

**“Stopped in the middle” with Elmarie Costandius:
Playing with interruptions/continuities**

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Abstract

This paper is written in memory of our friend and colleague, Elmarie Costandius, a visual artist and academic, whose untimely and unexpected death deeply affected us. While we had worked with Elmarie in various research projects, short courses, and workshops, over a period of ten years or so, in this article we refer to a series of encounters, in which we came together to explore a decolonial and post qualitative inquiry practice as part of a South African Swedish Universities Forum (SASUF) project (2020 - 2022). Entitled *(Re)configuring Scholarship in Higher Education*, the project focused on alternative ways of doing pedagogies and inquiry in the current context of higher education precarities and the consequent imperative for transformation. We wanted to explore how feminist new materialist imaginaries could be put to work with affective embodied practices to expand our thinking and reconfigure our scholarship. Guided by Elmarie's experimental arts-based approach, we opened ourselves to the affordances of playfulness, creative, serious and experimental thinking-making-doings, and the vulnerabilities of these embodied, relational scholarly praxes. Stopped in the middle, we show how our entangled thinking-making-doings continue Elmarie's legacy.

Keywords: affective embodiment, embodied learning, feminist new materialism, play, research-creation

Introduction

This paper is written in memory of Elmarie Costandius, a visual artist and academic whose untimely and unexpected death deeply affected us. Elmarie's life work was committed to visual redress and critical citizenship, as evident in the many installations resident on her home campus, the University of Stellenbosch, that continue to speak of her dedicated commitment to the decolonial project in the university and beyond (Costandius, 2010; 2016; 2021). Her work pioneered a range of radical breaks, both in terms of aesthetic justice projects (Gielen & Van Tomme, 2015) but also in relation to the larger project of reconceptualising scholarly practice.



As part of an upswell of dissatisfaction with the neoliberal (post)colonial academy and its well-worn traditions of knowledge, and in response to calls from feminist new materialist and decolonial bodies of work, there has been a proliferation of experimental, creative, playful, disruptive and transgressive scholarships (Costandius 2010; 2016; 2021; Kulundu, McGarry & Lotz-Sisitkal, Perold-Bull 2020). The post qualitative turn, as a different way of doing research as inquiry, has been an important part of feminist new materialist work and brought about a rich and growing archive of alternative ways of thinking and praxis in knowledge-making (Manning, 2016; St Pierre, 2019). Key to these shifts is the incorporation of embodied, affective, and relational forms of inquiry including the scholarship of teaching and learning. Increasingly, scholars are engaging mobile methodologies like walking and swimming, placetimespacemattering methodologies, arts-based and creative methodologies, amongst many other novel, experimental engagements (Nxumalo, 2020; Romano, 2020, 2023, 2024; Shefer, et al., 2024; Simpson, 2022; Springgay & Truman, 2017, 2019; Truman, 2022). Elmarie's life work was strongly bound up with these kinds of projects, engaging and experimenting with artistic, creative and imaginative methodologies that are also strongly dedicated to acts of memory, visual redress and liberatory imaginaries.

We had all been involved with Elmarie in various research projects, short courses and workshops for a decade before her untimely passing. The particular event we refer to in this article was part of a South African Swedish Universities Forum (SASUF) project (2020 - 2022), in which we all participated. Entitled *(Re)configuring Scholarship in Higher Education*, the project focused on alternative ways of doing pedagogies and methodologies in higher education. This article provides an account of our coming together to plan and prepare our input on reconceptualising higher education using feminist new materialist imaginaries, for a joint face-to-face meeting with our Swedish partners, in August 2022 in Stockholm. We also draw on a series of prior ongoing writing-thinking-creating together sessions that took place during COVID when we were working together online, as part of the SASUF project. The purpose of the article is to provide a glimpse into how working with prompts as enabling constraints, or constraining enablements, 'pressurized' our encounters 'towards eventful issue[s]' to share with our Northern Nordic partners (Massumi in Manning, et al., 2022).

When we gathered at Boulders Beach in Simonstown in July 2022 for three days of intensive collaborative thinking-making-doing in preparation for the upcoming meeting in Sweden, we were interested in how knowledge that is made differently creates different knowledges. We hoped to expand our thinking, understanding and practice of new materialism through experimental, embodied and grounded practice. Moreover, we wanted to take play seriously in the hope of offering something substantial, situated and southern to our Swedish partners as an act of redressing dominant northern practices. At that time, we were completely oblivious to the fact that it would be one of the last times we would have the opportunity to work together with Elmarie and that her life would be abruptly cut short ... stopped in the middle. The prescience of her words in one of our free-writings continues to haunt us:

I by accident typed Elm,arie, with a comma in the middle, and that made me think of how you sometimes feel you are 'stopped in the middle' of a process. The process can be interrupted in many ways:

Elmar,ie.

