

Towards Border-Writing: Guided Shifts of Attention in Freewriting

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1 INTRODUCTION

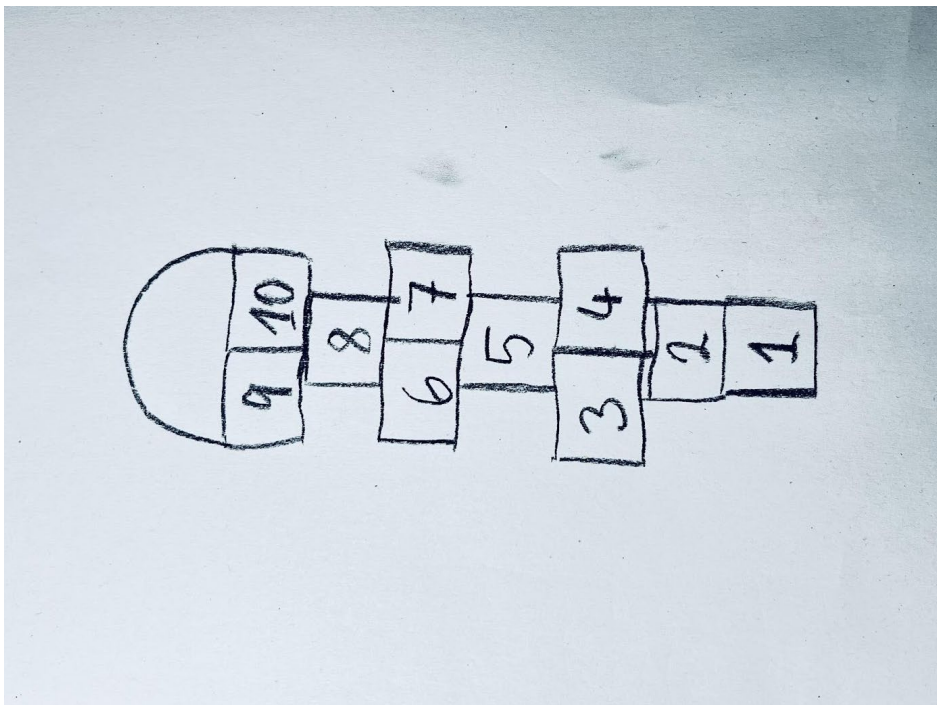
In this paper I want to reflect on intersections between the IWT CLASP Fellows Program and my previous work facilitating writing groups with artists – both through non-formal art education contexts and in the postgraduate studies program of Rhodes and Wits University. Initially, I was not sure how my background and experience would be relevant for writing-rich teaching and learning practices at CLASP. I did not face the same difficulties that I experienced as writer and editor in contemporary art internationally, when it comes to experimental and generative writing. While art writing is mostly determined by the hegemonial art discourse and the demands of the market,¹ the field of higher education seems to offer more space for experimenting with “writing as thinking”. This paper claims a space for creative and experimental writing practices as part of creative practice both as research and as studio work, and in teaching and learning. A space where “text” is not limited exclusively to mono-modal, monolingual normative forms of language, but allows for languaging across the written/oral spectrum.² It is based on scholarly work that assumes that writing can be enabled by creating permission for languaging in “third spaces” that are “interactionally constituted and characterized by hybrid language and literacy practices”.³ But what is required for “writing as third space languaging” to occur, and what does it have to offer for academic writing and research? I want to try and outline relevant moments, experiences and writing exercises from the CLASP Fellows Program and from the Unwriting Group that I have facilitated. There, we practiced writing as sensing, based on the theoretical framework of decolonial aestheSis,⁴ multimodal pedagogies,⁵ Universal Design of Learning models and trans-semiotic approaches of languaging.⁶

What did I learn from the Fellowship? I hope to communicate key experiences: The Fellows Program encouraged me to further unpack how senses *work* in freewriting practices – not limited to prompts, the sequencing of exercises or the detailed script of workshops. It was exciting to observe how IWT writing facilitators

guided our attention between interior and exterior spaces – between sensing, affect, memory, presence and process. I believe that this skill is not limited to verbal instruction or the controlled introduction of enabling constraints. There is nothing that seems “clear” to me about this question, or that will allow for a coherent research statement, which perhaps is a good start. Rather, I want to dare the reader to join in scattered reflections, fragmented thoughts and non-linear speculations about how freewriting as border-writing could be enabled by shifts of attention.

This paper is based in the belief that the meeting of inner necessities and form are part of walking the path, of doing the journey of writing in third spaces, relinquishing artificial borders between “languages” and accepted norms of “orality” or “writing” by activating “multimodal practices in third spaces.”⁷ Readers are invited to read this paper selectively and in any order. While this form might not appear acceptable in the academic context, I want to present it as an experiment on how writers and readers can work together to change terms and conditions of written texts, also by experimenting with what is called creative nonfiction writing. The use of the Hopscotch game for the form of this paper^{*} is motivated by the desire to interweave different kinds of texts to activate a sense of play and delight that I hope might shift the readers’ space of attention paper into third spaces.⁸

* The Hopscotch form of this paper is Inspired by Julio Cortázar’s 1963 novel *Rayuela* (Spanish name of the game), that is presented by the author as two books: one read “in a normal fashion” that ends in chapter 56, and the other following a sequence of chapters laid out “Table of Instructions” which includes the “expendable chapters” 57–155.



1 One of the many possible layouts of a hopscotch court.



“So, what about readers who feel pushed out by this use of an unfamiliar structure?” I asked myself repeatedly while knowing that most likely it won’t be their first time. So, tell them more about this choice, my inner editor replies. This form intends to set a mark at the outset, inviting the reader to observe the shift of their attention to inner and outer spaces in the processes of languaging, which involve constant movements and shifts of focus between listening, reading, observing, thinking, and writing, among others. Echoing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “Axiom 1”, that says everyone is different,⁹ readers are challenged to engage with differences of languaging, listening, perception, and writing that fall outside of the expected frame.

² Hopscotch game played during the Decolonial AestheSis Lab at The Point Of Order (Wits School of Art Project Space in Johannesburg) in April 2019. Khan & Asfour, 2020.

HOPSCOTCH WRITING

Using a difficult form, the paper asks for a radical recognition that learning processes are contingent on infinite factors which won’t allow for formulaic recommendations. In the words of Palestinian mathematician and educator Munir Fash-eh, learning is not about the abstract processes of “education” but about what is done when learning.¹⁰ This meandering, fragmentary and kaleidoscopic collection of (un)related thoughts and vignettes is shaped by following the senses that guide me, both when writing individually and when working with writing groups. I

hope that it will activate wonder and playfulness as much as questions and critical thought. It does not have a single focus or aim, but rather is an invitation to the reader to engage in either the flow of the pieces below or to jump between them according to their interest. And furthermore, to immerse themselves in the process of their own reading and writing / writing-based practices. One focus was to reflect on how writing prompts can guide writers in writing groups (and workshops) to apprehend the multitude of synchronicities and corresponding gestures between writing and its forms of multimodal synaesthesia. The pieces do not follow a categorization, but are collected according to what I found useful and inspiring in the context of my writing work with South African visual artists during the CLASP Fellows Program. This also means that the form of this paper draws from the personal and therefore political.¹¹ Further, it is intended as a form of “sayback”¹² and to point to useful practices and exercises that can highlight how difficult it is to describe and observe writing facilitators’ skills.

TRANSLANGUAGING

Translanguaging frames my writing (and research) practice when facilitating writing workshops and writing groups. To activate translingual writing as part of art education continues the research that I engaged in with fellow researchers of the “Another Roadmap for Art Education” network¹³ and that I continued as a writing fellow at Rhodes University and the Wits Writing Programme.¹⁴ In this context, I experienced the use of fictional forms such as fable or biomythography as conducive for non-fictional creative writing in the humanities.¹⁵



- 3 Bongiwe Phakathi (2024) *Phakathi nomkhathi nesikhathi*. Riso printed poem and digital collage of photographs and graphic patterns. Works selected from a developing zine project of corrupted digital and scanned images titled *Inqubo yokuKhiqhiza*.

Bongiwe Phakathi is a photographer and artist working with collage. Her works explore themes of [land: the use of] space and place, spatial navigation and organisation, community, identity and belonging, and the human experience. She has exhibited in various spaces which include the School of Visual Communication, University of Syracuse, New York; Iziko National Gallery of South Africa; C!ck Photography Festival, University of North Carolina; Market Photo Workshop Gallery, Through The Lens Collective and Association for Visual Arts South Africa. Her works are held in various collections, among others the Arts and Culture Trust and the European Delegation to South Africa. She was awarded to contribute to the Atlas of Uncertainties: Journeys Transforming African Cityscapes 2024/25 project.

After completing the MA in Creative Writing, I started to organize writing groups. I had learned during the program that personal concerns not only provide urgent questions that motivate creative practice. Reading Black feminist scholars such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks or Patricia Hill-Collins during Black Feminist Killjoy Reading Group meetings at Rhodes University presented me with a co-creative perspective on learning – shifting “knowledge” towards dialogic processes and thus enabling spaces for epistemological becoming.¹⁶ Teaching and learning as creative theorization has been practiced (mostly) by women of color in different colonized global contexts. It pushed me to interrogate my socialization in a German majority society that normalized difference as “diversity” and judged translanguaging as “broken German” that does not suit the desired imagined “multicultural” image. Looking at this condition from the outside, I learnt to value the trans-cultural and trans-languaging environment that I had experienced. It gave rise to stories that were not told in the cultural production mainstream. Thus, while the rhetoric of “diversity” in the German “multicultural” contemporary society excludes people of colour¹⁷ from its orders of cultural production in,¹⁸ it continues to extract profit and to constantly remind others of their otherness. Working as contributing editor for the international collaborative editorial project “Documenta 12 Magazines”, I experienced this othering gaze in critical cultural production, and in 2008 decided to move to South Africa where I co-founded and worked with the artist collective “The Dead Revolutionaries Club” in Johannesburg.

