

# FREEDON (AND ON AND ON)

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Rihanna photographed by Nick Knight and styled by Edward Enninful. In *British Vogue*, September 2018, London: Condé Nast, p. 288.

Tess McMillan photographed by Charlotte Wales and styled by Poppy Kain.

In *British Vogue*, September 2018, London: Condé Nast, p. 333.

Natasha Poly photographed by Mario Sorrenti and styled by Emmanuelle Alt.

In *Vogue Paris*, September 2009, issue 900, Paris: Condé Nast, p. 299.

Raquel Zimmermann photographed by Mario Sorrenti and styled by Emmanuelle Alt.

In *Vogue Paris*, November 2009, issue 902, Paris: Condé Nast, p. 146.

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Anonymous model photographed by Cédric Buchet and styled by Anastasia Barbieri. In *Vogue Paris*, December 2009/January 2010, issue 903, Paris: Condé Nast, p. 175.

Anonymous (1827). *Journal des Dames et des Modes*. [fashion plate] Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.488079>. [Accessed 2 May 2019].

Anonymous (1806). *Journal des Dames et des Modes*. [fashion plate] Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.487972>. [Accessed 2 May 2019].

Ling Ling photographed by Nadia Ryder and styled by Sophie van der Welle. In *Elle UK*, June 2017, London: Hearst, p. 78.

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Raquel Zimmermann photographed by Mario Sorrenti and styled by Emmanuelle Alt. In *Vogue Paris*, November 2009, issue 902, Paris: Condé Nast, p. 148.

Sanne Vloet photographed by Michael Avedon and styled by Joanna Hillman.

In *Harper's Bazaar US*, May 2017, New York: Hearst, p. 293.

Sanne Vloet photographed by Michael Avedon and styled by Joanna Hillman.

In *Harper's Bazaar US*, May 2017, New York: Hearst, p. 290.

Kendal Jenner photographed by Camilla Akrens and styled by Tom van Dorpe.

In *Harper's Bazaar US*, May 2017, New York: Hearst, p. 245.

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Anonymous model photographed by Manel Ortega. In *MANOLO*, July 2017, issue 02, Published by Manel Ortega, p. 82.

Anonymous model photographed by Jody Rogac and styled by Marcus Cuffie. In *Hello Mr.*, August 2017, issue 09, New York: Hello Mr. Inc., p. 43.

Anonymous model photographed by Jody Rogac and styled by Marcus Cuffie. In *Hello Mr.*, August 2017, issue 09, New York: Hello Mr. Inc., p. 55.

Iñigo photographed by Luis Venegas. In *BUTT Magazine*, Autumn 2008, issue 24, Amsterdam: BUTT Magazine, p. 58.



FREEDON echoes freedom but it has lost one line. The alteration of M into N in the moments of manufacture reveals the hollowness of the word, hobbling along, missing something. Taking delight in nonstandard English, FREEDON offers an ethics of error, valorising a ‘broken’ English for its ability to astutely and humorously comment upon a contemporary life that in many ways feels broken. In its half-hearted imitation of the English ‘freedom,’ FREEDON is at once a poor copy, where something seems to have gone awry, and a demonstration of joyous abandon: the FREEDON to circulate freely, don whatever, and disregard the rules.

The title of this article comes from a particularly poignant T-shirt found in Hong Kong last year. What appears to be a spelling mistake can be a conceptual opening. Rejection of the standard carves a path towards poetic insight unmoored from correctness. ‘Mistakes’ reveal a certain agency, the labour and gesture of the human hand. FREEDON is a moment of freedom from the imposition of ‘freedom.’ It is the refusal of an empty claim. FREEDON calls out freedom’s bluff.

In the Pearl River Delta, where an abundance of the world’s goods are made for export, alternate markets circulate items known as shanzhai. In English, we might say counterfeit, or bootleg, or fake. But in our findings these translations aren’t quite right.

In Chinese, shanzhai literally means mountain hamlet, suggesting an area where outlaws would stockpile stolen resources to redistribute among those on the margins. The word shanzhai retains this sense of subversive resistance and rejects the very notion of a single, original, rightful owner.

