillance.

READ: FOUCAULT 2000, PAGES 49-50.

55

I argue that our reality and most importantly our history is constructed through narrative, predominantly through documents, which were collected in a discriminative process. We have them now in our archives, stored as proof of history. READ: MBEMBE 2002, PAGE 21. It becomes a reality when constituted in a form, which shows the significance to chronicle events of our time in order

What story of a structure does Sophie tell?

to constitute history in the first place. The law of apartheid, so condemned, became nevertheless

the truth and the reality for 46 years for a whole nation. That state of affairs thus is not only imposed by the ruling government as it becomes a reality at large through the people living and believing in it and gets exposed when questioned by dissident forms: "The direct access from individual interests to social authority is objectified in the representative structure of a General Will - Law or Culture - where Psyche and Society mirror each other, transparently translating their difference." READ: BHABHA 1994, PAGE 43.

That the structures, mentioned above can be constituted in a very subliminal level can be seen in David Goldblatt's photograph that adores the viewer's eye with a beautiful black and white photograph of a landscape, the appearance of Sophie does the same until the eye gets interrupted through something that won't fit together. As does the unpacked story behind the seemingly unremarkable photograph in question:

How the archive of apartheid, much like the perfect crime, hides in plain sight, often making itself normal, innocuous, unremarkable, and largely unremarked. As the photograph shows, the genesis of the apartheid system is encrusted in the thin layer of its natural environment. Its survival today, as a manicured, incessantly preserved memory in the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens in Cape Town, gives us a strange but familiar image, and a structure. READ:

ENWEZOR & BESTER 2013, PAGE 33.

Taken by Goldblatt in 1993, the hedge was planted in 1660. All three photographs (ill. 24) speak about the relationship of human being and nature and how it is constructed and perceived. Even though they are empty in a societal sense, they tell a specific story about the society in place. Whereas nature exists in a pure form, the given structure is a testimony but only of being engaged, visited, and acknowledged. Hence these photographs also show the arbitrary nature of beurocracy, how contingent it is both interms of space and time, while nature itself does not care. Goldblatt draws a strong correlation between body and space, especially because the body itself is absent. Mary Sibande captures this structure in the surface of *Sophie*, while the narrative speak about the depth of the memory these incorporate. The environment changes as the beach is not anymore divided by skin colour, but the memory of body and space is still alive. To articulate and visualise this memory means to lay the ground, as Nuttall envisages it, "on which oppression can be challenged and the political appears to set a framework for personal remembering. Memory is seen as proceeding less from the inside out, structured by an internal set of needs and desires, as from the outside in" READ: NUTTALL & COETZEE 1998, PAGE 77.

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Mary Sibande recounted elsewhere in conversation that she needs to know where she comes from in order to be able to build her future. For this reason, she collected stories of her family and created the dress for *Sophie* based on these. This makes these massive multi-layered garments mnemonic devices of home. The home, the origin, is defined by the stories told by the people and the land, the habitat in which one grows up. In apartheid South Africa, that meant that land is assigned to in regards to the skin colour. White supremacy did not allow black people to own their land; they instead referred to home in the stories, memories and lives that were created on that soil.

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The late South African photographer Thabiso Sekgala produced a body of work about the legacies of homelands in contemporary South Africa (ill. 81-84). The Homeland or Bantustans were a construct of the Apartheid regime in 1958, to secure the white identity in the cities while ensuring cheap labour. **READ ONLINE: HOMELAND PRESS RELEASE 2011, PAGE 1.** Sekgala's work pokes on the issue of agency and ownership. Agency in the sense of an own identity process without having a determination

opposed upon one and ownership in the sense of the land, belongings and the freedom of movement.

While Sekgala investigates social structures and the appropriation of the space, Sabelo Mlangeni's black and white photographs of rural areas (ill. 78-80) make absence visible. This series speaks of quietness and almost a standstill of time. The breadwinners, who mostly go into urban areas to work, are absent, while the old people and the children stay behind, **READ ONLINE: STEVENSON GALLERY.** which makes this sequence seem unbreakable.

These conversations of body with the dress as social skin and space with the movement and labour build the complexity of *Sophie*'s translation and juxtaposition with artworks such as photographs of the 'homeland' presented.

In focusing on the artworks that represent the identity of *Sophie*, but in juxtaposition with numerous other artists and their depiction of South Africa, I will take a detailed look into works by Senzeni Marasela in communication with Mary Sibande's *Sophie*.

Sophie provides a platform of renegotiation regarding the old binaries of 'self' and 'other', showing that "past opposition have not completely disappeared. Material power relations mitigate against a boundless reshaping of the cultural landscape." **READ: LÜTGE-COULLIE 2006, PAGE 15.** She makes it obvious

Sophie as act of liberation?

that state systems – from apartheid to democracy – can be changed within a four-year period of negotiations, but that this does not necessarily change the society within twenty-two years of the advent of formal democracy.

To gain insight into *Sophie*'s narrative it is of course important to visit the history of South Africa, especially the imposed system of apartheid. It is given, that the structure of apartheid, as in the Afrikaans meaning of 'separateness' or 'state of being apart' was introduced already with the colonisation of South Africa by the Netherlands in seventeenth century, and the British in the late 18th century.

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IN CONTEXT

#marysibande #biography

This chapter engages the theoretical framework as outlined with Sibande's work, and the specificities of its context.

The concern here is over body, space and labour, and the negotiation of spatial meaning in various theories and artworks. My approach in reading *Sophie's* narratives is one that looks beyond the many sartorial layers at the conceptualisation of space that Sibande is creating as she disrupts a normative space aesthetic through her appearance as sculpture, photograph or billboard. Created, based on her own life, the artist Mary Sibande designed that royal 'maid' as a storyteller of a biography of thousands of lives in South Africa. She is the embodied struggle coming from apartheid history, seeking freedom and hope in building a unique identity. Hence, in the following, I translate *Sophie* into theories of body and space, accompanied by other artists, concerning the issue in their own artistic means.

Mary Sibande is a young South African artist. Born in 1982 in Baberton, Mpumalanga, a town founded in the 1880 gold rush of colonial era. She was born into the 1980s, a time that is marked by pivotal events, as it was a period of swelling outrage and the peak of violence through many political motivated assassinations and massacres. The

opposition (ANC, UDF, COSATU) became stronger and the struggle against the apartheid system overt and more radical, which resulted in two declaration of emergency under the terms of *Public Safety Act No. 53* in 1985 and 1986. Also during these years, the pass laws, under the *Influx Control Act No. 68*, were abolished, opening up the movement of black people into and throughout the country, especially the cities. That law was one of the most important pillars of the apartheid system, guaranteeing overall separation for the advantage of white supremacy. Not only in home affairs, but beyond, crucial changes were implemented and the pressure of other countries and institutions increased, when the U.N. Security Council declared South Africa's new constitution to be invalid and the U.S Congress brought sanctions against South Africa into action. **READ: BESTER 2013, PAGE 508.**

Sibande grew up in this state environment of uncertainty, violence and change and the finally demise of the apartheid regime. She was twelve years old when Nelson Mandela with the African National Congress (ANC) became the first democratically elected president of South Africa in 1994. Sibande's family line is grounded in womanhood, with many of them working as domestic worker - from her great-grandmother, grandmother to her mother. Mary

Sibande deals with her own identity through telling the story of her maternal family side. In doing so, she created her alter ego *Sophie*, a life-sized mannequin in a domestic 'worker-cum-Victorian' dress. As if on behalf of Sibande herself, the

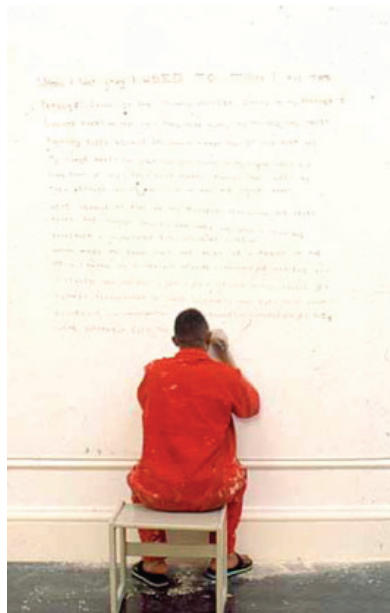
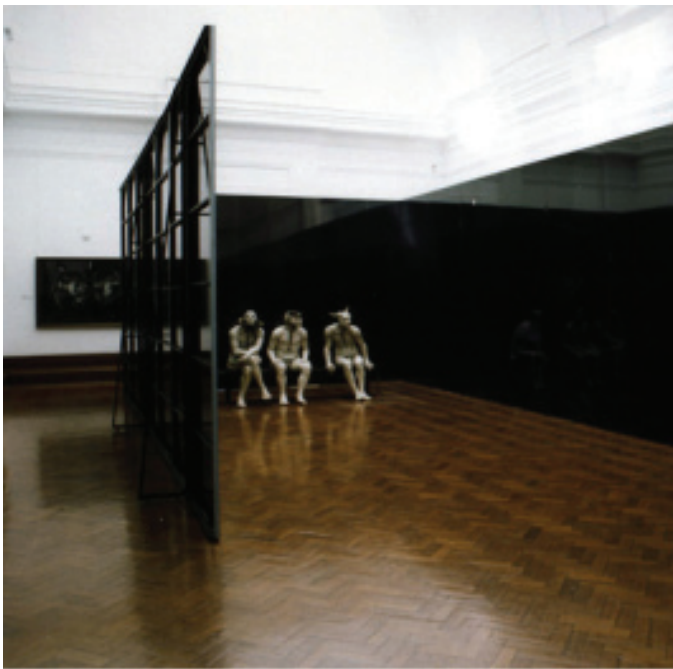
READ:

CORRIGALL 2015, PAGE 146.