E,Imarie,

E, l, m, a, r, i, e,.

Elmarie guided many of the collaborative activities through her unique experimental pragmatic and playful material-based approach. For example, one of the challenges we encountered during the face-to-face workshop was that Tammy was ill and could not join us in person. Undeterred, we decided to proceed. Tammy joining us remotely online created an opportunity to explore how an engagement across different locations and through different modes might highlight the specificity of situatedness, and how it would impact the unfolding processes. We were curious as to whether Tammy's absence/presence might enact a spatio-temporal diffractive encounter through which the more-than could materialise. Working with a range of material and embodied practices, some suggested by Elmarie and then collaboratively taken forward, Tammy would engage similar experiential activities where possible and we would share together online. These included a variety of arts-based or material-discursive exercises as well as walking and swimming methodologies, since we were staying near the ocean.

Chance, mobility, playfulness, affect and material provocations were key to shaping our creative and intellectual engagements with thinking about what it means to do academia differently. The element of chance brings a 'newness of the encounter' (Manning, 2013: 60) making every event creative, each generating 'a particular aesthetic patterning of events, a rippling out of the creative inquiry process that cannot be determined in advance' (Rousell, 2021: xv). For example, we began with a collaborative brainstorming of keywords pertaining to new materialism that we wrote on a large sheet of newsprint paper (see the teal text in Figure 1 below).

