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Gateway:

Entering into a Process of Questioning Pedagogical Practice in South African Education

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Arts (Fine Arts)

Department of Fine Arts
Faculty of Humanities
University of Witwatersrand
2017

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Compulsory Declaration: This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this research report from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, cited, and referenced.

Signature: Date:

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to critically engage with the limitations and ethical dilemmas inherent in socially engaged art practice and to closely examine the relevance of educational art practice by entering into a process of questioning the current education system offered in South Africa. This research project attempts to reveal various problems and benefits of working within the educational artistic paradigm. By working with the concept of a ‘gateway’, issues regarding access to education are investigated through the medium of poetry, which intends to question approaches to research methodologies in academic institutions. Power dynamics in educational practice is a central point that is considered in this research, with particular reference to resistance toward archaic and colonial systems of control.

Collaborative projects and acts of resistance in art educational spaces are analysed closely in order to explore interdisciplinary approaches to education that reflect decolonial objectives and encourage transformative action. The research identifies a need for complex and dynamic approaches to educational practice and knowledge production by placing value on previously overlooked material that may be utilised in order to rethink approaches to curriculum development.

The theory and practice of intersectionality is a key component in the theoretical and practical elements of the project as it suggests a complex approach to problems in educational practice by focusing on the importance of individual positionality. The importance of self-reflexive methods and approaches to educational research practice is addressed in relation to various failures that occur in participatory projects that often have negative associations but hold inestimable pedagogical significance.

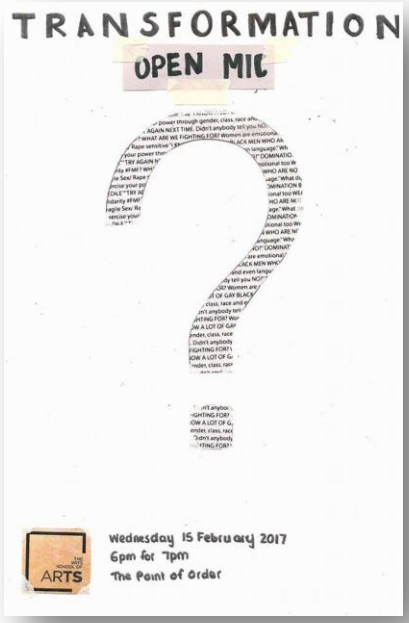
Reflections

Just as I did not intend to write *Gateway*, I did not intend to 'fail' in my collaborative art projects. I had my own thoughts of where others may have gone wrong, and sought to avoid these apparent pitfalls. And like many before me, I fell into ones of my own making. Even whilst I criticized certain approaches or theoretical orientations, I discovered that in my art practice I often inadvertently strayed into the very territory I sought to break away from. The only recourse left to me was both the hardest and the most rewarding – a shift from imposing my thoughts of how things *should* be, to internalizing and reflecting how things *were*, particularly on my apparent 'failures', and going further by declaring and even perhaps honouring them. These various failures became learning opportunities as opposed to disregarded elements that are often avoided. The subject matter was always going to be problematic and by means of conflict, debate and struggling through these difficulties I realised that this was the contribution I *might* make.

Gateway, in this paper, is a poem written by myself that acts as a structural device used as a springboard for themes and ideas further explored in the research project and each chapter respectively. *Gateway*, the poem, certainly presented itself as a work that would evoke inner conflict and one that would challenge me in ways that I did not expect from the moment it was written. Particularly with regard to the 'reading' or 'performance' of the poem and whether it would be necessary for me to use my own voice to do so in public, or whether it was necessary to perform it at all. Critically, what trailed alongside the problems inherent in the work itself, were the quintessential "*Why?*", "*Where?*", "*How?*", "*for whom*?", "*by whom*?" lines of questioning that led to experimentation and performative approaches. I found myself delving into unknown territory and felt it was best to steer away from the act of 'reading' or 'performing' the poem because of these unresolved problems.

One of the solutions I had attempted was a sticker paste-ups of the poem's various stanzas. This approach allowed the poem to live in public and achieved this in a tangible way that suggested the act of sticking the poem up in various public spaces, particularly the university space, was in itself, a performative act. I did not feel the need to perform the poem again and felt satisfied with my own solution. As a result, I was relieved and pleased with the outcome and I did not think that it was necessary to read the poem in public again. I felt strongly about this until I saw a poster that was put up at the university advertising an open-mic night in order to address the issues around transformation. This event was on the 15th of February 2017 and was going to be hosted at the *The Point of Order* gallery, which is situated across the road from WITS

University and is a space that is affiliated with student organising. The poster that advertised this



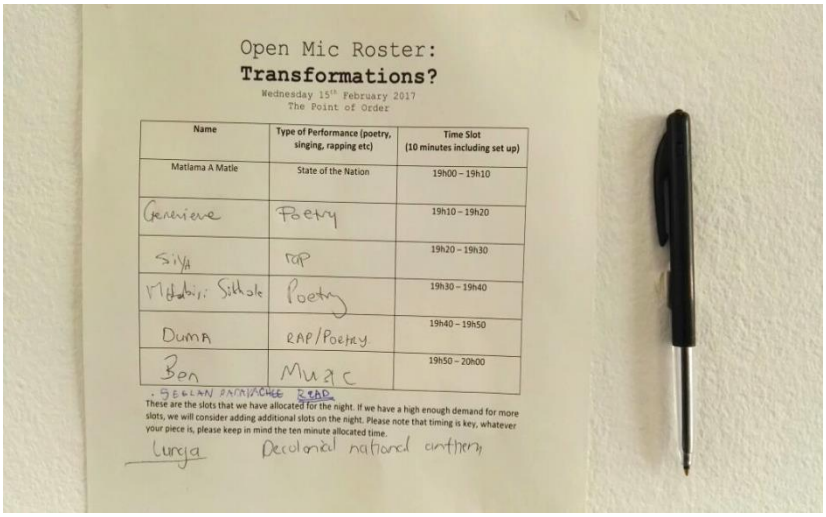
event showed a large question mark and this immediately piqued my interest.

Image 1. Poster for open-mic night at *The Point of Order* gallery addressing transformation (2017)

The question mark on the poster became a signifier for my own questions in the poem and I felt compelled to read it at the open-mic night in order to perform it within this context, where it would not be forced onto people but rather shared in spoken word. My MA (FA) exhibition was to be held in the same space only three days after this event and I felt it was important to read *Gateway* in order to allow it to be performed and heard without the strict boundaries of critique that the poem so often faced within academia. The open mic event presented itself as an invitation and therefore opened up the opportunity for the poem to be shared in a space where it was acceptable to do so.

On the evening of the open-mic night, I wrote my name down on the roster beneath the first act, meaning I would be second in line. This made me feel at ease because there was something quite daunting about the idea of performing first. As luck would have it however, the first performer did not show up, and I was asked to be the first in line to read my poem. Once again I was confronted with the struggle of my own position in a space having to own and

acknowledge my privilege in relation to my identity, my voice and my work. The response however, was overwhelmingly positive and I felt an immense sense of relief after the poem was read and heard.



Open Mic Roster:
Transformations?
Wednesday 15th February 2017
The Point of Order

Name	Type of Performance (poetry, singing, rapping etc)	Time Slot (10 minutes including set up)
Matlama A Matle	State of the Nation	19h00 – 19h10
Genevieve	Poetry	19h10 – 19h20
Siya	rap	19h20 – 19h30
Mthobisi Sithole	Poetry	19h30 – 19h40
Duma	RAP/Poetry	19h40 – 19h50
Ben	Music	19h50 – 20h00

These are the slots that we have allocated for the night. If we have a high enough demand for more slots, we will consider adding additional slots on the night. Please note that timing is key, whatever your piece is, please keep in mind the ten minute allocated time.

Lunga Decolonial national anthem

Image 2. Open-Mic roster at *The Point of Order* (2017)

By participating in the open- mic event, I learned a valuable lesson. That being comfortable and pleased with one's own solution to a problem is not always productive. That it is crucial to open up the possibility for input from others and to participate in the process of knowledge production in order to make contributions, rather than imposing named solutions onto the educational discourse that is constantly evolving.

In order to show the various failures, processes and nuances inherent in *Gateway* as a project, I decided to create a website that would serve as an archive and a platform for engagement. I felt it was necessary to invite the public to engage with the work in an environment that would encourage questioning and dialogue, and therefore decided against having a formal exhibition. Instead, I hosted a launch event for the website: https://www.isthisagateway.co.za accompanied by three zine publications that I had made as extensions of various elements in the research report and project. On the evening of the launch event, the 18th of February 2017 at *The Point of Order* gallery, I decided to place desks outside of the formal white cubed space containing zines and stickers, encouraging the public to take these objects home. Placing the desks outside of the gallery space reflected similar reasoning for

the development of *Gateway* outside of a physical space, but in a virtual space where the concept of access is placed in a different context. Although access to the internet is not yet democratised in South Africa, the intention to make the project accessible outside of the university space, was the main driving force and reasoning behind the development of the website.

The website was projected on a wall in the gallery and those who attended the event were encouraged to navigate through the site on a computer that was available in the space. Due to the fact that I had to use a 'gallery space' in order to host this event, I made the decision to create a few visual interventions in the space that would serve as further interpretations of the poem and the concept of *Gateway*. These visual interventions included a text piece on the wall of the gallery that was made out of various text cut-outs of *Gateway* the poem, and an old school desk that was placed in the gallery as a found object meant to represent an archaic/historical power structure that may have evoked nostalgia.