This paper is written from the positionality of solidarity with learners who face intergenerational silences of first languages. However, tracing linguistic trauma in writing requires at times for the writer to claim for the “right to opacity.”¹⁹ These and other questions hover over the keyboard while I want to elaborate how the choice of “hopscotch” came about. Perhaps, for now, it is to unpack a few of the many unexpressed premises of reading at the beginning and then to take up a piece of chalk and draw the outline of the hopscotch game on the tarmac of this writing.

BORDER WRITING

In studies on literature, the term “border writing” and “border literacy” emerged in the 1990s, where the interiority of the colonized subject refuses to be decentered but rather pushes the center out. This movement can be traced among others to Osvaldo de Andrade’s 1928 *Manifesto Antropófago/Cannibalist Manifesto* as one of abjection – consuming and digesting the epistemic violence of alphabetic writing and excreting the invading epistemological system’s detritus. Abjection here turns the tables on boundaries and changes the noun “dislocation” into a verb: the

devoured hegemonic system is dislocated by excreting it.* While fluid systems of orality refuse containment by the limits of literacy, words written on paper infuse the fluid ontologies of orality with new borders of literacies. At the same time, orality's multimodality infuses the written language with a corrosive power that creates new shifting literacies, both in terms of reading and transgressing borders:

Border literacy [is] the ability to read border literature, is a kind of border crossing as well as a democratic thought process [...] It avoids a single perspective, such as stereotypic, middle class, Western cultural bias. It takes a critical view of authority and supports the imaginative.²⁰

Over time, I found allies who tackle the question “How to write in between spaces?” in the poetic autobiography *Dictée* (2001) by US Korean artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha that tells the stories of revolutionary and transgressive women; the collected poetry and performances by multidisciplinary Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña published in *Spit Temple* (2012) whose “oral performances challenge not only the sanctity of the ‘poetry reading,’ but also that of the printed text, consecrating and desecrating them equally, as a means to explore the borders between them.”²¹; and Chicana queer theorist and womanist theorist Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa who shows us the way of the *Nepantla*. The *Nahuatl* concept refers to “the space of the middle” in the words of the writer: “I use the concept of *Nepantla* to describe the state or stage between the identity that’s in place and the identity in progress but not yet formed.”²² I find the liminal experience of writing-as-becoming essential for writing-rich teaching, as Anzaldúa reflects on *Nepantla* as:

about my being a writer and how I look at reality, how reality gets constructed, how knowledge gets produced and how identities get created. The subtext is reading, writing and speaking. So *Nepantla* is a way of reading the world. You see behind the veil and you see these scraps. Also it is a way of creating knowledge and writing a philosophy, a system that explains the world. *Nepantla* is a stage that women and men, and whoever is willing to change into a new person and further grow and develop, go through. The concept is articulated as a process of writing: it is one of the stages of writing, the stage where you have all these ideas, all these images, sentences and paragraphs, and where you are trying to make them into one piece, a story, plot or whatever it is all very chaotic. So you feel like you are living in that mist of chaos. It is also a little bit of an agony you experience. My symbol of that is *Coyolxauhqui*, the moon goddess, who was dismembered by her brother *Huitzilopochtli*. The art of composition, whether you are com-

* In the introduction to the anthology of contemporary South African writing *Forced Landing*, editor Mthobi Mtshali writes:

“We will have to donder conventional literature: old fashioned critic and reader alike. We are going to pee, spit and shit on literary convention before we are through: we are going to kick and pull and push and drag literature into the form we prefer. We are going to experiment and probe and not give a damn what the critics have to say. Because we are in search of our true selves – undergoing a self discovery as a people. We are not going to be told how to relive our feelings; pains and aspirations by anybody who speaks from the platform of his own rickety culture. We’ll write our poems in narrative form; we’ll write journalistic pieces in poetry form; we’ll dramatise our poetic experiences; we’ll poeticise our historical dramas. We will do all these things at the same time. We’ll perform all these exciting, painful, therapeutic and educative creative arts until we run out of energy!” (1980: 5).

posing a work of fiction or your life, or whether you are composing reality, always means pulling off fragmented pieces and putting them together into a whole that makes sense. A lot of my composition theories are not just about writing but about how people live their lives, construct their cultures, so actually about how people construct reality.²³

Inspired by these artistic practices, the Unwriting Group began experimenting with liminal writing, between modes of attention, signifiatory practices and modalities, and developed writing exercises and writing prompts, some of which will be presented later. Turning our attention to the process of reading and the engagement of the readers' senses with *language as material*: "Paper" sounds as if the reader had been handed a print-out on A4 bonded paper, while most likely it is read on screen. Still, the materiality of the word "paper" hovers as paratext²⁴ over this piece and evokes different senses in each reader. For some a silent desire to read printed letters on paper, perhaps, while for others it highlights the strictures of academic writing.

DECOLONIAL AESTHESIS

Moving into senses means to shift perception away from the narrow verbal and visual channel and towards an embodied perception of the pre-linguistic (emotions, beliefs, memories among others) that includes all of perception – and to practice writing as process of guided attention, similar to the use of form in cinema.* The notion of "decolonial aestheSis" moves outside of canonized standards of "aesthetics" to focus on processes of sensing and perceiving the world. It de-centers "art" from consumable objects to the process of perceiving. Walter Mignolo and Roberto Vazquez²⁵ elaborate how the Greek idea of *aesthesis* entered the discourse on Western aestheTics established by German philosophers Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten and Immanuel Kant, promoting Western ideas of beauty, culture and the sublime, as well as the idea of the individual genius artist. This colonial terminology is now inscribed in visual art education and discourse. In the interview "Decolonial Options and Artistic/AestheSic Entanglements," Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández and Walter Mignolo elaborate further the difference between "aestheSis" which is "related to popular culture and popular arts, and 'everyday aesthetic practices and the senses'"²⁶ whereas the European 'modern aestheTics' "emerged from European experience and local history, and that became, even already in Kant's work, the regulator of the global capability to 'sense' the beautiful and the sublime".²⁷ This role of senses in creative processes is elaborated by Gilles Deleuze who suggests, in *The Logic of Sensation*:

* Peter Elbow believes that to "improve your writing you don't need advice about what changes to make; you don't need theories of what is good and bad writing. You need movies of people's minds while they read your words" (1973: 77).

Sensation has one face turned toward the subject (the nervous system, vital movement, “instinct,” “temperament” a whole vocabulary common to both Naturalism and Cezanne) and one face turned toward the object (the “fact,” the place, the event). Or rather, it has no faces at all, it is both things indissolubly, it is Being-in-the-World, as the phenomenologists say: at one and the same time I *become* in the sensation and something *happens* through the sensation, one through the other, one in the other. And at the limit, it is the same body which, being both subject and object, gives and receives the sensation. As a spectator, I experience the sensation only by entering the painting, by reaching the unity of the sensing and the sensed.²⁸

Taking this experience of “being-in-the-world” a step further, I want to ask how we could consider writing as processes of sensing as well. In the South African context, “delinking”²⁹ means to resist the marginalisation of African languages.³⁰ This opens the opportunity of appreciating the creativity of spoken language and vernacular³¹ more confidently not only as repertoire but also as embodied knowledge. Listening to the senses also means to permit translingual and multimodal trans-semiotic practices as paths towards epistemological becoming.³²

WRITING EXERCISE

Sensing Writing

Friday 23 April 2021

Our speech is structured by breath. With each stretch of thought, we breathe in to then breathe out the next part of speech.

What does it mean “to find your voice?”

Are you not speaking already?

Write in regular phases of breathing – each thought one breath. Your body is an instrument, your body makes beautiful sounds. Allow the sound to carry your words. Become aware how the enunciation of each word reverberates through your body.

Write as you speak, speak as you read. Allow the words to activate the air, watch spit fly as you speak, watch air enter your lungs as you inhale what will be the next word.

As you see, we will look at the short moments of breath, the ghosts that move in-between words, sentences and paragraphs. The air that is to become the next word.

Natalie Sarraute
Tropismes (1939)

“The traditional novel, with its plot and characters, etcetera, didn’t interest me. [...] I knew it seemed impossible to me to write in the traditional forms. They seemed to have no access to what we experienced. If we enclosed that in characters, personalities, a plot, we were overlooking everything that our senses were perceiving, which is what interested me.”
Sarraute in: Guppy and Weiss 2023

“As I worked, I realised that these impressions were produced by certain movements, certain inner actions which had held my attention for a long time. Indeed, since my childhood, I think.

They are indefinable movements which slip very rapidly on the borders of consciousness; they lie behind our gestures, the words we speak, the feelings we manifest, which we think we experience and which it is possible to define.”

Sarraute in the preface of the French edition The Age of Suspicion ³³

“Je me suis aperçue en travaillant que ces impressions étaient produites par certains mouvements, certaines actions intérieures sur lesquelles mon attention s’était fixée depuis longtemps. En fait, me semble-t-il, depuis mon enfance.

Ce sont des mouvements indéfinissables, qui glissent très rapidement aux limites de notre conscience; ils sont à l’origine de nos gestes, de nos paroles, des sentiments que nous manifestons, que nous croyons éprouver et qu’il est possible de définir. Ils me paraissaient et me paraissent encore constituer la source secrète de notre existence.”
Sarraute 1956:ii

They seemed to spring up from nowhere, blossoming out in the slightly moist tepidity of the air, they flowed gently along as though they were seeping from the walls, from the boxed trees, the benches, the dirty sidewalks, the public squares.

They stretched out in long, dark clusters between the dead house-fronts. Now and then, before the shop-windows, they formed more compact, motionless little knots, giving rise to occasional eddies, slight cloggings.

A strange quietude, a sort of desperate satisfaction emanated from them. They looked closely at the piles of linen in the White Sale display, clever imitations of snow-covered mountains, or at a doll with teeth and eyes that, at regular intervals, lighted up, went out, lighted up, went out, lighted up, went out, each time at the same interval, lighted up again and again went out.