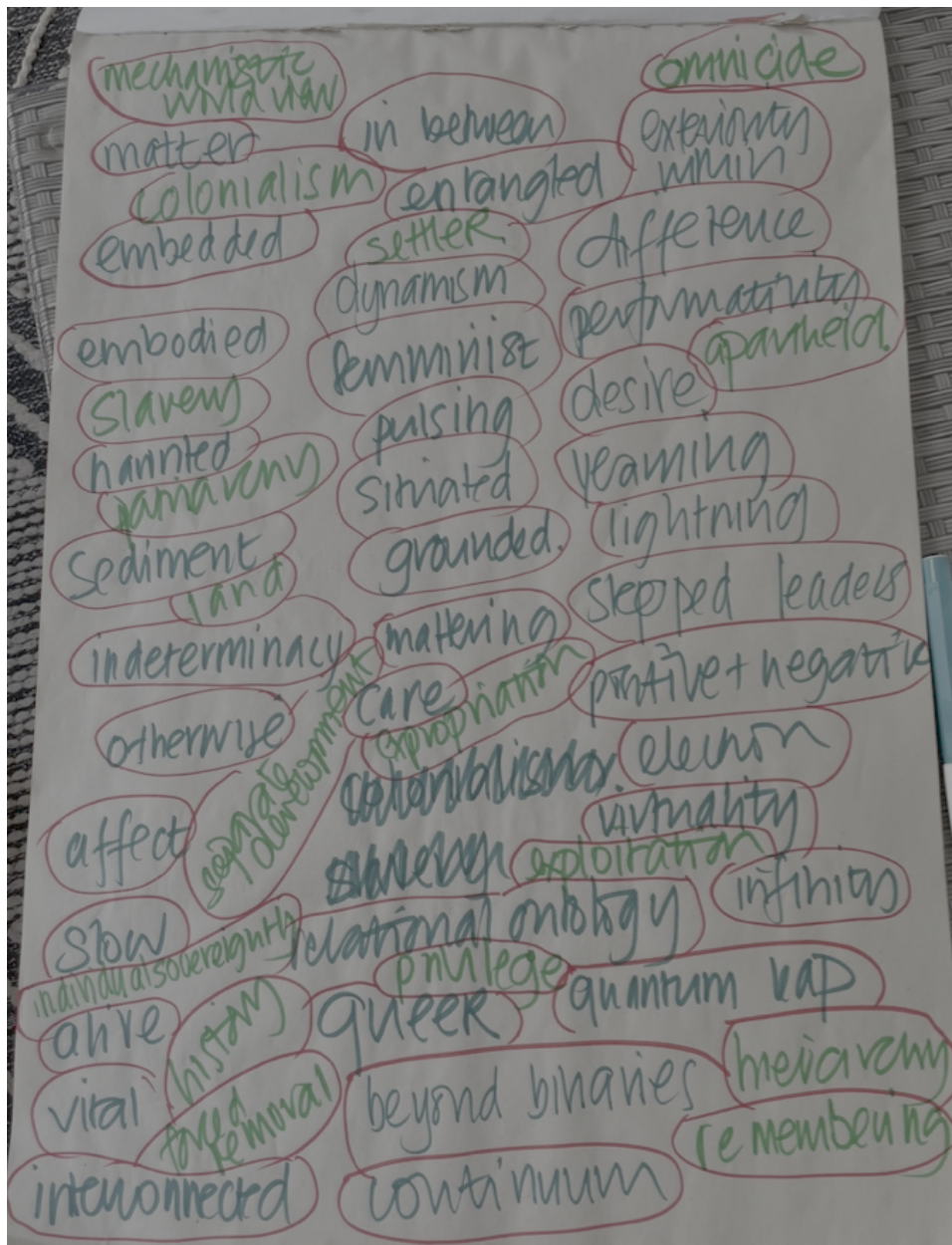


Figure 1: In teal: Affect; Alive; Beyond binaries; Continuum; Desire; Difference; Dynamism; Electron; Embedded; Embodied; Entangled; Exteriority within; Feminist; Grounded; Haunted; Indeterminacy; In between; Infinity; Interconnected; Lightning; Matter; Mattering/care; Otherwise; Performativity; Positive and negative; Pulsing; Quantum leap; Queer; Relational ontology; Slow; Stepped leaders; Sediment; Situated; Vital; Virtuality; Yearning. In apple green: Colonialism; Expropriation, Exploitation; Forced removals; Hierarchy; History; Individual Sovereignty; Land; Mechanistic world view; Omnicide; Privilege; Re-membering; Separate development; Settler; and Slavery

Following that, it felt important to situate these words within a global southern (South African) context (these are listed in apple green in Figure 1 above). The next step was to brainstorm potential doing-words that could animate our thinking-making-doing with concepts within grounded contexts (See Figure 2).