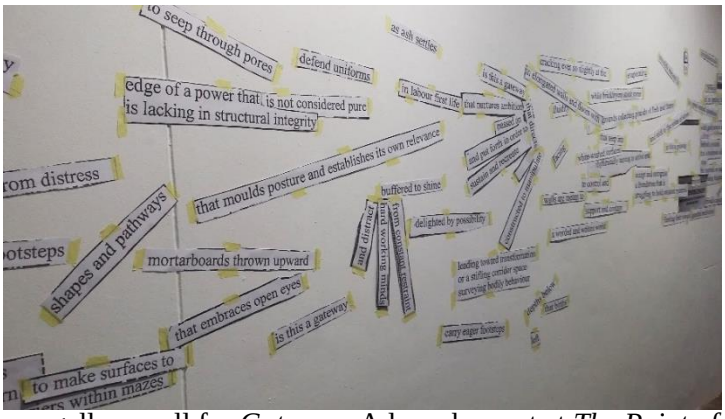


Image 3. Text piece on gallery wall for *Gateway*: A launch event at *The Point of Order* (2017)

I



mage 4. School Desk, Found Object in gallery, *Gateway*: a Launch Event, *The Point of Order* (2017)



Image 5. Members of the public engaging with zines and stickers placed outside of *The Point of Order* gallery for *Gateway*: a Launch event (2017)



Image 6. Members of the public engaging with text piece and website inside of *The Point of Order* gallery for *Gateway*: a Launch event (2017)

After extensive engagement with various people on the evening of the launch event about the content of the work, I realised that it was important to honour the process that led up to the work that was presented in the space in order to provide further context. I decided to read a poem called *Ode to Gateway* that serves as a moment of reflection in order to honour the entire process of *Gateway* as a project including all of the failures and mistakes. Reading this poem on the night of the launch event was an important moment for me as it allowed for an attempt at 'closing' the project even though it would continue to live online.

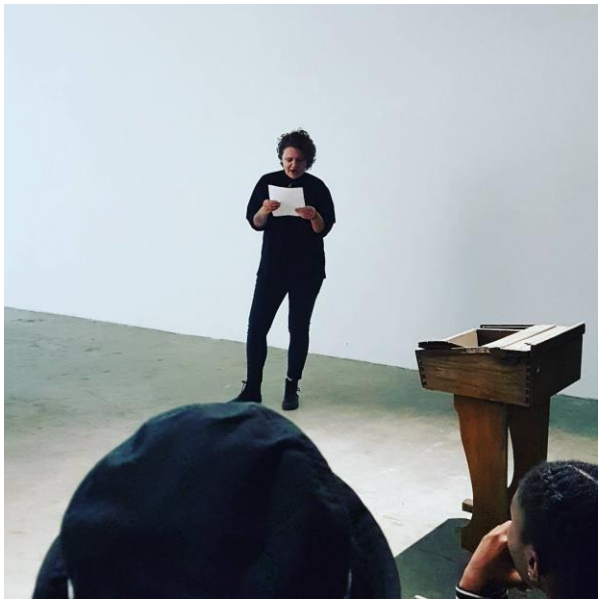


Image 7. Reading *Ode to Gateway* for *Gateway:* a Launch Event at *The Point of Order* (2017)

Reading *Ode to Gateway* allowed for a celebration of problems, difficulties and failures in a public space that I did not think was possible until the moment it was received in that context. On reflection, I realised that revealing problems and writing critically about the shortcomings inherently found in educational and collaborative practice became an important aspect to consider in my own work. Writing became a self-reflexive process that allowed me to recognise and value these various failures and problems. Adopting an intersectional lens aided me in the quest to apply this same critical approach to my own projects, thereby suggesting that

those specific and subjective failures can hold immense pedagogical value.

During the process of writing *Gateway,* I realised the importance of facing and raising tensions, and allowing the experience of the 'uncomfortable'. By not circumventing or avoiding, shaming or pitying, but traveling through the uncomfortable, I discovered questions of my own. Indeed, even as the poem *Gateway* poses questions, it purposefully has no question marks, one of the reasons behind this being that I did not wish to 'contain' these queries, or suggest that there were easy answers available to the questions posed. Moreover, these were *my* questions, and whilst they might be shared by others, the process of inquiry can only be understood from my particular reference point of positionality. *Gateway* cannot presume to speak on another's behalf. Therefore, *Gateway* seeks, if at all, to invite further questioning.

Gateway

Is this a gateway
that negates access and invites inquisitive bodies to move
toward a direction of
understanding that
walls are meant to
support and contain
restrict and determine the volume of
a porous barrier built with intent to control and
monitor
accept and recognise
a foundation that is
struggling to hold resistant material

is this a gateway
leading toward transformation
or a stifling corridor space
surveying bodily behaviour
with doors right and left
following in ordered succession
allowing for movement up, down-
left to right
while instructed to go forward at a slow pace
rhythmically aiming to strive and
strategically positioned in line to
wait patiently for predetermined outcomes

is this a gateway
that moulds posture and establishes its own relevance
in elongated walls and floors with
windows seeking,
cracking ever so slightly at the
edge of a power that
is lacking in structural integrity thus
facing a desire to mirror shapes and pathways
around a capsule aimed to prevent
fluidity to seep through pores
simultaneously
evaporating that which is not considered pure enough in consistency

is this a gateway
to a protected space for a select few
whose voices are heard and bodies unharmed as
those who hear the whisper of change rustle in the leaves
listen
and honour ancestry erased
by text black and white and leather-bound with golden
letters embossed proudly flaunting pillage and
hiding behind empathy manufactured by a machine built
by men
who trace their predecessors
as they erase the ancient teachers who birthed rain and sun

Chapter 1. A Language of Resistance and Containment



Image 8. "Shackville UCT" (2016); Photograph by Wandile Kasibe for IOL news.

To 'contain', by definition, is to keep something harmful under control, or within certain parameters in order to prevent hostile influence (Merriam Webster Dictionary). Containment is also affiliated with aspirations to maintain formalised order, whilst simultaneously, suggesting the act of holding something or enveloping something. A classroom space is a container. A container for bodies, experiences and various forms or productions of knowledge. Tension arises as soon as the functionality of the container (i.e., the classroom) is challenged. This may introduce a see-saw effect where resistance and containment become symbiotic, simultaneously entering into an opposing struggle with one another. Indeed, the requirement to contain does create a space for resistance, irrespective of the realisation that these opposing forces desire to dominate one another in a continually circular conflict.

One can therefore assume that there are active and passive roles at play inside the container or classroom space. For example, the teacher can be an active power imparting knowledge onto the student who is the passive percipient of knowledge, and the student can actively also become the 'resistor' of knowledge rendering the teacher's efforts superfluous. Allan Sekula writes about this one-sided power relationship in a classroom setting in an article entitled: "*School is a Factory*" (2014) and states:

> *"Students and audience are reduced to the status of passive listeners, rather than active subjects of knowledge. Resistance is almost always limited only to the possibility of tuning out. Domination depends on a monologue of sorts, a "conversation" in which one party names and directs the other, while the other listens deferentially, docilely, resentfully, perhaps full of suppressed rage."* (Sekula 2014, 40)

Sekula suggests that the interaction between two opposing parties can be read as a "conversation" where one party exerts power over another. His reference to the act of "tuning out" (2014, 40) reverberates an 'escapist resistance' which is a familiar response associated with controlled environments that demand passivity. The possibility to resist in this example remains on an intellectual level due to the physical limitations imposed by a classroom space.

Arrangements of chairs and desks placed within four walls demand certain postures, gestures and limited movement. These limitations are imposed onto the student from a very young age. Students will be repeatedly reminded of these limitations until they are conditioned to believe that this is the way to behave within this particular space. These limitations set in place are what Foucault would describe in *Docile Bodies* (1977) as "small acts of cunning endowed with a great power of diffusion [...]" (1977, 139). These acts of power are not axiomatic but rather exist on a micro surface level, as though seemingly unnoticed, and it is precisely this underlying implementation of power that guarantees docility and obedience.

In order to fully grasp this particular power dynamic, it can prove useful to imagine that Resistance and Containment become personified and enter into a dialogue. For example, this dialogue (namely Dialogue A) takes place in an office between a student (namely "R" for Resistance), who is sent out of a classroom due to an untidy appearance and a teacher (namely "C" for Containment), who is in charge of discipline with regard to this student's particular grade and class. This school has a strict code of conduct and dress-code. It is an environment that demands obedience, academic excellence and shows little or no flexibility with regard to the rules set in place:

Dialogue A.

C: "*There are no exceptions to the rules. Straighten your tie and neaten up your collar. Fold your socks once and tie your shoelaces. Loosen your belt in order to lengthen your dress to the appropriate level, approximately three centimeters above the knee. I am sure you are aware of this. And that? What is that on your wrist? Remove your bangle and pull down the cuff of your shirt. Now let me look at you... that is better, but wait, that hair! Unacceptable. Tie your hair back nice and tight into a neat ponytail or plait with a middle parting. You may choose a side-parting if you so prefer. Very good, but your hair band is the wrong colour. This will not do. The only colours permitted are black and blue. No exceptions. Your hair clips are not placed properly and seem to flop around in all that frizz. Come now, let's get a brush in there to tame that mess. Right… Now let's look at you... Not too bad! But wait...Why are you not wearing your blazer?"*

R: "*The blazer does not fit me. My shoulders are too broad. It is too small."*

C: "*There can be no excuses, no exceptions. Blazers are compulsory. You know this. Were you not told? Are you deliberately disobeying the rules?"*

R: "*I am not deliberately disobeying the rules. I was told and I know the rules."*

C: "*It has come to my attention that you are deliberately disobeying the rules. This is very unbecoming*."

R: "*The blazer does not fit me. My shoulders are too broad. It is too small."*

C: *"Why did you not say so in the beginning? I am sure we will find a blazer that will fit you perfectly. The cost of this garment will be added to your monthly school fees and if you have any queries you are permitted to communicate with administration regarding this issue."*

The display of power in Dialogue A is theatrical, as it can be seen as a dramatic performance of power over the student (R) who is in a submissive position and is not given any autonomy. It is an example of a power Foucault would state is founded on older "militaristic and monastic systems of control" (1982, 339). It is undisguised, as it does not attempt to conceal its intentions. It can be argued that this archaic example of a power structure should be challenged regularly in order for resistance to become a catalyst for a shift in power dynamics.