They looked for a long time, without moving, they remained there, in offering, before the shop-windows, they kept postponing till the next interval the moment of leaving. And the quiet little children, whose hands they held, weary of looking, listless, waited patiently beside them.
Sarraute 1963:1–2

In response to this text, we engaged in a dialogical writing processes in the Unwriting Group, adding our writing to an online document and commenting on each other's texts. The continued conversation resulted in the online publication of our experimental writing as *The Love of Writing, or Writing as Love/r: Collaborative Writing as Shared Visual Art Studio Practice*.³⁴

Writing does not take place outside the complex regime of cultural production, where "from a pedagogical perspective, the symbolic order is important because it is the order of stories and of representation and self-representation, of how we choose to express ourselves in a given time and place and to a particular audience."³⁵ Artists and creative workers constantly negotiate the demands of academic writing, the market, or current trends in creative research. In most creative curricula, apart from creative writing courses, writing is not introduced as a creative process. However, students across disciplines develop an abundant repertoire of multimodal, multi-sensory, kinaesthetic (and synaesthetic) experiences when working in different media, processes or materials. Writing can bring these trans-sensory and trans-modal processes in interaction with other creative practices, such as time-based media or spatial imagination. How can we introduce writing not only as a space of permission and of play, but also shift the students' attention to outside of monolingual, monomodal standardized writing? It seems that it is vital for writing-rich programs to engage in listening to the senses, to shift attention towards emotions, embodied knowledges and perceptions, and the senses of community. Considering Mignolo, this suggestion is an "option" among many other approaches of decolonization that is "open to all who would like to embrace it."³⁶ Thus, instead of claiming to present an answer, freewriting can expand writing into senses, where decolonial aestheSis provides a framework to decolonize Western ways of evaluating, receiving, appraising, and historicizing creative practices.

WRITING WITH ARTISTS

After about twenty years of editing, writing, and publishing in the field of contemporary art, I needed to turn and change, and to ask how writing continues cognitive imperialism³⁷ and about the "rhetoric of effects."³⁸

I enrolled in the MA in Creative Writing Program at Rhodes University to see if and how experimental writing could de-link writing from colonial literacies.³⁹ I experienced a turning point when listening to a fellow writer reflecting on how a free-writing exercise broke anxieties around their experience of linguistic displacement after being schooled in English:

The real breakthrough came from the free-writing. We are given five minutes to put pen to paper. No thinking, just writing. And for five minutes, I wrote more than half a page in isiXhosa, using only two English words. I wrote in my home language instinctively!⁴⁰

I felt of two minds about what I had written in this session. While others experienced my second-language English as fresh and alive, I felt defeated that I could not switch as easily between Arabic or the immigrant variety German that my father spoke and that I still have in my ear. When we were little, we used to tease him about what we regarded as “mistakes”. The work with South African writers opened my ears to the beauty of ungrammatical constructions such as Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s novels in the German spoken by migrant labourers. Perhaps one could say that what is called “literacy” grows and changes with paths of unlearning and finding new voices that speak for and through one’s effort to use writing to change.

Artists work in the contact zone of media and audience, and perhaps the seductive dream of simply producing and selling pleasing works that are easily consumable looms large in the background of the contemporary critical art field. While some challenge the perception of their work, others refuse to define or delimit their works according to the canonical concepts. In response to the global educational streamlining programs such as the Bologna process or research accreditation, creative research follows the rules of academic writing, while writing outside of the university responds to the demands of the market. Maharaj 2009 argues that writing is “more than” in the space of creative arts pedagogies and research projects. At the same time, artists are introduced to writing as sectioned off into different disciplines or expected practices, for example the traditional approach to “visual art” is to consider text as image,⁴¹ diagram, or concept, or to elaborate the trans-medial dimension of the oral/typographical signs used by language as sound or text structure. Considering the political dimension of art, however, means to also reflect on how critical theory shifts artists’ work towards densely elaborated theoretical treaties.⁴² At the same time, experimental writing has been present throughout art history, from Dada and Surrealism to conceptual art. Depending on the professional context, artists find themselves pushed to use further forms, from academic writing or research reports to “artful writing” for market related uses.

LOOSE REFLECTIONS AROUND ENTANGLED WRITING SPACES

To go deeper, I want to share reflections around writing experiences and tensions in relation to entangled spaces from my writing group facilitation practice. The colonial history of English in South Africa is similar to, but also differs from other (post/de)colonial contexts.⁴³ These challenges encourage educators, teachers and lecturers to dig deeper, and to dismantle the trifecta of unexpressed premises of “academic literacy,” which consist of the anglonormative monolingual habitus;⁴⁴ the decontextualized learner⁴⁵ and the standardized assessment of research output. While the last limits writing to the output-oriented task of producing a static “text”, the second ensures that it results from a secretive and secluded private practice of “writing” that shall not be disclosed; and the first limits writing to the privileged semiotic channel of monolingual language which is set apart from embodied epistemologies.

From my experience with writing groups, it is more conducive to unpack the monolingual habitus in context of the “decontextualized learner.” The tendency to isolate students from their social background and conditions in South African higher education is unpacked in the influential publication *Understanding Higher Education*, where educational scholars Chrissie Boughey and Sioux McKenna point out that in the dominant discourse of academic literacy, the “student is decontextualized from her social norms and practices, and her successes and failures are understood to be primarily or even exclusively a personal responsibility.”⁴⁶ Written in response to the Fees Must Fall protests in South Africa, the authors respond to the widespread feeling of alienation in the student body. On closer inspection, they expose the long-neglected urgency to examine and reconsider that “reading and writing practices of the university are profoundly social involving the development of particular identities.”⁴⁷ After the change to a democratic dispensation in 1994, teaching and learning bodies in South Africa were forced to transform and adjust regulation of access. The ostensive surprise of the higher education sector to the challenges of transformation is not credible given the schooling system’s continued stratification of race, class, and gender differences that maintains the intransigent white habitus of apartheid South Africa.⁴⁸ These silences continue masking the contextual social layers of privilege that elevate English as language of knowledge. The authors point out the need to challenge “institutional culture and discipline-specific practices underpinned by alienating values and norms [which] could counter some students’ efforts to pursue their personal projects.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, they argue that innovative changes such as student-centered learning that ostensibly foregrounds students’ agencies are “often misused to justify a focus

on students' deficits, once again absenting the notion of the university as a social structure and the student as a social being" and instead continue to feed the success of a privileged minority.⁵⁰ How can writing-rich teaching offer a possible starting point to make visible unexpressed premises in teaching and learning and to create spaces where these questions can be debated and unpacked?

Reading and writing groups can offer space for peer-led practices of feedback and conviviality⁵¹ thus easing the alienation of learners. Further, the romanticized ideal of the individual learner who bravely battles their way through complex literature is dismantled as writing group meetings allow for jokes and subversive practices against this model of banking education.⁵² They further assist emerging scholars in shifting towards a more horizontal approach towards learning, away from often competitive and stressful undergraduate regimes.

Third, and more relevant for writing group practices discussed in this paper, the majority of academic literacy discourse tends to ignore forms of generative writing that are activated by extra-lingual embodied practices of "situated writing."⁵³ The focus on the output neglects experimentation with writing that can lead to "knowledge of form"⁵⁴ and ignores the value of writing as co-creation, and epistemological becoming through translingual and multimodal writing processes,⁵⁵ thus not limited to the scouring of printed and online academic sources and oral performance of academic presentations, but rather drawing from trans-semiotic means of communication that are shared in writing groups.

Scholars highlight how the "monolingual paradigm"⁵⁶ masks normative symbolic practices by fortifying language as "property."⁵⁷ In my experiences with writing group facilitation, I often encountered how the embodied monolingual paradigm is linked to fixed identities and limited designations of nationality and ethnicity based on standardized and homogenous languages.⁵⁸ Most of the colonial normative grammars of African languages in South Africa, however, are not found adequate by their speakers⁵⁹ because "diverse regional varieties of language were homogenised by missionary linguists in favour of one 'pure' – and fixed – single standard language."⁶⁰ Fixed language attitudes continue in post-Apartheid South Africa to overwrite personal translingual practices, e.g. by disavowing ordinary language as "code switching" and therefore ruling out their relevance in and benefit for writing and composition in higher education processes*. Writing group facilitation and writing workshops therefore offer the unique opportunity to unpack language attitudes in context of different aspects of the monolingual paradigm that builds on the "homology between language and ethno-cultural identity."⁶¹ Depending on the school and region, children are not taught in their first language throughout their formative years, but sooner or later the first language will be replaced by the English language. In higher education, this adds another layer of alienation to the dif-

* Whereas US American scholar in rhetoric and composition studies Victor Villanueva argues that "code-switchers are rhetorical power players" (Villanueva, V., 1993. *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, p 23)

ficulty of learning “academic English” which is largely being ignored or downplayed by the large universities in the country.⁶²

Speaking *about* the context of entangled multilingual literacies in the Global South that are similar to the South African context of learning, however, is not enough. Social contexts of multilingual situations where first languages are recognized differ significantly – not only when it comes to teaching and learning but also when languages are endowed with full professional competency across social and economic contexts. National languages in European countries have been from the outset created and curated *for* the racialized signifying social body of European people.⁶³ In colonized countries, however, first languages were not only suppressed, they were framed through the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2000) as extractable knowledge by “dehumanizing colonized people through racialization.”⁶⁴ This “colonial imagination” presupposes “the colonized linguistically and expressively as less than human”⁶⁵ and therefore removes indigenous languages from teaching and learning contexts.

At the same time, the admission of first languages into administrative and communicative fields cannot be seen as fully decolonizing multilingual societies.⁶⁶ Instead, decolonizing the writing classroom needs to be approached as constant practice of activating entangled writing practices. To experience freewriting by shifting gears of attention came as a surprise to me, which later took shape as a practice of becoming. In what follows, I want to reflect how CLASP writing facilitation practices could turn these challenges into opportunities, for example by exploring how writers can “experience sentence-making as dynamic rhetorical action, to feel the effects of their constructions” through “experiential processes of understanding language through visual, spatial, motor, affective, and other sensory modalities.”⁶⁷ For writing facilitators, this means to prepare the classroom as a space of permission and experimentation, where learning through writing-as-thinking can open up to unforeseeable results.