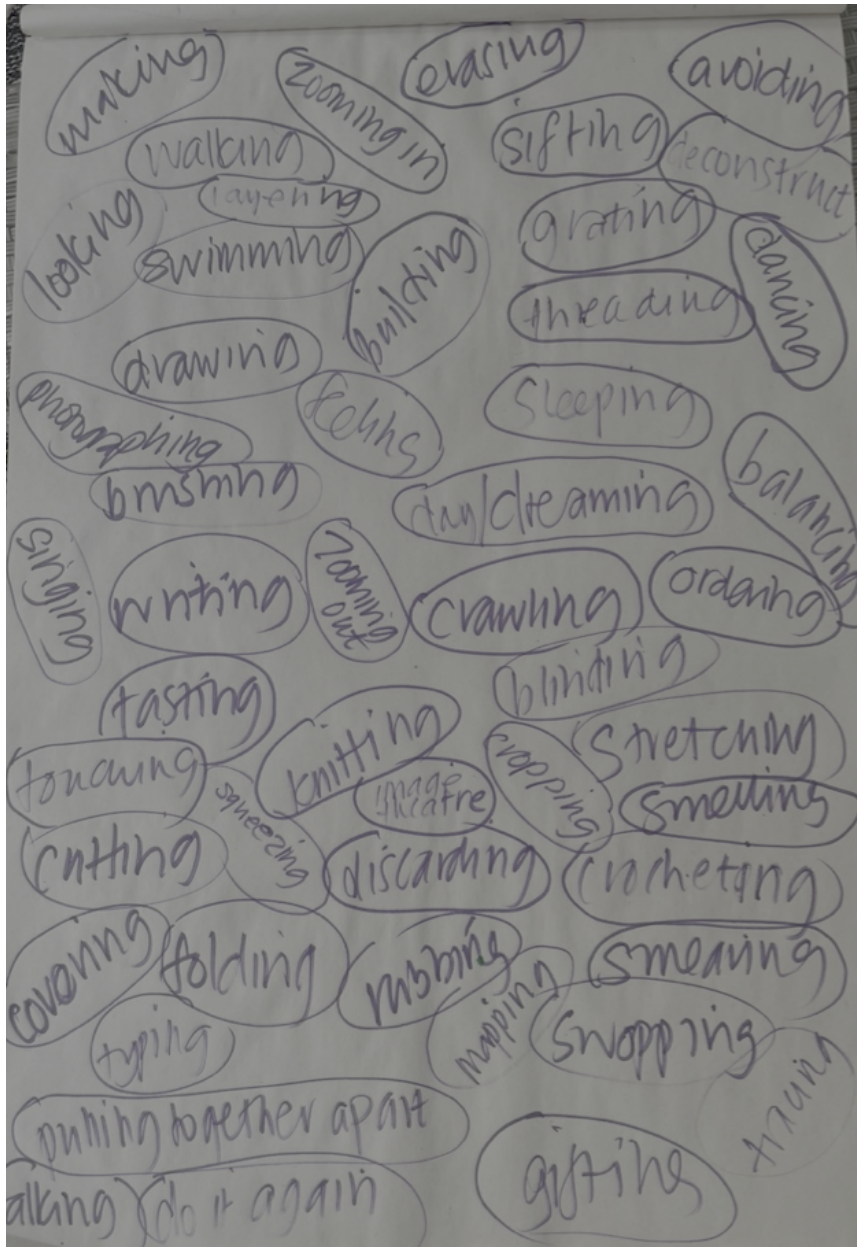


Figure 2: The prompts we came up with in our brainstorm included: Balancing; Blinding; Brushing; Building; Covering; Crocheting; Crawling; Cropping; Cutting; Dancing; Daydreaming; Deconstruct; Discarding; Do it again; Erasing; Feeling; Folding; Gifting; Grating; Knitting; Layering; Looking; Image theatre; Making; Mapping; Ordering; Photographing; Pulling together apart; Rubbing; Stretching; Sifting; Sleeping; Smearing; Squeezing; Singing; Swopping; Swimming; Tasting; Threading; Touching; Tracing; Weaving; Walking; and Zooming in

Relying on chance (comprising gravity, velocity and momentum) as an enabling constraint, we took turns tossing almonds into the air, allowing them to fall on the newsprint below. We worked with the combination of the words on which the nuts landed as prompts. The one proviso being that they had to be from one of each of the above-mentioned three categories.

This article does not offer fixed findings, given that our intention was to allow the process of play to catalyse events that pushed (and pulled) us towards indeterminacy in seemingly safe

and innocuous ways. We placed 'value in the process itself', curious about what might emerge through encounters and whether working in this way would encourage a rethinking of 'the very question of what is at stake in pedagogy, in practice, and in collective experimentation' (Manning, 2016: 141).

What we found in re-reading our writings-makings (Elmarie usually created something or played with words, rather than simply writing narratives), is that our dialogues and engagements spoke to how the thematics of serious play, indeterminacy and vulnerability are significant for the project of reconceptualising knowledge.

The article is structured as follows: We begin by locating our thinking-making-doing theoretically within the framework of feminist new materialist scholarship. Our discussion on the workshop itself is organised according to the daily prompts we worked with on each of the days. We revisit these prompts to elaborate on how we engaged with Elmarie's proposition of play as a serious matter. They served as enabling constraints that gave form and shape to our experimental inquiry. Within these we discuss the affordances of playing with relationality, affective embodiment, dualism, materiality, and precarity, as well as the play of decolonial praxis and speculative fabulation. We also include a selection of photographs, free writings, and collaborative poems that materialised during our three days together.

Feminist new materialism

Why are we exploring new materialism (nm)? How will yearning (a concept of new materialism) help me to understand life around me better? Is new materialism a lens to experience differently, engaging on a deeper level to apply the new understandings to everyday life. Or is it an engagement of ideas to become aware of how we think and do, and what effect new understandings have on our lives? Or is exploring concepts also a way of serious playing? – *Elmarie, free writing Day 1*

Feminist new materialisms is a transdisciplinary field of feminist scholarship that eschews humanist dualistic logics that separate among other things, matter/meaning, nature/culture, human/nonhuman. In order to unsettle anthropocentric humanism, feminist new materialisms draw from Baruch Spinoza's monist perspective to attend to the agency of matter and activate thinking beyond the strictures of the linguistic turn (Truman, 2021: xv). Some of the common threads running through feminist new materialist scholarship include the troubling of traditional research methodological approaches associated with positivism. For example, feminist new materialism foregrounds how participants and theories are implicated in research events. Another strand is how feminist new materialisms highlight the importance of relationality and affect. Linked to this is an attunement to the affordances of performativity in re-thinking representationalism. Finally, feminist new materialisms reveal how thinking with concepts and making-doing are equally albeit differently part of empirical research practice (Truman, 2021: xvi).

