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Sample, improvise and collaborate – bringing home multimodal learning through creative practice.

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In partial fulfilment of the completion of Master of Arts in Fine Art by research at the University of the Witwatersrand

Supervisor: Professor David Andrew



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Sample, improvise and collaborate – bringing home multimodal learning through creative practice

Abstract

The aim of this creative research project is to argue for and activate a critical pedagogy that is grounded in multimodality and what I will refer to as "*this* artist's sensibility" (Andrew, 2011, emphasis mine). This sensibility, for the purposes of this research project, is characterised by processes of sampling, improvisation and collaboration and is envisioned through visual and sonic modes, documenting and sampling the bricolaged constellations of personalised learning events within the home-practice environment. This auto-ethnographic research is framed by my own identity and informed by my experience as an artist, musician, composer, performer, teacher and mother. In addition, the research aims to critique the notion of the classroom and the system of education and to challenge how we think children learn and how they should be taught. I do not suggest a perfect solution, or the only way in which we should consider education. Rather, I hope this will be regarded as an honest and humble contribution to the research annals of critical pedagogy.

Introduction

In Chapter 1 I outline the rationale of the project and how it has emerged from my experiences of the contradictions, tensions, successes and benefits of arts education within global and local education systems, cast from a personal history. This personal history also introduces the auto-ethnographic methodology that is present in the dissertation, and how personal identity has shaped the research project and lays a foundation for personalised learning. Chapter 1 also introduces the reader to my understanding of terms such as “sampling”, “improvisation”, “collaboration” and “multimodality”, as well as a brief description of what I perceive as the education crisis and why I believe this research is important for the project of decolonizing education. Chapter 2 offers a critique of the education system supported by a literature review of the leading voices in this critique. Chapter 3 is an explanation of the methodology used in the research and pedagogy. Aside from research through creative practice, I have employed performance auto-ethnography as the main methodology, while unschooling, and multimodality have been the primary pedagogical methodologies. Chapter 4 is an overview of our home practice and samples of what and how we have learned. Chapter 5 explores my creative practice, my final exhibition and performance event held at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg and how this relates to and is influenced by the practices of other artists. This is followed by a short conclusion.

Chapter 1

A Personal History

I was born in 1976, the same year as the Soweto uprising. I began my formal education at a government school in the leafy white suburbs of Johannesburg in 1981. This was a South Africa deep in the throes of the apartheid regime, and although I was brought up in a politically conscious family and was exposed to some of the harrowing events that played out during this time I was still cosseted in white privilege which afforded me educational opportunities and life experiences which I predominantly took for granted. This social trajectory imprinted on my personal identity, and my consciousness awoke in parallel.

Fifteen years later I began my relationship with the media, the arts world and, inadvertently, arts education. This career began with my work, *Useful Objects* (1996), otherwise commonly known as *The Vagina Ashtray*, which won the Martienssen Prize while I was in my third year of a BA Fine Arts degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. I followed this with the release of my first full-length album, *Bone Needs Flesh* (1998), with the band Naked. This album received considerable critical and airwave success. The hit single, "Naked", followed in the footsteps of *Useful Objects,* and cemented my identity as a feminist artist blurring the boundaries of sexuality and gender, while remaining committed to creating cutting-edge music within popular genres. I toured and released music internationally with several bands, and later released my solo album, *All I Am* (2002), for which I received a South African Music Award (SAMA) for best pop album. I followed this with a stint as a composer and producer of music for film and TV, including for *National Geographic* and *Discovery*. I formed a film production company that created extreme-sports documentaries, while I continued to perform in a variety of settings, predominantly in collaborations and for corporate events.

During this time I also started a family, and so began my interest in arts education and the way in which the arts impact education. I began working with various schools as a private music teacher[1] and then later was employed as Head of Arts and Culture at a private school in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. As a Head of Department I was thrust into a management role, not only of a department,

[1] Schools I have worked at include St Mary's, Waverley; Auckland Park Prep; Mooiriver Primary; Michaelhouse; St John's DSG; Clifton Prep, NR; Kings School; Treverton College and Khazimula Children's Home.

but also making contributions to the general management of the school. I was also tasked with drawing up a new vision for arts education in the school. So began my awareness of how the arts were often poorly taught, misunderstood and misrepresented, and how little real impact they had within the greater system of formal education. Catchphrases such as “critical thinking”, “creativity”, “collaboration” and “cultural and social awareness” are often bandied about as the reason that the arts are taught within formal schools, but my experiences were regularly the very antithesis of these sentiments. Children were mostly extrinsically motivated by test results, rather than an intrinsic curiosity and the discipline required to perfect a skill.

A colleague at this school, who was the visual arts teacher, proudly proclaimed that “creativity does not belong in the art classroom.” This statement was made when I queried her art teaching methods and her attitude to pupil self-expression and individuality. The manifestation of this attitude was that if pupils did not emulate the prototype “artwork” supplied by the teacher, the pupil’s artwork would either be erased and re-drawn by the teacher, or removed and thrown away. This claim led to an extraordinary moment of realisation that is encapsulated in the following quote:

> Some auto-ethnographies begin with an epiphany (Denzin, 1989) – an event after which life never seems quite the same; an event that often generates pain, confusion, anger, and/or uncertainty, or that has made a person feel immensely vulnerable; an event, often a turning point, that changes the perceived and often desired trajectory of life. (Ellis and Adams, 2014, 264)

For me, hearing my colleague express such a position was that epiphanic moment. I resigned from my post – even though I was a widow, and sole breadwinner in my family, I was so tormented by these comments that I felt that I needed to pursue a deeper understanding of education, how it might be re-imagined, and what role the arts might play in this wider field. Should we be teaching “The Arts” or should we teach and learn as if we *were* an artist? What would happen if we treated teaching and learning as if we were creating an artwork, and the teacher and pupil were artists? David Andrew seems to challenge arts education (or all educators?) to consider this when he titled his PhD thesis *The Artist’s Sensibility And Multimodality – Classrooms As Works Of Art* (2011).

In that thesis I was struck by the following provocation made by a group of arts educators based in the United Kingdom in the mid nineties:

> It could be argued that arts teachers need to behave more like real artists and less like bureaucrats. School art, at its worst, is the art of the bureaucrat: neat, safe, predictable, orthodox. School art adds up: the real thing rarely does (Ross et al 1993, 161,162 in Andrew 2011).

This quote resonated for me, as did the research of Winner et al, (2003, 20) who write of "artistic habits of mind":

> By artistic habits of mind, we mean not only the mastery of craft and technique, but also skills such as close observation, envisioning, exploration, persistence, expression, collaboration, and reflection – the skills in thinking and creativity and the social and behavioural skills that are developed in the arts.[2]

What this reading has allowed me to do is to consider how I am situated within this wider field, and my nagging suspicion that our attitude to how the arts are taught needs to be completely overhauled. In fact, is it even plausible to have a standardised curriculum that can incorporate these "artistic habits of mind"? It has also led me to consider my own formal and informal education, and those moments that informed my experiences, opportunities, *cul-de-sacs* and successes.

It was predominantly the informal learning experiences that had the greatest impact on my later careers. The fact that I did not have a music teacher at school meant that I taught myself to play the flute, and essentially created my own distinct style which would prove to be valuable in the music industry. I did not complete any music grades but I had opportunities, from an early age, to play in Western classical orchestras as well as traditional African music groups. The processes of sampling, improvisation and collaboration were key to accessing and performing these genres. My high-school art teacher was not an artist nor a teacher, and left me alone to experiment with different mediums and styles at the back of the classroom. Because I was not in any way prepared to write the standardised exam for art, I scraped through with the bare minimum of marks, but later won the Wits University award for the best independent final-year artwork: The Martienssen Prize.

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[2] Although some critics may argue that these "artistic habits of mind" have been annexed by the neoliberal conquest.

Conversely, my high-school biology class was a tightly controlled and standardised space. My only remaining memory of what I learned in that class was the teacher telling us that it was a sin for girls to masturbate, but that it was OK for boys. Contrary to his intentions with this assertion, I spent many of my early years as an artist and lyricist teasing out this violent criminalisation of a woman's sexuality. It is interesting to observe that of my twelve years of formalised schooling, six of which were at one of the most expensive private schools in South Africa, this memory was deeply etched into my mind, while I cannot tell you what Pythagoras' theory is or what year Jan van Riebeeck arrived in the Cape. If I want to remind myself of what osmosis is, or of the life cycle of the frog, I can simply google it. Observing my children learning and discovering, it is through genuine interest, and when the experience has context and relevance within their lives they have the most reward. Conversely, when the experience is coercive or contrived, I immediately lose their attention and motivation.

Even though I did not complete my bachelor's degree in fine arts, nor have any formal background in music, I still had a successful career as an artist and musician, and though I never qualified as a teacher I was given the opportunity to head a department in a formal schooling environment. Furthermore, although I was never trained as a businessperson, when I inherited three businesses that were millions of rand in debt, I managed to turn these around. On reflection, I have wondered whether there have been "tactics" (De Certeau, 1998. xix), "artistic habits of mind" (Winner, 2003, 20) and "artists' sensibilities" (Andrew, 2011) that enabled me to shape these events so that they were understood as opportunities? While these three entry points emerge from different authorial contexts, I have found them useful in trying to understand the sensibility that underpins the manner in which I have approached teaching and learning in formal and informal settings.

The processes central to my understanding of this "sensibility" are sampling, improvisation and collaboration. Here I acknowledge how they may coincide with the imagining of the "artist's sensibility" in Andrew's work, but also argue for a specificity that is based on my particular experience in the music industry. If I consider my practice as an artist and musician, these processes were central to how I arrived at the "work" I produced. Reflecting further on my experience, these

3 De Certeau writes: "I call a 'tactic', on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localisation), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the fact as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuated itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. The 'proper' is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing'. Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'." (1998, xix)

processes were more often than not practised in an informal setting, and yet they became my greatest assets. So I began to question what would happen if these habits, these tactics, these artist's sensibilities were understood as the basis for forming a way of teaching and learning. Does my experience as an artist and musician offer something fundamentally different to that offered by standardised teacher education and training in the formal system of education? And how could this hypothesis possibly be tested within the formal system of education? Although this second question is not central to my research, it is one that is ever-present in my thinking, and a contributing factor to withdrawing my younger two children, currently aged ten and four, from the formal schooling system.

Removing my then nine-year-old son from formal schooling proved to be a dramatic and traumatic event. He was ricocheting from therapist to psychologist to paediatrician, each with their own diagnosis for his mood swings and violent outbursts at school. Finally, the homeschooling option created a moment in which I could explore an environment that promotes intrinsic curiosity and a desire to learn, away from the expectations and standardised testing of the formal school environment, as well as a space to truly immerse ourselves in the possibilities of the hypothesis of this research project. Through this process with my son I have begun exploring the writings around "unschooling" and self-directed learning, starting with the influential writings by John Holt, and later Peter Gray, who penned the definition of Self-Directed Education for the Oxford research Encyclopaedia of Education (2016). This form of learning is sometimes also called "natural learning", and is what we have actively and consciously undertaken in our homeschool environment. This also speaks to the multimodal pedagogical holders laid out by the New London Group. (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, 35), which I will discuss in the chapter about multimodal pedagogy and its relation to my findings in the home practice environment.

Over the period of this research I have tracked and tested this multimodal process entailed in my conception of "the artist's sensibility", tactics and artists' habits of mind, namely sampling, improvisation and collaboration, in the homeschooling environment, as the basis for a critical pedagogy. In doing this, I consider whether these experiences might inform a different conception of the "classroom" and the teaching and learning that takes place within this re-conceptualised space. For the purposes of this research I define my three contributions to the "artist's sensibility" as follows:

“Sampling” is a term often used in current music production, and refers to the act of copying a small sample of sound from another piece of music or from any other sound source and incorporating this into a new piece of music or sound. By doing this it retains part of its originality, but in the context of the new piece its meaning is altered. In this research project I argue that many moments of teaching, learning, research and even all cultural practices are an act of sampling. Michel De Certeau et al. defines cultural practice as:

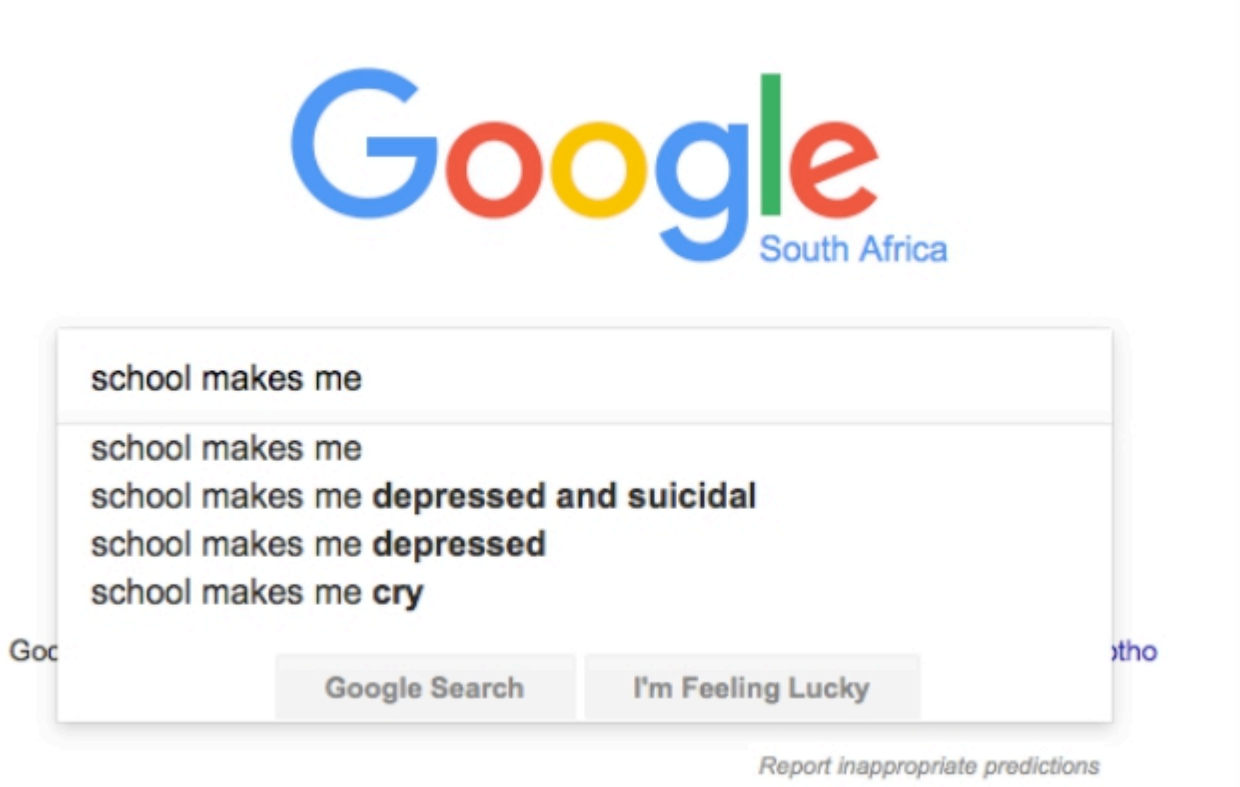
> … the more or less coherent and fluid assemblage of elements that are concrete and everyday (a gourmet menu) or ideological (religious, political), at once coming from a tradition (that of a family or social group) and reactualized from day to day across behaviours translating fragments of this cultural device into social visibility, in the same way the utterance translates fragments of discourse in speech. (1998, 9)

“Improvisation” is similar to the notion of “creativity” as defined by Douglas Hofstadter (1985, 232–259) as a variation of a theme. Creativity and improvisation are often assumed to be a simple spur-of-the-moment act, whereas I would argue that improvisation is a response within a repertoire of practised moves. These practised moves could also be called “samples”. Paul Berliner, in his book *Thinking in Jazz,* describes how an infant makes sense of the diverse patterns around her by mimicking their elements. Later, as this young musician begins to gain control of her instrument, she shapes melodies from diverse sources such as a relative humming the blues, fellow students singing on the bus, or the radio playing jazz tunes. She comfortably places intricate figures within a framework of rhythm and meter absorbed through a succession of informal and unrelated musical experiences (1994, 22, 29). Improvisation is recorded in the moment after years of rehearsal, but is distinct from sticking to a prearranged plan. Improvisation is about knowing the rules well enough to break them.

“Collaboration” implies working together, and in the teacher/learner relationship, by collaborating we acknowledge that every individual brings worth. Just as sampling and improvisation are basic human, pedagogical and cultural acts, so too is collaboration, and these three processes cannot be separated from one another. In my conception of the terms, collaboration is distinct in that it is “working with”, while sampling is “taking from”, and improvisation is “composition in the moment”.