NOTICING THE WORLD

What started out as an IWT CLASP capstone project, mutated over time into a multiplying strand of fractal processes. I felt the need to contemplate not only what I took away from the two-year Fellows Program but also to find a language and form to share perhaps discrepant reflections in response to experiences, also to pass on to the team and other fellows.

After completing the first draft, I started doubting if that was all there was. I was pulled in by different threads that ran through IWT CLASP workshops. I noticed

how these began developing a conversation around the writing group facilitation work that I had been doing so far, and more narrowly how facilitators can begin freewriting exercises and guide the awareness of the writer. I wanted to find out more about how writing prompts shift the attention in focused freewriting. These were suggested by prompts such as “What did you notice this morning on the way to the classroom?” inviting us to revisit recent impressions of the space we just arrived at. Activating our senses in the present movements of writing, through touch, vision, sound, temperature, or weather – or shifting attention to rather recent fleeting and marginal experiences that stood out – highlights our liminal and at times weird or paradoxical experiences that create a space of shared perception. These moments of recognition of a shared humanity would otherwise have slipped my attention.

In preparation for the first writing prompt at the cohort’s Bogotá meeting we listened to haikus from the Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō’s prose-and-poetry travel diary *Oku no Hosomichi* (“Back Roads to Far Towns” or “The Narrow Road Through the Provinces”). From my notes during the introduction of this work of haibun (a literary form that combines prose and haiku):

*The interchangeability of interiority and the external – how turning inside
the inside-out and the outside-in
can lead to a path of facing reality differently
and/or as a way to see oneself in a constant process
of growth and mending and to gather the courage of doing it.*

Now, nearly two years later, this interweaving movement between interiority and external senses sparks up as a red thread throughout this capstone project. To write means also to shift with ease one’s attention between the language of thought, the pre-verbal realm of embodied sensing, affect and emotions, the imagination and the outside of the material world. Magic appears as it condenses in the lines of written language. It is only now that I notice the synchronicities and overlapping moments between the work done by the Unwriting Group and the CLASP Fellows Program. I hope that this paper can recreate these fragile spaces of in-between.

Many writing prompts stayed with me. One stands out, where Derek Furr asked us to revisit “scenes of learning / scenes of instruction” and to explore through loop writing narratives of learning. The prompts were sequenced as follows:

- 1 Tell a story of a learning experience that was important for you.
- 2 Look at the story and write to reflect “who was the teacher” (not as in the person, but the agent of teaching) and what made learning happen and how did it occur?

- 3 Consider the environment and context: What influenced this moment and what did you feel had an impact?
- 4 What is left unsaid? Is there anything else that you want to add about this learning experience?
- 5 Work in groups and share your writing. Keep time and note common ideas and create a list of principles of learning.

Much later I noticed that we had followed a similar sequence of guiding the attention of the writing group between interior and exterior spaces to the relational, between noticing the world towards how we relate to each other.

BEGINNINGS 1

Over the two years of the Fellows Program I learned a lot about beginnings. Each teaching situation is different and the schedule changes slightly in every moment when learners meet. I say “learners meet” because it seems overlooked easily how much facilitators, lecturers, teachers and educators learn from students in the classroom. The work of beginnings is almost invisible, a short opening remark or reminder, a gesture or framing device. In my experience, the strongest are continuous and create coherence across meetings – for example, when facilitators participate in and complete the same writing exercise with.

The guided shift between reflection, observation and relationality is an offer to engage in a shared experience – as if opening the window on a continued interior monologue that at times gets stuck on the forces of circumstance, necessities, pursuits of intellectual or creative endeavors, or other goal-oriented activities. The prompts made us pause. They created a space for sensing and being.

After a walkabout of the PhD exhibition “working title” with Associate Professor in Psychology Peace Kiguwa, we spoke about how visual, sensory, and affective experiences are activated by the installation. I listened to their thoughts on how the individual parts of the exhibition at Wits Art Museum (29 July to 7 September 2024) *work together* and *work to gather* the visitors’ senses. The installation combines interactive works, a video screening, writing-drawings and silkscreen prints. It invites visitors to experience a continuum between my internal world and the gesture of writing as bodily movement. Entering the exhibition, visitors are invited to let marbles run down an incline in the gallery floor on a paper track, and to contemplate their trace in the wake of this “marble run”. This sense of playfulness was extended by offering different spaces for writing – sitting on the floor or standing at a high table. A video projection narrates my biomythography that is invisibly foreshadowed

by the invitation to partake in the joy and delight of the marble run. On the opposite wall, a 10-meter-long scroll of fabiano paper shows something that could be silk-screen printed alien glyphs. The installation aims to turn “artworks” into conversation pieces⁶⁸ that inspire visitors to engage in dialogue with and about the work. By juxtaposing works that are “unreadable” with others that are easily accessible (playing with marbles, drawing or writing on large pieces of paper) the installation tried to shift the viewers’ attention to each other, and to the surrounding space: The hypothesis being that visitors might either reject engagement or are carried by a shared curiosity into collaborative processes when exposed to incomprehensible works. Grant Kester discusses frameworks for “empathetic identification” which provide opportunities where we “both know and feel our connectedness with others”: “the process of collaborative production that occurs in the works I am discussing (involving both verbal and bodily interaction) can help to generate this insight while at the same time allowing for a discursive exchange that can acknowledge, rather than exile, the nonverbal.”⁶⁹ This concern to work towards a “dialogical aesthetic” is where I think the work of the Unwriting Group intersects with experiences with CLASP IWT writing processes, both acknowledging and striving to activate the intertextualities of the pre-verbal, relational and sensory. In my work, I intended for the silkscreen pieces to make accessible the fluid trans-semiotic multimodality that combines speaking and writing natural language, including mistakes and slippages. Without being obvious or instructional, the installation tries to communicate “linguaging” as a coding that is weighed down by the discrepancy between consciousness, awareness, the assumed state of “being awake” between physiological and psychological processes. Invoking a suspension of the schooled discrepancy between organic life and abstract elements of languaging, it invites visitors to experience the ephemeral movements of languaging between creation and loss. On a larger scale, life itself is a liminal experience. For me, writing means to make space for waking up every day to a different self, a different zone of being, where sleep is an active process in this constantly changing border-being. In the walkabout, I told my friend about recurring dreams and how they alternate between a desperate search for a home, where I end up experiencing boxes in boxes that continue indefinitely in a surrealist nightmare and the enjoyment of an open, organic swinging and moving home that allows constant change and mutation. My dreams are an active resource for my research.

UNWRITING GROUP STORIES

Facilitating the “Unwriting Group” with visual artists over the past years, we found an organic way to come up with writing prompts. At times, guests presented their work and the group would freewrite in response. Other times, participants presented drafts, poems, multimedia work or their research proposal for the group to give feedback, discuss and freewrite on. We had started meeting in the year before the Covid-19 lockdown, when the weekly meetings became a welcome event for members (see Du Preez and Le Grange 2020 discuss difficulties of online learning for learners in South Africa). Participants joined whenever it suited them. In the beginning, it was offered as open office hour for Wits postgraduate students on Fridays between 11am and 1pm, where no prior notice of attendance, or apology was required. This would allow people to flexibly drop in if and when they had something to present. Over time, others from places such as Market Photo Workshop, the Academy of Television and Screen Arts, University of Pretoria, Turbine Art Fair, and others joined our mailing list. Keeping the meetings open and flexible, no schedule or program was required, and new participants were informed about the meeting format as they joined.

As a result, each meeting was different and was shaped by the needs and interests of participants. Much later, looking back at the experience, we found that this freedom and sense of permission is enabled by an ethic of sharing writing processes. At the same time, this ethic also created the space – or else we would not have returned without questioning it. We then reflected on how this attitude is very close to that of musicians playing together, where the group holds the base rhythm while someone speaks, presents their writing, or adds their voice to shift the trajectory or perspective. I had managed quite soon to shed the task of the facilitator, which was to present the agenda, introduce new participants, or to suggest writing exercises. With the group becoming attuned, the meetings were carried by a shared concern for writing in different ways, which also motivated us to return each week. We took turns in welcoming new members and coordinating the session by listening to the rhythm of the meeting and to develop writing prompts that would be in tune with the shifts of attention, some of which I will share here.

My writing now moves to the hand and its memories of touchedness, the hand does what a hand does and I feel that language gives the hand an agentivity that other body parts don't easily achieve – the hand is doing digital work in two ways, where the finger is a digit and it sets into motion digits which are part of calculation processes. Typing into complex digital communication devices a single finger movement accesses the dissemination of signs in ways that surpass anything that could be possible done physically in a split second of typing.

Writing, I move the pen across the page | the page is limited | feel the borders of its physical shape. My imagination outruns the speed of writing until they engage in a dance:

There, listen to the sounds of bodies reaching outside of their physical boundaries towards each other, towards a firm hold just to be hurled towards the next quantum leap of minute reaction time space continuum: Eeeeeeeeeeeee – Eeeeeeeeeeeee – Eeeeeeeeeeeee – expanding their bodies outside of their skins, reaching and failing, reaching out to grasp something – anything really, beseeching this skeletal-muscular-tendon coated shape to inch further towards a point to hold on to, to expand that bone that joint that muscle just a notch further towards anything that resembles a bed-rock, to stretch that hand further to find a footing, to force this limb to lengthen further to a point that could provide support, a moment of stability or stillness – and as we strive to find a way out of our bodies towards a changed movement, further towards a point that appears so clearly in front of us, we find ourselves thrown back, three, four levels down to an earlier point of departure, miles away what we aimed for. No, I am not ready for this.