The process of play elicits humility as we relinquish power and control. Kara Stone (thinking with Jane Bennet's concept of distributed agency) reminds us that 'our agency is not as sovereign, separate bodies but as actants immersed in a complex assemblage' (2019: 98). Working with the materiality and the materials as an assemblage that cannot be separated, we recognised how 'the subject is not the root cause of an effect' (Stone, 2019: 98). Instead, we co-composed with the 'thing-power' (Bennet, 2010: 4) of inanimate objects, thereby undoing the metaphysics of individualism and human centrism.

In the next section, we discuss the affordances of play as experienced through the engagement with the daily activities/prompts. We have found it useful to organise this discussion as follows: playing with relationality; playing with affective embodiment; playing with dualism; playing with materiality; playing with precarity; the play of decolonial praxis, the play of desire; the play of speculative fabulation.

Day 1 prompt: settler | yearning | swimming

Working with the first prompt settler | yearning | swimming saw Viv, Elmarie, and Nike walk down to Windmill Beach, in Simons Town, Cape Town. It was cold and windy; the sea was rough and churning; Viv and Nike swam while Elmarie elected to walk along the coastline where she took photographs. Tammy, in the meanwhile, found ways of participating in some of the activities on her own at home, and joined us online for a freewriting session where we shared experiences of the activities as well as photographic records.

Playing with relationality

In her exploration of how creative play might encourage an ethical response to the world and its inhabitants, Loretta Fois argues that creative play is a transformational process that challenges 'individualistic worldview[s] and find[s] an intradependent connection that enables us to relate to nature and society in more cohesive and supportive ways' (2022: 251). Play does not happen in isolation; it is a relational activity that has ontological effects on all who participate in its process. Play is both a quality and an affective force (Stone, 2019: 97) that does not reside in individuals but moves between 'a human or nonhuman "other" counterpart engaged in the exchange' (Fois, 2022: 235). Our playful engagements confirmed how agency is distributed between the 'embodied dynamics of human and nonhuman factors' rather than through the intention of us, the human participants (Fois, 2022: 235). Indeed, entanglements with materials and their materiality foregrounded the ontological inseparability of all participants (human and more-than human) who continued to affect and be affected through the ongoing process of play. Viv reflects on how the affordances of play encouraged a playful engagement with the words and concepts, trying them on in her oceanic immersion.

Settler (I keep misspelling the word like it does not sit comfortably) yearning - how to take the entanglement of those concepts for a swim? The sea was very turbulent and what struck me is that you can't yearn when you are "at sea" - when you are being buffeted

about you just feel lucky to be in one piece, there is no space for yearning or desiring. The holdfast is a nurturant space - it is the root of the kelp that attaches itself to a smooth surface like a rock and houses many different settlers there. Creatures that flourish in the holdfast that come from different spaces. Perhaps some yearning happened between the holdfast and its settlers. - *Viv, freewriting on Day 1*

We also opened ourselves towards Erin Manning's conception of play as a relational field out of which something 'uncanny emerges' beyond any rigid and preconceived expectations (2013: 56). Manning suggests that the lessons learned through the act of play, termed 'with-knowing[s]', arise from within the field of experience in which 'everything is concretely at play' (2013: 63). Nike's writing exemplifies the generative power of "with-knowings" when, unlike other swims, the settler | yearning | swimming prompt for her was troubled, unsettling, unresolved, shifting, challenging, and disorienting.

Nothing was settled in the water. The sea was rough and churning ... refusing to settle, disallowing settling. I held on to rocks to stabilise myself but was frightened my skin would graze. The rocks felt like they belonged. The juxtaposition of yearning and settler was very affecting in that it touched on the yearning for belonging as Tammy also expressed. However, the precarity goes way beyond identity and belonging given the dire precarity we find ourselves in. I spent time with the kelp, usually the fronds' movement evokes a yearning, a reaching out ... but not today. The sea was too wild, too full, the kelp is often peeping through the water's surface, I swim through it, crawl, pull myself through it ... it looked/felt like we were in a washing machine. - *Nike, freewriting on Day 1*

Playing with affective embodiment

We cannot separate ourselves and our context from the creative process. A challenge for myself as a settler is to being deeply affected by what happened in settler history. As a settler do I have to give up my privileged position. I should come to terms with my own greed of not willing to give up my privilege as a settler. There is a yearning for erasing the settler past, or undo what has been done. The constant yearning and desire to undo and redo is a vital force for continuing exploring different options to undo/redo. Can the art process of engaging mentally and physically, using more of our senses, force the body to remember and experience on a deeper level to help us to go over to action? - *Elmarie, free writing on Day 1*