Sophie a practice of freedom or a freeing practice?

character *Sophie* continues the line of domestic worker in her family, as she was the first of her family being able to go to the university and break with the repetition of servitude. South African history is one driven by the question of identity and of ownership of the self and of the soil that is called home. As Sibande notes:

For me it was about protest. From day one the body was actually rejecting all; imagine if a helper would to wear that kind of big dress, no one would be able to do anything. So she is rejecting what she is supposed to do but at the same time she is doing what she is supposed to be doing because the headscarf is there, the apron is there. That is how Sophie became. **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015,**





These artistic approaches create ownership of the own body and agency over personal meanings of sexuality, gender, race or belonging. Sibande challenges more the notion of biography in describing a process from blue to purple to red, while everyone can now read his or her very own story into *Sophie*. She shows in that regard that the public narratives of history are not necessarily the purvey of a particular group anymore, its signs and symbols are not static, they can be put together in a sartorial narrative. Sibande disempowers symbols of oppression from the past, by using them in her own context of history writing. In doing so, she makes the concept of body and space, and of identity, visible and questionable, which is something art can be a tool for and the artist becomes an author of a counter-narrative that otherwise stays unrecognised. James Bladwind speaks about the mission of the artist to bring whatever lies beneath the surface into being:

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Society must accept some things as real; but he must always know that visible reality hides a deeper one, and that all our action and achievement rest on things unseen. A society must assume that it is stable, but the artist must know, and he must let us know, that there is nothing stable under heaven.
READ: BALDWIN 1964, PAGE 14-15.

Nan Goldin, Musa Nxumalo and Mary Sibande visually formulate what is unseen, when they expose the state of their own life by recording the life of others with or around them. Sibande replies to the question if *Sophie* describes a form of emancipation with: “yes, it is a transit. And the ground is moving, anything can happen.” **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015.** This time of transition can be found in the period at the edge of the demise of apartheid and the introduction of democracy in

South Africa, with the political and social change of a whole country. This was discussed in ‘Grey Areas’ debates, which emerged at the time of the 1997 Johannesburg Biennale **READ: ATKINSON & BREITZ 1999, PAGES 13-30.** arousing questions around presentation in visual art (ill. 58-62). Artists as well as scholars questioned their own and other’s works in the reflection of a systems rupture. In this debate, ‘grey area’ describes a mental state of transition in order to find a way of dealing with the ‘Other’ in the visual arts and the question of ‘who can present whom?’ “This calls into question how images in a decolonizing [sic] South Africa should look like [sic], and who has the right to use which images, and what the authorizing [sic] narrative ought to be.” **READ: ENWEZOR 1997, PAGE 26.** “‘Grey Areas’ also describes a legislative transformation of public space and therefore a new possibility of movement for coloured and black people in the late 1980s. Hence, it brought access to more places according to the law, where “several proclamations provided access to hotels, public recreational facilities, and demarcated certain residential areas as ‘grey areas’, thus acknowledging that certain neighbourhoods could be legally integrated” **READ: SANG-HYUN 2008, PAGE 239.**

While the young US-American generation found themselves involved in the clashes between conservatism and modernism, the South African negotiations, initiated by FW De Klerk and Nelson Mandela in 1990 laid the foundations for democracy and apparently ended the apartheid era. After Nelson Mandela became the president and the first step of a legislative transition was made in 1994, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) established in 1996 aimed to provide a framework for the society to come into terms

with the numerous atrocities made under the apartheid regime. Nuttall and Coetzee describe that “*the task of the TRC has been to delve into SA’s*

Does Sophie embody the space of grey area?

grim past; the records of the hearings of the TRC are the repository of South African memory.” **READ: NUTTALL & COETZEE 1998, PAGE 1.**

The 1990s in South Africa describe a time of opening up to the world through the new politics and international art events, such as the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, but also describes a time of forging a new national identity. Jo Ractliffe reflects on that time as follows: “[...] as much as we were opening up to the world, we were also opening up to ourselves; things were expanded and it was invigorating to feel the possibility that that moment offered us – as people and as artists” **READ: RACTLIFFE 2012, PAGE 65.** The South African democracy goes into its twenty-second year now, in 2016, as a fairly young state, where the negotiations of a national identity seems to gain strength within a socio-political and cultural debate. Seen in the movements of ‘Open Stellenbosch’, *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall*, it is a way to find articulation and agency for the identity yet to come, a process that can enable the young generation to find its place and voice in the 21st century. The artists examined in this dissertation come from different backgrounds and times, all of them chronologists of their own surroundings. Mary Sibande is however a biographer that reflects the present struggle of dealing with the past and the future as she creates a nationally resonant narrative through her own embodied story.

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THE ARTIST AS CHRONICLER

#transitgeneration #musanxumalo #autobiography #balladofsexualdependency

The Artist as Chronicler describes the function of artworks about society as mirror of a certain time and space. They enable to review a time that is gone and memories they reflect. These testimonies do not claim universal truth, but rather, stand for a biography to which many can relate. The capturing of oneself and the environment one lives in can create a generational chronical, and in “using self-representation to question and define our notions of self, we relate earlier to later selves, thereby constituting personal identity; we also relate ourselves to others, thereby constituting collective identities.” **READ: LÜTGE-COULLIE 2006, PAGE 1.** Mary Sibande is collecting, with the narratives of *Sophie*, a biography of collective identities, in representing herself in her alter-ego she becomes a chronicler of her time. This dissertation’s visual argument entails mainly photographic works as documents of life, whether documentary photography, art works or photographs of installations. They all manifest a point in time, prospectively telling a story of the past, howing a relation between the photograph and the (dis-) embodiment, which is here articulated in addition articulated through the use of hashstags.

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The camera showed that the notion of time passing was inseparable from the experience of the visual. What you saw depended upon where you were when. What you saw was relative to your position in time and space. It was no longer possible to imagine everything converging on the human eye as on the vanishing point of infinity. **READ: BERGER 1972, PAGE 18.**

In the sense that Berger describes above, the photograph is similar to

Sophie, the biography of a nation?

chapter of a biography as it can be revisited, and therefore be understood in context of the contemporary. The camera functions as a tool of self-expression and individualism, and the artist as author and subject of the artwork itself. That shift, from looking at the ‘Other’ towards one’s own reflection and environment gives unique insight into the social, political and cultural circumstances that shaped these works. Artists can function as chronologists of the present and constitute statements about the past as well as the future. Art provides the possibility of negotiation, imagination, aspiration and of belonging or observing. A complexity that needs to be deciphered in order to be understood, what is done within art history, as it opens up the connection between artwork and what is called reality, whether past, present or future. Nan Goldin became the chronicler of the 1980s in Boston. The photographs in *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986) ^(ill.50-53) depicts a utopian space, where people could be free of convention, and live out their personal sexualities. But her oeuvre also testifies to a lost generation between the social struggle and the new era of political stability, which made it possible to question the self over the question of political and social state. **READ ONLINE: O’HAGAN 2014.** Goldin became an auto/biographer of her time and her candid portraits of violence, drugs and death became the testimony of a generation caught in the quest for self-definition. Thirty years later, Musa Nxumalo depicts the ‘born-free’ generation to which he belongs and the search of an identity in the young South African democracy. His black and white series *In Search Of...* (2010-2015) ^{(ill. 54-}

⁵⁷⁾ is “evoking the work of American photographers Larry Clark and Nan Goldin, Nxumalo is both voyeur and participant, providing a unique and intimate view of his world. Collectively, these photographs reflect elements of self-portraiture and a singular view of a world in which the artist is personally immersed.” **READ ONLINE: SMAC GALLERY 2015.** These photographers show with their series the infinity of the moment that meant the whole world when it occurred, a passed micro moment. Similar to, although visually very different from these photographs, Mary Sibande writes her own autobiography with the depiction of *Sophie*. She is a chronicler for a process that can describe a generation by collecting threads of micro-moments, putting them together as a dress for Sophie. The stories she is collecting come firstly from her maternal family of three generations of domestic workers. Moulding these memories with her own life trajectory, Sibande creates a complex picture many can relate to. This is shown by the her artists peers who visualize similar issues like Senzeni Marasela, Zanele Muholi or Lebohang Kganye but also coming from the mere fact that the majority of domestic worker still in contemporary South Africa being black women. This makes it evident that many generations of South Africans com from this background. Particularly when it comes to her photographic work on *Sophie*, Sibande becomes physically her own alter ego, as she dresses herself into character as Sophie. In that act, she is also taking on the heritage she was born into, even though Sibande does not live the life of a domestic worker.