One such example of resistance acting as a catalyst for change in older power structures in a South African school environment occurred in August of 2016 at Pretoria Girls High School. The rules set in place at this school discriminated against young girls of colour by not allowing natural hairstyles to be worn in uniform. The school rules strictly required girls to straighten and chemically treat their hair in order to have a 'neat' appearance. Extensive media coverage on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) allowed people to express their opinions that strict dress-codes of conduct may cause harm, and furthermore that the rules implemented in this

school are arguably still based on older oppressive/colonial systems of control.

Consequently, a 'can of worms' was opened when the students of Pretoria Girls High School protested on their school grounds and decided to challenge the powers set in place and took matters into their own hands. A learner, who was involved in the protest, was quoted in the *Mail & Guardian* stating the following: "*I was instructed to fix myself as if I was broken*." (Pather 2016,1). This powerful statement made by the learner reflects the absolute requirement to be 'contained' within strict school systems of control. Videos of the protest show educators attempting to control the learners by 'cajoling' them to return to spaces of containment (i.e., classrooms) and enact structures/forms of containment (i.e., standing in lines). By actively resisting these orders masquerading as concern the students' message was heard and the issues raised by their resistance spread to many schools across the country experiencing similar prejudices disguised as discipline. In this particular example, resistance was therefore embodied in action by the students. Allan Sekula locates this particular form of resistance in the following statement:

> "[…] *the discourse of domination finds its dialectical antagonist in a discourse and practice of liberation*. [...] s*chool and the media are sites of an intense, often covert, daily struggle in which language and power are inextricably connected*." (Sekula 2014, 41)

Sekula links language and power to a struggle (2014, 41). This alludes to the idea that the language used in school spaces establishes its own struggle, perhaps locating this struggle between resistance and containment. However, according to Foucault, language functions within a larger domain outside of the classroom container, alongside variable mechanisms of power that operate continually (1977, 145). Foucault explains that disciplines are "[...] procedures aimed at knowing, mastering and using" (1977, 145). One could examine his statement in chronological order, for example: First one must *know,* and the knowledge that one obtains, is inextricably linked to power. It is this power exercised by the first step that places one at a vantage point to secondly *master* knowledge in order to thirdly *use* it to exert that power in different ways.

Language is a tool that is often used to exercise power over individuals. With particular reference to a classroom environment, it functions as a means of presenting knowledge but also producing meaning, and managing students. It creates the opportunity for resistance and containment to take place. The aforementioned dialogue (Dialogue A) demonstrates this third step; the *use* of power through language. It is similarly an example of a hegemonic power produced by a particular use of language, specifically to assert power over another individual in

order to attain obedience. In this specific example, hegemony normalises certain power relations via the use of language, hence there is an acceptance of this particular language seen in Dialogue A. Peter Ives discusses the construct of hegemony inherent in language, referencing Antonio Gramsci, Marxist theoretician in *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* (2004):

> *"Gramsci's initial significant exposure to the concept of hegemony was in the field of linguistics, where it was used to describe how a given population would adopt a particular linguistic form, parts of a language or an entire language from another group of people. The mechanisms of this adoption were not physical coercion, but were related to cultural prestige as well as economic, political, social and at times even military power."* (Ives 2004, 47)

It is precisely within this adoption of power through use of language that one can draw comparison with Dialogue A, because the student (R) must accept the language imposed by the system set in place, which is presented by the teacher (C). This adoption of language implies a direct link to the student's obedience of the power being exerted, positioning the student as passive and docile. Docility in education can plausibly be seen as a Foucauldian term and applies to individuals that are easily led or managed. Foucault explains that the "[...] body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (1977, 136).

In South Africa this form of control that ensures docility may be linked to historical colonial influence. In reference to the education system, the current curriculum offered, was founded on British systems implemented by previous nationalist regimes. The curriculum is therefore a contested subject, a container in itself that requires resistance in order to develop. The need for this development and resistance to colonial structures is seen in the extensive work of Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire's political orientation and approach to educational practice speaks to the importance of achieving liberation through the rejection of a dictatorial approach to education. Freire coined the phrase, "Banking Education" (Freire 1970, 72) due to his frustration relating to the curriculum that was offered in South America. He explicitly compares the act of banking to how knowledge was offered in schools at the time he practiced as an educator. Freire's writing comments on a system that was implemented more than forty years ago, but his arguments about the capitalist motives behind school systems can still prove applicable today.

Freire's work critiques the problematic dynamic of teacher-student interaction in an authoritarian approach to education and compares the transactional nature of this relationship to the act of banking. Freire thus recognises that the education system functions to achieve

capitalist goals. According to Freire, these goals are established by imperialist power structures pretending to have humanitarian interests (1970, 73). He describes this system as the "Banking Concept of Education" (Freire 1970, 72) which is further explained in the following statement:

> *"In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he- justifies his own existence."* (Freire 1970, 72)

This power enforced by the figure of the teacher as mentioned previously is in part what fuelled Freire to attempt to explore alternative approaches to educational practice. He sought to explore a new orientation that does not perpetuate the lineage of oppression, but rather suggests a shared experience in which knowledge is provided and gained by both those who teach and those who are taught (1970, 79). Freire developed a method he called "Problem-Posing" education that (according to his ideology) could create an environment where there is no difference between teacher and student, but rather shared knowledge production on an equal level (Freire 1970, 79). This quest for equality interrogates the role of authority in a learning environment. The ideals in Freire's argument can question whether an authoritarian figure is necessary for learning to take place, and if these power positions are problematic due to previous colonial systems of control. Freire's utilitarian ideals can be criticised as it might be difficult to achieve this level of equality in educational spaces, but his positioning could be useful to adopt in relation to ongoing attempts to decolonise the current curriculum offered in South Africa.

A decolonial approach could be seen as a starting point in the development of a new curriculum that resists archaic power structures still prevalent in education and values individual experience. It is however important to note that there is no formal definition for 'decolonial practice'. In his article named *"Geopolitics of sensing and knowing: On (de) coloniality, border thinking, and epistemic disobedience"* (2013) Walter Mignolo explains the term as a process of 'delinking' from Western narratives. (Mignolo 2013,130)

In an interview with Walter Mignolo (2014), by Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, Mignolo explains that the practice of decolonisation implies the act of *pushing out* colonial ideals and promoting Indigenous practices (Gaztimbide-Fernández 2014, 1). Freire would relate this rejection of colonial ideals to a rejection of the "Banking Educational Model" (Freire 1970, 72) and insist that it is only via the rejection of this particular model, that liberation can be attained

and individuals will experience a shift in consciousness that Freire holds synonymous with self-reflexivity (Freire 1970, 72). Mignolo explains that the concept of decoloniality is linked to autonomy as he explains it is an *"option amongst many options"* (Gaztimbide-Fernandez 2014, 1). The idea that the decolonial approach is a choice is an anti-colonial concept and therefore encapsulates the meaning of the term. Decolonial practice can therefore be interpreted as a form of resistance that embraces the choice to question dominant forces of containment without seeking resolution from outside influences. This approach is exemplified through the stance taken by the students at Pretoria Girls High in 2016 who were active agents in their demand for transformation.

A grasp of the concept of decolonisation relating to educational practice can therefore be seen as a crucial factor to consider in order to achieve alternative approaches to the way in which knowledge is presented and produced. A specific example of an interference that challenged the dominant power structure of the educational institution, reflecting ideas of resistance and containment and decolonial ideas, is a protest that occurred in February 2016 on the campus of the University of Cape Town. This protest involved the installation of a structure colloquially known as a 'shack', which is a structure many black South African citizens live in due to immense inequality along economic, geographic and racial lines still prevalent in the country and a recognisable reality in Cape Town. The consequences of this racial and geographic divide was brought to the forefront at the University of Cape Town by placing a container made out of steel and wood accompanied by a portable toilet on its doorstep.

The students spray-painted "UCT housing" on the outside of the container in order to further push the issue that they were addressing. In an online article students explained their reasoning behind the intervention that became widely known as "UCT Shackville". One of the students involved in the protest was quoted stating: "*We are are going to literally drop poverty at their feet*" (Mkhabela 2016,1). The students who are formally known as the *#RhodesMustFall* Movement at UCT addressed the ever pressing issue of racial discrimination at higher institutions in South Africa by containing their grievances in a literal structure that represents the continued poverty so many black students at the university experience in their lived reality. The container became a harsh reminder that all is not well in the 'New South Africa'. UCT Shackville served to reveal the university's ability to 'contain' these issues by turning the proverbial blind eye. The ability to ignore these pressing issues such as discrimination and a lack of housing is made easier due to the geographical placement of so called "townships" or "informal settlements" in Cape Town which are situated very far away from the university. The saying "out

of sight, out of mind" becomes appropriate and thus motivates the reasoning behind placing the container representing these overlooked issues in plain sight on the university's campus.

UCT Shackville became an alternative classroom space where an opportunity for dialogue and learning opened up, and students felt comfortable exploring this space of resistance as a productive means to gain agency. The container in this instance therefore became the object of resistance forcing the dominant power structure to turn inward and critically look at itself and its own shortcomings. This self-reflexivity is difficult and takes time to fully process as an opportunity to learn, which in turn, is what the engagement with decolonial practice could potentially offer. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith places emphasis on the importance of spaces of resistance that attain incredible pedagogical significance and in conjunction with UCT Shackville, the following statement by Smith can be seen as an indication of the greater need to value the learning experience these spaces may offer:

> "[...] *in the past, our stories*[...] *and social practices- all may be spaces of marginalisation, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope. It is from within these spaces that increasing numbers of indigenous academics and researchers have begun to address social issues within the wider framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice.*" (Smith 1999,4)

UCT Shackville as indicated by Smith's description of similar spaces, was a productive and temporary space of resistance. It in turn, was also met with resistance from powers that felt threatened by its presence and was flattened by a police vehicle while the students involved were arrested and met with violent and militaristic force. This action was met with further resistance from students and a cycle of conflict continued. The institution would regain control and 'contain' the situation with a brief return 'to normal' only to be met with further revolt at later stages, and thus this cyclical power struggle continues.