Our affective encounters challenged notions of individualised subjective embodiment. We found that to be embodied 'is to emerge in relation with other bodies, objects, social conventions, artworks, and texts that exceed an individual's bounded form' (Truman, 2021: 93). In the extract below, Elmarie found it illuminating to think with the way that the images she placed

into the shared google document embodied the spirit of inquiry that seeks to explore otherwise. Unfamiliar with the google doc format, she made the “mistake” of positioning the image within a word in the text (See excerpt below). However, rather than seeing a mistake as wrong, Elmarie played with it, curious as to what possibilities it offered to our inquiry (Haraway, 2010: 459). Positioning the image within the text, within a word, enacts a disruption of hierarchical relationships between the image and the text, forcing reconsideration of what a body of text should look like. In addition to dislodging the order of the text, the image, like the settler, is glaringly out of place.

Because of the problematic history of the settler, engagement with it often results or manifests in an escape into abstract worlds of thinking how to undo or redo, often



without ac

tually doing.

Being deeply affected then stays an abstract concept and not touching or moving the body. Can thinking about something making us do differently, can it become a bodily action? What is needed for it to become embodied? – *Elmarie, free writing after day 1.*

Day 2 prompt: patriarchy | entanglement | threading

Day 2 was sunny and windy. Elmarie, Viv and Nike worked with yarn, paper and various found materials. They chose to work with threading practices in unconventional ways. Elmarie wove “threads” of paper together, Viv crocheted “threads of found objects” and Nike threaded fabric through wrought iron furniture. Tammy was still ill and sat in her garden observing her garden in the warm sunlight. She took some photos of threaded lives that were shared in the online writing sharing session.

Playing with dualism

Our engagement with serious play has resonances with Kunst and Guotte’s proposal of ‘inquiry-play’ that disturbs the Western hierarchical dualism between work and play that positions work

as 'productive' and play as 'indulgent' (2018: 664-5). Refraining from those tried and tested logics associated with traditional research methods that produce predetermined outcomes and re-entrench the status quo, the indeterminacy of play enabled us to reconfigure scholarly practices differently (Kunst & Guyotte, 2018: 665).

Play also creates opportunities to explore more-than human relations in an attempt to de-anthropocise research practice and explore the co-creative potential of 'the environment and the non-humans' (Stone, 2019:86). By way of example, Tammy considers the entanglements between nature-human-non-living beings in the extract below:

Outside I sit briefly in the sun, hoping for it to dry my sinuses and bring back my energy and *joie de vivre*. It will, but these things take time. Everywhere I see the entanglements of nature-human-non-living beings (is that a contradiction?) - even those cannot be spoken beyond binaries, we would not have words.



entangled vygie and other pink blossom succulent. No knowing where the one ends, the other begins... there is a bee also somewhere hidden in a flower



living and dead entanglements. What dies becoming compost. Perhaps patriarchy is dead but still entangled and nurturing something new and different, soon there will be no more traces of its violences as it gets mulched into something new and fresh and vital and life-giving. – *Tammy, free writing Day 2*

Breaking down the binaries between nature and culture and reimagining “naturecultures” as proposed by Donna Haraway (2003), offered opportunities to ‘re-imagine the rules and assumptions ingrained in common anthropocentrism in order to move towards new, more considerate human-to-non-human relations’ (Stone, 2019: 86). In the material process of thinking-making-doing, Nike engages other logics that exceed Cartesian binaries and considers how they might give expression to structures that are less rigid than the modernist grid in her weaving through a wrought iron table (See Figure 3).

The silver fabric is unusual, a very delicate weave, unequal, the weft so thin you can barely see it, the warp shiny and strong. This imbalance creates a structural flaw in that the material tears easily, thinner than skin, it rips open with the gentlest of pressure one way but is much more tightly bound when tearing along the other axis. Weaving reminds me of the binary logic of the grid of modernism, the x and y and all that a la Rosalind Krauss¹. I wanted to explore weaving without a grid. The circle seemed like a good place to start...

– Nike, *freewriting Day 2*



Figure 3: Nike's thinking-making with the patriarchy | entanglement | threading prompt

Elmarie also paid attention to the potential of the weaving process to paradoxically unravel dualistic logics.

I started to take pictures and then realised that when looking at things through a lens I start to see different things. I saw the movement of the paper because of the wind that is also now part of the weaving. The wind lifted some of the paper strips and it started to fold it back over the weaving – it started to weave through itself. This made me think of how we should weave binaries into itself. I then let the wind entangle the parts by itself.