I can't pinpoint how this text about Pebofatso Mokoena's work came about. A few weeks before the walkabout of the exhibition "WAV – Inscriptions of Abstractions" at Aspire Art in Johannesburg, choreographer and dancer Toby Ngomane facilitated a body writing session at Bag Factory. We imagined extending our bodies outside of their physical boundaries, using sound. Not knowing what I was about to do, my writing took over and a text unreeled, as I wrote, in real-time:

Why am I moving so fast, they forgot to add brakes to this life! What's going on? Who is responsible for this outrage, is there any point of return in this thing called life, a manual for the experience of boundless nows and thens, inside of a red-hot pulsing body, encased in skin and hair and it itches and the sensations come from each and every side! I never asked for this! Where can I recall this order, how do I steer this spaceship called body? What and when is this? Who placed those gelatinous, shiny things in front of myself, light shines through glibbery squishy orbicules and like magic they turn the world upside down and shove lights colours lines shapes textures dust and grain onto those receptors which compute hectically click-clack-clickety- clack-click...

LISTENING TO THE HAND

I think that the heightened sense of listening to each other led to a more productive freewriting environment. The discussion around freewriting often centers around which prompts are most useful, and literature discusses different strategies of structuring, sequencing and formulating writing prompts.⁷⁰ The hopscotch arrangement of exercises interspersed by thoughts (and vice versa) aims to facilitate an imagination of how strategies of writing group facilitation could allow for a fluid conversation that is led by a conversation and a shared attention to each other, the space, and the writing processes. In the process, we began to develop writing prompts as conceptual metaphors which inspired writing exercises in imaginative ways.

FREEWITING THAT IS NOT

The Unwriting Group started as part of the Wits School of Arts Postgraduate Program in 2019/2020, when I worked as a Senior Writing Fellow at the Wits Writing Program. In the beginning, I continued the practice of open writing workshops that could lead to the formation of writing groups, which I had practiced at the Centre for Postgraduate Studies supervised by Professor Sioux McKenna at Rhodes University between 2016 and 2018, and the group of facilitators co-published two articles during that time. Observing that students from different backgrounds approached the freewriting exercises differently, we began to share experiences on how to respond to students' difficulties. Some raised concerns that they did not feel comfortable with the task, or that they did not know "how to do it." At that time, I attended the MA program in Creative Writing, mostly because I felt more and more alienated with the contemporary art discourse that I had been working in. When freewriting with artists, I had considered it more as part of the oppositional practice of surrealist "automatic writing," which does not focus on any given task – for example, as exercise of brainstorming, mapping, meditation, centering, or freeing language.

I find that Donald Murray's approach to Focused Freewriting opens a space for the writer to listen to their intuition, rather than disregard the feeling if freewriting "works" or to follow a formula:

Another technique I have found productive is freewriting. When you freewrite you sit down and let the writing flow, seeing if language will carry you towards meaning. Sometimes this is called automatic writing. It is writing

which seems to be writing without thinking. You have to suspend critical judgment, as you do when brainstorming or mapping, and hope that something will happen.

I'm never sure that anything will happen. In fact, right now I feel the fear in my stomach that nothing will come. It really doesn't matter. Some days the writing comes, and some days it doesn't. If free writing doesn't work I'll try brainstorming or mapping, or staring out the window, or turn to another project, or get a cup of tea, or take a walk, or otherwise create an interruption. But in a few minutes I'll be back, and something will work, most of the time.⁷¹

This framing allows for doubt, to “write and see” if anything will happen at all, and then to listen to the instruction: “It really doesn't matter. Some days the writing comes, and some days it doesn't.” It adds another level of sensing to the repertoire of the writer: to sense if the writing will come or not. But how is this related to guiding the writer's attention when freewriting? Consider, for example, the instruction taken from the book *Community of Writers*:

Freewriting. This is private, nonstop writing where you write about whatever you want to write about or put down whatever comes to mind. Your teacher will not ask you to hand this in or share it. Don't worry about whether your writing is any good or even whether it makes sense. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. If you can't think of the word you want, just put in a squiggle. Just keep writing and see what comes. Changing topics is fine. Try to follow the writing where it wants to go. If you seem to run out of something to say, just write that you have nothing to say or write about how you feel at the moment or keep repeating the last word or the last sentence. More will come. If too much comes to mind, don't worry about trying to keep up or get it all down.⁷²

Now if we consider in detail how this instruction is formulated, we might find that differences count. First, it is said to be “private” which implies that the writing is confidential, and that it is done independently from the other writers. At the same time, the activity is done in the same room with others, in silence, which turns it into a shared experience. The second set of instructions concerns constraints – “hand-in,” “worry,” “can't think,” “want” – however those that signal permission such as “see what comes.” and “try” leave the writer without any framing of what to “do.”

I was surprised to see how focused freewriting instructions soon shifted towards highlighting the experience of writing together in silence. To consider how

the senses are addressed, and how the writer's attention is guided. As pointed out before, every writer and every writing group is different, so how can we learn to decide on a freewriting prompt? What kind of prompt will be seen as an enabling constraint or as limitation or as a distraction? It is worth exploring to try out how writers respond to "don't worry" or to "some days the writing comes, and some days it doesn't," and to add that the group will share the experience afterwards? What is at stake in the framing of freewriting is to shift the focus away from the output and to highlight that it is more important to experience the process.

IS AUTOMATIC WRITING RELATED TO FOCUSED FREEWRITING?

Surrealism's interest in freeing the use of writing through "écriture automatique" was neither therapeutic nor trying to voice the unconscious,⁷³ but rather committed to the "prototype of the modern avant-garde: collective, politically committed, claiming an egalitarian connection but operating often at an abstruse and abstract level beyond the appreciation of the common populace, challenging, infuriating and difficult."⁷⁴ Drawing from Dada's uprising against the rational regime of Enlightenment, the (male) self was cast as machinistic homunculus that generated the power-hungry imperial language. Distancing themselves from experimental writing that imitated life, Surrealists claimed to go further because they "had freed themselves from such constraints because 'we had got our hands on the 'prime matter' (in the alchemical sense) of language."⁷⁵ However, it became clear that it was impossible to remove intention from the various surrealist games or techniques, including "free association" writing, cut-up, blackout, or "chainpoems."⁷⁶ What surfaces in this relegation of intention to chance, then, are underlying dimensions that point towards other moments. Implicated are not only what motivated the interest in accessing "free" writing⁷⁷ but rather becoming aware of other underlying desires, such as destabilizing writing, as this analysis of Mallarmé's poem shows:

Un Coup de dés is a complex picture of contingency and risk, and of those activities of will by which humans seek to discover pattern and purpose within their experience. The subject of the poem is simple and general. Mallarmé's 'hasard' is a condition of mind – the abidingly unstable medium of thought – and a condition also of the physical universe; the vulnerable and inventive self which is seen at work in the world – organising, controlling, game-playing, living against the odds, failing and starting again – is the human being at large. Although there are many touches of Romantic individ-

ualism in the working out of the main motifs – the captain ('prince amer de l'écueil') is a defiant moral solitary who takes pride in the singular anguish which his task imposes upon him – this whole imagery contributes to a portrait on the largest scale of a general human predicament.⁷⁸

As the gendered dimension of the writer surfaces against the backdrop of the 21st century discourse, it is not surprising that it did not take long to revisit gendered fictions of "free" writing across the history of cultural production. Recognizing the inherently gendered dimensions of the "author" in the hallucinatory formations of the machinistic unconscious as refuge against the loss of power to enunciate with "others" accessing technologies of writing.⁷⁹ Or, struggling to find a "voice" against emerging technological professional women writers, where the "new scribes: typewriters, typists, secretaries, stenographers [...] were transformed into input/output machines that needed only reproduce a text, their (predominantly female) bodies acting at once as storage material and receptacle of the male word."⁸⁰ The relevance of this framing of freewriting might surface when seen in context of turning the foundational role of phallogocentrism that has shaped the idea of "writing" against itself:

Besides, women among themselves begin by laughing. To escape from a pure and simple reversal of the masculine position means in any case not to forget to laugh. Not to forget that the dimension of desire, of pleasure, is untranslatable, unrepresentable, irrecoverable, in the "seriousness" – the adequacy, the univocity, the truth ... – of a discourse that claims to state its meaning. Whether it is produced by men or women. Which is not to assert that one has to give in to saying just anything at all, but that speaking the truth constitutes the prohibition on woman's pleasure, and thus on the sexual relation. The covering-up of its forcefulness, of force itself, under the lawmaking power of discourse. Moreover, it is right here that the most virulent issue at stake in the oppression of women is located today: men want to hold onto the initiative of discourse about sexual pleasure, and thus also about her pleasure.⁸¹

In the chapter "Bound Forms in Freewriting: The Issue of Organization" in *Nothing Begins with N: New Investigations of Freewriting* (1991), Haswell explores why Focused Freewriting stays inside the lane of well-formed sentences while it could not only break syntactic rules, but also turn opaque and move away from meaning. This echoes the discussion around the orders of cultural production earlier. It seems that even surrealist games cannot escape the futility of the search for the

perfectly random or arbitrary strings of words that would be “free.” Instead, contemporary artists started to make use of conceptual art to explore how interiorities can surface in the encounter with the artwork as “conversation pieces,”⁸² and thus surface as social imaginations.