Chapter 2

A Critique of the Formal Education System



As I embarked on this research project I became increasingly aware of not only the deficiencies of the education system, but of the perpetuated violence within this system. I include the random Google search of "School makes me…" to highlight my point. While reading *Rethinking Childhood: Attitudes in Contemporary Society* by Phil Jones (2009), I came across a UK study on self-harming and bullying (Hawton et al. 2006). They surveyed 15–16 year olds and found that 11% of all girls and 3% of all boys in this age category had self-harmed in the previous year.

> The most frequent motive expressed by both males and females was as a means of coping with distress. The research begs important and general questions about contemporary childhood. Why are children in such distress? … Why are their experiences silenced and invisible? (Jones, 2009, 20)

Jones goes on to deliberate on the focus of the education system on standardised testing and results rather than the well-being of the child. Children become separated from the learning experience until it is no longer about what they are learning, and instead about what their test result is.

Sir Ken Robinson, in *Do Schools Kill Creativity?* (2006), postulates that the design of education systems often fail as they teach creativity *out* of learners. Children are naturally creative, but by fitting them into an industrial-style, one-size-fits-all system where assessment is structured around one correct answer, they are set up for disillusionment. In his talk titled *Changing Education Paradigms* (2010), Robinson describes the current education system as an industrial factory line that was designed "in the economic circumstances of the industrial revolution", where learners are produced and categorised by their date of manufacture. These "schools are still organised on factory lines: ringing bells, separate facilities and specialised into separate subjects." (Robinson, 2010, 6:49). He argues with conviction that the current models informing the schooling system are largely inadequate for the times we are living in.

Cedric Cullingford's *Creativity and Pupils' Experience of School* (2007), which I have read as an important extension of Robinson's ideas, draws on interviews with children on the subject of creativity and elucidates the dichotomy between how children learn and their experience of school. It goes on to explain how children learn through experiences of creativity, and why the system of education stifles this approach to learning.

Cognisant of both the culture and structure underlying our current system, and the opposition of this system to the intrinsic nature of children to learn through creativity, as highlighted by Robinson and Cullingford, Paulo Freire makes several important observations about the oppressive nature of mainstream education and emphasises that this system is designed to subjugate the masses and make them easier to control.

- the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- the teacher talks and the students listen meekly;
- the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;

- the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (Freire, 1993, 2)

Pink Floyd's seminal song "Another Brick in the Wall*"* from the album *The Wall* (1979) seems to illustrate Freire's points perfectly, and in the practical component of the work I sample the iconography and lyrics of this particular song, as I discuss in the final chapter.

Another valuable and forceful critic is education writer and filmmaker Carol Black. Her documentary, *Schooling the World: The White Man's Last Burden* (2010) is a caustic critique of the education system and its violent colonisation and "destruction of traditional sustainable agricultural and ecological knowledge, in the breakup of extended families and communities, and in the devaluation of ancient spiritual traditions." (Black, 2010)

Below is an extract from Black's article for the World Economic Forum titled "Three Cups of Fiction: On 'Whites in Shining Armor' & the Toxic Fantasy of Saving the World with Schools". It is a condensation of the themes she addresses in her documentary, and I have included a lengthy excerpt as it raises some of the issues that the South African youth are tussling with in calls for the de-colonisation of education. These issues are particularly close to my heart as I live and work in a rural part of KwaZulu-Natal where the discrepancies between public and private schools are highly magnified, with some of the most expensive schools in Africa being on the doorstep of a town – Mooi River – with one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. Working in these schools as well as in the public schools and orphanages I am directly exposed to the gaping inequalities and the ramifications of these.

> The dirty underside of our system is that schools as we know them today are structurally designed to fail a reliable percentage of kids. Greg Mortenson, like everybody else, loves to tell the touching story of the girl from the village who studies hard, passes her school exams, and goes on to become the proverbial doctor-who-will-come-back-to-the-village-and-reduce-infant-

mortality. He raises a lot of money with that story, and a lot of donors go to sleep at night feeling better about the world because they are helping it to happen. But what Greg doesn't tell us, and what the donors don't want to think about, is **what happens to all the other children**. The dirty underside of our system is that schools as we know them today are structurally designed to fail a reliable percentage of kids. Interestingly, they reliably fail a much higher percentage of kids in low-income areas than they do in affluent areas, and this is true from Detroit to Gilgit-Baltistan. When we put children from traditional rural areas into school, what we're doing is transitioning them from a non-cash agricultural economy where nobody gets rich but nobody starves into a hierarchical system of success and failure in which some lives may get "better," but others will get much, much worse. Guess which club has more members? Welcome, boys and girls, to the global economy.

The reality is that there are few better ways to condemn a child to a life of poverty than to confine her in a bad school, and a very high percentage of schools in low-income areas are and will remain bad schools. Many NGOs as well as international programs like "Education for All" are focused on the body count, on getting more and more children into classrooms. What happens to those kids in those classrooms is harder to quantify or to track. One thing that seems clear is that an awful lot of them learn very little. A Brookings Institution study of education in Pakistan by Rebecca Winthrop and Corinne Graff reports that "the education system produces many unemployable youths with few skills for economic survival … In a recent survey of Pakistani youth, half the students say that they believe they lack the skills necessary to compete in today's labor market." A World Bank Policy Research working paper indicates that, contrary to popular belief, money spent on education often **increases inequality** in a country. This is partly because those who already have substantial assets are better positioned to take advantage of educational resources than those who have their hands full trying to get food on the table. But it's also because from its inception school was designed as a sorting mechanism, a rigged competition where only one form of intelligence is valued, only one way of learning is permitted, and one child's success means another child's failure. We forget that the structure of schools as we know them today was developed during a time when people believed in racist eugenics and Social Darwinism; modern schools were structurally designed to perpetuate a hierarchical class system, and – despite the best efforts of many dedicated teachers – that's exactly what they still do, through the non-democratic, hierarchical ranking of children which is hard-wired into our entire system of grading, testing, and one-size-fits-all standards. Until we

> change that – at home as well as abroad – education will continue to perpetuate and justify poverty, not to ameliorate it.
>
> Of course, even if everybody succeeded at school, you would just run into the fact that the current structure of the global economy does not provide enough good jobs for the growing number of graduates.
>
> Crucially, we need to recognize the real value of the intellectual traditions of other cultures – including non-literate cultures – and look for ways to share useful information **in both directions** which does not completely disrupt or undermine the social structures, traditional livelihoods, and knowledge systems of those cultures. And ultimately we need to respect their right to opt out of formal schooling completely if they prefer to raise and educate their children within their own knowledge systems and pedagogies." (Black, 2010 http://schoolingtheworld.org/three-cups-of-fiction/)

Robinson, Cullingford, Freire and Black provide four examples that expose and identify the structure that formal schooling takes, thus creating conditions which, not necessarily always overtly, oppress and control the learner into compliance. bell hooks is another voice that cannot be omitted from this critique. The acclaimed intellectual, feminist theorist, cultural critic, artist and writer promotes the cause of ending domination through understanding the ways systems of exploitation and oppression intersect through critical thinking, teaching, events and conversation. She has been heavily influenced by Freire's writing, and it seems fitting that it was bell hooks' book, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practice of Freedom* (2005), from which I borrowed the title of my exhibition: *Learning to Transgress: Learning as a Practice of Freedom.* As I will discuss in the chapter about my creative practice, this home practice that we were conducting was an act of rebellion; every humble and great moment was thoughtful in its transgression of the traditional roles of the educator and the educational institution.

> When I came to Freire's work, just at that moment in my life when I was beginning to question deeply and profoundly the politics of domination, the impact of racism, sexism, class exploitation, and the kind of domestic colonisation that takes place in the United States … And so Freire's work, in its global understanding of liberation struggles, always emphasises that this is the important initial stage of transformation – that historical moment

> when one begins to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one's political circumstances. (hooks, 2005, 46, 47)

bell hooks' book is centred around the tertiary institution and her experiences as a teacher and researcher within this environment.

> If we examine critically the traditional role of the university in the pursuit of truth and the sharing of knowledge and information, it is painfully clear the biases that uphold and maintain white supremacy, imperialism, sexism, and racism have distorted education so that it is no longer about the practice of freedom. (hooks, 2005, 29)

In my writing and thinking and making I was very aware of the complexity of my relationship to the institution, my critique of it as well as my compliance with its traditions. The success of the learner is determined by their ability to comply with this system, but this compliant learner is a contradiction to the one that is identified by Root-Bernstein at *The Second World Conference on Arts Education.*

> The 21st century demands renewed attention to creative imagination….Solutions to complex and intractable problems such as global warming, hunger, poverty systemic injustice and eradicable disease will require thinkers and doers who can bring to bear new combinations of knowledge and know-how in economic, political and cultural arenas (A report by The Human Resource Development in Africa, 2010,16)

While struggling with the disjuncture highlighted above as Head of Arts and Culture at a school in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, I came across *Creative Beginnings* by Lindy Solomon. She identified this dichotomy as follows:

> We are encouraged from a young age at school to conform and suppress rather than express our individuality. We have to wear uniforms, obey the rules, sit in desks (often in rows), submit to authority and develop the same knowledge, skills, values and attitudes as everyone else. Most schools do not have a holistic approach to education and focus on intellectual development rather than developing creativity and imagination. Often the very

> important relationship between creativity and intellectual and emotional development is not recognised. When creative energy is not nurtured, it becomes stunted. (Solomon, 2005, 17)

Writing ten years into South Africa's new democracy, Solomon's observations seem to address the specificity of the local while gesturing to the growing recognition of global dissatisfaction that is often expressed in relation to schooling systems. This thinking and the resultant practices more often than not provided a radical critique of arts education in the formal schooling system, and that selfsame system more widely.

In this critique I draw on ideas emanating from contexts as diverse as Britain, Brazil and South Africa. In doing this I show how there has been a growing understanding of current education systems as being insufficient for the needs of learners. While Freire's writing is rooted in the experiences of workers in the latter part of the twentieth century, Robinson's observations emerge from a system governed by New Labour in Britain. Significantly, Solomon writes from her experience in a post 1994 South Africa. Her background as an arts educator informs my thinking, as do her observations on a wider education system that, according to her, continues to fail learners.

The presence of Freire and hooks in my writing is intended to establish an explicit link with the writing produced under the aegis of Critical Pedagogy. While Freire's writing is primary for the research project, the work of others associated with this theoretical framework, such as Joe Kincheloe and Peter McLaren (2002), and Roger Simon (1992), is acknowledged as having a bearing on the development of the project.

I was initially drawn to the so-called "qualities" of "quality" arts education as the solution to the disjuncture that I have referred to above. *The Qualities of Quality: Understanding Excellence in Arts Education* (Seidel et al., 2009, 5), offers definitions and distinctions for these qualities and highlights the importance of context and relevance:

> Quality: 1. An inherent feature; a characteristic. 2. A judgement of excellence; a feature of value.
>
> For those who care deeply about excellence in education, the pursuit of quality is as enigmatic as it is essential. At their best, educational programs are complex: They involve

> dynamic relationships among people, among communities, and among bodies of knowledge. Quality is often a moving target – what counts as high quality in one context or at a particular moment in time may seem quite inadequate at another time or place – and identifying the signs of quality can be challenging, especially in an enterprise as complex and context-specific as teaching and learning.

Context and relevance have become two of my specific interests. These foci have come to encompass not only that which takes place within the learner's individual life, but the context and relevance of the learner within a community and culture. This is emphasised in many international arts-education documents including: The UNESCO *Road Map For Arts Education* (2006), and *A Report: Second World Conference on Arts Education 2010* (Education and Training; Human Resource Development in Africa) (2010) and Anne Bamford's *The Wow Factor* (2006). These publications give a global overview of arts education, its necessity in broader education, what the challenges are, and how arts education policies are implemented. The second document gives a report on the Second World Conference on Arts Education (2010) in an African context.

Art for Art's Sake? (Winner, Goldstein and Vincent-Lancrin, 2013), along with *The Qualities of Quality,* (Seidel et al, 2009) and Bamford's *The Wow Factor* helped me to frame an identity of what quality arts education is. Common themes include the following:

> Content is of less relevance to quality than method and structure.
> Content must be derived in relation to local environments, culture and resources.
> Shared values arising from various collaborations included;
> - An art/artist led process
> - A child-centred approach
> - Holistic development of the child
> - Belief that the arts can imaginatively stimulate and also encourage problem solving, affective learning and support social and cultural interactions
> - The potential of the arts to help participants to make connections with life and therefore illuminate how we feel and think. (Bamford 2006, 89)

Considering the above, I felt a conviction that we cannot create an environment for this kind of learning within the school models that are currently the norm in South Africa, and that arts

education on its own cannot provide the solutions. David Andrew suggests that multimodal pedagogy and the artist's sensibility should be integrated from arts education into all education. My proposal suggests an embodiment of these concepts, and that we extend the idea of the "classroom as a work of art" to "learning as a work of art". The production and consumption of art is a subjective activity by nature, as the process of learning should be. When I began my undergraduate studies in Visual Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1994, our first practical assignment was to draw a still life that was set up in the centre of the room. The items in the still life were fairly arbitrary: bits and pieces that the lecturer had found lying around in the studio. The thing that has stayed with me for all these years is the fact that, walking around the room, looking at some 30 drawings of the same thing, there was not a single one that was the same. Each drawing had its own perspective and technique, but even more importantly they showed that we all see the world differently. The way we see, react and interpret the world is determined by the combination of our physical experience (our senses), our inner bodily sensations, our mental activities such as feelings, thoughts and memories and our sense of relational connections. As Dr. Dan Siegel, the Harvard psychiatrist and mindfulness expert suggests, these elements make up what we know as the mind. Very few educational institutions take the mind of the individual into account. A one-size-fits-all, standardised approach is how children are expected to learn, with very little consideration of what they want to learn and the way in which they learn it.

Chapter 3

Methodology – Multimodal Learning, Autoethnography and Unschooling – Critical Pedagogy

This chapter is about the primary methodologies that I have employed in the research. I have grouped the three main concepts – auto-ethnography, multimodal learning and self-directed learning – under the umbrella of critical pedagogy. They are interlinked and have each played a part in the research as I will discuss below.

My first real grasp of how multimodal learning takes place occurred while I was driving with my then-two-year-old son, Marley. There was an unmarked truck ahead of us, and he said to me: "Mommy, why does that truck say 'be careful'?" I struggled to grasp what he was saying, so I asked him to explain. He pointed to the hazard tape on the truck body. I suddenly realised that he was "reading" this symbol in exactly the way it was intended [Figure 1].

Figure 1



I started paying more attention to these questions and comments of his. I noticed that he would read the signs of the road: e.g. for a "P" on an automatic vehicle gear stick, he would say "P for stop." He had once again interpreted the symbol correctly. Or when he read "Press" on the seat belt, it was the performance that had taught him the meaning of the letters. Later, he started to read the names of the sounds on my electronic piano keyboard. The word "lightning" would come up on the screen, and he would press a piano key and it would make a lightning sound. He was using the sounds to interpret the symbols. In the first chapter of the book *Multimodality* by Gunther Kress, he describes a similar scenario*:*

> On my way to work the bus gets held up for a large intersection, even quite early in the morning. Sitting on the top deck my eye is drawn to a sign, high up on the wall opposite; it shows how to get into the car park of a supermarket. It is not a complicated sign by any means, nothing unusual about it really. But I have puzzled about it: how does it work? Above all, how does it work *here?* It is about 150 m before this complicated intersection. Drivers have to keep their eye on the traffic; there's no time for a leisurely perusal. Of course, my academic interest in the sign lies in its joint use of image and writing …
> If writing alone had been used, would this sign work? I don't think it could: there is too little time to take it in. A little later in the day, if shoppers tried to *read* the sign, the intersection would clog up. With writing alone, a message would, quite simply, be too complex. Using three modes, in the one sign – *writing* and *image* and *colour* as well – has real benefits. Each mode does specific thing: image *shows* what takes too long to *read,* and writing *names* what would be difficult to *show*. Colour is used to *highlight* specific aspects of the overall message. Without that division of semiotic labour, the sign, quite simply, would not work …
> *Writing* and *image* and *colour* lend themselves to doing different kinds of semiotic work; each has its distinct potentials for meaning … and, in a way, as simple as that – is the argument for taking 'multimodality' as the normal state of human communication. (Kress, 2010, 1)

My interest in multimodality stems from the research produced in South Africa over the last two decades by Denise Newfield and the late Pippa Stein (2006) who led the Wits Multiliteracies Group at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Here I am particularly interested in the writing produced by David Andrew in relation to this project. His PhD thesis, titled *The Artist's*

Sensibility And Multimodality – Classrooms As Works Of Art, is an important document in identifying multimodal pedagogy in a South African context, the artist working in schools and *this* artist's sensibility. In this work, Andrew identifies many of the frustrations and challenges faced within the schooling system in South Africa, which "remain rooted in frames of reference from an apartheid period and dominated by an adherence to authoritarian and bureaucratic structures." (Andrew, 2011, 33) This bureaucratic form of pedagogy is certainly not isolated in a South African context, and Ross et al. argue "that arts teachers need to behave more like real artists and less like bureaucrats. School art, at its worst, is the art of the bureaucrat: neat, safe, predictable, orthodox. School art adds up: the real thing rarely does"(Ross et al. 1993, 161,162 in Andrew, 2011, 40).