I ‘frommel’ the paper but it un‘frommel’ or unfolded by itself again, into something that I

¹ In her seminal essay entitled ‘Grids’, art historian Rosalind Krauss positions the grid as a trope of modernism when she writes ‘the grid functions to declare the modernity of modern art’ (1985: 1).

was not intended to make. I also noticed the shadow part of the weaving, the dark sides. It almost created a division – or is it my mind that created that division? I am leaving it now there to entangle by itself in the wind and rain during the night. It is in flux.
– *Elmarie, free writing Day 2*

Playing with materiality

Play is an open-ended activity through which we came to recognise how the experimental quality of creativity lured us towards the future ‘rather than clinging to the illusory identity that the present places before us’ (May, 2005: 68). We were interested in whether playful material-discursive encounters might support a better understanding of the performative agency of matter (Barad, 2007) and, following Manning’s proposition, whether play’s purpose is ‘to create more play, to create more desire for play’ (2013: 63). We noticed how the entanglement between play, desire, materiality and creation, engendered a re-evaluation of how seemingly insignificant things matter, thereby leading us to new understandings of what comes to matter. We touched on play’s ‘intrinsic value, making it worth pursuing on its own for no other reasons beyond play, making play the ideal model for a space and method for value creation’ (Harper, 2015: 312).

We were particularly curious whether collaborative playing with materials could become an iterative sense-making activity that manifests Barad’s notion of us as inseparable (Barad & Gandorfer, 2020: 26). In an attempt to circumvent the innate restrictions of predetermined outcomes that tend to smother creative potentialities, we wanted to explore how open-ended play processes would make explicit the vital link between indeterminacy and creativity.

Thinking with Barad’s questioning of why ‘language and culture [are] granted their own agency and historicity, while matter is figured as passive and immutable’ (2007: 132), we set out to allow matter its due, and discover how matter matters, and how ‘matter comes to matter’ (2007: 152). This entailed playfully attuning ourselves to the ‘sedimented/sedimenting historicities of matter/ing’ so as to understand matter’s role in materialising new and unexpected modes of expression and sense-making. What we found was that the affordances of playing with materiality led us to ‘express differently, ... analyze and attend to expressions without reproducing pre-supposed ontological and epistemological assumptions, representationalism, and anthropocentrism’ (Barad & Gandorfer, 2019: 18). In her exploration of the ‘vitality of matter’, Bennet encourages an attentiveness to the ‘fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies’ (2010: ix). For instance, she highlights the agency of nonhuman bodies’ ‘ability to make things happen, to produce effects’ (Bennet, 2010: 5). What follows is Elmarie’s attentive account of her generative learning through material encounters:

I worked with three different materials, canvas, paper and plastics. I tried to cut or tear it into even strips to make a neat weaving pattern, but the plastic slipped away, and the paper did not tear into even strips. Tearing the cloth was a loud sound – that reminded me of the power of patriarchy. The plastic had no sound, but it slipped easily. That reminded me of the slipping of ideas into one another, and how ideas are often entangled with each other.

The cloth tears in even pieces but it 'rafels'² out. It got entangled even before I started to weave – often things happen by itself - it flows, and one should accept it. The paper is tearing easily – they all have different qualities. Some are more fragile than others, but it is not in a binary of strong and weak. The ants became part of the weaving and reminded me of how things get entangled while I was working with entanglement.
– *Elmarie, free writing Day 2*

Haraway highlights the important learnings that arise out of playing with failure when she states that 'we play with our mistakes; they give us that possibility' (2010: 459). Elmarie also paid careful attention to how seemingly innocuous mistakes could lead us towards new and unexpected understandings. In one of our collaborative freewriting sessions, she mis-spelled her name, as we have already referred to in the introduction of this article and re-iterate in the excerpt of her writing below. Committed to the experimental nature of our inquiry, she used this as an opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned through attending to the materiality of language.

I by accident typed Elm,arie, with a comma in the middle, and that made me think of how you sometimes feel you are 'stopped in the middle' of a process. The process can be interrupted in many ways: Elmar,ie. E,Imarie, E, l, m, a, r, i, e,. In the visual redress group colour (or from my perspective) became less important and it was more about what is socially just. Even though I have a lot of support from most of my colleagues working on the Visual Redress project, I have to now pause and think about what I do and say in the visual redress meetings. It is not a bad space because you become again aware of who you are through others. But I also experience it as if 'being human' and 'connect without colour' with others is not always permitted.

Colour = c.olour, col,our, colo,ur, c,o,l,o,u,r, c. o. l. o. u. r.
Human = h,uman, hum,an.