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Europe is facing its own history and its involvement in creating and shaping the world, which includes its history of colonial rule, formalised at the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference. This gathering of fourteen nations (France, Great Britain, Germany and

Sophie, the ghost from the past?

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Portugal as the major colonisers) determined the colonial political-geographical map of Africa. De Bill & Muller note that “the African politico-geographical map is thus a permanent liability that resulted from the three months of ignorant, greedy acquisitiveness during a period when Europe’s search for minerals and markets had become insatiable.” **READ: DE BILL & MULLER 2003, PAGE 298.** Artist Yinka Shonibare depicts that pivotal meeting for Africa’s history in the installation of fourteen headless mixed-race figures in *Scramble for Africa* (2003) ^(ill. 46-49). It shows their lack of identity, their humanity, and their “mindless[ness] in their hunger for what the Belgian King Leopold II called ‘a slice of

this magnificent African cake.” **READ ONLINE: SHONIBARE IN CHIMURENGA 2015.** Similar to Mary Sibande’s *Sophie*, the figures are vague, almost shadowy, in their presence, but with the context of the biography of Africa, the narrative Shonibare is constructing with his installation reveals itself, especially in the rupture of the event and the ‘typical’ African pattern on the Dutch wax printed cotton from which the suits are made.

Apartheid, as a consequence of colonial ruling, seeded oppression for many generations. The presented artworks and theories contemplating this inheritance, find strong manifestation in the narratives of *Sophie*. Mary Sibande and Yinka Shonibare seem to inform a time of transition. In dealing with the past, they create the ground from which the current generation might operate, and define their own space of history making, creating heroes within themselves. Sibande is sensible of her country’s inheritance when she talks about the past and the leverage the system of Apartheid still has upon the present:

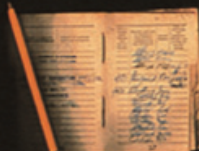
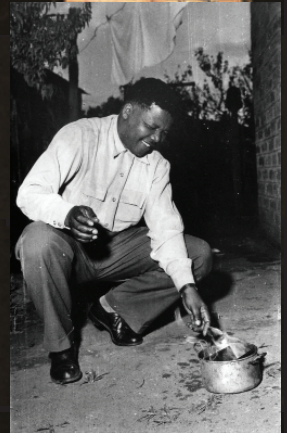
It was so smooth that system [apartheid]. It was perfect. To a point where you had to give it an A+, it was that good. Because not

did it actually click one person but generations because what you teach your child they will become in the future. If you tell your child you are not anything, you grew up thinking that you are not anything, all that is not yours and that is why a lot of people are not taking care of their

environment, because: ‘It is not mine’. As soon as people noticing, that it is theirs, they take care of it and clean around their own place. Pick up the papers, don’t throw anything away. That sense of pride is gone. And you also see it now, people still don’t feel like it is theirs, it is like borrowed. Someday the master will come back and take it. **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015.**

The Encounter with Contemporary History examines the system of a hierarchical geography, into which the world is divided. Therefore, through the dichotomy of the ‘contemporary’ and ‘history’ can the structure of space and the theory of origin as well as the liminal body be explained. This makes it possible to see *Sophie* as a hybrid of ‘maid’ and ‘madam’ as she also reflects the contemporary history in which we live and offers the stage where this dichotomy can be played out.

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The passbook, like the passport, was the object of access or exclusion and denial, playing a crucial role in time of apartheid in South Africa with its political legislative in 1948 by the accession of the National Party into power until the introduction of democracy in 1994. The passes were introduced in 1952 with the *Pass Law Act* and regulated the influx of black people into the urban areas, controlled their movements and access. This act made black people over the age of sixteen to unified territorial bodies, only allowed in the city when of use for the oppressing regime build on cheap labour.

This reference book, also called a 'dompas' - using Afrikaans, was a powerful legislative step to divide the social and physical space. It contained a photograph, employment history, and record of taxes paid. The artist Sue Williamson presents in her collage *For Thirty Years Next to His Heart* (ill. 42), a man's passbook page by page. It tells his 'official' life under apartheid and shows the trajectory of categories important for the white man and access into an oppressive system for the black man. **READ: WILLIAMSON 2004, PAGE 54.** Over the time, people protested against the unjust pass laws, which resulted in

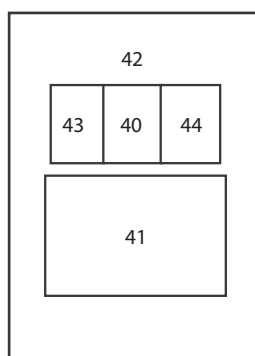
the woman's march to Pretoria, the seat of government in 1956, which is still celebrated as woman's day annually on the ninth of August. But it also led to, what is known as the *Sharpeville Massacre* 1961 when many people died protesting the living conditions under the pass law. In that context, the passbook becomes an instrument of force and power, the body becomes possessed by a regulating state.

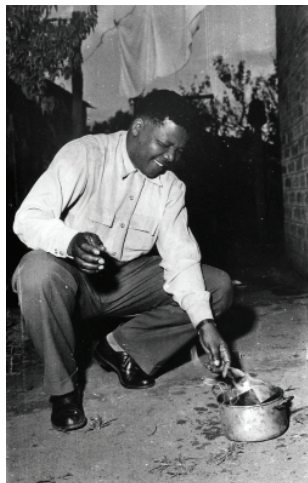
In present day Europe, the refugees by their mere presence contest the legislative investment in sameness that the EU promotes, and challenges the passport as a form of policing of the body and its movement, and the geographical borders used as a means of control and power. The 'Other' as an unwanted persona has arrived in the cities of Europe and anyone that does not fall under 'European' in appearance and behaviour stays under a surveillance through the question of the passbook. This suspicion towards someone is depicted in the photograph by Ernest Cole of a police swoop (ill. 41) in the streets of Johannesburg. What this shows is that there will be possibly always an 'Other', something we need to isolate from in order to define personal belonging. The invention

of cartography gave rise to the concept of the human 'belonging-in-the-world', which is described as 'Dasein', where the world of nation states is made possible by the passport, and where borders have the effect of not only to protect those who they enclose, but also allowing the monitoring of them as subjects of the State. Giorgio Agamben puts this power relation of body and state in a precise explanation:

The fundamental categorical pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/political existence, zoē/bios, exclusion/inclusion. There is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion.
READ: AGAMBEN 1998, PAGE 12.

Where does Sophie belong to?











THE ENCOUNTER WITH CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

#theageoftherefugee #passport #europe #bertholdbrecht #giorgioagamben

While 'Dasein' was explained in the previous chapter as the framework to locate the body within the world and the relationship to it, this chapter looks at the actual implementation of a current situation. As we find the world divided through borders, the body is also a geographical subject. Its movement is limited in the order of state power and defined by its origin, hence by the passbook/passport that states the persons belonging. This geographical body is incorporated by the binary of Sophie being a 'maid' and a 'madam'. Both figures are limited in their movement through the dress and the body. As discussed earlier, the domestic worker is in a constant state of transition between the home and the city, where this movement is defined by her work and justified by the passbook she had to carry with her at any given time. Thus it limits her to a specific geographic area selected by the apartheid state of South Africa referred to by the State as a 'Homeland', which creates a notion of 'never quite being', always in the liminal.

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Today, globally, the figure of constant transition is the refugee, a body that never quite is but stuck in a geographical limbo until the state power decides about his or her status. The refugee crisis as examined above, triggered a general debate about the hierarchy of this world and the importance of the body as valued according to its cultural and religious background rather than mere skin colour. Pictures from current international

media coverage show the movement of masses travelling over the Mediterranean Sea. In treating the body as geographical entity, shows the attempt to regulate the world as it happened in apartheid South Africa, as the pass law regulated the influx into the cities. What was raised in the photographic coverage and deistributed in social media, newspapers and news shows, was the question of the territorial body that is the refugee par excellence. Agamben has noted, "in the system of the nation-state, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection and reality at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of a state." **READ: AGAMBEN 1998, PAGE 75.** This applies so dramatically to the contemporary situation the world is facing and it underlines the importance of discussing the 'body' and the 'space', considering the global events of today. And as it is not possible to cross over borders legally as an individual a structure of unification under the label of the 'refugee with a lifejacket' appears to categorise the 'Other', which creates a distance between 'them' and 'us', stripping away the personality of those refugees who come. *Sophie* as representation of a 'maid-cum-madam', **READ: ALLY 2014, PAGE 45.** in the sense that Sibande provides below, is unified with others by means of her uniform:

That's what a uniform does to people. You have to look like the next person, the next person has to look like the next person, so it unifies people and for me

it was quite important that she was a unified person, she has to relate to everybody. From the beginning I was aware that the story is not uniquely Mary Sibande but everybody.
INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2016.