Andrew's hypothesis is that "… the artist's sensibility in tandem with multimodal pedagogy begins to address this situation – and also suggests a thinking space for a different conception of educating educators" and that this research begins to address the question: "How do we ensure that criticality and creativity achieves a more central place in the education of learners (and educators)?" (Andrew 2011, 41). In the *C30 Project,* (2008) Andrew and Neustetter tested and documented the possibilities and potentialities that emerge when learners, teachers and artists working in a school engage multimodal pedagogy. Newfield and Stein's *The Multiliteracies Project: South African Teachers Respond* (2000) is another important South African text that is relevant to this research in the manner in which it provides examples of multimodal work across a range of disciplines.

There are two key texts in the area of multimodality that inform my research project. The first is the seminal writing edited by Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis for The New London Group and associated authors in the 2000 publication *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*. The introductory chapter provides a useful grounding in terms of a definitional framing of multimodality:

> This view of mind, society, and learning leads us to argue that pedagogy is a complex integration of four factors: Situated Practice based on the world of learners' Designed and Designing experiences; Overt Instruction through which students shape for themselves an explicit metalanguage of Design; Critical Framing, which relates meanings to their social contexts and purposes; and Transformed Practice in which students transfer and re-create Designs of meaning from one context to another. (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, 31)

In the above quote, Cope and Kalantzis (2000, 35) identify what have sometimes been identified as the pedagogical holders for multimodality. In what follows I expand on each of the holders, acknowledging that these have been revised since their original publication in 2000.

Situated Practice	Immersion in experience and the utilisation of available Designs of meaning, including those from the students' lifeworlds and simulations of the relationships to be found in workplaces and public spaces
Overt Instruction	Systematic, analytic, and conscious understanding of Designs of meaning and Design processes. In the case of Multiliteracies, this requires the introduction of explicit metalanguages, which describe and interpret the Design elements of different modes of meaning
Critical Framing	Interpreting the social and cultural context of particular Designs of meaning. This involves the students' standing back from what they are studying and viewing it critically in relation to its context
Transformed Practice	Transfer in meaning-making practice, which puts the transformed meaning (the Redesigned) to work in other contexts or cultural sites

Of course, with my interest in self-directed learning, alarm bells went off in my head when I read "overt instruction", but the authors go on to clarify this as follows:

> Overt Instruction does not imply direct transmission, drills, and rote memorisation, although unfortunately it often has these connotations. Rather, it includes all those active interventions on the part of the teacher and other experts that scaffold learning activities; that focus the learner on the important features of their experiences and activities within the community of learners; and that allow the learner to gain explicit information at times when it can most usefully organise and guide practice, building on and recruiting what the learner already knows and has accomplished. It includes centrally the sorts of collaborative efforts between teacher and student wherein the student is both allowed to accomplish a task more complex than they can accomplish on their own, and where they come to conscious awareness of the teacher's representation and interpretation of that task and its relations to other aspects of what is being learned. The goal here is conscious awareness and control

> over what is being learned—over the intra-systematic relations of the domain being practiced. (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, 33)

My understanding from this is that it is more an act of mentoring and facilitating, rather than the overt instruction that we might associate with Freire's description of the education system. bell hooks writes: "It has been my experience that one way to build a community in the classroom is to recognise the value of each individual voice" and that we have to consciously break the cycle of accepting the monogynous way of teaching. "Let's face it: most of us were taught in classrooms where styles of teaching reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal." (hooks, 1994, 40, 35)

The second is the 2014 publication *Multimodal Approaches to Research and Pedagogy: Recognition, Resources and Access*, edited by Arlene Archer and Denise Newfield. The value of this publication is that it allows me to situate my own project more critically in relation to South African examples of multimodal research that have emerged in the last decade and more. However, my sense is that it poses multimodal pedagogy as some kind of magical elixir for the woes of the education system in education. It does not seem to consider the challenges of resourcing a multimodal learning environment within this system. I was forced to consider my own identity within the pedagogical environment, as well as my own children's identity and the roles that our stories play as they intertwine and play out within a broader community – how the choices we make as individuals and as a group impact on our learning outcomes. I had to consider auto-ethnography as the transformative process that I was looking for.

More specifically, Carolyn Ellis and Tony Adams (2014, 264) argue that auto-ethnography starts with an epiphany (as noted in Chapter 1), and Lisa Starr argues for the value of auto-ethnography in education and its positioning within a critical paradigm as a "transformative and emancipatory process"(2010, 4). In fact "We cannot move theory into action unless we can find it in the eccentric and wandering ways of our daily lives….[Stories] give theory flesh and breath." (Minnie Bruce Patt in Jones, S., 2005, 763)

In Stacy Holman Jones' chapter titled "Autoethnography: Making the personal Political" (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), she discusses performance and its relation to auto-ethnography, and to research in a wider context.

> Turner's move to link ethnography with performance as a lived and living practice accomplishes four goals. First, it turns our attention to how bodies and voices are situated in contexts – in and of "time, place and history". Second, the performative turn moves researchers and researched toward a relationship of embodied "intimate involvement and engagement of co-activity or co-performance with historically situated, named, unique individuals. Third, performance-centred ethnography points up the visual, linguistic, and textual bias of Western civilisation and redirects our attention to an aural, bodily, and post-modern expression of culture and lifeworld, fieldwork and writing …
>
> Performance ethnography is grounded in two primary ideas: (a) that our identities and daily practices are a series of performance choices (conscious and unconscious) that we improvise within cultural and social guidelines and (b) that we learn through participation or through performance. Performance ethnography can take many forms ranging from recreating cultural performances for audiences invested and interested in understanding, preserving, and/or challenging particular identities and ways of life. To presenting individual (autoethnographic) experiences as a means for pointing up the subjective and stated nature of identity, fieldwork, and cultural interpretation.(Holman Jones, 2005, 769, 770)

These ideas articulated what I was doing with my children. Everything we were learning was through some kind of performance, whether through asking questions, telling stories, making music, digging in the garden, searching Google; everything, albeit humble and seemingly irrelevant, was part of a performance of understanding the world around us and inside us. I will explain this further in the next chapter.

Another reason that I felt compelled to consider an autoethnographic methodology was the pressing consciousness of the researcher as coloniser and dominator. There is a kind of violence inherent in research, which can be similar to the version of the teacher-pupil relationship suggested by Freire. Informed by my experiences of academic discourses as "the Vagina Ashtray Artist" on one hand, and then by my experiences of teaching in a wide variety of circumstances, from well-resourced private schools to public rural schools, the following quote resonated deeply with me:

> No need to hear your voice when I can talk better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the coloniser, the speak subject, and you are now at the centre of my talk. (hooks, 1990, 151-152 in Fine, 1994, 70)

The auto-ethnographic methodology through creative research has allowed me to take a closer look at this form of pedagogical practice within the microcosm of my family, and the particular dynamics at play in this context. This also ties into the concept of the researcher as *bricoleur* as described by Denzin and Lincoln in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2005, 3) and further supported by Joe Kincheloe in *Describing the Bricolage: Conceptualizing a New Rigor in Qualitative Research* (2001). Within this bricolage, it is challenging to find a beginning and an end point. The chicken before the egg? I like to use Nick Sousanis's research through comic form; *Unflattening* (2015), as an example. This book challenges the linear, single narrative, and allows us to think and process in a non-linear way. He employs a medium – the comic – that is not traditionally viewed as an academic art form to disrupt and agitate our view of text verses image, but also how we "read" academic research. It is an "experiment in visual thinking" and a "serious inquiry into the ways humans construct knowledge" (Sousanis, 2015). In doing this he has compiled a critique of our social, education, political, environmental and economic systems through creative practice. My reading of this graphic novel has led me to understand this form as an exemplification of the concepts of bricolage, multimodality and a critical paradigm.

As there was no manual for "How to conduct creative research of critical pedagogy in the home environment", I had no idea how this creative practice would evolve, what it would look, feel and sound like. I had to truly allow the process to unfold in its natural way. As Sullivan argues:

> [t]he meanings that artists make from their imaginative investigations are not only *collected* from their encounters with things around them but they are also *created* in response to their experiences. This is what is unique about the inquiring mind of artists, for they create new understandings from what we do not know, which profoundly changes what we do know … when art making is placed within the culture of research, imaginative practices have the capacity to reveal new truths. (2005, xii)

This grants the artist unique advantages in both research and education as "… art practice, in its most elemental form, is an educational act, for the intent is to provoke dialogue and initiate change" (Sullivan 2006, 33 in Andrew, 2011, 11).

Sullivan's position is relevant for my project as it places research through art practice firmly within the domain of a critical paradigm. The power of art to be transformative and create change is central to the framework of this research proposal. This I call *The Magic* of the arts, and through my practice I have held on strongly to this notion of the power of the arts to transcend language, cultural and physical boundaries and to speak to the essence of our humanity.

Carol Bertram and Iben Christiansen describe researchers in this paradigm as being focussed on "bringing some kind of social change" and "aim[ing] at unpacking structural, historical and political aspects of reality in order to arrive at change of an emancipatory nature. In other words, they set out to critique *and* transform" (2014, 28).

The fields I draw on for my research are visual and sonic, rather than comic and text, but the conception is similar. In its disruption of our prepossessed assumptions, Sousanis is employing a criticality that is transformative.

Lincoln describes critical theory as follows:

> *Critical theory.* The aim of the inquiry is the *critique and transformation* of the social, political, cultural, economical, ethnic, and gender structures that constrain and exploit humankind, by engagement in confrontation, even conflict. The criterion for progress is that over time, restitution and emancipation should occur and persist. Advocacy and activism are key concepts. The inquirer is cast in the role of instigator and facilitator, implying that the inquirer understands a priori what transformations are needed. But we should note that some of the more radical stances in the criticalist camp hold that judgment about needed transformations should be reserved to those whose lives are most affected by transformations: the inquiry participants themselves (2005, 113)

Extending this to education and teaching, *critical pedagogy* is essentially teaching-for-change. The teacher/learner questions the perceived dominant pedagogical structures (as noted in the literature pertaining to Robinson, Freire and Solomon) that are in place and, in doing so, helps the participants to achieve a critical consciousness.

The "participatory engagement" or dialogical interaction that I have undertaken in my family's homeschooling environment "serves the double purpose of leading to transformation and making participants more conscious of the historical and political nature of society. It links analysis of suffering, conflict and collective struggle to notions of critique, imagination and hope (*cf.*Giroux, 1988:213)" (Bertram and Christiansen, 2014, 29).

> Some researchers consider autoethnography an inherently critical approach – a method that describes *and* critiques a person's experiences on behalf of promoting social change, and a method that not only disrupts norms or representation but also treats research as a socially – and relationally conscious – act (Ellis, 2007; Holman Jones, 2005; Spry, 2011 in Ellis and Adams, 2014, 261)

It is almost impossible to separate critical theory and autoethnography from the practice of unschooling, or self-directed learning. Critical author, John Holt, coined the term unschooling, and American psychologist and research professor at Boston College, Peter Gray, defines self-directed education/unschooling in the Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Education (2016):

> Education, broadly defined, is cultural transmission. It is the process or set of processes by which each new generation of human beings acquires and builds upon the skills, knowledge, beliefs, values, and lore of the culture into which they are born. Through all but the most recent speck of human history, education was always the responsibility of those being educated. Children come into the world biologically prepared to educate themselves through observing the culture around them and incorporating what they see into their play. Research in hunter-gatherer cultures shows that children in those cultures became educated through their own self-directed exploration and play. In modern cultures, self-directed education is pursued by children in families that adopt the homeschooling approach commonly called "unschooling" and by children enrolled in democratic schools, where they are in charge of their own education (Gray, 2016, 1)

I understand the visual and sonic modes that have been central to my practice as an artist since the late nineties as the primary methodological approach for this research project. As such, my assertion is that in the "making" process the artist educator is able to theorise through a series of multimodal decisions that enable a transformed teaching and learning experience. The practical component for this research involves the recording of multimodal events that foreground the visual and sonic modes. Footage and recordings from the auto-ethnographic pedagogical processes in the home practice environment are juxtaposed with elements sampled from other sources. This multi-sensory event, rather than merely illustrating theoretical tenets, embodies the "tactics" that are at the core of my understanding of the artist's sensibility that is central to the teaching and learning I aspire to.

Chapter 4

Home Practice and the Children as Co-researchers

There is not much documentation of researchers working with their own children, or even researchers working with homeschooled children. I became aware of the lack of any kind of legacy in this field while applying for ethics clearance from the university ethics committee. Although there is a growing field of research wherein the child is acknowledged as a co-researcher, it is very rare for the researcher's own children to be included and acknowledged. There was Gunther Kress's book *Before Writing (*1997*),* which includes his observations of his own children in their production of a multitude of objects such as drawings, cuttings and collages, and John Holt's *How Children Learn* (1967), which includes observations of children learning when they are outside of a strict educational framework. Not only have I observed my children learning and doing, but I have participated alongside them. This has been a deeply critical and emancipatory process. Of course it would be impossible for me to separate myself from being a mother as a researcher. I am naturally overly enthusiastic of our successes and too critical of our failures, but there is also a total immersion in the process. I've been intimately involved with my co-researchers for as many years as they have been alive, and I have observed many aspects of their learning and development on all levels.

Just as much as this research experience has forced me to question my beliefs about how teaching and learning happens, and my own identity within this, I will also need you, the reader, to be critical of your own experiences and pre-conceptions. I have found this process incredibly challenging: to trust my children's natural curiosity and ability to learn, and to stop myself from falling back on "schooled" notions. I consciously began asking "why?" of everything that I thought was necessary for my children to learn. When applying this to school curricula, there is very little that stands up to this test. Most often, the answer is simply "because this is what you have to learn in order to get to the next grade". When explaining our pedagogical practice to my father, an esteemed professor and researcher in the field of actuarial science, his response was "What about the gaps?" This response highlights our socialised belief that there is only one source of knowledge and understanding, the single narrative or the single truth. The school curricula, often designed by the "great white men", as bell hooks refers to them, have everything that a child needs to know in order to live a fulfilling and rewarding life, while contributing to the society as a whole.

> We have to consciously break the cycle of accepting the monogynous way of teaching. Let's face it: most of us were taught in classrooms where styles of teaching reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal. (hooks, 2005, 35)

As I began this project I felt an unravelling of all that I had held to be true and worthy of learning. I started to say "what about the gaps" in the curriculum? What about all the important things that a child needs to know outside of the schooled environment, and why are these not as important, if not more so, than what is inside it?

In our own home we have actively engaged unschooling practices, and I have documented the events as they have unfolded. Looking back over the course of my research it is difficult to disentangle multimodal pedagogy, performance autoethnographic pedagogy, critical pedagogy and unschooling. They all seem to play such a powerful role in what we have been doing. It also seems silly to try to explain what we have been doing in those terms, because essentially we are simply living life and learning naturally[4] along the way.

But before I continue to elaborate on the experiences in our home practice, let me introduce you to the players and the environment of our home practice.

I was widowed in April 2010, and so my two oldest children have a different father to my youngest. Having experienced this kind of trauma, my children have had an extra load of psychological issues to deal with, though I don't believe that this is an uncommon experience in the South African milieu. Making mental health a critical component of our work has definitely enhanced and deepened our learning. Although it is not the primary theme or subject, our awareness of our psychological wellbeing has been part of a holistic pedagogical practice which treats each child as an individual with different physical, emotional and mental needs and abilities. My partner has endorsed, supported and encouraged this critical process that we have undertaken.

4 Of course *what* and *how* we learn is often predicted by social, cultural and economic circumstances, but humans are constantly in a state of learning.

Born in the year 2000, my daughter, Lilu Woods was my first-born child. She currently attends a private, Anglican boarding school for girls. She has been critically involved in the creative work, and has played a pivotal role in the performances that critique the education system as we ask "What about the gaps?" I will discuss these works in Chapter 5. Due to the fact that she is not homeschooled, I have not documented her so-called learning experiences in the traditional sense (like literacy, numeracy etc.) although the creative work that we have done together certainly accounts for a learning experience.

