



THE PERSISTENCE OF EMPIRE: UNVEILING TRANSNATIONAL LEGACIES OF RACE IN 'FUNNYHOUSE OF A NEGRO'

Alexandra Dodd

It is my vile dream to live in rooms with European antiques and my statue of Queen Victoria, photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books, a piano and oriental carpets and to eat my meals on a white glass table.

Adrienne Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*

One of the most dazzlingly catalytic aspects of Homi Bhabha's introduction to the 1986 re-edition of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (first published in England in 1967) is his insistence on the radical poetics of Fanon's voice. It is the embodied *poetics* of Fanon – the *affective* power of his existential meditations on transgressive racialised desire and its mad, sad dysfunctions – that serves as the inspiration for this text. This essay turns around a play written in the mid-1960s at the height of the Black Power zeitgeist and drenched in Fanonian conceits of psychic disturbance. In it, I explore the play's reinterpretation in the postcolonial context of contemporary Cape Town and anatomise the effects of its geographic and temporal translocation. The contemporary production is an intensely postmodern affair employing a dizzying mash-up of genre-crossing interpretative strategies, from Victorian aesthetics to cartoon projections to the omniscient remixing presence of a god-like DJ in his elevated booth. I posit that these postmodern tactics of fracture and fractal serve as the ideal vehicle for the transmission of the playwright's disjunctive Fanonian poetics of race into the present tense.

'Memories of Fanon tend to be mythical. He is either revered as the prophetic spirit of Third World Liberation or reviled as an exterminating angel, the inspiration to violence in the Black

All images from *Funnyhouse of a Negro* in this essay are from the December 2010 production of African American playwright Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, directed by Mwenya Kabwe at the Arena Theatre in Cape Town, photographs by Ingrid Masondo.

Chuma Sopotela in *Funnyhouse of a Negro*

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