When these disruptions occur, opposing power languages start to interact and the complexity of resistance and containment is uncovered. Both forces oppose each other and possess the ability to become one another. A deeper understanding of the multi-faceted problems these elements propose when in opposition or dialogue, can potentially offer significant pedagogical relevance, and perhaps alternative approaches, to educational practice in a contemporary South African socio-political climate.

is this a gateway
to pillars towering
burning to fall
with grounds collecting pounds of flesh and flame
that seep into
depths below
white-washed surfaces
buffered to shine
by soft skin pierced palm to palm while
clouds of burning breath sting
as ash settles
and stick to the soles of shoes

is this a gateway
built to strengthen a vessel
rooted in soil
fertile
with the remains
of crushed vertebrae
reduced to a fine white powder
intended to nourish and feed
the mouths of those deemed worthy
to benefit from conquests
achieved by ship and sail as
swords shift toward pen on paper

is this a gateway
that births
in labour first life
a worded and written world
that directs
mortarboards thrown upward
while bricklayers stack stone
to make surfaces to
carry eager footsteps
watched closely as
arms and legs yearn to
resist the circular barriers within mazes

is this a gateway
lightly polished by a flickering fire
actively seeking the source of
an inherited confidence
carried out
with good posture and poise
hiding
behind a promise
that a bookmark will
stop
the numbers on pages
from being forgotten

Chapter 2: At the Intersection of Questions and Complications

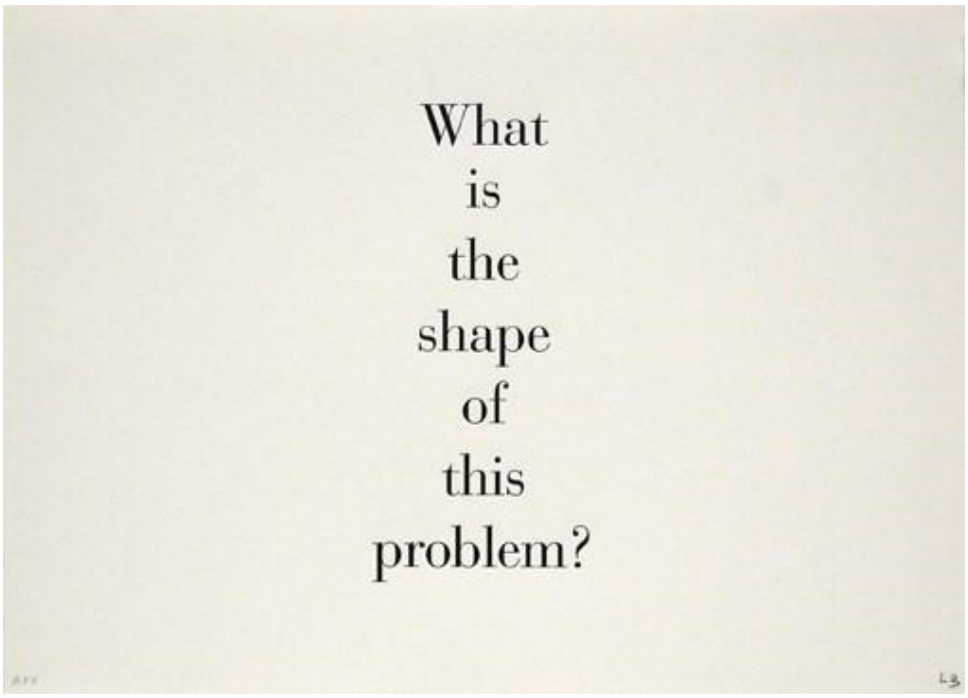


Image 9. Louise Bourgeois "What is the Shape of This Problem?" detail (1999**).**

With reference to its linguistic core, the word 'quest' by definition, declares an investigation or pursuit, and thus directs an enquirer onto a path that may lead toward an outcome of sorts or satisfactory apprehension. Philosophical methodology frequently refers to questioning as a process that will inevitably unveil problems that indicate a need for solutions. In the field of education, the act of questioning is affiliated with learning and problem solving, as it aids in the pursuance of knowledge and is therefore strongly linked to achievement. In contrast, the act of questioning can also be associated with resistance in disciplined school environments and has the potential to give rise to a voice of dissent that can further complicate problems and seek complexities, in order to rethink structures in society that are accepted and deemed normative owing to authoritative status.

The motives behind questioning authority can thus suggest a need for change or a diversion from the current *status quo*. As previously mentioned, a predominant critical text that inherently shares this sentiment is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire. There is a notable thread that runs throughout Freire's writing that interrogates various power dynamics inherent in educational institutions and teacher-student relationships. His position reflects an attempt to

balance binary power structures in order to achieve equilibrium in spaces where learning is expected (1970, 73). Freire's critique of authoritarian systems prevalent in education is frequently implemented, due to its adaptation in teaching methodology. However, his approach can lead to the notion that the binary opposite of a problem will lead to a solution. Freire's method is therefore not merely idealistic, but the wholehearted acceptance of his particular critical framework into mainstream practice in educational settings may limit the intention of his philosophical "Problem Posing" paradigm.

I would like to imagine that Freire's "Problem Posing" education needs further exploration and questioning. Perhaps the act of questioning can offer an approach that complicates this solution offered by Freire and can thus reflect on his "Problem Posing" objective. It may prove productive to ask: "*Whose Problems*?" "*What problems are being posed*?" in order to attempt an understanding of the complexity of a problem by questioning its origins instead of naming solutions that are often temporary and unproductive. A similar approach can be seen in the theory of intersectionality.

Kimberlé Crenshaw addresses the need for a multi-faceted approach to presupposed problems and solutions in her theory of intersectionality (a term she coined in the 1980's) that in its ideology, exposes the fact that individuals are affected by various oppressions and privileges that overlap and influence one another (Crenshaw 1991,1242). Crenshaw's work addresses ways in which race, gender and class intersect in order to construct complex identities in society. As an African American woman, she felt it necessary to point out that her experiences of specific prejudices are complex and cannot be classified or framed within broader umbrella terms such as 'racism' or 'feminism' (Crenshaw 1991,1242). She argues that approaches to problems require a multidimensional awareness in order to avoid the oversimplification of issues. Crenshaw's position discloses the reality that a one dimensional solution cannot possibly satisfy the needs and desires of largely diverse groups. The following statement reiterates this:

> *"The problem is, in part, a framing problem. Without frames that are capacious enough to address all the ways that disadvantages and burdens play out for all members of a particular group, the efforts to mobilize resources to address a social problem will be partial and exclusionary."* (Crenshaw 2016, 1)

Adopting an intersectional lens can help navigate the treacherous problem areas that develop when confronted with the challenge of restructuring the education system in order to achieve pedagogical inclusivity. It is therefore imperative to make a connection between intersectionality

as a disciplinary subject, and the implementation of the ideas that arise from its theoretical concepts, into practice. In an article named "*Toward a field of Intersectionality: Theory, Applications and Praxis*" (2013) by Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Leslie Mckall, this needful link between theory and practice is discussed in relation to intersectionality as a concept that should be implemented in order to gain a well-rounded understanding of its effectiveness and scope:

> "[…] *scholars and activists illustrate how practice necessarily informs theory, and how theory ideally should inform best practices and community organising. These concerns reflect the normative and political dimensions of intersectionality and thus embody a motivation to go beyond mere comprehension of intersectional dynamics to transform them*." (Cho, Crenshaw, & Mckall 2013, 3)

Achieving a broader understanding of intersectionality, in educational practice in South Africa, can potentially offer a variety of approaches to methodology that may better identify the needs of individuals who so often slip through the cracks of a 'one size fits all' educational system. A contemporary application of this process with a focus on the close examination of current tertiary institutional structures can be seen in WITS academic, Angelo Fick's work, as he questions the current state of the curriculum offered at universities in South Africa, with particular reference to changes needed at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. In an online article entitled: *"Decolonising The Curriculum: The Politics of Change in and Through Education"* (2016), Fick reflects on his thought regarding the subject at hand; the possibility of decolonising the curriculum in university spaces in South Africa. He mentions that the current structure needs to be understood as a multifaceted and complex operation that is afforded its functionality from key elements that are often overlooked:

> "*The methods and forms of instruction, as well as the control of access to sites of instruction and the gatekeeping around who is afforded such access are structural components of any curriculum."* (Fick 2016, 1)

Fick proposes to look critically at discarded elements often lost in the development of a fixed "black and white" curriculum that serves as an umbrella term and is seldom challenged due to its institutionalised authority. By examining these overlooked elements closely, issues regarding access and the need to dismantle imperialist power structures are brought to the foreground. It may prove useful to reiterate Mignolo's statement that decoloniality can be seen as

an *"option amongst many options"* (Gaztimbide-Fernandez 2014, 1). This therefore suggests 'a way out' of circular power dynamics that perpetuate a discriminatory and often hostile nature of institutionalised culture. Perhaps this 'option' as pointed out by Mignolo and described by Fick does not seek legitimacy in academic 'prestige' nor does it require a framework consisting of socio-economic levels of efficiency but rather sets the stage for the acts of questioning to take place without restraint.