The body depends on the written document, that decides whether one can move freely in this world or not. A system, carried out by humans,

Sophie as physical and mental passage?

is justified through a mere object, a written document. The body is categorised and classified into that hierarchy until it vanishes, and all of what counts is the document of written words. It evidences Derrida's argument, where he speaks of the perception that the written word as patronising to the spoken word. **READ: DERRIDA 1997, PAGES 18-27.**

Brecht has likewise noted thus: *The passport is the person's most precious organ. The passport is not made in a simple way as the person does. A person could be created everywhere and in the hastiest manner and with no reason—but the passport shall never. This is why the passport is accepted when it is a good one—while the person could be excellent and still not accepted.* **LINE OF A THEATER PLAY BY: BRECHT 1940-41.**

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In that process, I remembered a course in my study in Berlin about post-colonialism, in particular 'writing back' as a discipline that focuses on the narrative in post-colonial countries and challenges the eurocentrism in history writing. I often had the feeling that we in Europe are busy looking into other narratives, when stating the view on it from this eurocentrism but actually rarely see it as one within a whole. Especially the Europe of today is once more comprehensible as the centre, even though it is not any more opening itself up to other nations by colonising them but isolate itself from the world. In connection to the superior attitude of the colonizers during apartheid, its history has a shocking familiarity with the Europe of today.

In that, this dissertation embodies the summery of a scholarly journey, as it is the product of a personal journey too. Coming from Germany in a time, as Europe is facing a tremendous crisis, which not only questions the legitimacy of its highly secured borders but also challenges the social component within the European Union (EU) and is often mentioned and highly recognised moral status. Only in December 2012, the committee in Oslo awarded the European Union with the *Nobel Peace Prize* for its "peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights". **READ ONLINE: PRESS ASSOCIATION 2012.** Since then, and it continues at the moment of writing, where the Mediterranean Sea and its shore has been turned into a mass grave. The UNHCR report from July 2015 counts:

in the first six months of this year, 173,000 refugees and migrants crossed the Mediterranean Sea, travelling in terrible conditions upon unsafe boats and dinghies.

Many more tried, but didn't make it. In mid-April 2015, 800 people died in the largest refugee shipwreck on record (...). **READ ONLINE: UNHCR REPORT 2015, PAGE 2.**

Masses of moving bodies towards Europe, being in a state of transit in their search for a safe space are the personification of what Edward Said formulates as the "age of the refugee". **READ: SAID 2002, PAGE 137.** That physical distance to the known and the proximity to the unknown forces one to articulate, and therefore to define one's own standpoint and to mark one's own belonging. The artist Ai Weiwei is known for his intervening art often discussing the power of the state over the individual.

As an artist, he uses his popularity to state current events. His personal re-enactment of a widely circulated image of a drowned refugee infant (ill. 29) is a photograph that went viral and turned into a symbol of the struggle and suffering for the 'era of refugees'. As well as the installation of lifejackets attached to the pillars of the concert house in Berlin (ill. 27) **NEWS VIDEO ONLINE: ALJAZEERA 2016.** serves as symbolic reminder of what is happening at European borders. These bright orange life jackets are like modern day uniforms of the refugee, describing the moment a person loses his/her identity behind a garment. Weiwei brings back the focus on the 'Other' and the meaning of the body in his installations in Greece and Germany. Refugees, predominantly Syrian, trying to flee death in their own country are often forced to take that dangerous route over the Mediterranean Sea because they lack the visa or passports required to enter Europe legally. A piece of paper or plastic orders the

world into a hierarchical system, and controls human movement. How the sign 'Europeans only' is captured in Peter Magubane's photograph from 1956 (ill. 26) becomes a highly topical reading, a repetitive political agenda of 2015, captured by the photographer almost 60 years prior.

Given this, it is reminiscent of Edward Said's writing about the 'exile' as the experience of a distance between the present location and the own culture one was raised into, **READ: SAID 2002.** which can be seen as a juxtaposition between the home and the destination. Taking these mentioned concepts of the 'Other', exile and the body into account when examining

Sophie's narrative it is important to also mention the concept of identity as Stuart Hall writes:

identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the 'positive' meaning of any term—and thus its 'identity'—can be constructed. **READ: HALL 1996, PAGE 4.**

Ultimately, 'Dasein' and the 'Other' constitutes the unique position of writing about Mary Sibande's *Sophie* in this present time and space and gives the framework to connect the mechanisms of body, space and movement on a macro level as the refugee crisis and the recent South African's past with the distilled biography of Mary Sibande and her artwork *Sophie* and myself as its researcher.

Sophie as political body?

The interplay between the self and the sign, when considering the concept of signifier and signified, **READ: DERRIDA 1997**, which is also crucial in Derrida's writing, can be found in David Goldblatt's photograph (ill. 24) from the series *South Africa - the structure of things then* (1983). The sign as the signifier makes the space from an absolute space to a tangible ordered social space. **READ: LEFEBVRE 1991, PAGES 169-171**. The mind as the signified then reacts to it as the body moves either towards the left sign 'Beach and Sea - All Races' or 'Beach and Sea Whites Only'. "To render the symbolic literal is to disrupt and make apparent the fetishistic prerogatives of the symbol by which a thing, such as a body or a word, stands by convention for something else. To render literal is to collapse symbolic space" **READ: SCHNEIDER 1997, PAGE 6**.

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The meticulous execution of segregation shows especially the third sign in the middle, which reads, 'Boundary Between White and All Races Area', which becomes ironic when thinking of the fluid watery boundary of the sea, across which the foreign colonisers had once come. In addition to the thought about psychological impact Goldblatt's photograph gives rise to, it also shows the aspect of a designed landscape, as a construct of norms and laws, imposed over the given surroundings. The body is detached from the landscape following the work of signs, reflecting itself in the given rules and acting only towards them according to a received label. In the aforementioned book Goldblatt describes the memory of a lady that makes the normative space

What is Sophie's signified concept?

depicted in the photograph, created through signs and understood through a respectively affiliation ('white', 'non-white') understandable. *She too had thought that the last pole marked the end of the racial zones, until walking there with her husband one day she went beyond that point. Thinking that she was now safely in an area free of restrictions, she strolled off to her right. Then, she said, a White man driving past, stopped his car, got out and said: 'You are not allowed to walk there, can't you see the sign?'* **READ: GOLDBLATT 1998, PAGE 188**.

In dressing *Sophie* in 'the madam's garment', one can argue that she is depicted elevating the black body into the madam's position across a power differential between them constructed by apartheid narrative, and further, to stepping across boundaries made by others for one's own imagination, which are by nature illegitimate.

They don't make them as they used to (2009) (ill. 25) is Sibande's first image. Knitting a superman jersey, that iconic symbol of the supernatural Clark Kent. *Sophie* is not only taking on her oppression by way of this allegory, but she also extends beyond the confining stereotypes of male heroism in creating her own superhero powers, which involve self-recognition in the face of :

She [Sophie] aspires to be like the madam but not to be the madam. So there is a difference. Her aspiration is to elevate herself from where she is but not taking someone's else's place. Because she knows her limit and that is why the maid uniform is there, the apron and the headscarf is there to remind you the viewer that you still looking at a maid. **INTERVIEW IN AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2016.**

The title *They don't make them as they used to* (2009) is nostalgic, of being 'made' by the structures of society in the past, and the pressure, but concomitant freedom of creating the hero in oneself alone in the now as *Sophie* is depicted knitting her own 'Superman' jersey. It brings about the question as to what it means to inhabit one's own skin, versus the conformist uniforms that society and authority demands? *Sophie's* posture of creating her own costume, that gives her the power to be everyone and everywhere she wants to, that is, regardless of social, economic or political restriction, can be brought into debate with Goldblatt's photograph, and shows the striving in creating one's own biography, hence the own 'Dasein' in and to the world. Looking into South Africa's history through collected visual testimony gives an understanding of the structure and lives of everyday South African lives. It also gives the opportunity for me as a reader external to this context to look back at my own heritage, coming from Germany.









Whose story does Sophie tell?

South African history is strongly

recognition of the architecture of power and dispossession.”
READ: BESTER 2015, PAGE 74.

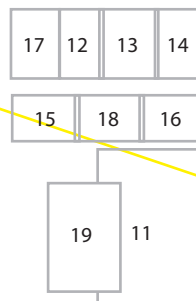
no longer allows itself to be understood in terms of the previous regime [systems of oppositions]”.
READ: SPIVAK 1997, PAGE XXVII.

dominated by the legacy the system of apartheid passed on to a young generation qt once inheriting a post-1994 formal democracy. This complex is built on racial division, implemented by spatial signs and symbols and justified by partial oppressive laws. This valuation of colour can be found in numerous photographs made, among others, by Ernest Cole. (ill. 11, 12, 16, 17) With these testimonies the photographers dismantle a system that created physical and intellectual oppression through the structure of space and architecture, articulated through signs and language, and denied a collective humanity and self-chosen identity.