WRITING AS LOVE(R)

These loose notes are inspired by the pleasure of play, and of writing, and a deep sense of permission that allows for it. I find that writing as “search” can be an expression of love, the love for radical pleasure in words, where the ultimate risk of becoming language is death, as Hélène Cixous notes in “Coming to Writing”:

But if space without bounds hadn't been given to me then, I wouldn't have written what I can hear. Because I write for, I write from, I start writing from: Love. I write out of love. Writing, loving: inseparable. Writing is a gesture of love. The Gesture.⁸³

In these lines, an unbounded love in and for writing can be felt, in its rhythms of opening and closing, but also in its incompleteness. This practice opposes not only conversational maxims of quality, quantity, relation and manner, the demands for text form to follow its function, and, in academic texts, to appear effectively structured so as to develop thoughts according to an ordered plan. Loving to write and writing to love is also about excess. Coming to writing here means to write the body, to write away from conscious thought, to respond to language passing through a writing body, and to acknowledge its contribution, which can't be consciously accessed.⁸⁴ At the same time, Peace Kiguwa traces the entanglement of Black Love in “neo-liberal, capitalist, patriarchal and racialising context” between the strictures of gendered love, rage and liberations struggles: “If we are to consider love, then, as a critical dimension of the project of recovery and decolonisation, what features of love of oneself do Black and African feminist writers engage?”⁸⁵ The role of writing as liberatory practice⁸⁶ is thrown into relief in a poem by South African poet Gabeba Baderoon (2018) that Kiguwa discusses in the article:

Until one day I began to write
and I wrote until I could not forget
myself anymore
On the page appeared
each breath and gesture, each posture

of the body I had torn away
On the page appeared the years
and the words I could not speak
On the page appeared the pages
and the emptiness I had erased
On the page appeared my bones
and my memories
and at last I stepped again into my body.⁸⁷

The senses of the many dimensions of writing as “love” not only as mutual respect and accountability but also as co-creation and critical imagination, as processes of growth and listening, echoes what the group read in *All About Love* by bell hooks (2018).

BEGINNINGS 2

The Unwriting Group worked without preparation or planning, simply from a shared love interest in writing. I found in my notes reflecting on this experience the following passages:

When minds meet in writing, a sense of movement spreads through hands, pens invisibly extending and connecting pages, stretching across time and space. In writing, then, hands craft speech to connect thinking minds in dialogue. I am not alone here, on my page, writing and reflecting. Through our voices speaking onto the page threads of thoughts interweave into different flows, a simultaneous, heteroglossic, plurivocal stream of unmaking meaning, of search for connection instead of understanding, of dislocating selves in processes of seeing / finding / losing the other, instead of contesting monologic spaces of crafting “text”.

Like breathing on a glass pane, making visible traces of hands crossing shared surfaces of thought. Joint writing, then, does not merely mean to come together to write in a group. It’s not coming together as members applying their minds, reflecting on and responding to what the others bring to this shared space. It’s the finely woven web of silken threads made up of silences and half-uttered sentences speaking to the writing that I consider special in this shared process of writing.

A paradox really, because, at times, it is impossible to know what you will write, actually. And even less possible to guess what others could mean in their unfinished thoughts.

Somehow, though, we seem to have guessed that the magic of a collaborative writing process would assist in the process of grappling with what one cannot not articulate clearly. And if you will, it allows us to verbalise thoughts without ending. Not knowing what I intended to say at first, without a clear question in mind, without a point, really, the process of sharing writing with others guides me towards new insights.

In the Unwriting Group I experienced how a group of strangers can meet regularly to write, and to complete what could have been the work of weeks of lonely reflection, and instead finding fluid ways of experimentation, of trying out how to make a concept flower and sprout in unforeseen, unexpected ways while productively missing the common paths of reasoning. This is when I began to think of our work as a time-machine, as a flying carpet and spacecraft.

I can't really say when the moment of doubt crept in, perhaps it was unlocked in the moment I experienced copying a text and suddenly finding myself hearing the words of another writer in the writing of my own hand (for the main part copying Judith Butler's forward to *Of Grammatology*). What I can say for sure, however, is that this moment of doubt arrived in an embodied way as I started feeling it as a different ear, hand, and eye on my own freewriting. It burst the bubble of happiness,⁸⁸ and was confirmed further, for example, when reading articles on focused freewriting (by Sharon Marshall (2009) or Nicole B. Wallack (2009) among others), I follow my alerted eye with every step catching glimpses of invisible borders that are erected outside of this notion of "free" – both inside the words that are used and the construction of sentences that suggest a "free" movement, while attesting that they themselves were confronting racialized, economic, or other, intersectional oppressions and obstacles. But also then: spatial obstacles – a response by my PhD supervisor Dr David Andrew suggested to "fill the entire paper" – and I wondered, what this could mean, what about the borders of the paper, there is no entirety at all, and that the delimited space of writing can never be "filled." And yes, I do think that I am getting closer to the question that is behind the question that Peace Kiguwa in the first response as reader of the proposal posed: "What comes before language?"

From the outset, the Unwriting Group experimented with translingual writing (Figure 3). While protests at universities remind us every year about the lack of access for the majority of matriculants in South Africa, the higher education land-

scape saw in 2015 for the first time a simultaneous wave of protests initiated by students in the wake of the announcement that fees would be raised in the coming year.⁸⁹ At that time, I worked at the Centre for Postgraduate studies at Rhodes University where the protests infused a new sense of urgency across faculties and disciplines. They were still in our ears when we read the call by the UCT-based Creative Knowledge Resources (CKR).

CALL

For Submission of Writing

Please submit an abstract of between 250 and 300 words via the CKR website at creativeknow.org. Any questions related to the open call can be sent to admin@creativeknow.org with the subject line: *Open call for Writers Enquiry*.

28 June 2021 30 August 2021 25 October 2021

Topics may include, but are not limited to: Art collectives and movements in the Global South; live art and social engagement art; Decoloniality, disruption and the creative fields; Public spaces/Politics of Space, protest, citizenship; Affect, play and the creative fields; Creative Pedagogies; Art institutions and art organisations in the Global South.

<https://www.creativeknow.org/call-for-commissioned-writing>

RESPONSE

Writing Exercise, Sensing
Writing, 13 August 2021

*The love of writing and writing
as love/r: collaborative
writing as shared visual art
studio practice*

Draw with your non-dominant hand. Write without pen and paper. Listen to colours, follow the scent of consonants and vowels, gargle text and spit it out, taste a fading sound. In this writing group, visual artists and students met over more than a year to explore and experiment with writing as a quest to expand, question and entangle how artists use writing processes in and as part of their creative practices. Over time, writing turned into a shared concern and collaborative practice. We wrote around questions, such as: How does writing and visual art texture our senses and tap into embodied knowledges? How do we experience writing processes, outside of thinking, of reflecting and understanding? How does it feel to write across languages and media? How do we follow the desire that unfolds in writing and artmaking? How do we situate ourselves in processes of “sharing” in writing groups, which transcend individual creative processes? How can we share individual studio practices, allow each other into the intimate space of creative processes? How can we turn to writing as healing? How can we learn to write differently in a collective?

We want to propose an experimental piece of writing as practice-led research paper for publication in the CKR publishing project. Members of the writing group will submit a piece of writing or visual artwork which reflects on writing as visual art studio practice, making available writing processes, exercises and topics we discussed. In this paper, we claim that there is a gap in research of the role of writing as part of visual artists’ studio practices in visual art theories, art history and art writing in general. This paper is the beginning of a larger practice-led research project on the role of creative writing in visual artists’ studio practices led by Fouad Asfour in collaboration with the writing group members.

* The piece is published online as “The Love of Writing, or Writing as Love/r: Collaborative Writing as Shared Visual Art Studio Practice”, (Asfour et al. 2022): <https://www.creativeknow.org/bopawritersforum/the-love-of-writing>

BEGINNINGS 3

My writing is informed by my practice in the field of contemporary art and non-formal art education, and facilitating writing workshops and writing groups in South Africa. Working as Senior Writing Fellow at the Wits Writing Programme (WWP), I engage with postgraduate students in synchronous and asynchronous writing groups and workshops, focussing on the role of language as positionality in writing as well as activating creative writing and narrative in postgraduate research. These aim to establish an independent and self-sustaining writing culture within the WWP, to encourage informal writing as an opportunity to listen to developing thoughts unfiltered by formal writing requirements. Thus, writing groups provide a space for participants to hone and develop their personal generative writing practices which are conducive for developing formal writing skills.⁹⁰

During my Creative Practice PhD at the Fine Art department at the Wits School of Arts, I facilitated writing groups that aimed to encourage students to activate their translingual repertoire in writing. The design of writing workshops is developed with visual art students aiming to create an awareness for the interaction of the multimodal imagination of their conceptual practice in conversation with sensing the various dimensions of the media they use, and how to reenact these moments of sensing the media into writing⁹¹ in their creative practice. These forms of sensory exploration aim to assist students in negotiating, interrogating and re-inventing the role of writing in their creative practice as well as in academic writing. The research draws from my experience transcribing artist talks from 1997 to 2003 for the artist-run art institution Secession in Vienna,⁹² as editor and publication manager for the Kunstverein in Cologne and editor for *Documenta 7 Magazines*,⁹³ followed by working with popular education organizations in South Africa. I learnt about collaborative writing from community organizations such as Khanya College or the Market Photo Workshop in Johannesburg. With the artist collective The Dead Revolutionary Club, we facilitated writing workshops on critical thinking and visual literacy, published an online Zine and organized discursive events. I also co-authored a research study commissioned by the Goethe Institute, entitled “Opportunities for Non-formal Art Education and Professionalization for Cultural Workers in Africa,” for which I interviewed curators, cultural workers and educators across the continent.⁹⁴ The study was part of the ongoing international research collaboration project entitled “Another Roadmap for Arts Education.”⁹⁵ Participating research groups presented and reflected on histories of decolonial/decolonizing pedagogies in the field of non-formal art education. The project came in response to the so-called “pedagogical turn” in the field of contemporary art that began in the second half of the 1990s and which revived emancipatory movements from art history throughout modernism and other artist movements.

In my work with art institutions and artist-run projects, I try to highlight historical traces throughout art histories that focus on the educative role of writing/speech acts in artistic practice. This trajectory in my writing originates in decolonial practices that I encountered while working with artists in Vienna. In collaborative texts and publications, we interrogated the influence of post-structuralist writers on conceptual art and experimented with different forms of publications (e.g. wall newspapers, fragmentary online texts, SMS novels, or twitterviews). At that time, text production in contemporary art moved away from fixed text, inspired by Swiss curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist's publication of artist interviews in *Artforum* between 1996 and in 2003, at the same time of the travelling exhibition *Cities on the Move* which made visible artists' studio practice in dialogic modes and which revived ephemeral publication practices known from Fluxus movements, such as newspaper inserts, happenings, parties, cooking events among others.