However, one could argue that without a certain amount of restraint, it may be impossible for learning to take place. To ask: "*How much restraint and authority is needed in a learning environment?"* and *"Is there room for a balanced approach that allows for agency and self-exploration in that environment*?" may be some of the most frequently asked questions leading to extensive debate and conflict in pedagogy today. Considering these complexities, the theory of intersectionality becomes a necessary approach and if practiced in academia, it can potentially allow for focused critical scrutinisation of research projects and their presupposed impacts.

Linda Smith expresses that the engagement with such extensive questioning could become part of the decolonial project, and in turn, act as a preventive measure against future exploitation in research practices. Smith argues that it is essential to ask the following questions while engaging with academic practice:

> *"Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?"* (Smith 1999, 10)

By encouraging those who engage in academic practice to question the validity of research by asking these fundamentally important questions mentioned by Smith, the practice of intersectional ideology may become a means to rethink approaches in traditional academic research methodologies. Intersectional ideas and practices can be difficult to implement in a formal academic curriculum and, should they meet resistance, may need to function outside of rigidly disciplined environments as seen in the thoughts arising from the *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall* moments.

The *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall* moments revealed, in the discourses following their conception, what intersectionality so frequently seeks to uncover. That *differences* amongst individuals who study at tertiary institutions are *salient* and could be utilised and acknowledged in order to reshape the current educational system. This reflects an honouring of difference as opposed to the idea that a constant return to utilitarian ideals (that have origins in nation building

and place emphasis on unity within difference) is necessary. Such utilitarian ideals have frequently disappointed the population of South Africa, particularly the youth and students currently attending tertiary educational institutions.

It becomes important to question these idealistic ‘solutions’ to problems in order to understand that the romanticism inherent in such structures may reinforce subjugation and continually perpetuate older oppressive systems ensuring that a privileged few will have access to quality education (Weber 2008, xiv-xv). This is ensured by a system put in place that promises tertiary subsidisation on good merit from government and private funding. Academic merit is equated to 'good quality' education systems that are often seen in private institutions that attract students who are from a high economic income and have access to numerous resources (Weber 2008, xiv-xv). Hence, the system ensures that the Black majority population of the country receives an education that is not of the same measured standard due to various socio-political constraints, but also due to a system that values capitalist interests above the notion of a 'South African democratic ideal' so often portrayed in the media.

Discontent with the South African education system is thus linked to a desire for transformation and dramatic change from the current system in operation. There is a definite desire to break down older structures in order to replace them with contemporary, charismatic and engaging approaches to educational practice in order to meet the needs of students who are not satisfied. As seen in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (2013) by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, the refusal to accept an oppressive structure that pretends to recognise the interests of the people, and the intention to dissemble it in order to break away from limitations set in place, is understood in the following statement:

> “*we cannot be satisfied with the recognition and acknowledgement generated by the very system that denies a) that anything was ever broken and b) that we deserved to be broken part; so we refuse to ask for recognition and instead we want to take [a]part, dismantle, tear down the structure that, right now, limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places that we know lie outside its walls*.” (Harney & Moten 2013, 11)

Beyond the walls of institutional limitation, there could be new possibilities and spaces in education that could allow questioning to take place. This may encourage new levels of understanding in relation to subjects that often raise discomfort or debate. The student movements in South Africa have frequently revealed that there are diverse positions in the overarching education crisis, and that opposing ideas surrounding systemic racism, inequality

and historical privilege, spark extensive and heated debate. As a result, social media has become a space for questioning to take place. Reading comments and racial/sexist slurs on social media platforms that are triggering, and at times incredibly disturbing, alert to the fact that individual roles/positions need to be declared openly. Social media has thus become a space where intersectional ideas could be put into practice and observed on a public platform.

A topic that was at the forefront of various debates during the student protests at universities in South Africa, was the presence of white supremacy and white privilege in educational spaces. From my own experience as a white South African, this is never an easy topic to engage. However, I would like to suggest that the difficulty inherent in the engagement with uncomfortable questions and hard hitting debates, can create invaluable learning opportunities, especially for those who are willing to listen, and place value on the process of introspection and critical self-examination.

Social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* not only allowed questioning to take place during the height of the student protests (and continue to do so), but also actively encouraged critical thinking and self-reflexivity (Thomas 2015, 1). Unfortunately, a side-effect of this mode of communication can be a self-affirming behaviour that can be described as a process of 'navel-gazing'. This suggests a constant inward-looking process in order to self criticise, but in contrast, can be interpreted as narcissistic and in a country that is still segregated in many ways, this behaviour can reflect a fear of losing power often related to privilege and race (DiAngelo 2011, 58). Raising these tensions can reveal that some of the most valuable lessons are the most difficult or uncomfortable. Personally, as a white person living in South Africa who has access to a tertiary education, I have been shielded and protected from such discomfort, regardless of my own intersectional queer positionality.

Many people who have the privilege of access to quality education struggle with feelings of alienation from the current education crisis experienced at universities in South Africa. In my practice as educator and student, I have come to recognise that my position as a white South African has afforded me with an 'outsider' status in various contexts related to contemporary problems in education because of the inescapable lived experience of privilege and power afforded to my position. I would therefore suggest that the embodiment of 'witness' and 'listener' should be considered with particular reference to the position of 'outsider' in pedagogical practice. I would like to imagine that consciously occupying a position of witness allows for learning to take place passively, outside of controlled classroom environments, and in everyday settings. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of witnessing is the position whence the

witness experiences or is subjected to events/happenings. This position can be described as the perception/perspective of the witness; the figurative space that the witness occupies. The witness could also be interpreted as 'other' in many instances and could therefore be actively witnessing an encounter from a perspective 'outside' of the happening. Trinh Minh-Ha writes extensively about the concept of "otherness" in her book: "*Elsewhere, Within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event* (2011) and unpacks the meaning of the term by looking at its self-contradictory positioning:

> "*The named "other" is never to be found over there and outside of oneself, for it is always over here between Us, between our discourse* [...]." (Minh-Ha 2011, 45)

The act of "bearing witness" indicates a certain amount of responsibility carried by the one occupying the position of witness. I would like to suggest that we learn by questioning our own problems, failures and potential through the recognition of different experiences and positions (not only from a position of self) as opposed to the negative implication of 'othering' that perpetuates discrimination and prejudice. The process of witnessing and questioning may offer opportunities for learning that can potentially create spaces where intersectionality could be practiced in order to rethink and rebuild an education system in need of transformative action.

is this a gateway
that embraces open eyes
delighted by possibility
that nurtures ambition
passed on
and put forth in order to
sustain and recreate
a dream
constructed to manipulate
and distract
hard working minds
from constant restraint

is this a gateway
that sets off an alarm aimed at summoning
shields meant to
defend uniforms
from distress
as spoken word in song resonates
higher ground stretching further
than barricades blocking
staircases
as soaring sounds shoot upward
only to fall on ears
conditioned to have selective hearing

is this a gateway
that confronts those who navigate passageways
with intimidation in order to
excel in a space where excellence
is measured on levels of
assimilation
as achievements are
assessed and marked by
protocol
founded on a power
losing its relevance
in a quest to become malleable

is this a gateway
that has a
destination point in place
satisfying
curious beings
by providing answers
to open-ended questions
longing for retribution
and comfort in a space where
uncertainty is the origin
of an opening that leads
fleeting feet toward guarded enclosures

is this a gate-way

Chapter 3. Learning through Failure and Collaboration

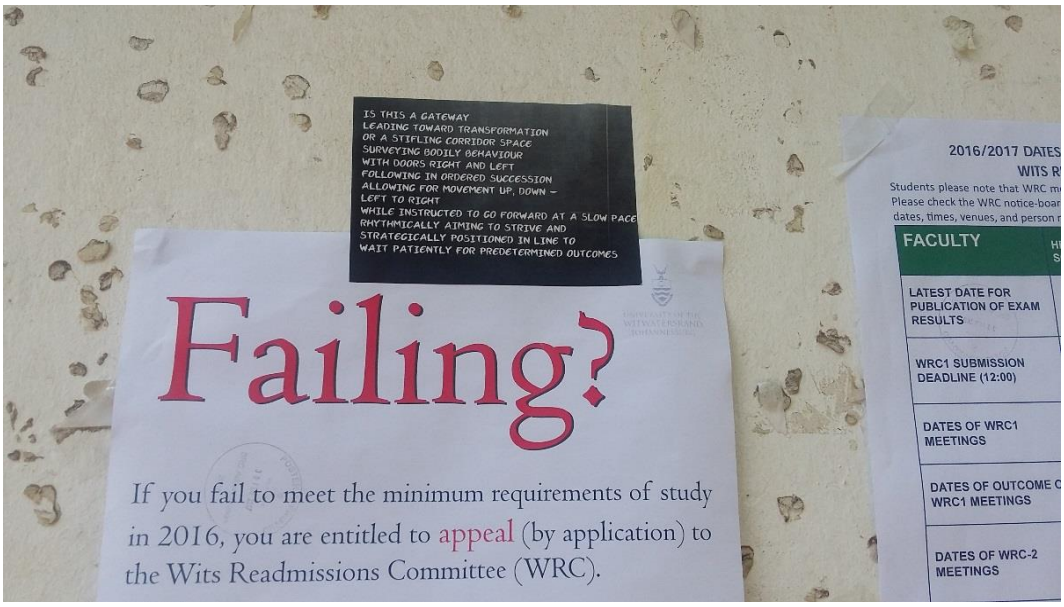


Image 10. Second stanza of "Gateway" poem: Sticker paste-up at WITS University (2017).

In the field of education, there is an expectation that successful results should be achieved, and this perception of success is often equated, but not limited to, positive and satisfactory outcomes. The defining factor that influences the classification of what these outcomes should entail/what criteria should be met, is often determined by a set curriculum that standardises success in ways that will benefit the structure that these named 'outcomes/results' must operate within. Success can also be seen as a step-by-step process that is strongly related to the various stages/grade levels or 'gateways' in the education system that must be completed and passed through, in order to move forward; up the ladder towards advantageous objectives.