In juxtaposition to these testimonies of the past, *Sophie* seems to be just a statuesque beauty, apathetic and indifferent, sitting amidst an ocean of puffy blue layers of endless dress in *I’m a Lady* (2009), (ill. 19). But what she does is actually a very powerful, still, and peaceful attempt to deconstruct history and the structures opposed on the black body whilst connecting the fragments in another order, thereby creating a counter-narrative that bluntly takes the past into the present, moulding a hybrid persona out of it. Mary Sibande’s play with meaning and perception is reminiscent of Jacques Derrida’s notion of “deconstruction”. **READ: DERRIDA 1997, PAGES 10-18.** In that concept Derrida points out a hierarchy of words, when put in juxtaposition, which lies in our use of language, especially written language. This defines a lineage of power perception when they are aligned to each other; man and woman, white and black, and so forth. The notorious hierarchy of racial categorisation, of black and white as a designations of skin colour, as well as the position of oppressor and oppressed. The use of the label ‘black’ and ‘white’ is now questioned once more, especially within the movements in North America as well as South Africa, which show that “the critic must make room for ‘the irruptive emergence of a new ‘concept,’ a concept which

Although the oppressive hierarchy of the apartheid regime was undermined to some extent by means of its new Constitution, it is still inherent within the universities, archives and museums as the established institutions of (colonised) knowledge. As Mbembe argues, “we therefore have to rethink the human not from the perspective of its mastery of the creation [religion] as we used to, but from the perspective of its finitude and its possible extinction”. **READ LECTURE ONLINE: MBEMBE 2015, PAGE 25.** This statement by Achille Mbembe comes amidst the current debates and protests of students in South Africa, given as a public lecture in 2015 at Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, and speaks to an alternative way of thinking through the archiving of biographies of both people and objects. The current debates underline the striving to change the power relations of a system that still feeds from the past the country was supposed to overcome when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) sought to bring juridical justice through an act of parliament in 1995. The spatial signs of the past are still visible, its language is still spoken, even though the signs of ‘Net Blankes - Whites Only’ (ill. 14) were removed.

The omnipresent attribution of race to the the human body created a norm and a manner of belonging in relation to geography and skin colour, as the signage read ‘Europeans’ or ‘whites’ and ‘non-whites’ or ‘non-European’, respectively. That creates norm and reasoning, manifested not only in readable signs but also in architecture and structural space. This is also visually captured and collected by David Goldblatt in his series *Structures and Democracy*, (2014), which Rory Bester describes as: “his most overt engagement with the ritualisation of apartheid, especially the repetition and







DASEIN' – BEING IN THE WORLD

#martinheidegger #beingintheworld #Iputaspellonme #edwardsaid #zion

As the title of this dissertation suggests, *Sophie* is the embodiment of a conscious construction of the 'self', and it is therefore important to look into the relationship between the self and the world. Especially as *Sophie* inhabits site-specific narratives pertaining to South Africa's past. To be able to translate these narratives the following concept help to locate the relationships drawn through them. It also gives a possibility to present my own standpoint as the author and as foreign to this country's past. Therefore I will approach *Sophie* as a means to decipher past and present happenings.

'Dasein' or 'being-in-the-world' is a concept that originates from the philosopher Martin Heidegger, **READ: HEIDEGGER 1996**, which I make use of in my approach to the subject and the process of writing this dissertation. As consciousness opens up the relationship between the being and the world, it is apt to explain my own 'Dasein' in terms of visiting South Africa's history through Mary Sibande's artwork *Sophie*. Being-in-the-world is an act of being physically somewhere, hence consciously engaging with the world. For me it is an almost scientific truth. As much as this concept is worldly it is also deeply spiritual in the sense of being self-aware, as opposed to a higher religious being, but also acknowledging it. Heidegger studied philosophy after abandoning theology, and in his writings, he speaks about the temporality and the transcendence of being, acknowledging: *The thematic analysis of the temporal constitution of being-in-the-world led*

to the question: how is something like world possible at all, in what sense is world, what and how does the world transcend, how are 'independent' inner worldly beings 'connected' with the transcending world? READ: HEIDEGGER 1996, PAGE 322.

A possible answer herein gives A possible answer to this rhetorical question can be found in the artwork by Santu Mofokeng, *Eyes-wide-shut, Motoulen Cave, Clarens* (2004) ^(ill. 9) from the series *Chasing Shadows*. Mofokeng speaks about the different meanings of 'shadow' in South African vernacular languages being: "a good or a bad seriti/ is'thunzi depends on the caprice of enemies, witches, relatives both dead and living, friends or associations, and on circumstance or time" that he further connects with his own experience of growing up in a mixture of "pagan rituals as well as Christian beliefs". **READ ONLINE: MOFOKENG, 1997.** In an interview with Mary Sibande in late 2015 for this research, she suggested that *Sophie* is a shadow, not real, when I asked about the black skin. In this suggestion lies a very interesting analogy to Santu Mofokeng's explanation of shadow and Heidegger's being-in-the-world as it finds fusion within the appearance in *I put a spell on me*, 2009 ^(ill. 10). Firstly I connected it to Nina Simone's version of *I put a spell on you*, a passionate love song. Then I discarded this connotation, because the *Sophie* in this picture is clearly a religious figure, but I was obliged to ask, "how far are these two concepts of belief apart?" "Karl Marx once said, religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature. The heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium,

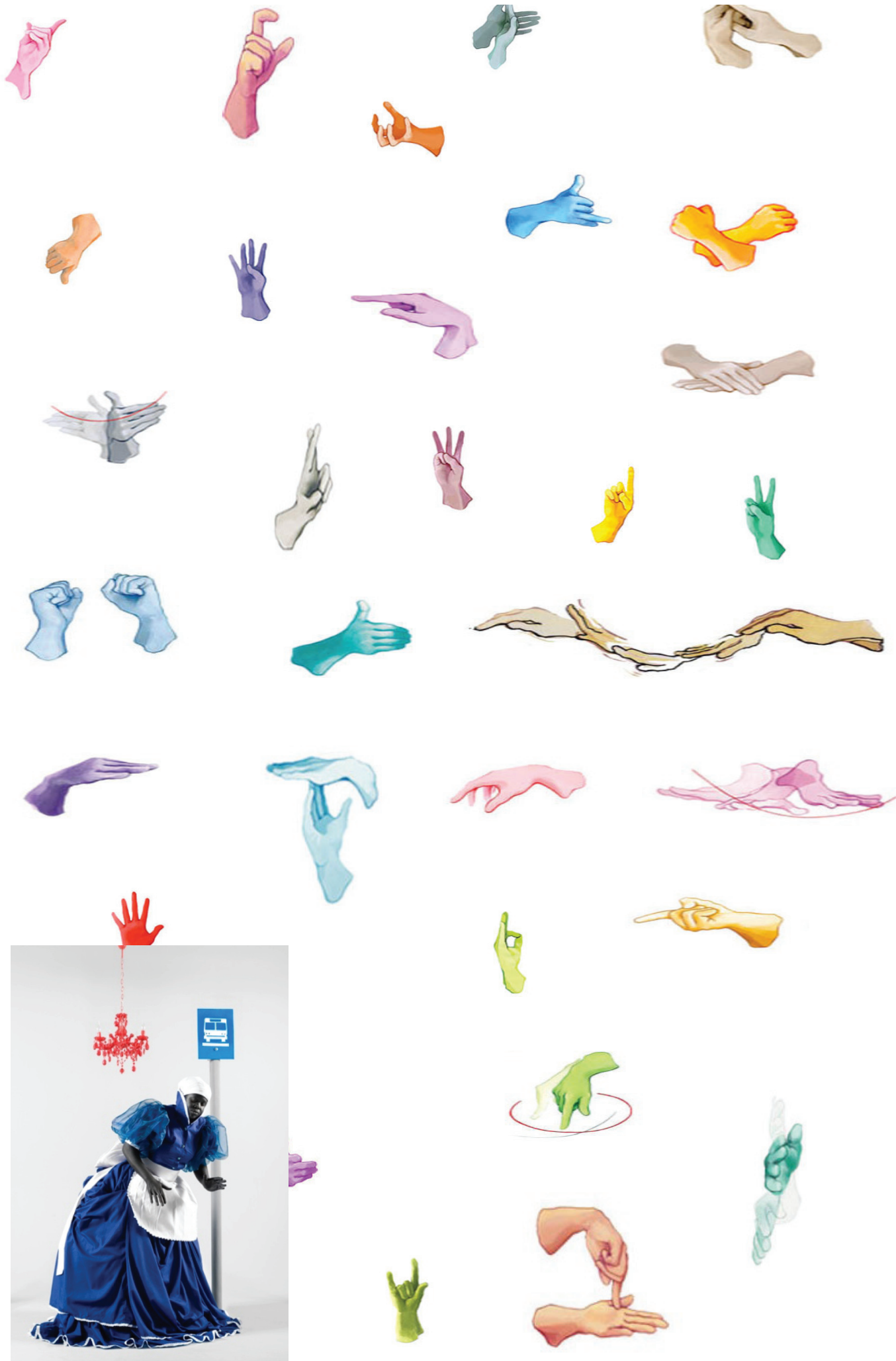
of the people. But to Marx I argue is it religion or love?" **HEARD IN A SONG: RADICAL, 2014.** In this reading of Marx lies the juxtaposition of the 'inner world' and the 'transcendent' world, death and eternity and the history and the present being as well as the acknowledgment that these oppositions are interleated. I submit a reading of *Sophie* as the reincarnation of South Africans' history, and of the present situation of a young generation in conversation with their tradition and their future. I put a spell on me is, in one sense, depicting the Zionist costume, but it also uniforms

Sophie *the incarnation of innerworld and transcendence?*

a larger public of self-empowerment to write their own history, to praise the goddess in oneself. *Eyes wide shut*, the almost closed eyes of the depicted man describes perfectly the state of transition between the self and the world the figure depicted in the photograph. *Sophie's* eyes are always closed but her mind is vivid, dreaming and aspiring on her own behalf in different situations, as Sibande describes the closed eyes as: "(...)the state of dreaming, state of aspiration. That is when she is not herself; she could be anything that her head is telling her to be. When you close your eyes either you are sleeping, dead or praying." **INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE, 2015.**

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The sign as a significant of an environment to be read in reference to Umberto Eco, becomes a visible explanation in Susan Woolf's *Taxi Hand Signs* (2008) ^(ill. 7).