My second child, a boy named Mojo Woods, was born in 2007. He began schooling at a pre-school and continued on to a private co-ed prep school. We withdrew him at the end of his grade two year, and at first homeschooled him with a fairly structured program. By the end of 2016, however, we were pursuing a self-directed approach to his learning. We had to spend some time deschooling [5] him, and unlearning what we all had come to expect learning to look like. We have found that a routine has benefited him and assisted his mental health and feelings of security. I will discuss this routine and how his learning experiences have manifested.



Figure 3



Figure 2

[5] I use the word *deschooling* as a reference to the adjustment process that a child goes through after leaving formal schooling before entering an informal, self-directed process of learning.

Our son, Marley Allan, born in 2012, has never attended a school, and his learning is completely self-directed.

These three very different characters and educational backgrounds give me a wonderful point of reference to work from. In the case of Lilu, we are very consciously critiquing her experiences within the schooling system. Mojo has a more structured unschooling process, while Marley is completely free to learn however he chooses, or however it happens.

I cannot attach or include every daily event to this dissertation, but I will draw from the journal that I have kept to highlight certain points, or to shed light on the process that we have undertaken. We live on a smallholding located on the Mooi River in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. We have an extensive vegetable and fruit garden which supplies much of our table, and the children are involved in the growing, maintenance and preparation of food. [Figure 2] The land and river is also a source of scientific, geographic, biological, botanical and environmental experiences that deepen our understanding of the world around us. In figure 3 the boys are exploring sedimentary layers of the soil eroded by the small river tributary that runs through our property. The children have access to many arts materials and because I am a music teacher the house is well stocked with a range of musical instruments and opportunities. This has included forming a band with the two older children, and performing our original music at various events and festivals. The children have several external activities and mentors which they have chosen to participate in or with. The house is equipped with computers and wifi, but not television, so their screen time is mostly self-directed.

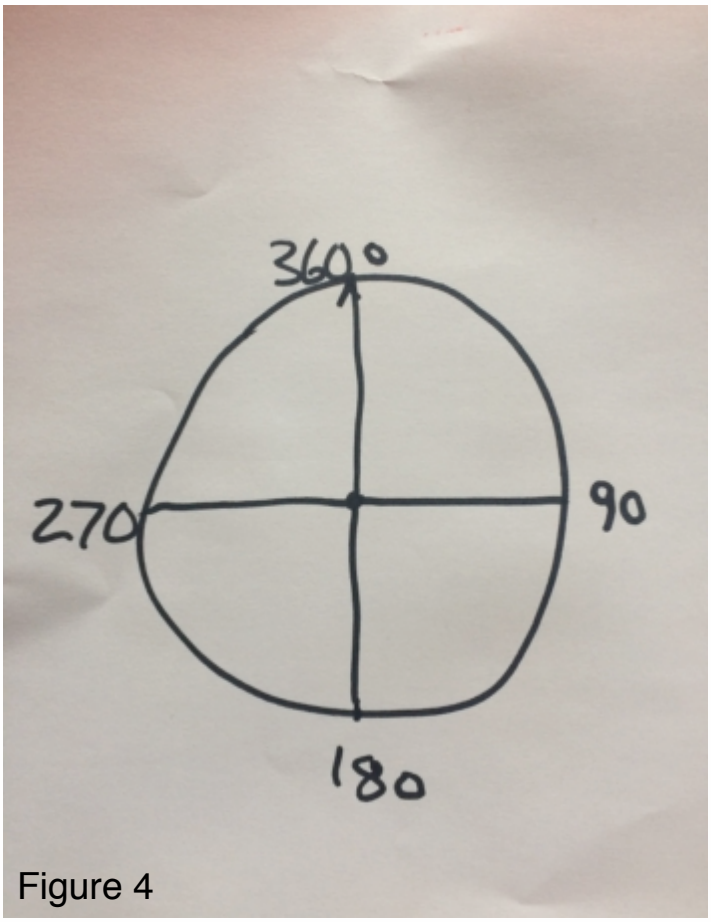


Figure 4

Marley, now aged five, has had a constant and unwavering curiosity for numbers, symbols, and understanding how the world works. He has never been to a formal school or followed a curriculum, but, as parents, we have availed ourselves to facilitate the answers to his numerous questions. By the age of three he had taught himself to write and read the alphabet in both upper and lower case. He had worked out the number placing for numbers up to a trillion (i.e. 10; 100; 1000; 10 000; 100 000; 1 000 000; 10 000 000 etc.) and had worked out the degrees of a circle. He would perform a spin in the air as if he was the compass in the circle, and when he landed back on the floor he would measure the degree he had landed on [Figure 4]

While riding his bike in the driveway, he said out of the blue; “Look Mom, I’m riding the infinity symbol” and lo and behold he was indeed riding the shape of the infinity symbol:

∞

We were slightly shocked that Marley was processing such supposedly advanced concepts, but on further reflection, it is us adults that put limits on what kind of learning or understanding is appropriate or possible at certain ages.

> In *The Significance of Theory,* Terry Eagleton says: Children make the best theorists, since they have not yet been educated into accepting our routine social practices as “natural” and so insist on posing to those practices the most embarrassingly general and fundamental questions, regarding them with a wondering estrangement which we adults have long forgotten. Since they do not yet grasp our social practices as inevitable, they do not see why we might not do things differently.” (hooks, 1994, 59)



Figure 5

Concomitantly Mojo, at the age of nine, began exploring square roots and building the visual examples of these using wooden square blocks [Figure 5]. This is hardly the kind of mathematics that a nine year old is expected to understand in school, and yet he understood and engaged with the concept perfectly well.

Marley's interest was sparked based on stories from his Grandmother, who had traveled to Russia. He located Russia on the world map and googled bears in their natural habitat (we have various maps and world globes located around the house as well as Google Earth, a computer app which allows you to locate and visit almost any location in the world.) He also discovered that the major landmark close to our house is a mountain called Mount Johnsson. He started locating this mountain when we were out traveling on the road and so could navigate his way home.

By age four we were reading his favourite book, *Mog the Forgetful Cat* by Judith Kerr (2005). When I got to the page where the father in the family, Mr Thomas, wanted to watch a boxing fight on TV, I did a bit of editing, thinking that Marley wouldn't understand the concept of a fight on TV. So I just said that Mr Thomas wanted to watch TV. Marley immediately stopped me and reprimanded me for not reading it correctly. He pointed to the word "fight" on the page, and said "It says fight." Slightly aghast, I handed the book to him and asked him to read it to me. He read every page without much prompting or correction.

Serendipitously, I came across Peter Gray's online article in *Psychology Today* titled "The Joy and Sorrow of Rereading Holt's 'How Children Learn'".

> Children don't become readers by first learning to read; they start right off by reading. They may read signs, which they recognize. They may recite, verbatim, the words in a

> memorized little book, as they turn the pages; or they may turn the pages of an unfamiliar book and say whatever comes to mind. We may not call that reading, but to the child it is reading. Over time, the child begins to recognize certain words, even in new contexts, and begins to infer the relationships between letters and sounds. In this way, the child's reading improves." (Gray, 2017)

You will note that all these examples are exactly what multimodality is defined as. John Holt was a brilliant observer of children in their free environment. He enjoyed watching and writing about their natural ability to learn through play, and what interested them. His writing is down to earth and accessible, making him by far the most cited author on unschooling. While musing about Lilu's struggle to learn Zulu, her additional language, at school, I came across this quote by John Holt in *How Children Learn:*

> Bill Hull, once said to me, "If we taught children to speak, they'd never learn." … I realise this is an important truth. Suppose we decided that we had to "teach" children to speak. How would we go about it? Fist, some committee of experts would analyse speech and break it down into a number of separate "speech skills". We would probably say that, since speech is made up of sounds, a child must be taught to make all the sounds of his language before he can be taught to speak the language itself. Doubtless, we would list these sounds, easiest and commonest ones first, harder and rarer ones next … We would not let the child hear much ordinary speech, but would only expose him to the sounds we were trying to teach … Along with our sound list, we would have a syllable list and a word list … and then we would teach how to combine the sounds, then learn the grammar rules … drill, review, test.
>
> What would happen? What would happen, quite simply, is that most children, before they got very far, would become baffled, discouraged, humiliated, and fearful, and would quit trying to do what we asked them. If outside of our classes, they lived a normal infant's life, many would probably ignore our "teaching" and learn to speak on their own. if not, if our control of their lives was complete, they would take refuge in deliberate failure and silence …" (Holt, 1983,85)

From what I have observed, language is taught with the same formula that Latin was taught to my parents. It is taught as something foreign, and taught to be tested, not to be spoken. There is little immersion into its culture or environment.

Recently, Marley asked me how he learned to speak. I explained to him that we all learned by listening, copying, trying and practicing. Essentially, we *sampled*, *collaborated* and *improvised*. This learning is completely self directed, and has no set formula. Furthermore, I would argue that sampling, improvising and collaboration are at the heart of all pedagogical, creative, cultural practices and research acts, and as social beings, with a cultural history that is layered, complex and diverse, we employ these ingredients to not only make sense of the world, but also our place within it. Marley's learning practice has employed sampling – by searching existing knowledge, or copying frameworks; improvising – by experimenting with his own ideas in conjunction with these pre-existing knowledge basis; and collaborating – by working with the people and resources available in his environment.

We have allowed learning to take place unbound by a preset conception of how learning should take place. So, when Marley has had an obsession – for example with the comparative speeds of different objects, such as a space rocket and a polar bear – we have sat down and worked it out together. These questions of his are totally self directed. They are things that interest him at the time, and once he feels he has grasped a concept he will move on, without the hindrance of a set formulae of age-appropriate learning. He might have learned to read from the performance of us reading the many colourful bedtime stories that interested him, or his Google searches, when no-one in the house knew the answers. When he wanted to build a rainbow pyramid in Minecraft, he googled the colours of the rainbow and then had to work out how many blocks he would have to build in order for his rainbow pyramid to finish in a point. He also then learned the differences between the colours and how they are made by mixing colours together. This was something that interested him, so he worked it out himself.

I would say that at the heart of all these pedagogical events was a performative and autoethnographic aspect. Children don't think of themselves as learning, they think of themselves as doing. It is a well-documented phenomena that people learn best when they experience hands on what they are learning, and they are more prone to learn deeply when the subject is of personal interest to them. I call this context and relevance. Peter Gray has done extensive research into how

children are naturally designed to learn through their environment, through everyday experiences and play, while John Holt often writes about this, and how standardised schooling and testing directly opposes this path of learning

Reading and story time are an essential part of our daily routine. From a few months old the children started having stories read or told to them, and this ritual naturally blossomed – not only into an extensive vocabulary, but also into wonderful discussions about stories, history, language and words. It developed the imagination as well as being a nurturing restorative time between parent and child. Although this thesis is not about childhood literacy, I have read with interest the PIRLS Literacy 2016 report. (Howie et al, 2018). In this study of reading and comprehension levels in grade 4 and 5 children, South Africa scored lowest out of the 50 countries included. There is evidence that a home which has a culture of reading and story telling leads to early literacy. (O'Carroll, 2018). My firm belief is that if a child can read she can learn anything, and this is evidenced in our home environment where, from as early as three years old, Marley was able to conduct searches on Google and to locate websites that he wanted to utilise, to follow instruction manuals or select items in his games. However, on a cautionary note, if a child is forced to read and the stories don't appeal to them this will quickly kill any love of reading.

From our reading and discussion we have kept a record of the words that we have come across. These words were specifically words that Mojo stopped us to ask about. These words become far more relevant in his daily life than a spelling list which is normally given to children to learn without context. Below are some of the words that have come up and I urge you to consider the pictures and senses that are aroused by each word, and how they might manifest in a child's mind.

Sinister Shrapnel Resentment Outstripped Sentient
Contraband Flank Delirious Sardonic Irony Mediocre
Envy Discernible Substantial Frail Resembled Furtive
Repulsed Tethered Imbibed Scruples Assuage Fruition
Mantle Jubilation Mourning Reverence Bereavement Genes Racism
Homophobia Equality Erosion Sediment Contain Macabre
Inroads Gruesome Uncanny Obnoxious Anniversary Majestic
Momentum Deceiving Fiber Horror Persist Crag
Truce Humdrum Gnarled Detest Foliage Malignancy

Alchemist Ominous Potent Malice Recall Repute
Shunned Dishevelled Flabby Constellation Puberty Liberal
Acceptance Communism Black Market Innumerable
Veiled Malice Corrugated Incantation Ensconced Hitler Jews
Homosexual Torture Gas camps Suffocation Death Scientific
experiment Capitalism America Charlottesville Communism
Republican Democrats Trump Liberal Period Uterus
Egg Sperm Blood Baby Heterosexual Transgender
Cisgender Bisexual Hormones Bolster Constellation
Midges Wraith Cairn Fortnight Barrow Fragrance
Perfume Sparse Notch Ominous Threatening
Diminished Lull Bane Italics Font Contrive
League Wan Mournful Dejected Besieged Astray

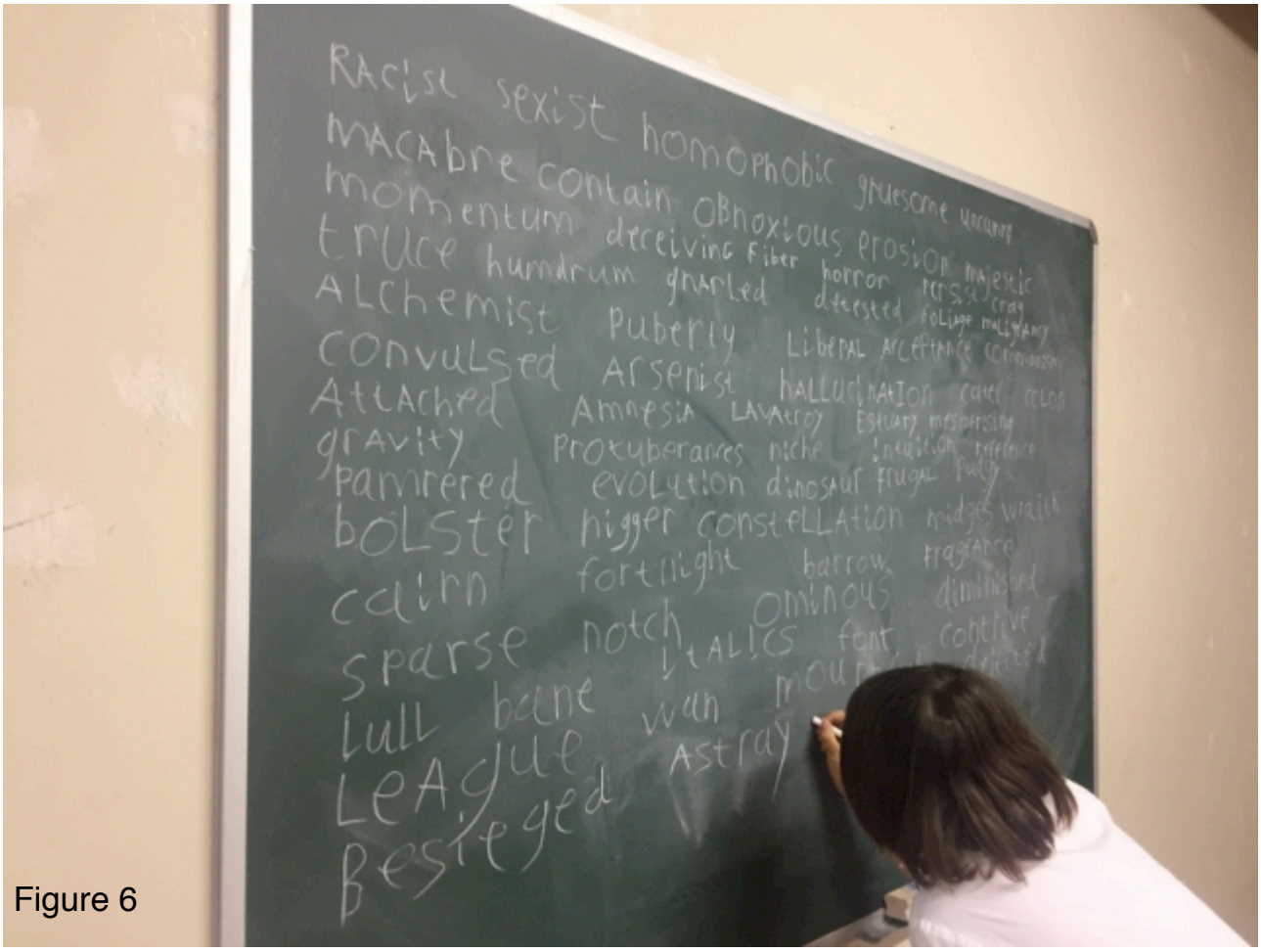


Figure 6

[Figure 6] is a photograph of the performance that Mojo did with some of the words that we had discussed.