In shanzhai collaborations between seamstress and machine, the loom is a potential instrument of rebellion. In snatched moments on unsanctioned tools, the shanzhai shirt as stolen product protests a larger theft: theft of land.

theft of resources, theft of time. The hybrid language that appears on shanzhai clothing - mostly made by women and an object of fascination and derision around the world - can also be read as ‘shanzhai lyrics,’ a feminist project of appropriation poetics, a form of *écriture féminine* written from and on the body. A la Nasrullah Mambrol’s description of *écriture féminine* as conceptualized by Helene Cixous, shanzhai writing is also “characterised by disruptions in the text such as gaps, silences, puns, new images... incomprehensible and inconsistent... it is attributed to centuries of suppression of the female voice, which now speaks in a borrowed language.”<sup>1</sup> Wantonly rearranging a borrowed tongue, shanzhai writing as *écriture féminine* destabilizes hierarchy, and makes space for new insights at the site of non-normative language.

1 Mambrol, N. (2016, May 14). ‘Ecriture Feminine’ on *Literary Theory and Criticism*. Available online at: <https://literariness.org/2016/05/14/ecriture-feminine>.

LIVING IN POVERTY DOESN’T MEAN  
STERILITY, IN THE FACE OF  
F THE PESSIMISTIC  
THINKING ABOUT THE  
FUTURE STATE OF THE  
EARTH.  
THE RESULT OF MORE  
LIBERAL IDEAS KEEP  
CLOSE TO LIFE.  
NOMADIC  
MINIMALIST COSTUMES  
ARE CREATED BASED ON  
SPATIAL DIMENSION  
ISSUES LIKE MEDITATION  
BLOWED AWAY BY MIST.  
THE NEUTRAL AND  
CALM VAPIDITY  
ENLIGHTENED USTO  
EXPLORE WHAT WE NEED  
ON EARTH.  
INESCAPABLE REALITY IS  
REFLECTED PERFECTLY  
THROUGH PLAIN AND  
SIMPLE TONES.

These T-shirts model what we might call shanzhai tactics, subverting hierarchy through exaggerated mimicry:

Logos become symbols that mock the hyperbole of branding:

financial anxiety de  
 weakeens survival in dou  
 profits down CAST  
 Dow Inflation anortgage MONETARY  
 mic disaster looming CAPITAL fear aro  
 SHARES WORTH Crash! nalysts oses stimu i us  
 slow revival  
 assets cial crisis  
 deepens dollar weakeens  
 doubt Interest rates  
 RECESSION FORECAST revivsund nalystsDownturn  
 MONETARY slump  
  
 Global Trends BUST! disaster  
 looming  
 announces trading loss  
 oses stimu i us package  
 asse  
 CAPITAL INVESTMENT Crash!  
 anxiety deepens rates  
 survival in doubt  
 Revival Rates ION  
 FORECAST  
 inancial crisis anortgage  
 CAPITAL  
 dollar weakeens MONETARY POLICY  
 Profits down Global Trends



Language is transformed into an unspooling pattern:

jldjladjflaeijliajfdljfladjlajdfladjf

Shanzhai lyricism expresses contemporary consumer affect in an incisive and humorous poetic mode that reshapes recognizable phrases to undercut a culture of numbing positivity and productivity:

## UNEMPLOYED

Dear my boss,  
I don't want to work for the weekends  
I'm going to find my happiness  
(Skateboard, Read a book Surf,  
Travel, Dance Sleep)  
SO I WILL QUIT!!  
Please confirm

Happiness Makes  
business sense

## Chance

Vogue Meili On the aicxa iswafroj the  
the aicxae mesor the

The rampant interweaving of branded trademarks, plagiarized material, and unrecognizable content destabilizes clear distinctions between original and copy, undermining claims to intellectual property rights. And yet, the rich and powerful continue to determine the parameters of who gets fined or jailed for violating them. As the popularity of shanzhai grows, Western corporations have begun making their own shanzhai inspired lines - shanzhai shanzhai. In its Canal Street shanzhai-style pop-up shop, the brand Diesel sold DIESEL merchandise, capitalizing on the aesthetics of counterfeit and the appeal of a deliberate flaw. Despite this cheeky homage, who gets called (and sued for being) a bootlegger has to do with the continued delineation and protection of private property for a small elite. Corporate entities

can afford to defend their plagiarism as innovation; the smaller operations of the secondary market cannot.

Perhaps the widespread appeal of shanzhai products in the West (as evidenced by the swell of articles, blogs, fashion lines, music and art projects both documenting and inspired by shanzhai) has to do with a sense that shanzhai writing rejects the logic of individual ownership and exploitation of the many by the few. Instead, it retains something of the shared resources and communal spirit of the commons, where communities sustained themselves on land that was not yet parcelled out by fences and hedges - and whose ownership and control by a single person would have seemed absurd.