The taxis, Woolf discusses run throughout the city of Johannesburg, connecting the townships with the CBD and the suburbs, without a schedule or distinguished by an official stop. They are not arbitrary, but rather organised according to their own system. Drivers and passengers who knows the specific signs used for routes and destinations use these to navigate this informal transport system. Several parameters are important: the destination defines the pickup points, the point of alighting is elected by the passenger en route. With the visual definition of these signs, Woolf makes a transitional space tangible and comprehensible, because it follows signs that can be learned and understood. This described process of transit is also immanent in Mary Sibande's *Sophie*.

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Through a sequential presentation, Sibande develops the identity of her alter-ego *Sophie* as a process of emancipation, which her figures is performing on a blue and purple stage, designed with signs and symbols of the artists environment. These stages are asserted through the garment's main colour; blue for the first stage, where the focus lies on the maternal past of her family, purple places a focus on the artist Mary Sibande herself, and her path to excavating the story of her family, which is moulded into a manner of autobiography. A magazine is transitional because it is a format for trend, a catalogue, where a reader connects to its images in a way not unlike they might to an advertisement on billboards that sells an imagining of what it depicts. It also constitutes a perpetual flow of

life, captured on paper that can be revisited like a chronicle. While Woolf translates the signs of commuting, which are in place but not necessarily captured officially into readable and adaptable signs of recognition and repetition, she opens up a space of transit. While Woolf visually collects the signs that are used by a public in communication in the present visually, Mary Sibande excavates signs from the past and puts them with the once of her very own life and origin together through *Sophie*.

This may be read as an articulation of her process of emancipation in an auto-biographical act. This creates information that a public-taxi commuter, spectator of the artwork or reader of this text can use in order to translate and access either a space or a debate with the knowledge of these signs. Whereas the magazine is made to be ephemeral, an autobiography, statue or monument, may stand instead for the infinity of one particular life; a projection of one human being and of their importance. An autobiography by its very nature is often about the past, rather than about the present, but simultaneously it is made for the future, because it was not made for the person regarding it, but to distribute a legacy from another time. *Sophie* is not just the amalgamation of the 'maid' and the 'madam' but about the past through a present reading. Hence to be able to tell her familie's story in order to get a direction she sews the memory into a possible future, as it's importance is formulated by Derrida accordingly:

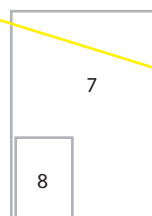
How can we think about this fatal repetition, about repetition in general in its relationship to memory and the archive? It is easy to perceive, if not to interpret, the necessity of such a relationship, at least if one associates the archive, as naturally one is always

tempted to do, with repetition, and repetition with the past. But it is the future which is at issue here, and the archive as an irreducible experience of the future. READ: DERRIDA 1994, PAGE 38.

As much as the described form of a magazine and the biography stand in opposition in terms of their temporal mandate, they both unite the act of worshipping something that is not immediate. The autobiography is used here to point out a singularity and individuality, whereas the magazine represents the mainstream. In addition to that, the last page is the first page, which questions the perception of a beginning and end - a critique of the academic argument. A cycle without a beginning nor an end, as it is the natural characteristic of history, movement and biography. What this methodology of a cycle against a linear approach has, instead, is momentum in the moment it is recognised by a public.

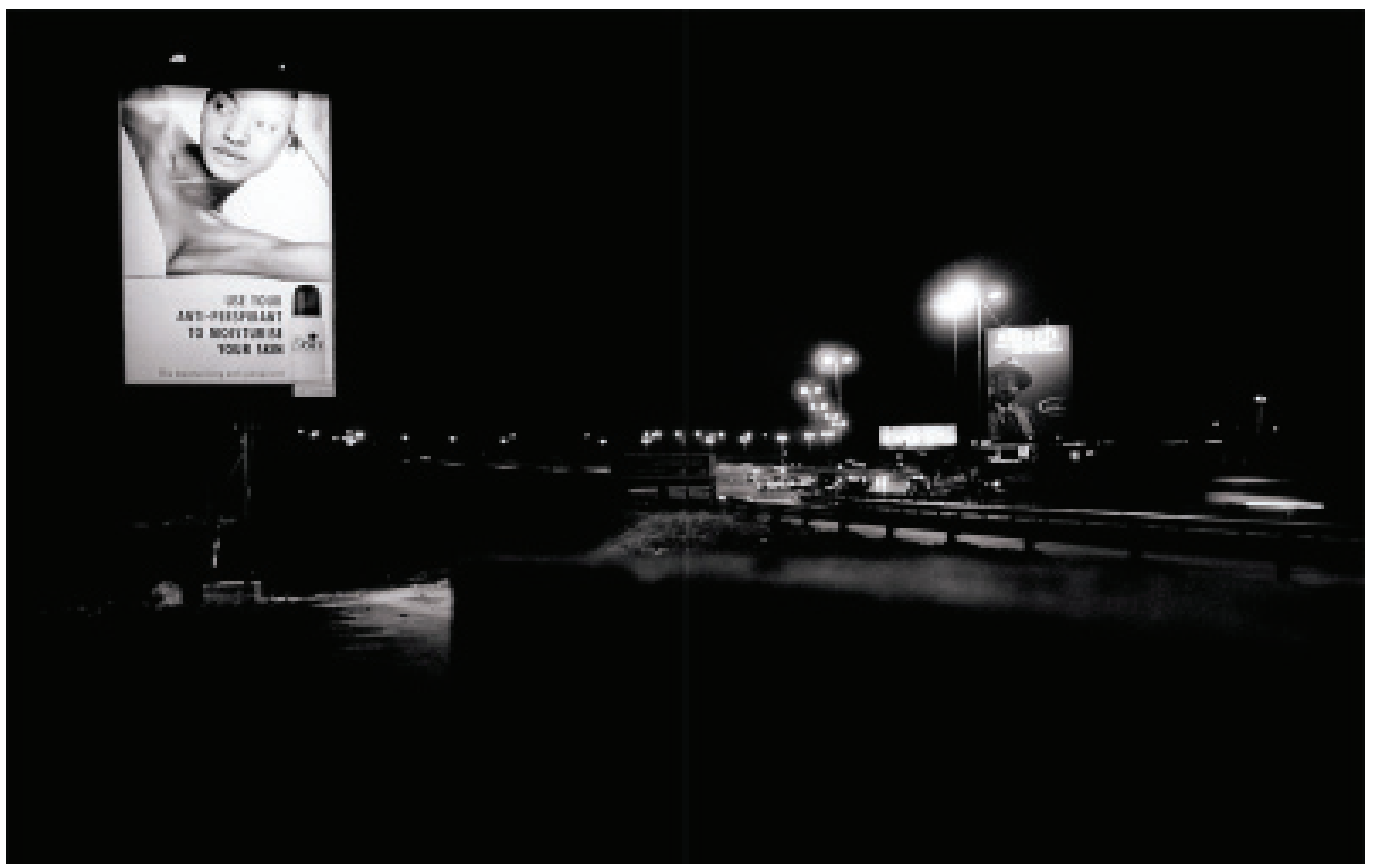
Woolf shows with her *Taxi Hand Signs* the significance of knowledge in regards to power and space when it comes to movement, as Mofokeng captures in his photographic rendering of billboards above the visual power of public space onto the moving body through space. The power relation between body and space, is a core element Mary Sibande questions in her art and something that is currently articulated among South African youth movements like #RhodesMustFall or #FeesMustFall, and their act of re-claiming publicspace, which will be explained later in this dissertation.

Sophie as counter- archive?











Mary Sibande makes exactly that space of the city, of dreams and aspiration, of labour and of identity, visible with her artworks. This dissertation constitutes an argument of this negotiation, as *Sophie* is always located between dreams and reality. This inbetweenness forms thus a negotiation of body and space she is creating for herself through dreaming and on the other hand the body and space that is resonating with a reality, where she is told what to be. The act of labour meanwhile becomes a site of drama, as if a kind of stage. *Sophie* as a character acts as a social agent to whom people can relate, and even though she appears soft in her features, the always-closed eyes, and worldly innocent caught up in her dreams, she is not. She creates space for a discourse of the past in the present tense as she plays with the 'here and there' of time and space and consequently makes location obsolete and central at the same time because she describes with her narrative a transit of a state of becoming. The figure of the domestic worker is historically one that is always in transit between her family home in the township and the 'Other' family home in the city. **READ: ALLY 2011.** Being shuttled between these two places means to move through space. The photographer Santu Mofokeng, in an exemplary way, makes the space of transit, which the figure of the 'maid' inhabits, tangible and visible in his black and white photographs. He maps out a topological space, in its continuity, connectedness and convergence. In his series *Township Billboards*, Mofokeng can be seen to depict the fringe area between city and township accompanied by the billboards, lined up on high stills along the streets. Typically, to find where people are on the move, where they are passing through a transit space, the billboards he photographs, seem to create a logical communication of information and advertisement without leading to an actual place or representing an actual reality as they often create an ideal rather than a reflection of what is in place, seen in *Democracy is Forever, Pimville;* ²⁰⁰⁴.