Some of the literary series of stories that we have enjoyed have been *Harry Potter, (*J.K. Rowling, 1997–2007), *Narnia* (C.S. Lewis, 1950–1956) and *The Lord of the Rings (J.R.R Tolkien, 1954–1955),* to name a few. Mojo often discusses the connections between these stories, not only the complexity of good and evil, but also the development of characters, often children, over the course of several books, and the fantasy world and its relation to the real world. After reading the books, there is always great excitement to watch the movies, to see how the filmmakers interpret the stories, scenes and special effects. The soundtrack is listened to separately, and favourite pieces are listened to many times, as the sound evokes the memories and emotions of the stories.

Performance of some kind has been an integral part of every learning experience, and making videos has probably been the most successful documenting of this. The children have been stimulated and motivated by the process of making videos. Mojo started using video to record his science experiments. My aunt, a UCT emeritus professor in microbiology, mentored this process, and Mojo used the opportunity to "teach" the experiment. Once again, the experiments were initiated by his interest, and mentored by a knowledgable facilitator. The experiment was recorded and done by the child, which made it relevant and contextualised for him. This is another example of multimodal pedagogy. Some of the experiments included light reflection, diffraction, colour and light, centre of gravity, surface tension, photosynthesis, static electricity, atmospheric pressure, reverse osmosis, growing yeast cells to produce CO_2, the properties of plastic, conduction of heat etc. These videos were then posted to his YouTube channel, which made them more interactive. Digital media is a prominent tool in the way this generation learns and communicates, and creating a YouTube channel had many positive spin-offs. He had to create a YouTube character that was recognisable for his viewers, and ensure that the information that he was conveying was not only correct, but fluently presented. He also had to ensure that his lighting, background, props and sound was aesthetically pleasing. These were all elements that he had to work out for himself.

Other mentoring that Mojo was able to enjoy was at a bronze foundry run by friends of ours. Mojo was able to go through the whole moulding and firing process, see how the different materials worked and behaved with heat, and measure the temperatures that metals melt at and the comparative melting temperatures of different metals. He moulded, [Figure 7] caste [Figures 8, 9 and 10] and fired [Figure 11] his own bronze paper knife [Figure 12].



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

Mentoring is a fundamental and essential aspect of this multimodal pedagogy. The collaboration of this process is empowering for both parties. [Figure 13] shows a collaborative session with an electrical engineer in which they learnt about electricity and circuitry.



Figure 13

Another successful mentoring process that Mojo undertook was with a leather artisan. He was so taken with this process that he started his own leather business. He has made a range of accessories including earrings, necklaces, bracelets, wallets and bags. Not only was the design and production process a creative learning experience, but he also had to learn skills in maths, business, entrepreneurship, marketing, and presentation. Once again sampling, improvisation and collaboration comes to mind. Sampling in that he looked at existing examples of leather accessories, either in books or the internet. He improvised with his own tools, leather and design. He collaborated with his mentors. [Figure 14] shows examples of his leather work.



Figure 14

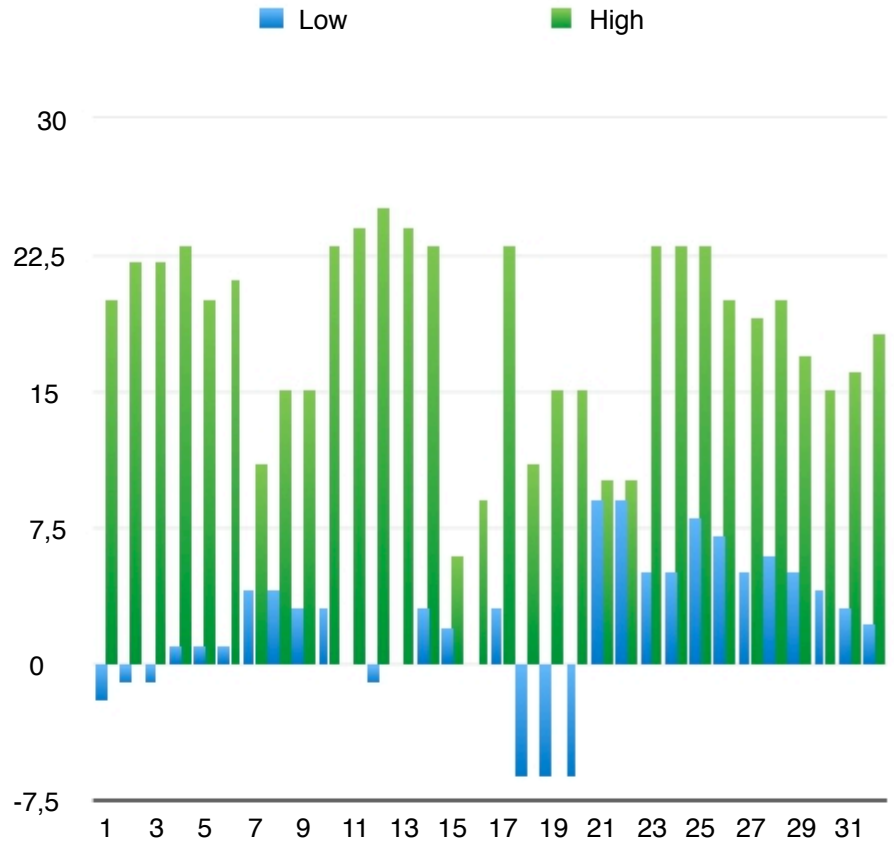
One of the routines that we have kept over the course of 2015–2018 is a daily recording of the weather. At 8 AM every morning, Mojo would record the minimum and maximum temperatures as well as the rainfall. He quickly had to learn the degrees of temperature, include the negative temperatures which we enjoy at our home, as well as the rainfall in millimetres and the decimals, for example 1.5 mm. He designed a table to record these measurements and graphs to represent them. He inserted formulas in the tables to measure the total rainfall for the month and the average high and low temperatures, and he would highlight the coldest and hottest days of the month as well the day with the highest rainfall. [Figure 15] is a one-month sample of what we did. This routine was triggered by watching the documentary *Before the Flood,* presented by National Geographic, which features Leonardo DiCaprio as a United Nations Messenger of Peace on a journey to five continents and the Arctic to witness climate change firsthand. He goes on expeditions with scientists uncovering the reality of climate change and meets with political leaders fighting against inaction. (https://www.beforetheflood.com/about/).

August temps

Date	Low	High
1	-2	20
2	-1	22
3	-1	22
4	1	23
5	1	20
6	1	21
7	4	11
8	4	15
9	3	15
10	3	23
11	0	24
12	-1	25
13	0	24
14	3	23
15	2	6
16	0	9
17	3	23
18	-6	11
19	-6	15
20	-6	15
21	9	10
22	9	10
23	5	
24	5	23
25	8	23
26	7	20
27	5	19
28	6	20
29	5	17
30	4	15
31		16
average	2,193548387096774	18,161290322580646

Aug rainfall

Date	Mm
1	0
2	0
3	0
4	0
5	0
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	0
10	
11	0
12	0
13	0
14	5,5
15	0
16	0
17	0
18	0
19	0
20	
21	2,6
22	0
23	0
24	0
25	0
26	0
27	0
28	0
29	0
30	
31	0
total	8,1



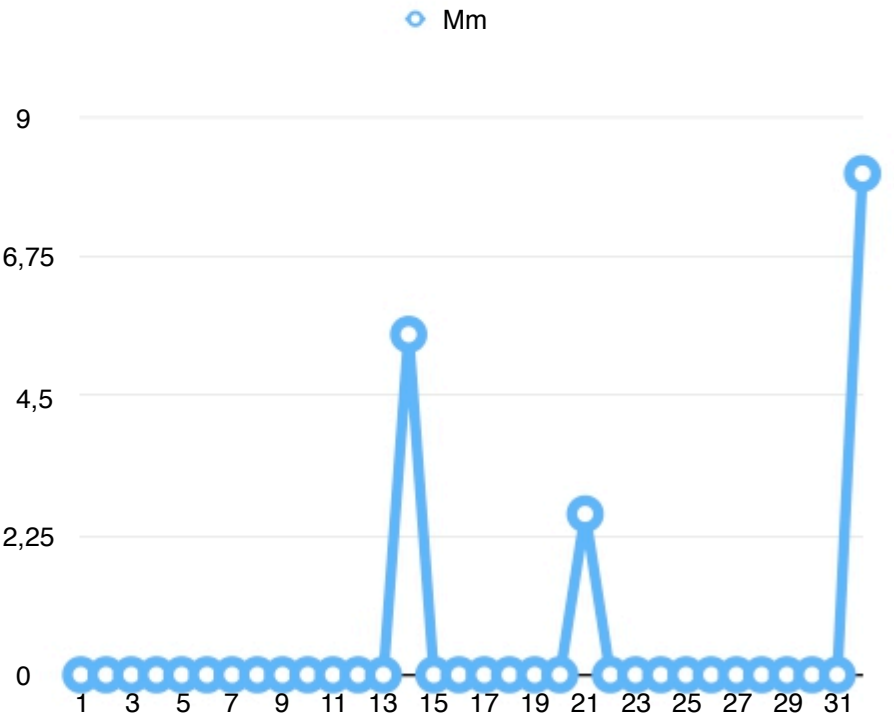


Figure 15

Enraptured and incensed by the reality of the situation which humans have made for themselves, Mojo was motivated to not only record our own weather pattern and track any changes over the course of time, he was also interested to find ways of making our own lives more self-sustaining, energy efficient and greener. It was a daily routine, a performance that was done each day, and was relevant to our daily lives. This routine and discipline counteracts the commonly held myth that self-directed learning lacks discipline and the grit to perfect skills and tasks.

Another essential aspect of our routine and discipline is music practice. Like learning a language, music requires immersion in that art and daily discipline. Mojo chose the drums as his instrument when he was just six years old, and began working with his mentor. He has followed the Trinity College London syllabus and has completed several exams with distinction. However, the exams are seen as a tool to perfect rudiments and skills, and he has gone on to sample these techniques and patterns to improvise in his collaborations with other musicians including in our band *Sleepless.* In 2017 he performed several times with this band, including at the Oppikoppi music festival. He also performed at the International Marimba and Steelpan festival in Gauteng in 2016 and 2017, where the band, which competed in the open section, won two second places and one first place.

Although the scope of this research does not include the merits of music in the classroom and as a learning tool, it does seem relevant to include my observations as a music teacher of our home practice. Not only does it develop co-ordination, memory skills, discipline, the ability to collaborate and to be an individual working as part of a whole, it also teaches language skills and mathematics.

Music is the most perfect example of mathematics in our everyday lives. Written music symbolises the seven elements of music – melody, harmony, pitch, tempo, rhythm, form and dynamics. Within the five lines of the stave, the musician is interpreting these symbols to create the magic of music. Within these symbols, complex mathematical equations are embedded. For more explanation I have attached in the Appendix *The Mathematics of Music: Some Notes* (Thomson, R. 2017) at the end of this document. Like the science experiments, making videos of our music has been an important aspect of our learning. Below are the lyrics of a song that Mojo and Lilu wrote together in 2017. It was written independently of me, and is and insightful commentary of our society and youth today.

Contaminated Beings

Over medicated
Under stimulated

Agitated
Trying to grow roots
In a place without truth
This flesh
This bone
This skin
Her only home
All alone

Living paraplegic lives
Disconnected broken lies
Humanity compromised
Lost allies

Where are the hands of your mother?
Where are the feet of your father?
Where are the gods we used to pray to?
Where are the ghosts of our family?
‘cause baby, baby, we are contaminated beings
and baby, baby, we need emotional healing
‘cause baby, baby, we are contaminated beings
and baby, baby, we need emotional healing

She is on her feet
While the world is on its knees
Missing the breeze
Praising the obsolete
Your gods are drunk on a sacramental wine
I think it’s time
You took that leap, bassline
You’re an artist, not a crime

Students, the soldiers of our youth
Praising these lies like the gospel truth
‘Likes’ more cherished than the wisdom tooth
Where is the youth?
Where is my youth?

Where are the hands of your mother?
Where are the feet of your father?
Where are the gods we used to pray to?
Where are the ghosts of our family?
‘cause baby, baby, we are contaminated beings
and baby, baby, we need emotional healing
‘cause baby, baby, we are contaminated beings
and baby, baby, we need emotional healing



Figure 16

Gaming has likewise become an essential aspect of our home practice, and rather than limiting the children's learning, creativity and imagination, it has done the exact opposite. I will use the sandbox video game Minecraft as an example. In this game the player builds with a variety of different cubes in a 3D world. The player can choose from a myriad of materials– including concrete, terracotta, metals, stones, minerals, trees, grasses and flowers – to build and protect herself and environment. In December 2016 I was surprised to find the boys "mining" outside [Figure 16]. They had invented a game in which they imagined they were mining for precious minerals. I overheard them listing the properties and uses of diamonds, gold and iron. They have also developed a vocabulary and a greater understanding of the real world through their creative exploration of this screen world. They learned basic farming techniques like irrigation and using bone meal as a basic fertiliser.



Figure 17

They have learned about different types of trees and wood and their properties. They also learned about sedimentary layers in rock and soil, and the mathematics involved in making geometric and

symmetrical buildings. [Figure 17] is an example of a house that Marley built using cobble stone, oak wood, and oak wood planks, sheet glass and lanterns. Marley had to quickly learn to read the labels and instructions on his screen in order to progress. This reminds me of the now famous “hole in the wall” experiment conducted by Professor Sugata Mitra in 1999. In this initial experiment, a computer was placed in a wall in a Delhi slum. Children quickly collaborated to access the language and terminology of the internet, even though they did not know English. There was no adult supervision or facilitation, but the children were still able to use the computers successfully and accumulated an English vocabulary of over 200 words in a few weeks.

In [Figure 18] Marley is collaborating with friends to build a Minecraft world. They share information and learn the rules of the game by experimentation and improvisation.

Figure 18



It would be impossible to include every learning event, with humble and extraordinary revelations happening every day. Each one of these events could be linked to a “subject” learned at school, but it seems irrelevant to try to document all of these parallels, because the children are learning all they need right now.

Of course, the most critical question that comes out of this is what practical application this type of learning has in a country that is so deeply defined by inequality. The environment that we have created for our children is so obviously well resourced; from access to books, the internet, digital gaming, outdoor facilities, arts and science materials, mentors in a wide variety of fields, but probably most significantly, access to two parents who are not only both committed to the time to facilitate this kind of critical pedagogy, but also have the creative skills to find solutions.

Chapter 5

Practice Review

Having worked predominantly as a professional musician and then later as a teacher, the idea of research through creative practice was quite foreign, and I arrived at the project with no clear idea of what the work would look and sound like, how it would manifest, or even what my aesthetic language would be. This was an important aspect of the research, as I was consciously not reverting to a set of preconceived practiced moves, but allowing the process to define itself as the research unfolded. The practices that influence this project lend weight to the concept of researcher as *bricoleur* and the idea that there are many layers and contributing factors that influence our reading of research as well as the creative output of the project. These strata manifest physically and primarily as sound and visual art forms and samples, but are guided and activated by multiple stimuli such as memory, experience, education, culture and language. What follows is a reflection on my own creative practice and the projects, samples and collaborations that inflect this practice.

While writing the proposal for this project, I came across Nic Sousanis' project, *Unflattening* (2015), which adopts the form of a graphic novel and is in fact his PhD thesis. It "… weaves together diverse ways of seeing drawn from science, philosophy, art, literature, and mythology, it uses the collage like capacity of comics to show that perception is always an active process of incorporating and reevaluating different vantage points" (Sousanis, 2016)

I was challenged to consider my creative research as a non-linear *process*. Process became the important theme in the work as I started to record the performance of making. I started to see all the stories I was reading, the sounds I was hearing and the art I was seeing as intricately woven together. Hundreds of thoughts, ideas and voices, sometimes isolated, sometimes in harmony, sometimes discordant, all contributed to my experience of the research and "cognition" of it. In the preface of his book *Before Writing,* Gunther Kress articulates a need for a greater understanding of "cognition": "… and one that does not sever pleasure from thought, and thought from emotion, feeling, affect" (Kress, 1997, xviii), because these are essentially traits that separate us from technology, and what makes our humanness valuable in the technological age.