## ENJOY THE FREEDOM OF THE WORLD

totalitarianism  
I N D E S P E N S I B L E



Largely made from appropriated materials, shanzhai writing can be read as evidence of what Marxist feminist scholar Sylvia Federici, in her text *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, refers to as “everyday forms of resistance,” the pilfering, smuggling, poaching, and piracy that have long been the daily survival and subversion methods of the underclass to enact the redistribution of goods. A specifically feminist framing of shanzhai fashion production links the daily uncompensated labour of women that enabled the development of capitalism with contemporary issues of unequal access to the wealth generated by technological innovation.

Among the many tasks women did and do that are not considered ‘labour’ and thus remain undercompensated, spinning textile was traditionally a woman’s task. This exploitative gendered division of labour can still be seen today where, according to Emily Schultze,

“70% of garment workers in China are women, in Bangladesh 85%, and in Cambodia as high as 90%”<sup>2</sup> and wages for garment work remain unfairly low. These contemporary conditions reflect Federici’s argument that primitive accumulation is not only a historically situated occurrence but is “re-launched in the face of every major capitalist crisis, serving to cheapen the cost of labour and to hide the exploitation of women and colonial subjects.”<sup>3</sup>

2 Schultze, E. (2015). ‘Exploitation or emancipation? Women workers in the garment industry’ on *Fashion Revolution*. Available online at: [www.fashionrevolution.org/exploitation-or-emancipation-women-workers-in-the-garment-industry](http://www.fashionrevolution.org/exploitation-or-emancipation-women-workers-in-the-garment-industry).

3 Federici, S. (2014). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*, Autonomedia, p. 17.

LOVE FOR \$ALAD

pick-me-up girls

Life is too short to waste any time on wondering what other people think about you

In the first place, if they had better things going on in their lives, they would have the time to sit around and talk about you

What's important to me is not others' opinions of me, but what's important to me is my opinion of myself



Today, the manual aspects of computing, the labour of inputting information, are still mostly done by female workers who perform the daily, thankless tasks upon which a male-dominated industry depends in order to demonstrate rapid growth and the smoothness of its apparently disembodied operations.

These underpaid and invisibilised workers are referred to as 'mechanical turks,' a term that retains its orientalisising origins from when it was coined to describe the amazing human-machine hybrid of a chess-playing robot dressed in Turkish clothing (in order to hide the real human inside the machine, moving the pieces with magnets and receiving no credit).

As Shawn Wen has shown, today the term is used to describe the workers, dispropor-

tionately women of colour, who carry out the gruelling tasks a human can do more accurately than a computer, such as captioning images or transcribing subtitles.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the textual and textile 'errors' visible in photos of Google books that catch the shadow of a scanning hand or in the typos of a shanzhai tee are sites of rupture that point to the lie of seamless production and reveal the presence of bodies upon which capitalist industry depends and which it conceals.

<sup>4</sup> Wen, S. (2014, November 11). 'The Ladies Vanish' on *The New Inquiry*. Available online at: <https://thenewinquiry.com/the-ladies-vanish>.

It'sNotWhoYou Are...

It'sWhaYouWear...

I Mean,

WhoReahy Cares

Who YouAre

Anyway

The secondary clothing market in China might be said to bridge the 'women's tasks' of both textile manufacture and computer programming to design and produce shanzhai garments available for purchase in markets and on e-commerce sites. The language that erupts from the speed of shifting global trends, filtered through the particular gendered economics and mechanics of garment design, production, sale, and purchase, is displayed atop the garments, a literal speaking the body.

Thus, while this area of women's labour continues to be underpaid, under-protected, and under-recognized, the resultant shanzhai writing should nonetheless be appreciated as a site of creative agency and influence that communicates and comments upon the aesthetics and poetics of power and desire, rather than as an accidental by-product of faceless factory figures.

THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST

FEAR IS THE MOST ELEGANT WEAPON

YOUR HANDS ARE NER MESSY

THREATENING BODILY HARMIS CRUDH

WORK INSTEAD ON MINDS AND BELIED

PLAY INSECURITIESLLIKEA PIANO BE

CRBATIVEIN APPROACH.FORCS

ANXIETYTO EXCRUCLATING LBVELSOU

GENTLY UNDERANNE THE PUBLIC

CONFIDENCE PANICDRIVERS BLNDMAY

IYER CLIFFS ANLTBBRNATIVBIS

IRROR-INDUCED IMMOBILZA

FERDS ON FEAR PUT THIS EFFICIENT PROCESS

IN MOTION

FASEF CCN.TFSSFS

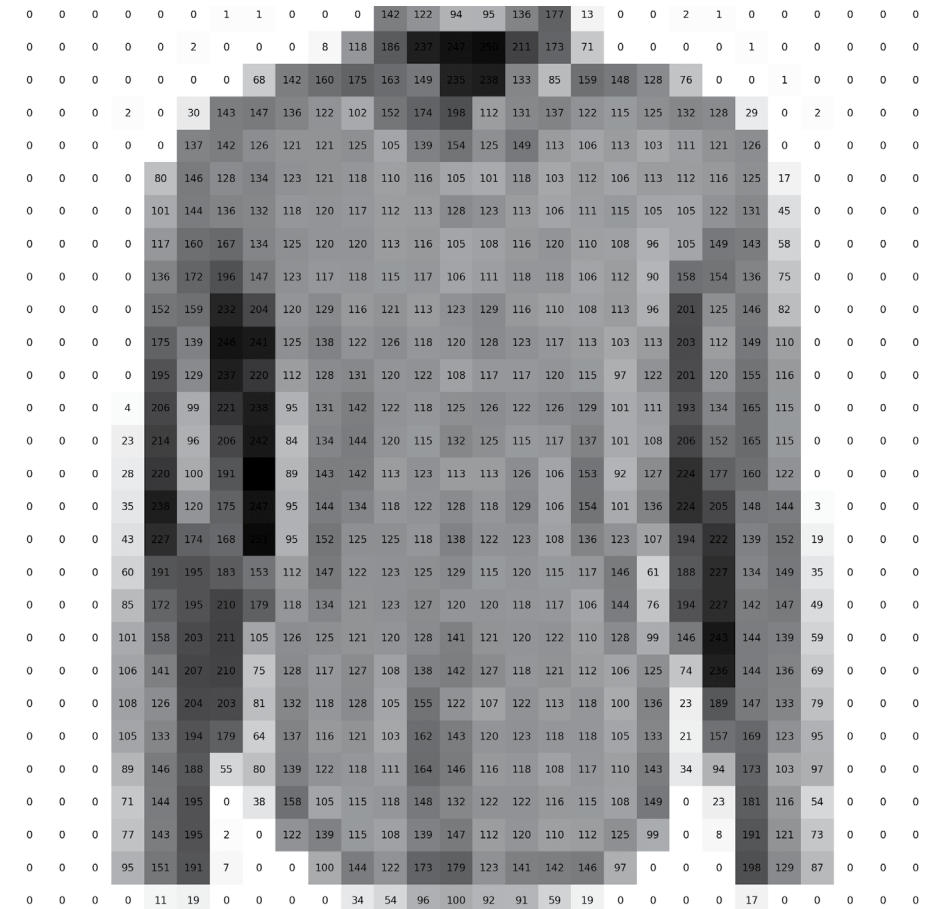
Shanzhai garments are so fetishized in the West precisely because they do not conceal the labour of production and the anxiety of surplus but instead articulate its contours in a hybrid machine-human language that speaks to the absurdities and inequalities of accumulation.

A major site of terrifying excess, the fashion industry encapsulates the catastrophe of waste. The rush of words that covers and smothers the shanzhai T-shirt is at once constructed of and deconstructs

the contradictions of abundance; shanzhai writing is a costume of carnage within the carnivalesque performance of both violence and delight. We babble and exclaim. Freed, and on and on. FREEDON.

*This text was developed in consultation with the Women's Art Library, Special Collections & Archive at Goldsmiths where Shanzhai Lyric's growing collection of shirts was the inaugural 'Archive in Residence' through September 2019. The publishing of FREEDON (and on and on) corresponds to a cycle of work that seeks to put shanzhai lyrics in conversation with artist practices that occupy the 'non-serious' sites of gossip, fashion accessory, textile, glitch, and theft. Drawing on Marxist feminist discourses that examine the contemporary conditions sustaining the historical invisibilising of women's labour (for instance, in fashion production or as data processors in IT industries), here shanzhai lyric is considered as an unauthorized collective creative process that refutes the logic of private ownership and fosters instead the active redistribution of property.*

# MACHINE LEARNING CLOTHING



## THE FASHION-MNIST DATASET

Rowan McNaught & Laura Gardner