Knowledge-production in contemporary art draws from eclectic, trans-disciplinary discourses that are validated by scholarly work in the humanities while feeding into public discourse as well as the art market. Throughout the history of art (I use this term cautiously here as it is currently reframed in the process of decolonizing creative practices), artists have disseminated antagonistic and resistant creative practices, tapping into different socio-political contexts. This trajectory is common to most collaborative creative projects which come together by a shared concern, facing oppression, structural/political violence and to challenge the hegemonic production of knowledge. Today, this trajectory is continued in the exponential growth of practice-led research in creative departments in tertiary education.

However, it is important to note that these creative epistemologies reach far into the past where collective action was harnessed towards "Theory as Liberatory Practice" as formulated by bell hooks (1991). Historically, art movements have always been involved in public education efforts, see for example Joseph Beuys, Tucuman Arde, MEDU Art Ensemble and others which are discussed in the research project *Sweet Sixties*.⁹⁶ They draw from grassroots movements that activate creativity and dialogue towards conscientization. Letter-writing as contemporary art publication transgresses socio-political boundaries, see for example the mail-art of the 60s and 70s Fluxus movement,⁹⁷ or the artist project NET by Andrzej Kostłowski and Jarosław Kozłowski,⁹⁸ or the project "Letter writing as a technology of the past present and futures" by the Africa Cluster of Another Roadmap.⁹⁹ Artist journals and magazines create new forms for creative intervention on the page, such as "Souffles/Anfas" a socio-political literary magazine published in Morocco between 1966 and 1972, the trilingual political and cultural magazine "Lotus/Afro-Asian Writings" that was published between 1968 and 1991 by the Afro-Asian Writers' Association, or the multilingual South African cultural magazine *Staffrider*

that was published between 1978 and 1996 (preceded by the experimental magazine *Donga* (1976-1978)¹⁰⁰ (some of those were presented at the *Documenta 12 Magazines* project exhibition in Kassel in 2007).¹⁰¹

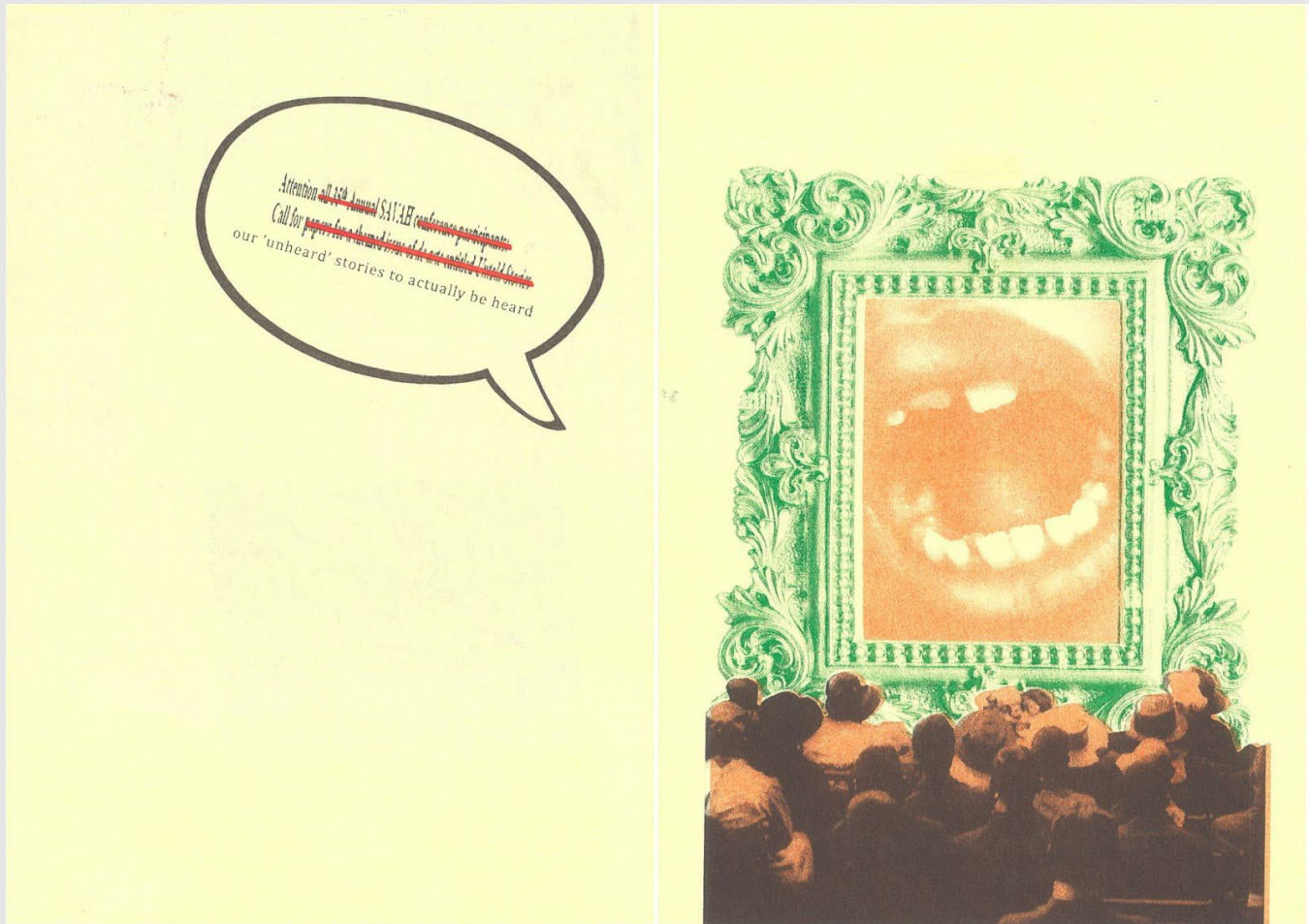
The praxis of self-reflective and creative writing that is common to collaborative artistic writing and publishing projects breaks hegemonic forms of Kolonilingo-normativity.¹⁰² In the book chapter “Toward a Metaphysics of Shit”, Jean Fisher asks if art can “function as an effective mediator of change or resistance to hegemonic power, or is it doomed to be a decorative and irrelevant footnote to forces more powerful than its capacity to confront?”¹⁰³ By the mid-2000’s it became increasingly difficult to veil the increasing rift between anti-imperial and anti-colonial movements in a globalised art discourse. A special issue of the MIT-Press art journal *Grey Room* (2023) is dedicated to reflect on the failure of art institutions, journalists and critics to respond to the centrifugal powers of *documenta 15* exhibition curated by the Indonesian art collective *ruangrupa* as a “missed encounter.”¹⁰⁴ The vast variety of post- and decolonial experiments of breaking English in response to the “political and historical imperatives that variously shape the reception, perception and use of English in the wake of colonial rule” is discussed by Gopal (2012) across different contexts. At the same time, mainstream contemporary art discourse responds to antagonisms by either defusing them¹⁰⁵ or by playing the “identity politics” card when challenged for example by critical race discourse,¹⁰⁶ thus evading their “ambivalence toward an influx of new paradigms, cultural differences, and aesthetic vocabularies.”¹⁰⁷ Critical writing and reflections on South African art has a long and embattled history,¹⁰⁸ and the Unwriting Group not only responds through decolonial-aestheSis-writing to experiment with new forms of writing and to facilitate reflections on writing as creative practice, but we also initiated rigorous critical debates about academic writing across creative disciplines and in contemporary art discourse.

UNTOLD STORIES

In November 2021, South African visual artist and scholar Philiswa Lila shared a call for papers by the South African Visual Arts Historians Association (SAVAH) with the Unwriting Group: “Attention all 35th Annual SAVAH conference participants: Call for papers for a themed issue of *De Arte* entitled Untold Stories.”¹⁰⁹ In our meetings, we reflected on the untold origin story of the journal and decided to collectively create a Zine, referencing Walter Battiss’ inaugural journal issue in 1965 which took the form of a Zine itself (see double-page spread below). For us, it is important to understand writing both as form of meaning that cannot be sep-

arated from the form of publication. We work *through writing* towards alternative / different spaces for artistic practice, creative production and publication. While our Zine failed to pass peer-review, we learnt in a round table discussion with the editorial board of *De Arte* journal at The Point Of Order on 8 September 2023 that the Zine inspired heated debates about the publication of creative contributions to accredited, peer-reviewed journals.¹¹⁰ In this conversation, we made explicit our claim to access the space of accredited journals such as *De Arte*. Their profile and revenue extracts knowledge from creative praxes, not only as reference text, but as knowledge. Thus, in our collaborative creative praxis, we activate multimodal / trans-lingual and trans-linguistic forms of imagination and practices of writing in a bid to question the narrow paratextual conventions of publications that generate knowledge through “research”, and to point towards studio practice not only as site of generating but also of contesting knowledge.

We hope that our work will shift and expand the terms of engagement of writing across creative praxes as these are thwarted by intransigent monolingual and cis-modal regimes: to accept translingual and multimodal creative praxes not only as text, but as interstitial forms and processes of knowing.



- 4 Nono Motlhoki with Toby Mpendulo Ngomane (2022) *Attention SAVAH Call for our 'unheard' stories to actually be heard*. Riso printed digital collage.

Nono Motlhoki completed her Honours in Fine Art at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her studio practice is currently based in Johannesburg, where she uses photography, video and printmaking as tools to investigate the intimacies and violences that are implicated in romantic love. She engages the nuanced ideas of inheritance, consumption, texture, and materiality to perform and document the internal lives and politics of black women in love. Her practice is characterised by a valorisation, problematization and curiosity towards black love, as well as abstract narrative and relationalities of the domestic and heart spaces. She defines her practice as a decolonial and sociological enquiry into love, exploring how love manifests at the intersection of race, class and gender. Currently, Nono is interested in domestic gestures as a manifestation of love, and the domestic space as a site of self-erasure.