The practice of sampling, improvisation and collaboration were foremost as I recorded these practices, and they were clearly evident in the final event in which the work was displayed, performed, installed and heard. This event took place at the Ramparts of the Old Fort at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg. This then became a site-specific event, and the space lent its stories and memories to my own and those of the participants. I refer to the people that attended the event as participants, not as audience members, because as they moved through the space they became implicated in the performance and the research itself. Stacy Holman Jones wrote that:

> Performance ethnography is grounded in two primary ideas: (a) that our identities and daily practices are a series of performance choices (conscious and unconscious) that we improvise within cultural and social guidelines and (b) that we learn through participation or through performance. (Holman Jones, 2005, 770)

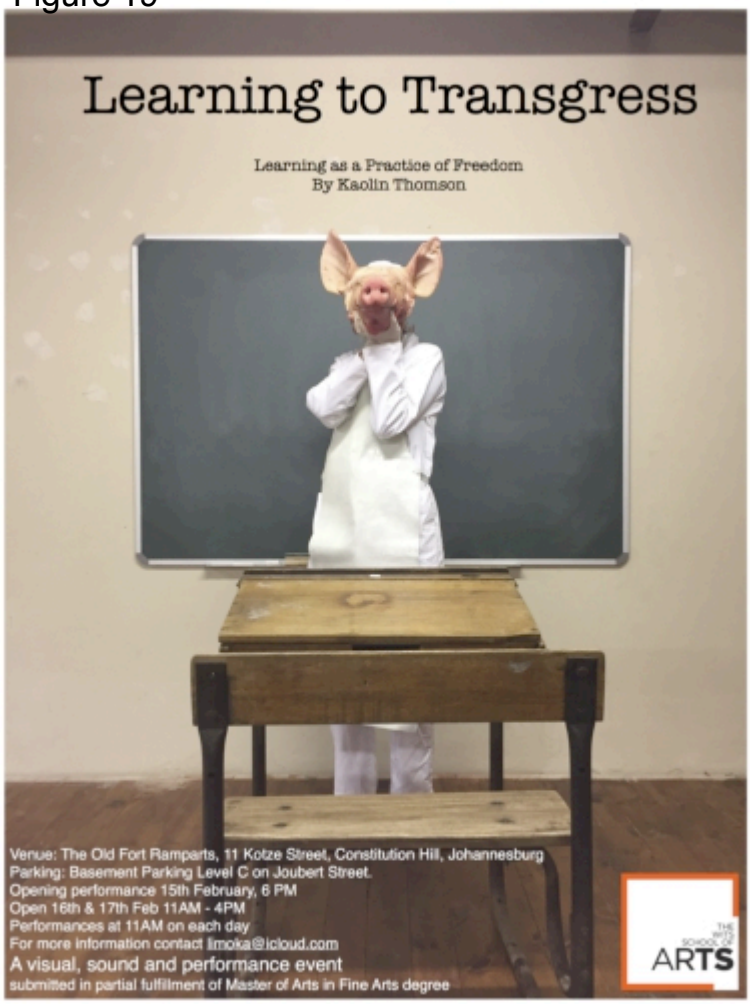
It was through this participation in the performance that I hoped to create the visceral, physical and transformative experience for the participants that are the hallmarks of autoethnography. The self-professed grandmother of performance art, Marina Abramović, explains how she incorporates the audience in order to reach this transformed state:

> Nobody's life is changed by somebody else's experiences. I want more from the public. I want them to be involved and go through changes as I do. It's very difficult, and it's a pioneering job because for so long there have been set rules: the artist performs, the public observes. (in Scott, 2007, 101)

It was her performance, *Imponderabilia,* (1997), that I reflected on when I considered how my event unfolded. The participants had to consider their own identity, role and collusion within the system that I am critiquing. They had to confront themes such as the partnership of colonisation, christianity and capitalism in South African education; white supremacy; discipline vs. punishment; sexism; patriarchy; racism; homophobia; mental health; children's rights; collaboration vs. coercion; perpetuation of industrial-age teaching practices; the hierarchy of languages, symbols and "subjects"; and even how we consume art.

I titled the exhibition *Learning to Transgress: Learning as a Practice of Freedom* as a response to bell hooks' seminal book titled *Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practice of Freedom* (1994).

Figure 19



For me this summed up my experience of the research. It was at once the act of learning as a transgression against the conventional norms of the education system, as well as learning the act of transgression. The process had been both painful and transformative and I had to peel away the layers of all that I had believed and was taught to be essential in education for a child to grow up as a functional member of society. This was an act of transgression. The daily rebellion and discomfort that we undertook. "When teaching in the critical paradigm, there is a vulnerability, one has to let go of the need for affirmation, and authority. There is anxiety in the letting go, a discomfort of shifting paradigms" (hooks, 1994, 39).

The image on the event invitation [Figure 19] displayed myself in the traditional position of a teacher – standing between the desk and black board – holding a pig's severed head. This invitation was posted on social media, and was the first taste of the visual references (samples) and aesthetic language that I had employed. Described as blunt, minimalist and sparse, this, as it turns out, was the same aesthetic language that I had activated with *Useful Objects,* otherwise known as *The Vagina Ashtray* (Thomson, 1996).

This particular piece is also an example of "*this* artist's sensibility", applying the processes of sampling, improvisation and collaboration. Operating within the parameters of a feminist discourse, I sampled other work within that discourse, particularly work such as Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1979). I improvised with a medium that I had never worked with – ceramics – and I collaborated with a ceramics specialist, Marina Walsh, to complete the work successfully. I asked a

friend to give me a cigarette to stub out into the ashtray. He happened to be smoking Gauloises Blonde cigarettes at the time, and unbeknownst to me, this label would define the political weight of the work. In her review of the work in the *Mail & Guardian,* Hazel Friedman (1996) wrote:

> Clever and Quirky, its apparent neat resolution belies its subtle Semantic layers. It comprises a half-smoked cigarette (the brand was Gauloise Blondes, which adds a clever pun to the work) in a ceramic ashtray resembling a back vagina, lips or a turd. Simultaneously, it speak of social taboos, the body as a dumping-ground and, metaphorically, of violation – sexual and political.[6]

Figure 20



It was this mentality that I brought to the *Learning to Transgress* event. Knowing that I had sampled, improvised, collaborated and performed these works, but that the participants, the space, and sometimes fluke events added layers of meaning that were unintentional, but create the magic of the arts that is often out of our control.

As the participants moved into the space, the first image they encountered was of Lilu standing in the dimly lit and cramped passageway, dressed in a school uniform with a bloodied, leather butcher's apron, a leather mask, and a white butcher's hat. She was facing side on, and with a deadpan expression [Figure 20, 28 and 29]. The participants were guided into the first room, which was darkened, and the first audio-visual piece was projected onto a large screen. This piece is titled *White on White.* It is a five-minute slide show.

Evoking Mohau Modisakeng's video installation *To Move Mountains* at the National Arts Festival in 2016, and *Untitled Frames* (2012–2013) [Figures 21, 24 and 25], *White on White* samples several

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[6] To read more about the controversy that followed this review, please refer to Brenda Schmahmann's *Picturing Change* (2013) 202–206



Figure 21



Figure 22

Figure 23





Figure 24

tools of oppression, including the leather apron, mask, machete, and sjambok [Figure 22 and 23] as well as the intimate sounds of breathing, heartbeat and movement of fabric. I hoped to disturb the viewer with imagery that would have been associated with the brutality of apartheid policing, but now wielded by a white female, brutalising her own daughter, signalling the awareness of my own complicity and that of the participants.


Figure 25


Figure 26

My goal with this piece was to arouse a physical and emotional response to what I perceive as our unquestioning perpetuation of broken systems. I am dressed in some sort of uniform, possibly a butcher's, which indicates my authority.[7] I carry a machete and a sjambok, both considered to be traditional tools and weapons in South Africa, and neither associated with a white woman. The shock of first violently threatening my own daughter, who is seated at the desk wearing a traditional school uniform, with these weapons, and then when she rises and peels off my mask, hat, and clothes to reveal raw blood underneath, until I am lying naked in a foetal position on the floor. The look on my face in this instance is one of cognisance – I have seen what can never be unseen [Figure 27]. The photographic stills are curated in such a way that the viewer has no option in the narrative. This is self-consciously didactic and highly choreographed, drawing attention to the system of indoctrination within our society.

Figure 27



The blood is a response to Mohau Modisakeng's use of coal dust and oil, which rubs black onto all the white apparel. In *White on White,* once the blood is spilled, it begins to mark and taint all the white surfaces. I then start to dress Lilu in the white uniform that is now smeared with blood, and

[7] Stanley Milgram's *Obedience to Authority* is an interesting reference here. His influential work is an account of the experiments on the psychology of obedience to authority and understanding socially organised evil in society. When a person is dressed in uniform, people are more likely to be unquestioningly obedient to their authority.

even though I have passed on the "mantel", it is dirtied, and we have both witnessed this unravelling. The soundtrack is a recording of my breathing, heartbeat and singing. I endeavoured to not only create a very physically intimate sound, but also something that melodically invoked a calling of the ancestors, or an ancient traditional ceremony. Here I reference Deborah Bell's *Return of the Ancient Ones* I–V, (2013–2015) which uses visual and sonic modes as a powerful medium for transformation. The sounds she uses are almost prehistoric, primordial. Of course, Lisa Gerrard is an eminent sonic conjuror of celestial and primal beings, and she has been an influence on the development of my own vocal sound over the years.

Another important reference for the work is South African musician and producer Felix Laband. His 2015 release *Deaf Safari* is a sound piece that uses samples and layers that are distinctly South African, but within the context of Western music genres to investigate ideas around religion, ethnicity, politics, crime, sexuality, ordinary day-to-day life and violence. I am particularly interested in his use of sampling in recording and live performances. In *White on White,* I sample from his piece titled *Getting Old* from this same album. "Maybe we can find out where we really go", whispered in a child's voice, leaves us considering the perpetual human endeavour, what "this" is all for, and where we go when we die. In the conclusion of the sound piece I sample from Lindokuhle Nkosi's poem *Wisdom of the Elders,* which features on the liner notes of the album cover of *Shabaka and the Ancestors* (2016).

Wisdom of the Elders

In the burning of the Republic,
it is always the flattened mountain
that performs the first act of self-immolation.
Then the shacks (too close, a mouth with too many teeth jostling for attention)
in protest of their own impoverishment.
And the people within them follow.
And art work in schools we cant afford,
and burning schools
burning because we have nowhere to learn.
Fire in the peripheries we've been relegated to.
Queer black bodies spinning on the tip of a candle-flame.
Borders incinerated,

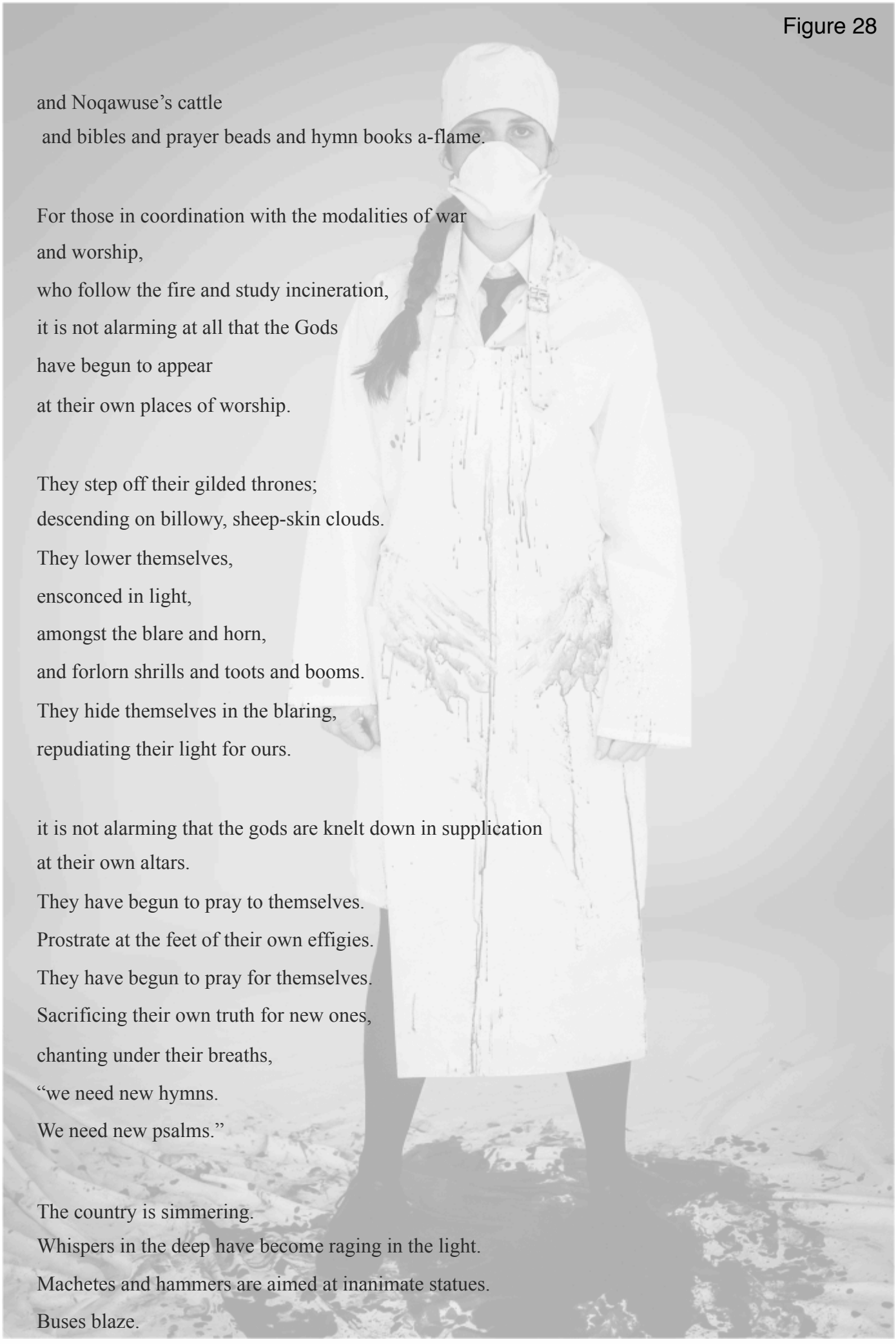


Figure 28

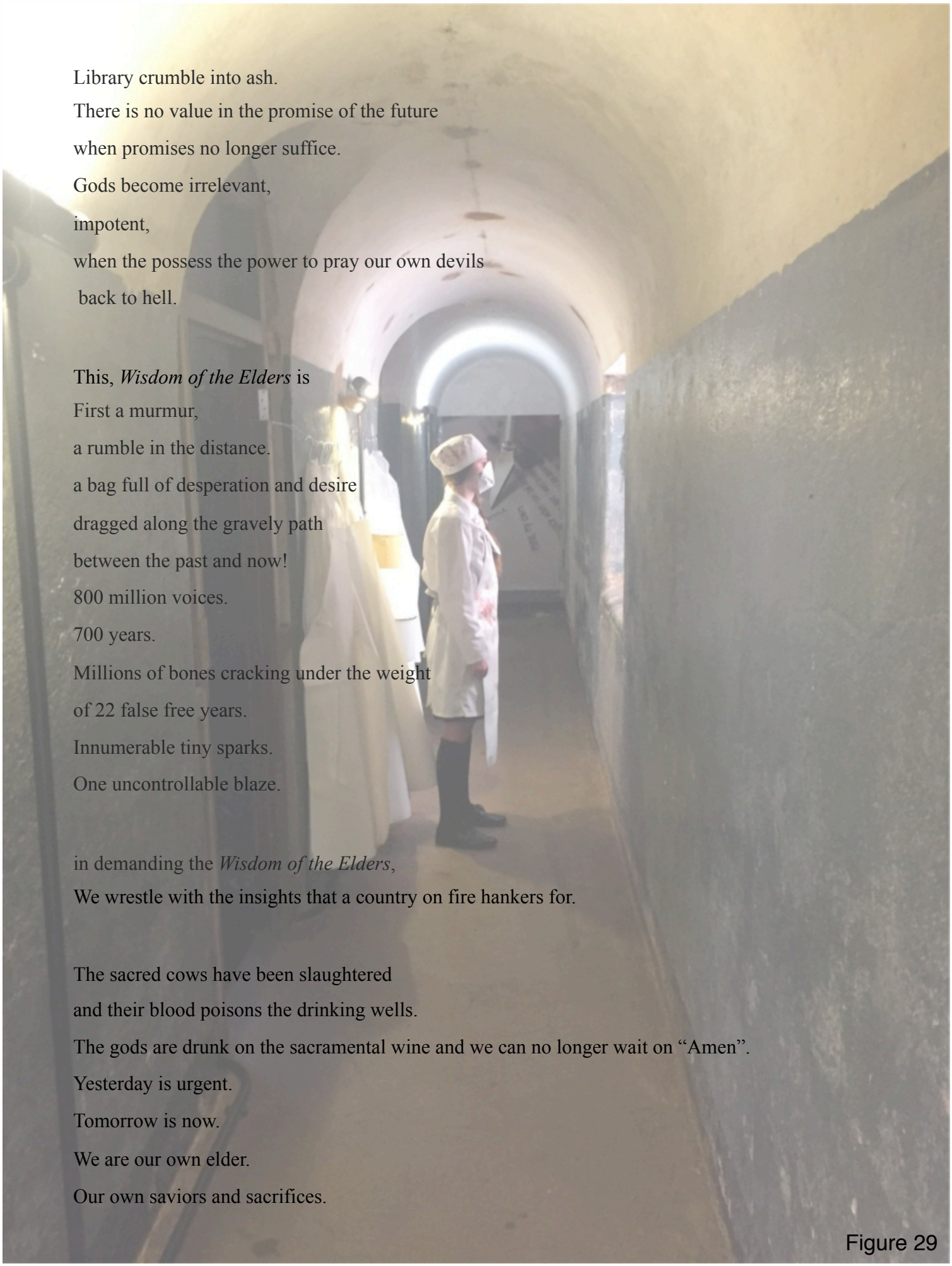
and Noqawuse's cattle
and bibles and prayer beads and hymn books a-flame.