If a grade is not passed or expectations are not met, then the opposite of success becomes titled and classified: *Failure.* A word that can have the ability to psychologically indoctrinate and determine end results before tasks are attempted. To receive an "F" on a paper or school report can be an incredibly disappointing experience for a student. I have personally witnessed this first hand, and have failed learners by the influence of my own authority in a school environment where failure was experienced by myself and my students in different ways. One of the most valuable lessons I have learned from teaching in a classroom is that failure (if re-framed), could have the ability to encourage an individual to try again, re-attempt, rebuild and re-imagine the same task that was attempted and considered unsuccessful.

In the introduction to "*Failure*", a collection of texts addressing the concept of failure and its relevance in contemporary art, Lisa le Feuvre writes about the various nuances and influences of failure in a piece aptly named "*Striving to Fail*" (2010). Le Feuvre's opinion on failure reflects optimism, thus encouraging productive and positive interpretations of the subject*:*

> *"If perfection and idealism are satisfying, failure and doubt are engaging, driving us into the unknown. When divorced from a defeatist, disappointed or unsuccessful position, failure can be shifted away from being merely a category of judgement."* (Le Feuvre 2010, 17)

Failure can therefore be both debilitating and productive. Failure can be observed and experienced in many forms; some of which are not limited to language and classification, but rather exists internally, on a psychological level. Failure therefore has the ability to set standards, realise potential and predetermine outcomes and the experience of re-attempting projects/tasks can spark creativity as it requires complex problem solving skills. Artistic and educational practice can therefore gain from the experience of failure as it can play a vitally important role in the facilitation of learning and knowledge production.

During a process where artistic and educational practices interlink, collaboration is often the catalyst for interdisciplinary action to take place. It is through the constant interaction between these two fields that collaborative and participatory art projects have become popularly practised in various communities and learning environments. These projects require collaboration in order to run successfully and this is not always easy to achieve because the act of collaboration can introduce power dynamics between facilitators and participants for various reasons.

Firstly, it is inherently difficult for a given group of people to work together in harmony and achieve equal power dynamics. Secondly, even if the ideal is achieved and people work together and collaborate successfully, power dynamics may arise by the mere presence of various intersectional positions such as race, class and gender if left undeclared. Thirdly, to reiterate Linda Smith's approach: "*Who will benefit?*" (Smith 1999, 10) Will the participants benefit or will the organisations that fund these projects benefit? Or will the person who facilitates the project benefit? Also, to harken back to Freire's critique of the "Banking" model, in many collaborative projects it can be interpreted that facilitators project ignorance in order to justify their own gift of knowledge, that thereby justifies their own existence (Freire 1970, 72).

These projects seek to have measurable outcomes and this in turn satisfies a capitalist model. Socially engaged projects conducted with the intention to have educational impact and work with

people, therefore have ethical implications and should be subjected to close examination and critique. Claire Bishop unpacks the various reasons why collaborative art projects are so strictly criticised in *The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents* (2006):

> *"The social turn in contemporary art has prompted an ethical turn in art criticism. This is manifest in a heightened attention to how a given collaboration is undertaken. In other words, artists are increasingly judged by their working process — the degree to which they supply good or bad models of collaboration — and criticized for any hint of potential exploitation that fails to "fully" represent their subjects, as if such a thing were possible."* (Bishop 2006, 2)

Bishop highlights the complexity of collaborative practice as she mentions how working methods are questioned in order to determine whether projects are exploitative or problematic. It is difficult however, to fully assess collaborative projects because facilitators often have the power to control the manner in which the projects are executed and how the outcomes are presented. These projects are often funded by organisations that expect positive feedback in order to fulfill certain requirements that adhere to social responsibilities. As a result, failures are not often aspects of collaborative projects recorded or reported, due to the potential negative impact this may have on access to funding and reputation.

I would like to suggest that failures and tensions observed and experienced in collaborative practice should be considered vitally important learning tools, instead of being "brushed under the carpet". In "*Spaces of Critical Exchange*" (2012), a conversation between Liam Gillick and Fionn Meade, a direct and honest description of participatory practice is seen, revealing the inherent problems in collaboration:

> *"One thing all of those projects have in common is a kind of lack. They're described as discursive, or* [...] *"collaborative", when, in fact, they all demonstrate three key things: lack, suspicion, and withdrawal or a sense of subjugation, or something close to that. From the artistic perspective, they demonstrate a kind of submissiveness by working alongside structures or people for whom the process of actually accepting a movement into that kind of space is difficult or problematic".* (Gillick 2012, 1)

Gillick's statement alludes to the idea that one should perpetually question who is benefiting from the act of collaboration and that there should be a constant and strong critique of the position of power that the artist as teacher or facilitator occupies. This power dynamic can be presented as overt, and the artist/facilitator is perceived as 'expert', or covert where elements such

as language, space and position act as vehicles for these power structures to mobilise. I will now discuss three of my own projects, namely: *Projections of Knowledge Production*; *This is not a lecture. Thiz iz a leckcha*; and finally *"Gateway"*. These projects and the relationships to the major collaborators involved will be described, after which I will seek to discuss how differing ideas surrounding my interest in collaborative practice, the various ethical dilemmas of working collaboratively in order to conduct research in academia, and finally finding my own voice through the process of witnessing and learning through failure were born and realized through the engagement with these projects.

"Projections of Knowledge Production": Photography project at Rosebank Progress College

For a period of four years, I taught full time at a private secondary school in Cape Town named Rosebank Progress College. During my time at the school, I had developed a friendship and collaborative professional relationship with one of the teachers, Barbara Wellbeloved.

At times we would act as a support system for one another as we experienced similar problems in class, and as a result we shared various methods and teaching philosophies with each other in the staff room. During difficult times when we experienced frustration with the school curriculum or school structure itself, Barbara and I would get ideas for educational outings and exciting projects for the learners to engage with outside of the classroom space. At the end of 2014, it became apparent that I would have to leave Rosebank Progress College in order to further my own studies. This was an incredibly difficult decision to make as I found it hard to let go of the personal connections I had built over time with colleagues and students.

When I arrived in Johannesburg in 2015 to start my academic journey at Wits University, I decided to incorporate Rosebank Progress College and my exchanges with Barbara into a collaborative project that would explore ideas that were of interest to my *own* research. I did not realise at the time, that this was contradictory to the ideology of participatory practice, as the entire project was dictated by my own interests. The initial ideas that I wanted to explore were around language used to maintain control in a classroom, language used to provide knowledge to students and the visual language perpetuated and reflected by the classroom space itself. The aim of this project (that I wanted to address) was to explore the various ways that a classroom space dictates communication and access to knowledge, and how each student receives information differently.

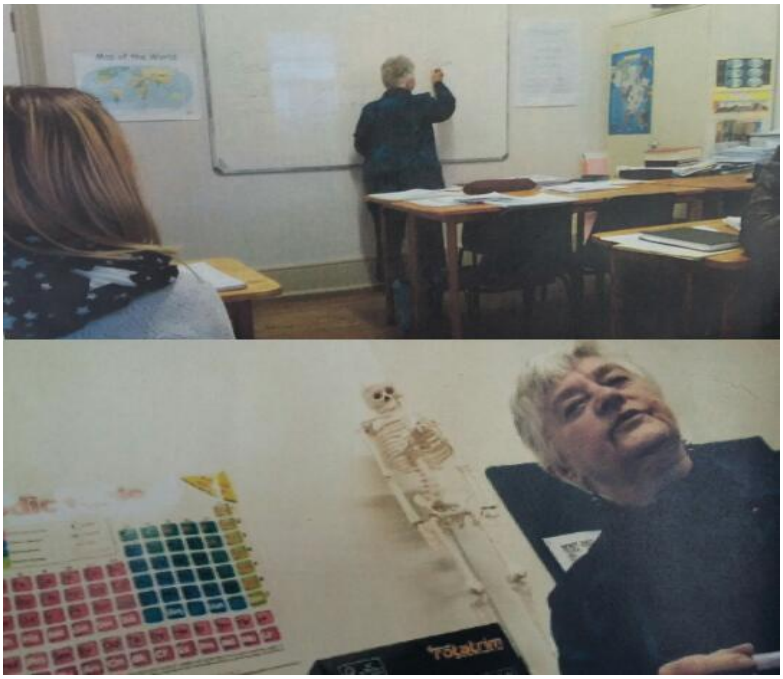


Image 11. Photograph of teacher, Barbara Wellbeloved during her Grade 10 Life Science lesson taken by a student at Rosebank Progress College, Cape Town (2015).

The entire project was conducted via email correspondence and required me to collect and analyse photographs taken by students in Barbara's Grade 10 Life Science class. I requested that Barbara allowed the students to photograph her in the classroom from their various perspectives from their desks by using their cellphone cameras. I wanted to see what a visual representation of one lesson would look like, from the various perspectives that the students occupy in the classroom. The results were satisfactory on my side of the exchange due to the fact that the students and Barbara alike, had followed my instructions and I received the visual references that I expected from the project. Students might have enjoyed the experience, but I started to realise that the project failed to effectively question the classroom environment and various ideas around knowledge production. The project was not mutually initiated, but merely facilitated via my own instruction. My intention for the images taken by the students was to attempt to revert authoritarian power dynamics in a classroom space as I envisioned an image taken from the perspective of a desk showing the teacher as a monumental figure, looking down at the students. I thought this would somehow 'free' the students from a 'submissive' position by taking power in the action of photographing their teacher. This was however naïve and presumptuous on my side for several reasons. In many ways, the images only perpetuated those ideas and failed to give the students any agency or power. Additionally, whilst I might argue that by using images without

naming the students this was a virtuous act of preserving anonymity, the act of appropriating images from students without giving due credit may further undermine their agency and erase their intersectional positionality, rendering me a perpetrator of the very system I sought to interrogate. In my role as 'witness', in many ways being separate from the space as the project occurred, my consumption of the images arguably takes on a voyeuristic rather than witnessing position. Also, whilst intending to increase the agency of the students, for whom I initially believed myself to be 'allied' to, in many ways I aligned myself with Barbara, who as my friend and also as 'gatekeeper' to this space, I may have sought to please and placate.