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(ill. 5) Mofokeng explains the billboard

in his work as significant symbol standing for a power relation of the apartheid regime in the past, and the economic dynamics that followed into the democratic state of South Africa, he raises the point that the billboards "capture and encapsulate ideology, the social, economic and political climate at any given time" **READ ONLINE: MOFOKENG 1991.**

A billboard as visual vehicle of communication defines a space of order and control, stating access, boundaries and discipline, which Mary Sibande works with when she put *Sophie* out into the streets of Johannesburg presenting her as giant billboard. They function within the production process of everyday life and in decoding the given signs, the public reacts to them; not necessarily in a literal way, but in the way of reading, understanding and reacting accordingly. The sign, as that which stands for something, is a cultural phenomenon that, according to Umberto Eco, may be studied as communication. **READ: ECO 1984, PAGE 26.** The sign as an aspect symbolical knowledge determines ways of communication in public space. Without the knowledge of the signs one might not be able to decode and therefore to react to them. That knowledge or lack of knowledge defines belonging and not belonging respectively to a certain space, country or city as it also opens a relationship towards space and the ability to question the given communication may it be done through billboards, signs or monuments.

To classify a physical and psychological space by aesthetic means, a norm of movement through that space is constructed. The foundation for this order of the space lies in the repetition of the same structure and of its recognition by the public. It is that discipline that urban structures demand in order for society to function accordingly. This is expounded upon by Foucault in *Space, Power and Knowledge*, where he examines the relation between them as signifiers of society. He states

that power is not necessarily negative, it is rather a structure everyone can use. He gives an example of architecture, of how a house is built, can inform a specific use for the inhabitant, but rather gets determined by the body itself, which is using the building in a way that informs its architecture, and not only by the structure given **READ: FOUCAULT 1980.**

In that, social structures and public aesthetics are often contested when a society changes over time and space, when the public questions politics and power relations, where consequently, the norm of today is not necessarily the norm of the past. To understand the complexity of *Sophie*, it seems to be important to understand the mechanisms of signs and of structure within history and space as parameters for the way a society works. The billboards Santu Mofokeng speaks about are signs imposed onto, creating an ideal, as they are of a geographical,

Sophie, a monument?

official state. There are also signs of an informal, cultural state, which determine power and knowledge dynamics, which *Sophie* is both constituted by, as she also questions them. Because the sign occurs within a public discourse, in the sense of a tool that makes a conversation possible in the first place: "the way the public functions in the public sphere (as the people) is only possible because it is really a public of discourse. It is self-creating and self-organized [sic], and herein lies its power, as well as its elusive strangeness" **READ: WARNER 2002, PAGE 414.**

These symbols of culture and history make the world understandable and define a familiar space for an individual but they also give access to an environment, because signs can make it understandable.







INTRODUCTION

#bodyartpolitics #spacepowerknowledge #MichelFoucault #SantuMofokeng #intransit

This chapter consists of an exploration of methodology and design elements that are important to an explicit reading of this dissertation, presented as a magazine, as well as the following chapters: *Dasein, The Encounter with Contemporary History, The Artist as Chronicler and In Context*. These chapters together comprise many pages, which is clearly unusual for an introduction. This lengthy scope is based on an approach that starts from a broad perspective on the dissertation topic and is narrowed down by applying distinctive concepts of body and space to the artworks of Mary Sibande. This is important because with this dissertation, I seek to create a distinctive location in time and space, only possible by means of a wider narrative, which generates a resonance between the artworks presented, the author's background and the reader's 'nowness' of the moment of engagement.

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The dissertation takes a multi-layered approach to understanding the body in art, politics, history and space as a moving, understanding and signifying entity. As this dissertation is presented as a magazine, my deliberation starts with its design. Every chapter can be taken to address another layer of Mary Sibande's artwork *Sophie*.

This figure is presented and dressed in multiple layers of garment and narratives from the dreams and aspirations of the fictional domestic worker *Sophie*. I will decipher the layers of Sibande's work with the help of theories and other artist's work in an open-ended manner.

As the title suggests, the reason for the following is the character of *Sophie*. She is not a real person, she stands for many generations of South African women. Created by the artist Mary Sibande, and generated as a representation of the lives of her maternal family, Sibande constructs an alter ego and an identity that comes alive. *Sophie's* guise is that of a 'maid', and she is dressed simultaneously in a 'madam's' costume, typically found in the depiction of Victorian fashion between 1837-1901. The persona is hence a statue that connects opposites, that collects fragments of time and space of South African history and consists of numerous identities, both alive and dead. *Sophie's* stories are woven into elaborate dresses, with apron and headscarf, *Sophie* questions the power relation of space and history as she takes on the space of cities, galleries and dreams. It is a story that connects the life of three generation of domestic worker, infused at once into one monumental character. The

Sophie the personified Utopia?

character's life spans several eras, from colonialism, through apartheid, into the present.

"Sophie is either your aunt or your mother or grandmother or your neighbour. Sophie is all these women and that is why people can actually relate to the work because they have seen this before. If Sophie is not your mother your grandmother your neighbour or your aunt she is the woman that cleans for you."

INTERVIEW AT THE ARTISTS STUDIO: SIBANDE 2015.

The dresses and postures Sibande creates are given material form out of visions and dreams. The garment becomes the carrier of *Sophie* as the canvas gives ground for the picture, but more importantly for me is that Sibande draws connection and makes things visible. Especially that space and labour whose nature it is to be unseen, unknown and without agency. Individuals who are invisible as the 'maid' are supposed to perform domestic duties 'in hiding'. The figure, *Sophie* represents is in a steady form of transit through the city from home to home, not here, not there, she moves through other peoples' spaces as defined by her dress.

The removable wrapping of this dissertation thus is not transparent at all, rather a strong garment that reveals not a glimpse of what it contains. The hands have to discover before the eyes can perceive what it contains. This gives a mystic aura of protection and hiding of unpacking and exposure of secret and narrative.

Images. The study focuses on the work of Mary Sibande. Her narrative is understood through a personal reading that connects my origin to the experience made in South Africa through the engagement with Sophie, and is accompanied by pictures I have identified as relevant for the conversation and understanding of the dissertation. Pictures are used in three different ways; firstly, as a specific argument with a detailed contemplation. Secondly, as part of a series or a wider argument, but not referred to directly, and thirdly, as visual extension without a without a specific recognition within the writing. The numbered reference boxes determine this structure of reference and are used for the order in the list of images titled *Courtesy*.

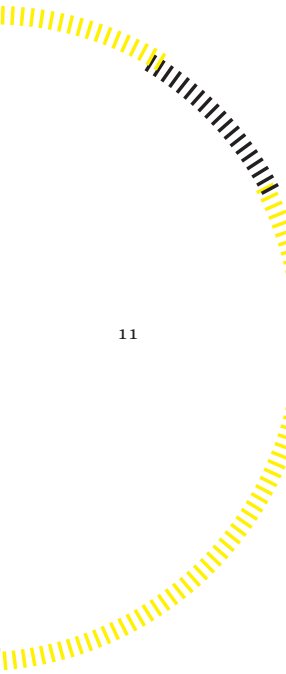
Beginning and End. The dissertation starts at the last page, and ends at the first. This is a pointed critique of the diachronic, where life is taken to be best understood as a perpetual flow of events. As mentioned, the pictures are always on the left, whereas the text is always right. That comes from my own experience of browsing through magazines. Flipping through the dissertation from the “new” beginning to the “new” end creates a visual argument, as the images are set into motion, like the use of a flicker book that enables the mind to bring the imagination to life and explore the pictures as a flowing story. Nevertheless, the construction of my writing started with the introduction

and ended with a reflection, where, during research and writing, the development changed the reflection as I went along. Hence, the document itself has a beginning and an end, without a narrative structure.

Interview. After all, it is Mary Sibande’s story that is recited here, and because I am very thankful for the personal conversations we had, it is important to present the artist’s voice. It represents not only her, but especially her artistic alter ego, Sophie. The ‘maid’, the identity, the space, the woman, the dreamer. For these conversations I met with her in 2015 and 2016 in her artist studio at August House in Johannesburg. The interviews were focused on Sophie without denying my own thoughts and and reading to manipulate questions I wanted to be answered. This methodology follows the approach that actively includes the interviewee and interviewer in a so called biographical narrative, which is explained later in the dissertation.

Collage. Some pages show pictures that are overlapping, from a background and a foreground as they ‘physically’ meet. The purpose of this is not to present a whole new picture but rather emphasize a distinctive relationship I want to carve out in using that method. Hence the focus is on the tangible rather than the wholeness.