For those in coordination with the modalities of war
and worship,
who follow the fire and study incineration,
it is not alarming at all that the Gods
have begun to appear
at their own places of worship.

They step off their gilded thrones;
descending on billowy, sheep-skin clouds.
They lower themselves,
ensconced in light,
amongst the blare and horn,
and forlorn shrills and toots and booms.
They hide themselves in the blaring,
repudiating their light for ours.

it is not alarming that the gods are knelt down in supplication
at their own altars.
They have begun to pray to themselves.
Prostrate at the feet of their own effigies.
They have begun to pray for themselves.
Sacrificing their own truth for new ones,
chanting under their breaths,
"we need new hymns.
We need new psalms."

The country is simmering.
Whispers in the deep have become raging in the light.
Machetes and hammers are aimed at inanimate statues.
Buses blaze.



Library crumble into ash.
There is no value in the promise of the future
when promises no longer suffice.
Gods become irrelevant,
impotent,
when the possess the power to pray our own devils
back to hell.

This, *Wisdom of the Elders* is
First a murmur,
a rumble in the distance.
a bag full of desperation and desire
dragged along the gravely path
between the past and now!
800 million voices.
700 years.
Millions of bones cracking under the weight
of 22 false free years.
Innumerable tiny sparks.
One uncontrollable blaze.

in demanding the *Wisdom of the Elders*,
We wrestle with the insights that a country on fire hankers for.

The sacred cows have been slaughtered
and their blood poisons the drinking wells.
The gods are drunk on the sacramental wine and we can no longer wait on "Amen".
Yesterday is urgent.
Tomorrow is now.
We are our own elder.
Our own saviors and sacrifices.

Figure 29

The *Sacred Cows Have Been Slaughtered* is the final line in the sound piece. As the participants move out of the first room back into the passage, they are confronted with the reality of Lilu dressed as she was at the end of the slide show. She then shifts to them each in turn and dresses them in a butcher's apron, a mask and latex gloves. They have no choice in this violation of their personal space. To quote one participant: he " … felt claustrophobic, uneasy, culpable, and although covered (apron, mask, gloves), felt stripped bare, exposed and vulnerable."



Figure 30

In Marina Abramović's *Imponderabilia* (1997) [Figure 30] she stood facing Ulay, both naked, in the entrance of a gallery. The audience had no choice but squeeze past these two naked bodies. I hoped to evoke the same experience here, whereby the participants have to undergo a very physical and sensory experience that implicates them in the narrative and the art-making experience.

Now dressed in their uniform, they then moved into the next room, where they encountered *Read Between the Lines* [Figures 31 and 32].

Figure 31



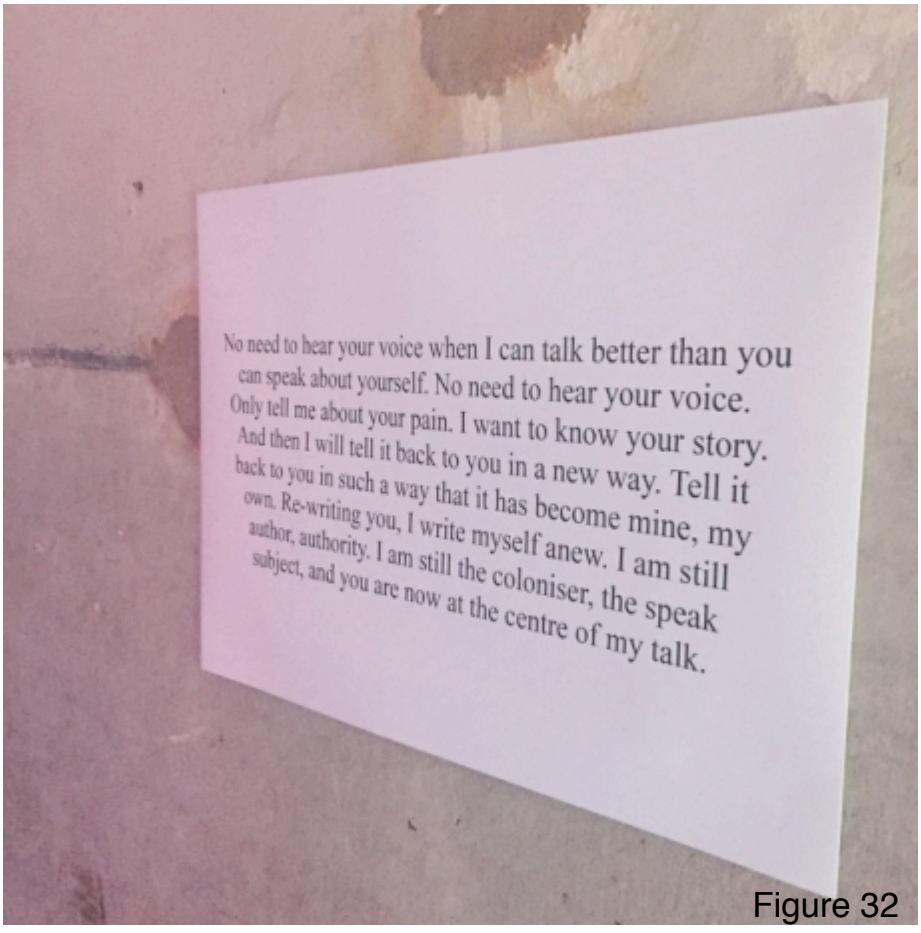


Figure 32

In 2015 I started to play with the paper on which I was making my notes for my research proposal. I started to cut it, roll it, fold it, weave it, stick it. It became some kind of ceremonial process, and then I read bell hooks':

> … no need to hear your voice when I can talk better than you can speak about yourself. no need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the coloniser, the speak subject, and you are now at the centre of my talk. (hooks, 1990, 151–152 in Fine, 1994, 70)

I was casting myself in the role of researcher, author, coloniser, as I took all those pieces of stories and wove them into my own. This became a symbol of the perpetuation of a system that takes individual voices and stories that are impossible to be read or heard as they have been cut up, re-worked, and re-written. The same system that Freire, hooks, Black, Cullingford, Gray, Robinson, Holt, Jones and Pink Floyd had critiqued. The same system that puts children into a classroom for a minimum of 12 years, to be told that even though what they are learning has no relevance, use or interest in their individual lives, they must learn what is prescribed to them in order to proceed as a contributing member of society. If you pass the standardised test you are a success, and if you fail the test you cannot continue. In essence, this system is a thinly veiled machine to maintain the capitalist class structures.

The work consists of a 4x1.2 meter board, with the notes for my research proposal stuck onto the board and then on top of that, the notes rolled and folded to create a relief of quotation marks.

Similar to Frances Goodman's [Figure 33] use of false nails, eyelashes and sequins with historically female crafting techniques such as quilting, crochet and embroidery in making her sculptures and installations within a feminist discourse, I use the implements of the education system – scissors, paper, glue, desks, blackboard, chalk – to weave quotation marks between which no-one will ever know what is written. Unbeknownst to the viewer, I collaborated with an illiterate domestic worker to roll the paper. This is an ironic response to bell hooks:



Figure 33

As I already suggested, growing up in a rural area in the agrarian south, among the black people who worked the land, I felt intimately linked to the discussion of peasant life in Freire's work and its relation to literacy. You know there are no history books that really tell the story of how difficult the politics of everyday life was for black people in the racially segregated south when so many folks did not read and were so often dependent on racist people to explain, to read, to write … The emphasis on education as necessary for liberation that black people made in slavery and then onto reconstruction informed our lives. And so Freire's emphasis on education as a practice of freedom made such immediate sense to me …

And it was educators like Freire who affirmed that the difficulties I had with the banking system of education, with an education that in no way addressed my social reality, were an important critique. (hooks, 1994, 51)

The irony of casting myself as the authoritarian, the coloniser, paying an illiterate woman to make the art work that critiques the education system that she aspires to in order to gain liberation and emancipation from poverty and powerlessness. It is my very privilege and my education which has allowed me access to this critical response.

To draw attention to the process rather than the product, I made a time-lapse video of the making process with a soundtrack of frenetic sounds sampled from cutting, folding and tearing paper, scissors, glue and the physicality of my breathing sounds. The inspiration for this soundtrack, and in many ways, the sound design for the whole project, once again came from Felix Laband's *Deaf Safari* (2015).

The event participants then moved to the third room, where they encountered some 120 A4 photographs scattered over the floor. These photographs were randomly placed. The content was some of the recordings of performances that we had undertaken during the research. The participants then had to make critical decisions of how they were going to move through the space. Would they walk carefully so that the pictures were not moved or marked? Would they walk on the pictures? Would they re-arrange the pictures? Would they take pictures? These were all decisions they had to make while still dressed in the butcher's uniform and encountering the other members dressed the same. It heightened their sense of a performance within a performance, their physicality in the space, their role in the art-making process, and questions around how we consume art.

The works themselves are sampled from sources including the **#metoo,** [Figure 34 and 35]**,** Dean Hutton *#fuckwhitepeople* (2016) [Figure 36 and 37], and Kemang Wa Lehulere *"To whom it may concern"* (2015) [Figure 38]. My use of the schoolroom props such as the chalkboard and school desk denote a long genealogy of iconographic references. Wa Lehulere, David Andrew (*C30 project,* 2008), Thomas Hirschhorn *ANSCHOOL* (2005), Hicham Benohoud *La Salle de Classe* (1994–2001) and particularly Pink Floyd's *Another Brick in the Wall* (1979) [Figure 40] are prominent samples. The paper mâché mask is a replica of the masks used in this music video. In the light of the location of this research, it is interesting to note that the single "Another Brick in the Wall" and album, *The Wall,* were banned in South Africa after it was adopted by school boycotters who were protesting the racial inequalities in the education system of the apartheid regime. Below are some of the images from this room.

Figure 34





Figure 35

Figure 36





Figure 37



Figure 38

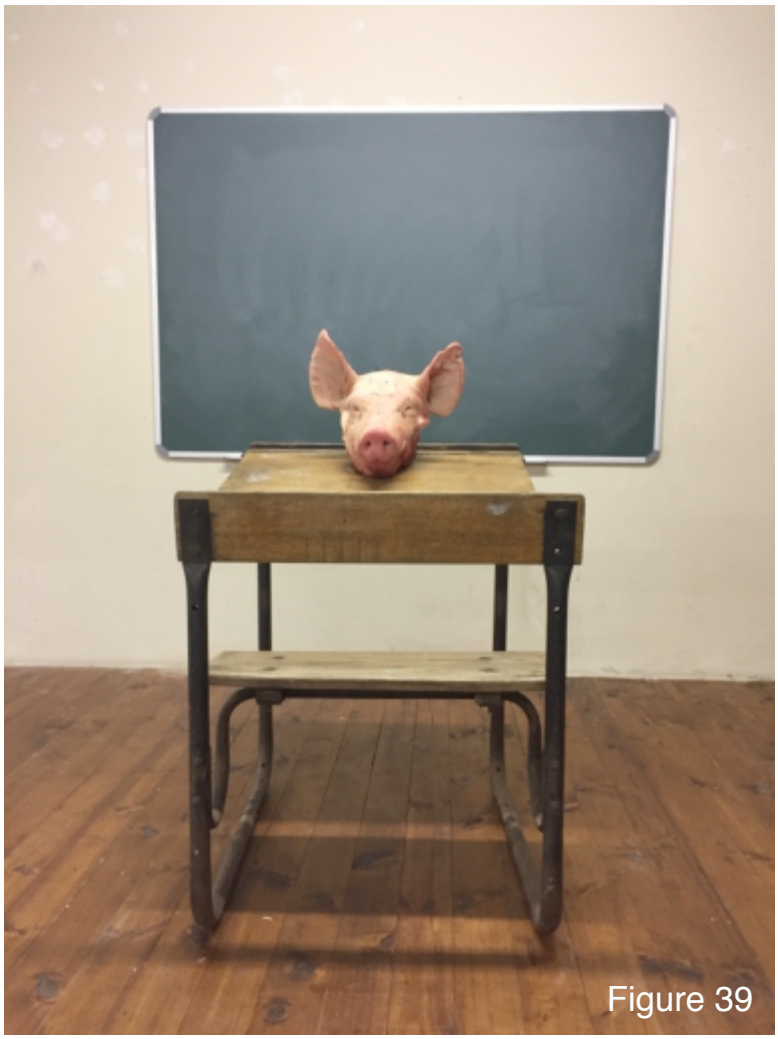


Figure 39



Figure 40



Figure 41



Figure 42



Figure 44

Figure 45





Figure 46

Figure 47





Figure 48

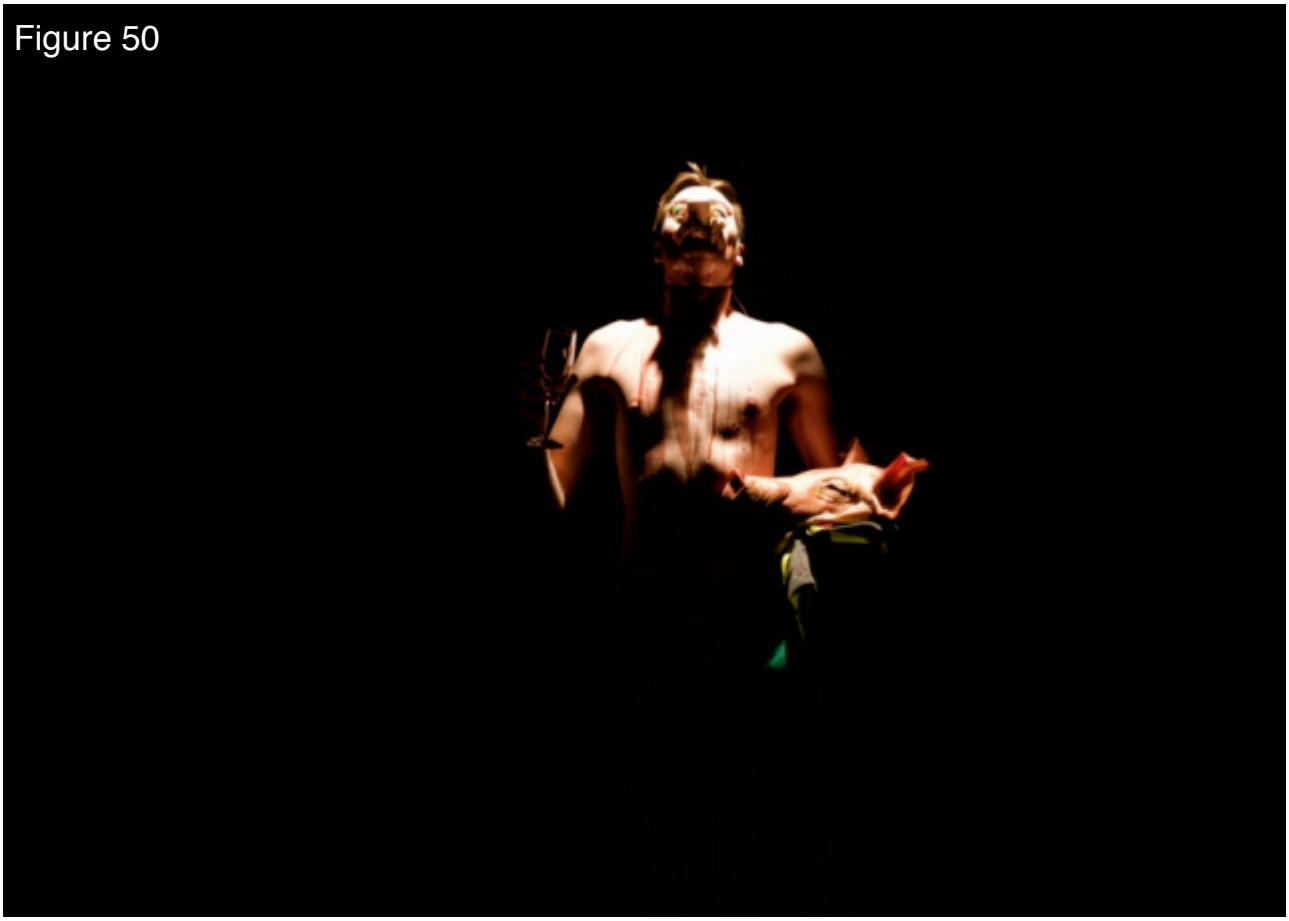
Figure 49



In the final room of the exhibition the participants were confronted with the severed pig's head in the flesh [Figure 49 and 51]. According to *Hall's Dictionary of Subjects & Symbols in Art* (Hall, 1979, 247), the pig is a symbol of greed, lust and gluttony, but for teachers and school students, the

pig head may also conjure two of the main setwork books that have been taught for several years within South African schools: *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954) and *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945). Ironically, both these works challenge the very system that they are being taught in. The iconography of my work here also samples from South African performance artist Gavin Krastin's piece titled *Pig Headed* performed at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 2016. [Figure 50].