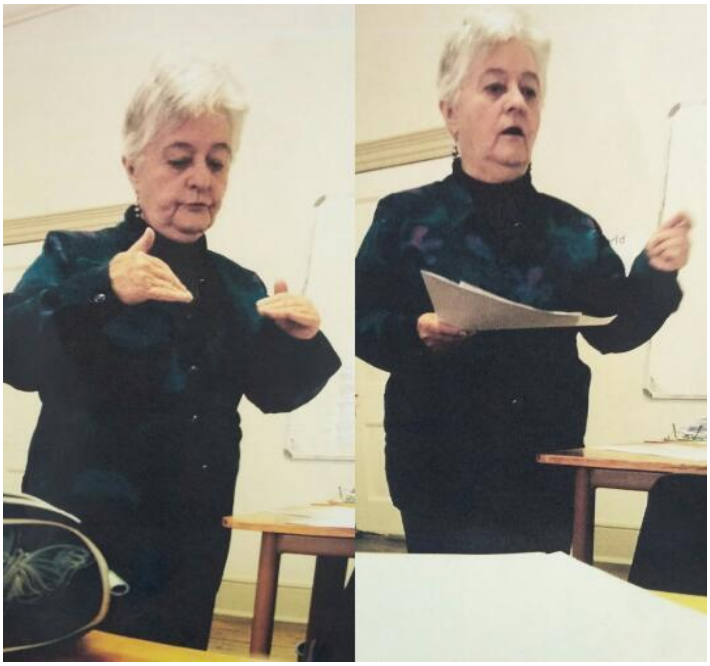


Image 12. Photograph of Barbara Wellbeloved during her Grade 10 Life Science lesson taken by a student at Rosebank Progress College, Cape Town (2015).

It was however, through these acknowledgments of 'failures' that I fully understood the significance of my own desire to maintain a connection to Barbara's classroom space specifically. I wanted to remain connected to a space that I had left and this was a means to do so by using the images as a springboard for ideas around pedagogical practice that were intended to inform my research project. Engagement with this project allowed for continual correspondence with Barbara about educational practice and inspired her to write down some of her own thoughts that arose after the project was completed. In her personal piece of writing that she entitled: "*Moments of Learning*." Barbara shared the following thought process with me:

> *"I don't feel that the actual physical 'place' necessarily facilitates favourable moments in which learning can occur. It certainly can be light, bright, comfortable, filled with happy pictures and equipment, but the individual might be closed even to these encouraging circumstances."* (Wellbeloved, 2015)

This was a valuable follow-up on the project conducted in Barbara's classroom as her writing encouraged me to think further than my own intentions, which was the initial driving force behind the project. This led me to notice that the most valuable moments in collaboration are those that arise unexpectedly without being steered into a direction. These moments often go unnoticed but I would like to argue that they can embody immensely important learning opportunities. Observing and recognising the failures in this project thus allowed me to grasp that engagement with collaborative practice can be complex and problematic, and this was something I felt compelled to investigate further. It also alerted me to the dangers of my position and the implications of my own influence.

"This is not a lecture. Thiz iz a leckcha": A performance piece that was conducted at the University of Witwatersrand (in collaboration with Chase Daenos)

In 2015 I invited my friend and colleague, Chase Daenos, a performance artist and activist from Cape Town, to participate in a performance piece at the Wits School of Arts with the intention to submit the performance as a practical component for a course called The Curatorial as Artistic Practice that I needed to complete during my first year of Masters.

Chase and I had previously collaborated on various educational projects together in Cape Town, with a specific focus on community art activism in Ocean View, a community in Cape Town where Chase resides. We started a Non Profit Company called Da Kou Kau Collective in 2014, and worked together on various projects aimed at facilitating art and educational projects with the youth in Ocean View. I was incredibly lucky to have gained a relationship with Chase and his family, which continues to remain a very important aspect in my personal life irrespective of previous collaborations. Because of my connection to Chase, I was included into a community that is not my own, and was thus allowed access to spaces as an outsider that I came to realise was largely due to my own racial positionality and privilege. For example, on a practical level it was easier for me to gain approval from members of council in Ocean View in order to use spaces to facilitate workshops. Chase would not get the same quick responses as I would and we soon came to realise that this was due to my racial privilege. This realisation pushed me to continue grappling with my own ideas around collaborative practice.

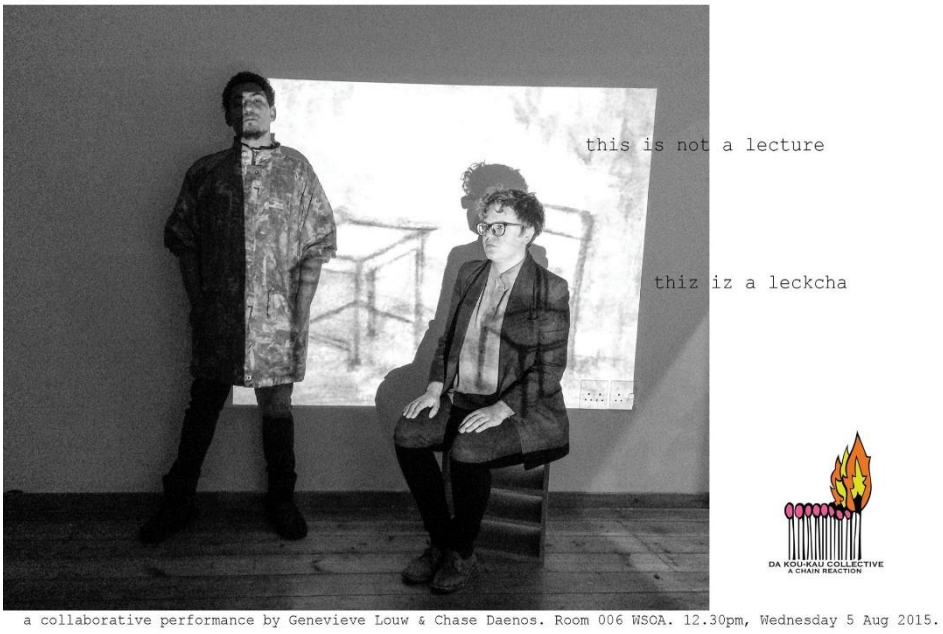


Image 13. Invitation to *This is not a lecture. Thiz iz a leckcha.* (2015).

Engaging in dialogue on Chase's front porch until the early hours of the morning, about topics that were (and continue to be) tense and often uncomfortable, provided me with the impetus to be very critical of my own intentions and aims behind conducting research and partaking in collaboration.

Chase and I both attended the same University during our undergraduate studies and often discussed our different experiences of the same institution. When I started attending a university in Johannesburg, which is quite a distance from Cape Town, our community projects in Ocean View became unsustainable and our collaborative relationship shifted toward a different mode of making that consisted mostly of debate and critical exchange conducted from a distance.

Similar to my motivation behind continuing a correspondence with Barbara Wellbeloved at Rosebank Progress College, I did not want to let go of my collaboration with Chase, and therefore suggested an exchange that would be facilitated at Wits University. Evidently, I would benefit from this experience academically as it would aid in my own acceleration as a student at the university, and this presented itself with a power dynamic that became heavily debated, and eventually created the premise for the performance piece to take place.

In our early conceptualisation of the performance, we decided that I would embody the archaic symbol of the colonial academic institution in a space inside the art school at the

university. Additionally, I made a video that was projected in the space in order to accompany the performance, that showed me in my studio engaging in critical dialogue with myself about the various shortcomings and intentions seen in my collaborative engagements. Chase embodied the position of "outsider" in relation to the academic institution, intentionally rejecting academic language and imperialist power structures. We decided to call the performance: *This is not a lecture. Thiz iz a leckcha* as a means to reflect our different voices and to interrogate academia.

The following transcript exemplifies the collaboration between Chase Daenos and myself with regard to the performance:

Thez no reezon ta ecksplayn it.

This is not a lecture. This is a conversation between me and you. You sit and look up but you do not see me. You do not see anything but I'm here and always will be. Always have been, wel thatz noht troo. Listen, I'm true, believe me. I'm here aren't I?

Image 14. Collaborative transcript by Chase Daenos and Genevieve Louw, for *This is not a lecture. Thiz iz a leckcha.*(2015).

We performed in a classroom space located inside the art school, interacting with the projected video piece. I sat at a desk, frantically writing, as Chase moved in and out of the projection speaking words that purposefully drowned out the sound of institutional language. Eventually tensions heightened as he proceeded to pull the desk away from my body in order to place it outside of the space leaving me with no object to interact with except a chair. He proceeded to remove the chair from me, and sat on it whilst tearing away at a piece of sugar cane that he started to chew. This piece of cane was used during the performance to hit my projected image in the space, setting a tone for unsettling violence.

Chase used the desk he had removed from the space, an object that represents the academic institutional structure, as a surface to conduct a cleansing ceremony and offering to his ancestors who have all been historically rejected from academic spaces due to racial discrimination. Chase conducted the ceremony by inviting people from the audience to assist him with the ritualistic process. The performance ended as he re-entered the room and switched on the light, approaching a blackboard that read: "Raise the Tension". He took a piece of chalk and changed

the phrase to “Praise the Tension.” At this point I realised that there was no other option for me but to leave the space and kneel in front of the shrine in prayer.



Image 15. Chase Daenos seen occupying the chair he took from me and is eating sugar cane while I sit on the floor, looking up at him, from *This is not a lecture. Thiz iz a leckcha.*(2015).