Transparent Paper. Between text and picture is a transparent paper. It is disruptive and connects at the same time. It is for you to make notes to do the academic commentary and interact with the object. Everything is allowed on this paper, only in red, though. However, be mindful which side you use or why both sides? Because it reflects on the pages you are interacting with.



This user manual gives an explanation for the specific design I used and the interaction between reader and dissertation it should spark. The design follows a function that creates a space between the dissertation and the reader, as for example, the lines used point to the very connection between words and images. This space refers to Foucault's concept of the 'here and there', in time and space, which will be discussed on a later stage in this dissertation. This plays with the phenomenon, where, the body may be physically present while the mind is somewhere else, carried through the words into past times and situations. Hence, the lines as well as the yellow and grey chapter symbols give grounding, while the the images and words open a playful imagination of pushing and pulling from page to page. On the same token, the use of the hashtack refers to the the concousness of disembodiment, as a hashtack mostly sets a pin to something that is not physically represented. Thus, this symbol especially through its use in digital social platforms became a reflection of one's own location in respect to time and space.

Envelope. The envelope is made out of a domestic worker's uniform. Everyone knows this kind of garment, this kind of uniform that hides the individuality of a person behind its label. The 'maid' provokes inevitably the attendant

subject of the 'madam', as a concept of labour and relationship of employer and employee as well as private and public space. As the soldier requires the uniform to become visible as such, the woman becomes visible as a domestic worker by means of the apron and the headscarf. I argue that the haptic perception of this creates exactly its objectness and elevates it from the mere words it carries. It allows you, as the reader, to connect, to touch and feel. Now, that the dissertation is revealed from its uniform, there is a story to discover.

Magazine. The design, and consequently the materiality of the present dissertation is a conceived construct of its visual and haptic appearance. A magazine presents itself to a specific audience, whether covering the pertinent aspects of news, fashion, art, sport, or food. It is consumed and thrown away as product or collected and stored as nostalgia and 'authentic' window into the past. It constitutes a blueprint of the society back then, like the DRUM Magazine that stands for a distinctive South African past. A magazine is a information device, and reflection of the time and space the content covers. A magazine comes usually in issues, published repetitively, in a sequence. Thus, it makes itself obsolete as soon as it appears, as the next one is already in production to cater for the endless striving for 'the next'. Hence, I use the concept of the magazine for design purposes, and representation of images, but also to visualise the cycle of time and space, which will later in the text be called 'autobiography', 'death drive' and 'archive fever'.

Magazines are often delivered to the reader directly, entering the private space in a plastic envelope to protect the object, as its cover remains visible, teasing at the highlights to be found inside its pages.

.yellow pages expand the frame of reference to visual discussion of greater depth.

.avoiding chronology.

.does a generic formular exist of what the self is, how it is built?.

.reflections are everywhere, but not always visible as such.

.can there be a beginning, an end?

.argument is fragmented – life is not a linear experience.

.this magazine is not only a medium – this dissertation is not only a purpose – I am not only a student – Sophie is not just a ‘maid’.

.this is an object with a subject – this is an experience – this is a testimony.

.the grey pages are important, but stand for themselves.

.identity is a praxis.

.is it liberty or resignation to accept the past?.

.stories need to be told in order to be believed.

.more like a slippery slope.

.the words on the dark pages are the reasons Sophie’s story is told.

.hashtags refer to the location in a non-physical world, in which this dissertation was conceived.

My approach is about hope, dreams, aspiration, about the identification of something we can hold on to, which is not coming from an external place, but rather from within ourselves.

After all, we need an explanation for all this, life. We need guidance about where to go, what to feel and who to be. This is why we visit the past to build ‘the now’. Yes, it might be logical, but this is not about guidance or a formula. It is much more about getting lost and realising the ever-moving self to be the only stable variable.

AUTHORS' NOTE – ON THEORY AND PRACTICE

This somewhat unconventional list provides a guide for a specific reading, and reveals the operational questions of the study. Opening a printed document is a simple act, something one might not consciously engage with. This simplicity although becomes a complex act when approached the opposite way. To start at the end means to think another direction. As you opened this dissertation from the back to start reading is the outcome of a product made in a non conformist way. Why this is quite difficult to manage, becomes clear how fixed it is and how the system works against those who use it, namely those who should be in charge of the system. MS Word, the programme in which this dissertation is written, and I are at odds as I structure what I want to present, so that it becomes a test of self-reflection as it is a challenge to the 'norm'.

.blank pages give time to breathe.

.images give a focus and the foundation of the written word.

.images can be confusing – not answering questions – but raising uncertainty, which is good.

.blank pages rupture the flow of words.

.lines are pointing towards somewhere or something.

.references give structure of the argument but lose focus – searching for the bigger picture.

.is it understandable what lies behind?.

.is it enough?.

.lines that are drawn oblique on the page are there to interrupt the eyes.

.questions are not necessarily there to be answered, they point to my way of perception.

.is it understandable?.

.location, location, location; and the relation of signs.

.amplified questions stand for Sophie's presence in the absence.

.knowing and understanding are two different things.

MARY SIBANDE
SANTU MOFOKENG
SUSAN WOOLF
SABELO MLANGENI
ERNEST COLE
SIMON GUSH
DAVID GOLDBLATT
PETER MAGUBANE
AI WEIWEI
ELI WEINBERG
SUE WILLIAMSON
YINKA SHONIBARE
NAN GOLDIN
MUSA NXUMALO
TRACEY ROSE
WENDA GU
SIEMON ALLEN
JANE ALEXANDER
KAY HASSAN
THABISO SEKGALA

LERATO SHADI
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GISÉLE WULFSOHN
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LALLA ESSAYDI
HENTIE VAN DER MERWER
LEBOHANG KGANYE
MIKHAEL SUBOTZKY
DILLON MARSH
ANDREW TSHABANGU
MPHO MOKGADI
JO RACTLIFFE
GUY TILLIM
IMRAAN CHRISTIAN
ALF KUMALO
HAROON GUNN-SALIE
PAUL WEINBERG
OTHERS
MEIDA
RHODESMUSTFALL

FEATURING ARTISTS & PHOTOGRAPHERS

Is an overview of all artists and photographers represented on the following pages through their works. It serves the purpose of acknowledgement of their works, as I do not state the source and title of the image directly with its presentation. Text and visuals are strictly separated, in avoiding captions it gives a visual reading, uninterrupted by the images' name. The images including caption are represented in their chronological order; as an appendix called Courtesy.

These illustrations build the dissertation's visual argument and are represented in chronological order, the repetitiveness of some of the images show their importance for the reference and the focus what the text describes. They tell a distinctive narrative of their origins' intention but also create broader stories when read in relation, juxtaposition or in opposition to each other



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DISSERTATION

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Sophie AND THE NEGOTIATION OF SPACE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

“We are the sum total of our experiences. Those experiences – be they positive or negative – make us the person we are, at any given point in our lives. And, like a flowing river, those same experiences, and those yet to come, continue to influence and reshape the person we are, and the person we become. None of us are the same as we were yesterday, nor will be tomorrow.” **READ ONLINE: NEBLETT 2009.**

Reflecting on what B.J. Neblett speaks about above, my own experiences are shaped in, invoked by and shared with the environment in which I find myself in, informed by people around me. I had the enormous fortune to be accompanied, guided and interrupted by wonderful people who taught me life, seen and lived through their eyes, which enabled me to live my own.

I have a great number of people to thank. Experiences that will travel with me further through my life and form a unique memory of my time in South Africa, especially in Johannesburg. When it comes to this master dissertation in particular, I want here to acknowledge those that helped me on this path, to whom I convey my deep respect and gratitude.

Andrea von Carnap

- mum - for the support, home and freedom she always gave me.

Mary Sibande

- artist - for her wonderful narrative of Sophie, sharing her thoughts and dreams, and for answering all my questions with an open heart and mind.

Rory Bester

- supervisor - for teaching and guiding me through this complex dissertation. Moreover, for encouraging me find my own way of expressing thoughts and ideas.

Gallery MOMO

- for the access to the gallery archive and interesting discussions about South African art.

Abel Siminya

- designer - for the interest and the excitement my ideas and our collaboration.

Andrew Thsabangu

- photographer - who showed me his favourite streets of Johannesburg and opened my view to this unique city.

Johannesburg

- city I fell in love with - for its complex beauty.

DECLARATION

This dissertation is submitted to the faculty of History of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in fulfilment of the Degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg, March 15, 2017

Supervisor: *Dr. Rory Bester*

Student: *Nisha Merit von Carnap - 974930*

I declare that this dissertation is my own work. It is submitted for the Degree of the Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and has neither been submitted before to any other degree or examination at any other University, nor prepared under the aegis or with the assistance of any other body or organisation or person outside the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Name

Date



CONS TRUC TING THE SELF

Sophie and
the
negotiation
of space

CONTENT
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POLOITCSM OF THE DRESS
THE SPACE
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SANTU MOFOKENG / SABELO MLANGENI
NAN GOLDIN / LBOHANG KGANYE
GISELE WULFSON AND MANY MORE

EXCLUSIVE
THE VOICE OF THE ARTIST
MARY SIBANDE