Figure 50



Behind the desk stands the blackboard inscribed with Mojo's words. This we recorded as a performance in the venue itself [Figure 41]. Once again the participants had the choice to involve themselves critically in the performance. Some members even chose to erase and re-write words. The piece of music in this space is a forceful commentary on the state of the education system in South Africa that I sampled from Radio 702's Bongani Bingwa interview with St John's College head, Paul Edey (omny.fm, 2017). In this interview, Mr Edey fumbles over his words when pressed by Bingwa to clarify issues of racist language used by school staff to pupils. Another audio sample includes *1 Giant Leap* (2002), which is a collaborative multimedia experience and "check-in" on the state of humanity at the turn of the millennium. It samples data from as wide a pool as possible,

crossing the bounds of borders, hemispheres and continents in an attempt to present a global "status update" as humanity faced the brink of change from one time period to the next. Some of the themes for exploration include: Time, Masks, Money, Confrontation, God, Inspiration, Sex, Death and Happiness. I was fortunate to be directly involved in the project, contributing to some of the compositions and interviews. Here I sampled "I want to tell everybody about bout bout myself" from the song *My Culture.* Once again, the rhythmic elements were sampled from Felix Laband's "Ding Dong Thing" (2015) and "Hey, teachers, leave them kids alone!" from Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall".

Consistent with the established vocal sound of the previous pieces, I improvised what I hoped to be an ethereal, other-worldly, melodic mantra. In combination with my flute and piano recordings, I allowed the layers of sounds and samples to influence the patterns in a basic and reflexive way.



Figure 51

Conclusion

Throughout this project I have collaborated and improvised with several people, and along with the event participants, their histories, emotions, memories and senses became entangled with my own and the spaces in which we performed together. My children, Lilu, Mojo and Marley were an integral part of the research as well as being photographers, filmmakers, artists and musicians alongside me. Photographic credit also goes to Karen Edwards, and co-composer and music producer Kevin Leicher is credited with collaborating on sound production and performance.

In conclusion, this work certainly does not stop here. In fact there is still so much to record, document and discover. Every day brings new and fascinating revelations into our home practice environment, from the humble to the glorious. The most profound conclusion to be drawn from this process has been the revelation of how children learn when they are empowered to learn how and what they are interested in, and when we free ourselves of the indoctrinated, colonised, capitalist, and punitive curriculums and teaching methods that we are led to believe are the only way that a child can learn and be functional in society. When children are given the resources and tools to not only actively participate in their learning, but even to lead their own learning path, they learn what is necessary for them to know in their particular environment and culture. The concept of the classroom has been left far behind, and we are learning through making our stories. As I tap out these final lines, Marley (aged five) is working out how much 25 x 25 is and how many seconds are in three hours, Mojo (age 11) researches the causes of paralyses in children and the primary causes of boating, airplane and car accidents, and Lilu (age 17) is preparing for her debut directing role of Lara Foot's play titled *Tshepang.* All are doing what they are interested in, and are dynamically and democratically conducting their learning experiences with the context and relevance of their own individual lives and community. Imagine what would be possible if all South African children were afforded the access to the wealth of mentorship, facilitation and resources that our country and society has to offer through a re-conceptualisation of schools. Imagine if South African communities, cultures and traditions were acknowledged as vital parts of education, and a sustainable future.

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Appendix

THE MATHEMATICS OF MUSIC

SOME NOTES BY PROFESSOR R.J. THOMSON

The most obvious relationships between music and mathematics are arguably those of rhythm and tempo, and pitch and harmony.

Rhythm and tempo

In western music, rhythm is usually expressed in terms of "meter", as the number of beats in a "bar". In general, the first beat of a bar is notionally accented. The implications here are that:

- there is a constant number of beats in a bar;
- the number of beats per minute (i.e. the tempo) is constant;
- the listener hears the same number of beats in a bar as the player plays;
- the listener divides a piece of music into the same bars as the player;
- the player intends the listener to count beats and bars in the same way as she does.

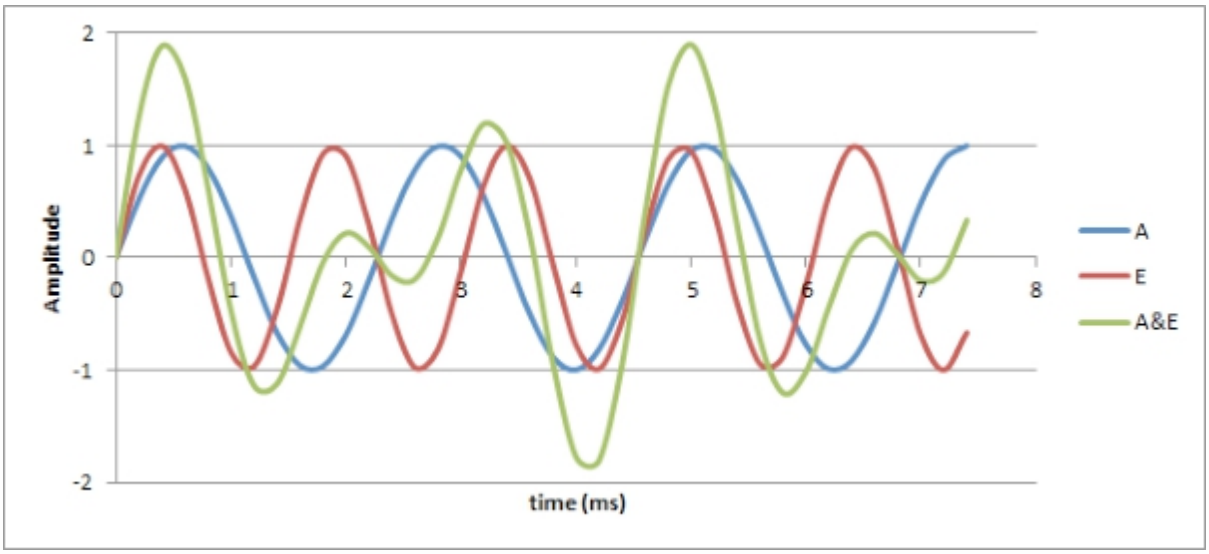
So every note starts on a beat or between two beats. And every note ends on a beat or between two beats. Thus a particular beat may be denoted the nth beat of the mth bar, that is the lth beat of the piece, where $l = nm$. A conductor may instruct an orchestra to start playing from the nth beat of the mth bar.

A beat may have different "values" (i.e. durations). Thus a quaver has half the value of a crotchet, a semi-quaver has half the value of a quaver, a semi-demi-quaver has half the value of a semi-quaver etc..

All the above implications may be deliberately flouted by a composer. The meter may change from time to time. Also, one rhythm can be superimposed on another. The tempo may suddenly or gradually change, or may be deliberately varied (*tempo rubato*). In African music, a player may deliberately avoid dividing her music into bars, leaving it to the listener to group and accent different notes, thus hearing different melodies, but the tempo doesn't change.

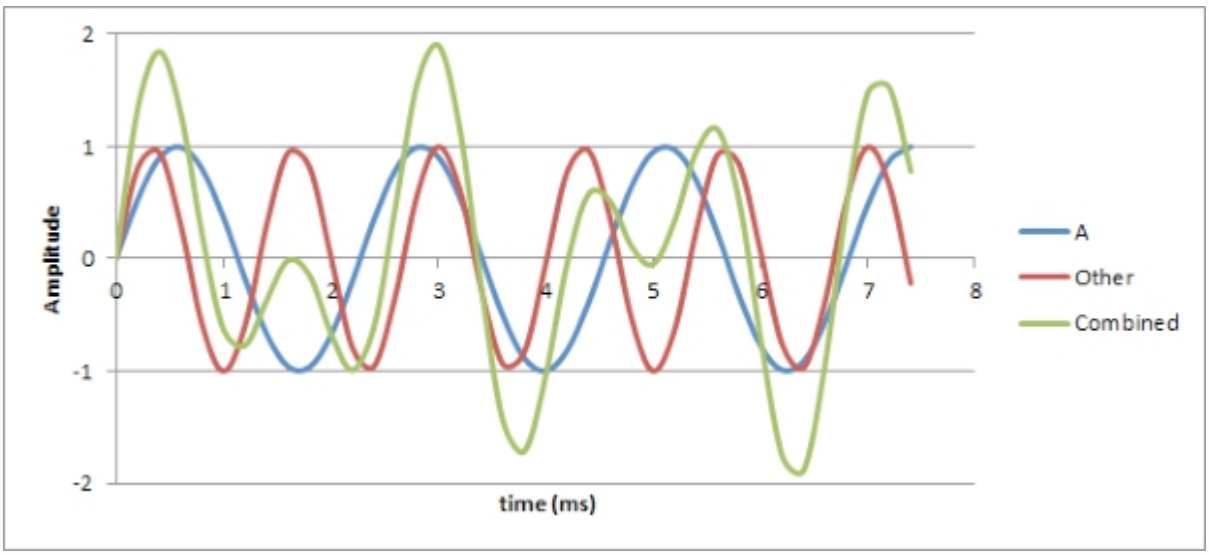
Pitch and harmony

The A above middle C has a frequency of 440 Hertz (Hz) (i.e. 440 cycles per second). This is the frequency to which an orchestra tunes. If the frequency of the E above that were 1,5 × 440 = 660 Hz then it would resonate with A. This may be shown as follows:



Here the second cycle of the combined sounds, starting at 4,5 ms, is the same as the first, so that the combination is not disturbing to the listener; it exhibits harmony.

If the frequency of a particular note were (say) 1,7 × 440 = 660 Hz then it would not resonate with A. This may be shown as follows:



Here the combination displays no cyclicality, so it is disturbing to the listener. Sometimes discord may be deliberate.

It would appear that we should set the frequency of E to be exactly 1,5 times the frequency of A, with similar relationships for other octaves. In the key of A, E is the dominant and A is the tonic. E is a 5th up from A. Similarly, in other keys, we should make the frequency of the dominant 1,5 times that of the tonic. Considering the C major scale, suppose that the frequency of C is f Hz. Then the dominant is G, with frequency $3/2f$. In the scale of G, the dominant is D, giving a frequency of $9/4f$, or, reverting to our original octave, $9/8f$. A similar approach would give us the frequencies for all the white note of the piano. This is the "Pythagorean Scale".

The problem with the Pythagorean Scale is that we would need to retune our piano every time we wanted to change scale. So the "Tempered Scale" was introduced. That scale is divided into 12 equal intervals (called "tempered semi-tones"), comprising the chromatic scale. The frequency of each note is $2^{1/12}$ times that of the previous note. Thus, in the key of C, the dominant is G, which has a frequency of $2^{1/12}$ times that of F#, $2^{2/12}$ times that of F, etc. … to $2^{7/12}$ (i.e. 1,498) times that of C and $2^{12/12}$ (i.e. 2) times that of G. The difference between 1,5 (under the Pythagorean Scale) and 1,498 (under the Tempered Scale) is unnoticeable.
The frequencies relative to the frequency of C are as follows:

	Pythagorean Scale	Tempered Scale	Difference
C	1,000		0,000
D	$9/8 = 1{,}125$	$2^{2/12} = 1{,}122$	0,003
E	$81/64 = 1{,}266$	$2^{4/12} = 1{,}260$	0,006
F	$4/3 = 1{,}333$	$2^{5/12} = 1{,}335$	–0,002
G	$3/2 = 1{,}500$	$2^{7/12} = 1{,}498$	0,002
A	$27/16 = 1{,}688$	$2^{9/12} = 1{,}682$	0,006
B	$243/128 = 1{,}898$	$2^{4/12} = 1{,}888$	0,010
C	2,000		0,000

The above comments apply to western music. Other scales may be used in other musical traditions. For example, some African music uses a pentatonic scale, i.e. five notes.

For further information regarding western music, reference may be made to H.D. Jack (1995). *The Mathematics of Music*. Austin Community College.



The Coda

A Coda is a musical term for the concluding passage of a piece. It is the Italian word for “tail” and it stands outside of the formal structure of the piece. I have chosen to add a Coda to the dissertation after receiving the examination reports. This Coda is not intended to change the focus of the research but is a response to important questions that should inflect further research in this field. The first point is that, as a white, privileged person, I have had extraordinary access to resources to support my children’s self-directed learning. These resources are not limited to physical ones but also opportunities, and access to extended family and friends who were able to provide mentorship in their professional fields. It is not enough to simply acknowledge this privilege, but to take a messier and riskier path to make a real contribution to this field in the South African context.

I believe that the current education system is an inherently colonial structure, and therefore any learner wanting to free themselves of this, must do so outside of the prescribed system. For a better understanding of the colonial program through education, the film *Schooling the World* (2010) by film maker Carol Black is an important reference. In the South African context, communities have been disempowered through this education system, and powerful indigenous knowledge systems have been undermined and delegitimised to the point where they are no longer considered valuable knowledge forms or ways of learning within these communities. What I hoped to convey in the conclusion to the dissertation, was that, as a nation, we have a myriad of opportunities, resources, and platforms to learn from and within, but to harness these we cannot keep playing along to the same broken tune that was written in the industrial era by a white man. We have to completely re-imagine learning, re-write the song.

I have chosen a riskier and messier path with my own children, albeit cosseted in the comforts of my privilege, but nonetheless, I have chosen to turn my back on a system that my children could continue to “benefit” from in the perpetuation of colonial and capitalist structures. This has been part of our process of “Learning to Transgress”. This has not been a simple or easy path, and in many instances we have had to forge our own way with a critical consciousness that has been met with many challenges, and (well meaning) critics. In order for these critical, self-directed pedagogical practices to be accessible for all learners and communities , a complete overhaul is required of who, how and why knowledge, stories and skills are disseminated.

Linked to the access to these resources, are the opportunities, however unorthodox, that I have experienced in my careers, and how I was able to unlock these opportunities simply by using my skin colour as the key. These doors remain locked to the majority of South Africans, even now, in our post-apartheid era, particularly within the education system. For example, in the private schooling sector, which is viewed as a highly sought after stepping stone to better opportunities in education, management, governance and teaching staff remain untransformed with a majority white constituency filling these posts. Management and leadership positions have a further concentration of white males, even in all-girls schools. Access to these education opportunities are further removed from underprivileged communities by these institutions only giving teaching and management staff rebates (sometimes up to 100%) on school fees, while the predominantly black grounds and cleaning staff are not given any such rebates. This is an institutionalised program within this system to maintain a colonial stronghold regardless of the window dressing called “transformation”. This system also still applies to many public universities, where the progeny of teaching and research staff access a formidable discount in tuition fees, while maintenance, cleaning and grounds staff enjoy no such discounts.

It leaves me feeling uncomfortable that I am surrendering to this system in order to submit my work for examination, and what would my results have been if the playing field were level? In my video installation, *White on White* (2017), I am hoping to draw attention to this very issue: the knowing perpetuation of these systems, generation after generation.

I hope that this research project will catalyse further research into these areas, and more focused attention on how we can change the system.