The performance raised questions around language used in academic spaces that often has the ability to exclude rather than develop people who enter the gateway to academia. This performance was marked by an imbalance in power dynamics between myself and Chase that was often very difficult to articulate and not possible to resolve. Failure to do so resulted in a performance that was spontaneous and honest, which allowed for tension and discomfort to become an essential part of the dialogue surrounding collaborative practice. Despite the tensions that came out of this performance piece and the uncomfortable undertone, it would still be considered a ‘well-executed’ art work.

It is important however, to take note of the moments in collaboration that are often pushed aside because they are too difficult to acknowledge as they reflect on personal failure and frustration. There were many projects that Chase and I conceptualised that never came into being and this was due to the same conflict and tensions that arose in the performance piece but on complex personal levels that are often hard to pin-point or understand whilst engaging in

collaborative practice. One of the most difficult realisations for me personally was the fact that I had expectationsto take part in projects that would hopefully have ‘satisfactory’ outcomes. I was playing into the Banking model without realising it. I was often the one who pushed for projects to happen as opposed to Chase's organic approach that did not need an end result, and thus I felt disappointed if projects did not manifest into reality. Also, at times I felt frustration by my own ‘lack of voice’ in my efforts to not enforce my influence on the one hand, but also to not upset the delicate balance forged with Chase as friend, but also as gatekeeper. In these instances, the mantle of ‘witness’ may have provided a psychological ‘safe harbour’ where my voice could be channelled into an inner dialogue of reflecting on what I observed and experienced. These realisations are not easy but prove to be incredibly valuable lessons that reveal the often untold story of collaborative projects.

“Gateway”: A poem that questions the academic institution.

After extensive engagement with collaborative practice, I felt it necessary to create something that was made in my own voice. The drive to do so most certainly originated from ideas that sprung from my collaborative projects. I wanted to find a way to articulate my own questions about the education structure and started to write *Gateway* after returning from a visit to Cape Town which often served as a reflective space away from the university. The poem thus became a creative outlet that allowed me to question without worrying about academic expectations or validity. *Gateway* started as a self-reflexive exercise which spontaneously and surprisingly to myself, manifested as a poem. The process of writing *Gateway* was cathartic as it represented a process of release. In doing so this opened up an opportunity for the writing to flow freely without relying on consciously directed outcomes and goals. It was a surrendering of the need for control which is affiliated with academic practice and reflected a need for a spontaneous approach that allowed questioning to take place.

The imagery reflected in the poem was extensively informed by the *#FeesMustFall* movement which primarily started at Wits University in 2015. The *#FeesMustFall* movement had a ripple effect across South Africa during my studies at Wits. There was no shortage of reporting on social media showing students in protest often clashing with police and security forces as well as the institution itself. The constant exposure to the coverage of protests and the personal accounts I experienced at the university space compelled me to write in a reflective manner, from the position of witness both of events occurring simultaneously outside and within myself, creating what could loosely be described as a testimonial that questions the institution

through the medium of poetry. Writing the poem from the perspective of an art student at the university, created a need to show the poem, in order for it be experienced publicly. As a result, I needed to think critically about how this would happen and I experimented with various approaches that involved reading the poem, performing it and attempting a design for large banners that would be hung on the facade of the university building, facing a public street in the inner city of Johannesburg. I wanted the poem to evolve, to live outside of its pages, in order to propose an interdisciplinary method displayed in the university space that could potentially rethink the current curriculum and structure set in place.

I soon ran into various problems that were posed by the banners. These ‘larger than life’ objects existed in my mind and became an idea that transformed into a daunting, violent symbol that might have performed an imposing act; one that could only be described as the poem being ‘shouted at people’ rather than it being shared. I could not execute such a boastful act from my position as a white person in South Africa that bears a history in colonialism, a system that functions by taking over spaces for personal gain. For these same reasons I felt that the enactment through reading the poem in my own voice or those explicitly chosen by me to be problematic.



Image 16. First stanza of “*Gateway*” poem: sticker paste-up at entrance to Wits School of Arts (2017).

I was faced with a dilemma, but through the interaction with ideas around intersectionality and failure, this problem turned into something productive.

I made the decision to print the poem on stickers and to stick each individual stanza in a different place on Wits campus. I chose a quiet day to do so, to inconspicuously put *Gateway* into the space that it questions without being noticed. I realised that I was still imposing my position and my ideas onto a space but felt that the medium of the sticker allowed me to do this in a way that would not draw direct attention to myself. I also became aware that the reason why I felt better about this was because of fear. Fear of being noticed, fear of committing violent acts in a space that has experienced so much violence imposed onto people, while my body would remain unharmed. I wanted to test these introspective feelings and push them further and thus took the spontaneous opportunity to stick one of the stanzas onto a police van that was parked in a very public area on the university campus. I was not afraid of any consequences. I knew that this act would go unnoticed because of my position of privilege. I documented this act of rebellion and soon moved onto my next target. Outside of the university library I was confronted with a notice board that stated “Wall of Shame”. I realised that this was a tactic used to publicly shame students who committed plagiarism. I confidently stuck a stanza on top of this sign in front of a security guard who was not concerned by my actions.



Image 17. Tenth stanza of "*Gateway*" poem: sticker paste-up on police vehicle on Wits campus outside Solomon Mahlangu House (2017).

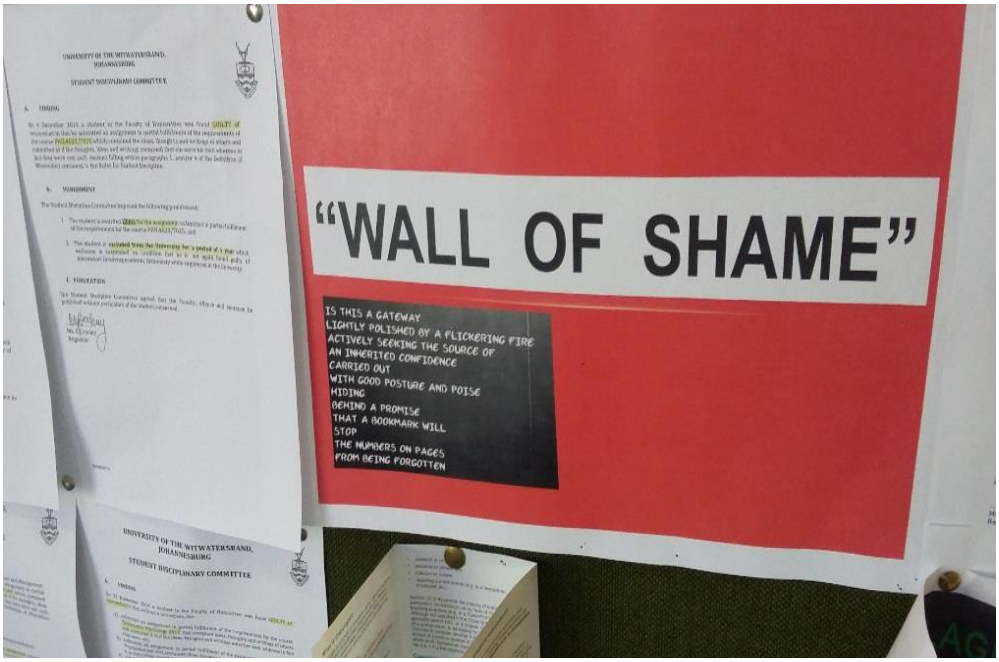


Image 18. Eighth stanza of "*Gateway*" poem: sticker paste-up on notice board outside of Wartenweiler Library on Wits campus 2017).

The act of sticking or placing the poem on top of these spaces I deemed worthy of critique did not strike me as problematic until I proceeded to stick a stanza on a brass plaque that commemorates educators and students who lost their lives in WWI and WWII. I did not think twice about sticking my poem on this object, until I documented the process, paused and looked closely at the image of the Protea flower gleaming in the sunlight. I immediately experienced an overwhelming sense of nationalist conditioning that resonated with my own history. A history of Afrikana, a history of pride that has its roots heavily set in a power associated with my own identity and mother tongue- Afrikaans; a language strongly associated with oppression and yet a language associated with those I love and respect. I started to feel deep shame and regret, and quickly moved the sticker to the side of the plaque structure where it was less visible. *Why did I not experience the same regret after willfully using my own position of privilege to criticise the presence of the police van? Why did I negotiate my decision to place the poem beside the plaque rather than forcefully on it whilst I had no reservations for those other targets? Why did this only occur to me in retrospect?* There is no resolution to the problems introduced by these questions, which is one of the reasons why *Gateway* purposefully contains no question marks. There is no "easy way out" and no way of reconciling these mistakes and failures that have their origins in archaic power structures. There is only the decision to learn and to listen to the moment, that is now so crucially vital, so inescapably relevant to the possibility of change.



Image 19. Ninth stanza of *Gateway* poem sticker paste-up stuck on a plaque, and then removed, and then stuck in a less "imposing" position. Wits Campus (2017).

Ode to Gateway

I did not decide to write you in the beginning.
even though you were
always there, this I know
now
that I decide to place you
with words.

I do regret not saving all the disregarded parts of you,
for those were only deemed unworthy by my own doubt
and conditioning.

I should have kept them.
Celebrated them,
the failures
because they're a part of you.
and I did you wrong.

However,
this is not a navel-gazing exercise;
a boring introspection.
Rather, it’s an ode to you,

I want to thank you,
Gateway.

I'm not sure why I can’t memorise you.
Remember and recite you

I have tried to perform
read
sing
PROJECT you.

I have tried.

I wanted to print your name
on enormous banners
that would be displayed on the facade of a building.
You know the one,
the University.
Draped high between pillars,
in text black and white
for the world to view.

But this was my lesson you see,
It was not what you wanted to be.

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