Toby Mpendulo Ngomane is a Heart Warrior and passionate creative who has held many different spaces: Choreographer, actor, production manager, dramaturg, lighting, costume and graphic designer, curator, dancer, photographer as well as facilitator. With an interest and specialisation in body-based work. He understands the body as a vessel that is continuously receptive to all the sensations in and around it. Consequently, he holds a great curiosity about how this vessel understands and translates the world through different disciplines. Whether they are traditionally performative or not. Understanding that even the nature of photography can be as deeply embodied and physically performative as dancing or even running. He is also an endurance athlete whose focus is on ultra-distance mountain running. An extension of his curiosity about the body and the body in space.

CALL: WRITING AND
READING EXERCISE

Pauline Oliveros, *Cross
Overs*. April 2, 1996
Evanston, Illinois

Sound a word or a sound.

Listen—surprise.

Sound a word as a sound.

Sound a sound as a word.

Sound a sound until it is a word. Sound a word until it is a sound. Sound a sentence
of sounds. Sound a phrase of words.¹¹¹

* This exercise inspired a conversation with Austrian artist Ricarda Denzer and resulted in the presentation of the audio paper “Dividuality Through Opacity,” at Denzer’s Sounding Research Listening Session #1 on March 14, 2022 (available online at: <https://www.soundingresearch.net/audio-paper>). Denzer invited artists and writers to respond to Pauline Oliveros’ prompt: “Put your feet on the ground. Inhale ... and exhale with sound. Inhale ... and exhale with sound...” (Denzer 2024: 150).

Physical writing: How can I write a tear through the page?

I need to write about something but it sticks to me like it does not want to let go but talk about something else.

When I say I wonder when someone thought that writing was not a creative act it sounds simplifying, because it's not about who looks at a piece of writing and what does one see in it, it's about the body contributing to the writing in unknown ways.

And how can I know what the body writes, and what the mind thinks it writes independently?

At this point in time, I have no idea where this is going. In terms of communication, there is an expectation in the reader, and in my mind there are different options opening up.

I don't have any idea what that has to do with the text I am supposed to write. Now I will switch on the internet and research a bit more and get a bit distracted. Then I will read this and that, and find a new thought, which I find interesting in this context. I will think this thought and that one, and will come across new readings. I will read and then realise that I have moved away from the initial task, which is writing a text, and which I have branched off into fable writing and recording the process instead.

Now there is a pause. The writing mind is pausing.

My novel needs to continue in different ways, in different voices. Self-interrogation as a writing process? I need help. This text is not happening.

I could write it as a piece of fiction, allow experiences to wash ashore as flotsam and jetsam on a tired bank.

A short burst of making sense, and then tired again, pausing.

And that was that, I can't work more today. I will try again in the morning. Thinking, I might start with an outline, where I will write what I want and add bits that have accumulated over time.

Didn't follow through with the form though, the fable got stuck in the middle.

A duck prances into the king's courtyard, the guard tries to ignore it and is questioned when caught. It could go the Solaris way, where people and things that are on your mind appear out of nowhere. Except that the king will be trying to hide the duck. I hope the duck will manage to escape and the king will witness it.

The guard will pretend that nothing untoward had happened and move on. What will happen next?

This text is written in response to the call to submit writing projects in response to the two-year CLASP IWT Fellowship. I am excited by its ethics of experiential learning that focuses on practicing “writing as thinking”. I hope that this contribution manages to communicate the vast expanse of experiences that writing programs such as the CLASP IWT Fellowship can offer, while hopefully pointing out how much more research this field deserves. As mentioned earlier, it might be a good start for a research question when nothing seems “clear” at first. And perhaps it might be expected too much, but I hope that this collection of fragments will inspire readers to try out for themselves how senses change orientation while freewriting. In turn, this might motivate the reader/write to develop their own writing exercises that will lead to further questions about writing.

NOTES

- 1 Carrier 2003, Harris 2003
- 2 Boone & Mignolo 2020
- 3 Abdulatief et al 2021: 138
- 4 Mignolo and Vázquez 2013
- 5 Jewitt and Kress 2003, New London Group. 2000
- 6 Lin 2015
- 7 Guzula, McKinney and Tyler 2016
- 8 Abdulatief et al 2021
- 9 Sedgwick 2020:144
- 10 Fasheh 1990
- 11 Hanisch 1969, Giovanni 1988
- 12 Elbow and Belanoff 2000
- 13 Asfour 2017
- 14 Asfour et al 2020
- 15 see for Figure 3, and: Hurtado 1999, Lorde 1982
- 16 Khan, Asfour & Skeyi-Tutani 2022
- 17 Kilomba 2008
- 18 Gaztambide-Fernández 20202
- 19 Glissant 1997: 189-194
- 20 Hicks 1988: 56
- 21 Alcalá 2012: 27
- 22 Anzaldúa and Hernández-Ávila 2000, 178
- 23 Ika 2012: 276-277.
- 24 Genette 1997
- 25 2013
- 26 Gaztambide-Fernández 2014: 201
- 27 Mignolo and Vázquez 2013
- 28 2003:34-35.
- 29 Mignolo 2007
- 30 Guzula 2021
- 31 Elbow 2012
- 32 Asfour et al 2020
- 33 Nathalie Sarraute in the preface of the French edition *The Age of Suspicion* Translation from: Jefferson, A., 2000. *Nathalie Sarraute, fiction and theory: Questions of difference*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 18, 149.
- 34 <https://www.creativeknow.org/bopawritersforum/the-love-of-writing>
- 35 Gaztambide-Fernández 2020:15

- 36 Gaztambide-Fernández 2014: 209
- 37 Battiste 1984
- 38 Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013
- 39 Mignolo 2007, Alvarez 2016
- 40 Gantsho 2016
- 41 Kotz 2010
- 42 Piper 1999
- 43 Alexander 1989
- 44 Guzula, McKinney & Tyler 2016: 137
- 45 Boughey and McKenna 2021:54
- 46 Boughey and McKenna 2021:54
- 47 Boughey and McKenna 2016:7
- 48 Heleta 2016
- 49 Boughey and McKenna 2021:57
- 50 *ibid.*
- 51 Khan, Asfour & Skeyi-Tutani 2022
- 52 Freire 1978
- 53 Livholts 2019
- 54 Murray 1990
- 55 Asfour et al 2020
- 56 Yildiz 2012:2
- 57 Derrida 1998:17
- 58 Yildiz 2012, Dowling 2022
- 59 Segoete 2019, Segoete & Rosen 2021
- 60 Guzula 2021
- 61 Yildiz 2012:26
- 62 Boughey and McKenna 2021: 66
- 63 Yildiz 6-14
- 64 Veronelli 2015: 119
- 65 *ibid*
- 66 Alexander 1989
- 67 Rule 2017:21
- 68 Kester 2004
- 69 *ibid*: 115
- 70 Marshall 2009, Wallack 2009
- 71 Murray 1984: 27
- 72 Belanoff and Elbow 1999: 9-10
- 73 Bacopoulos-Viau: 2019
- 74 Stockwell: 2012, 48

- 75 Breton 1969: 299
- 76 Stockwell:2012, 55
- 77 see also Haswell 1991
- 78 Bowie 1978:142
- 79 Ashcroft 2022: 560
- 80 Bacopoulos-Viau 2019:43
- 81 Irigaray 1985:163
- 82 Kester 2004
- 83 1977/1991: 41-42
- 84 Acker 2001
- 85 2023: 18
- 86 hooks 1994:59
- 87 2018: 56
- 88 Sara Ahmed 2004
- 89 Ahmed 2020, Rhodes Must Fall 2015
- 90 Oluwole et al 2018
- 91 Rule 2018
- 92 Published as: Liska, S., ed. 2011, *The Secession Talks. Exhibitions in Conversation 1998-2010*. Cologne: Walther König.
- 93 Djerbal, D. and Asfour, F., ed. 2018, *Rencontre à l'Espace Noun* Organisée par NAQD et documenta 12, dimanche 24 septembre 2006 Meeting at Espace Noun. Organized by NAQD and documenta 12 Sunday September 24, 2006. NAQD 33-34:1, 139-156. <https://doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.3917/naqd.033.0139>
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- 95 Accessible online at: <https://www.another-roadmap.net>
- 96 Arevshatyan & Schöllhammer 2014
- 97 See for example: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/mail-art>
- 98 Kemp-Welch, K., 2013, *Autonomy, Solidarity and the Antipolitics of NET*, in: Bozena Czubak ed., *NET. The Art of Dialogue / NET. Sztuka Dialogu*, Warsaw: Fundacja Profil, 34-56.
- 99 <https://another-roadmap.net/africa-cluster/blog/letter-writing-as-a-technology-of-the-past-present-and-futures-a-new-project-for-2020>
- 100 For more information see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staffrider> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donga_magazine
- 101 Find more information at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documenta_12_magazines
- 102 Guzula & Tyler, in press; Guzula & Abdulatief, 2024

- 103 2002: 65
- 104 de Bruyn 2023
- 105 Holmes 2003
- 106 Gule 2010
- 107 Gonzalez 2008:14
- 108 Mutloatse 1980, Koloane 1997
- 109 The South African visual art journal *De Arte* focusses on “visual arts in South Africa and the Global South, including links to philosophy, politics, history and religion” and can be accessed on the portal of Taylor & Francis: <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rdat20>
- 110 The “Policy on the Evaluation of Creative Outputs and Innovations Produced by Public Higher Education Institutions”, that was issued by the South African Department: Higher Education and Training DHET in 2017 and implemented in 2021, caused editors of academic journals to change the editorial policies and evaluation criteria for creative submissions: <https://www.dhet.gov.za/Policy%20and%20Development%20Support/signed%20Creative%20outputs%20report%202020.pdf>
- 111 Oliveros 2005: 54)

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