She went on to further experiment with words:

- But I also experience it as if 'being human' and 'connect without colour' with others is not always permitted.
- But I also experience it as if 'being human' and 'connect without colour' with others is not always permitted.
- But I also experience it as if 'being human' and 'connect without colour' with others is not always permitted.

² *Rafel* is Afrikaans for "fraying".

Butla Iso
 exp erien ceitas if'be
 inghu man'a
 nd'co nne ctw itho
 utcol our'wit
 hoth ersi snot alw
 aype rmi
 tted.

Butla = butlia is a fruit

Iso = Left Salpingo-Oophorectomy (the surgery to remove the ovaries and fallopian tubes)

Exp = The "exp" stands for "exponential"

Erien = Erien is of Irish origin and means "Peace"

Ceita = recipe in Portugese

Etc ...

– *Elmarie, free writing in online planning session prior to workshop*

Elmarie's experimentations above make explicit Bennet's thinking about how 'agentic capacity' is 'differentially distributed' (2010: 9) and how we can learn from careful attunement to materiality's agency.

Playing with precarity

In our inquiry into the more-than that play offers, we explored the affective affordances of playful activities that bring to bear or contour our thinking-making-doings. For example, we discovered that playing with materials is a process of allowing materials to play with us, as Nike recounts:

I remember during the weaving with entangled | patriarchy | beyond binaries prompt, I looked to the materials, the weaving process, the elements to unravel the binaries associated with patriarchal logics. Weaving in and out of the wrought iron outdoor furniture, the wind constantly unsettling the fibre as I worked, I touched on the fragility and precarity of all that we are trying to work with, to understand and uncover. The act felt hopeful, our coming together was an act of hope as we try to make sense of the precarious world. Thoughts that surfaced during the process ... the desire to explore weaving beyond the x and y and the neat weave of the grid. The fragility of the fabric and the solidity of the table, the fabric more forgiving compared to the table ... moulded, melted metal, cast into shape. The delightful shimmer of the elusive threads, that resisted being trapped into a fixed arrangement. I have left the piece as it is ... gently fluttering in the breeze, in shadow

now. I suspect the material will fray more, it will be interesting to see whether the circle will hold and whether the entangled threads will remain intact. – *Nike, freewriting Day 2*

Serious Playing

Serious play can be an act of refusal to play the academic game, as Elmarie suggests in her writing below where she considers how leaving the 'misplaced' image inside of her text might prompt a way of thinking differently, she writes:

Is exploring concepts also a way of serious playing? In the same way that creative practices work – the process is exhilarating and gives us pleasure to engage with new ideas, but there is also end products in art that communicates ideas to the viewer, or leave i



t open for the viewer to interpret. What is our end-product of this engagement? Are we trying to find alternative methods to understand on deeper levels? Can the art process of playfully exploring ideas help us to see or think differently? In what way can art process help us to engage more ethically in the world.

Viv considers how play can activate an immersion in pleasurable activity, rupturing the bounds of what is normally expected from scholarly practice in academia. Riddle, et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of reclaiming pleasure in the contemporary university to make academic life meaningful.

I felt a sense of peacefulness whilst working alongside Nike and felt like a lizard absorbing the sun. All the while at the back of my mind though I was thinking of the unwritten chapters and that this is not work it is play. I made that comment to Nike that art is playing and Elmarie disagreed last night, she said art is really hard work and that we haven't really been working hard at all. Well, whatever we were doing it was pleasurable slow and I didn't want to stop doing it when the time came and we had to.

Day 3 prompt: and | tasting | ground

The combination of land | tasting | ground prompted us to work with spices. Nike also chose to work with candles and wax. Tammy, feeling weak, made a spicy hot drink and joined the writing session.

The play of decolonial praxis

Our final day's prompt brought into play our thinking-making-doing with decolonial feminist scholarship that explores the entanglements between the 'modern, colonial, gender system as a lens through which to theorize further the oppressive logic of colonial modernity, its use of hierarchical dichotomies and categorial logic' (Lugones, 2010: 742). Lugones elaborated so powerfully the long entanglement of gender binaries with human-nature and other colonial binaries, which resonated strongly with the work we were doing:

I understand the dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the non-human as the central dichotomy of colonial modernity. Beginning with the colonization of the Americas and the Caribbean, a hierarchical, dichotomous distinction between human and non-human was imposed on the colonised in the service of Western man. It was accompanied by other dichotomous hierarchical distinctions, among them that between men and women. This distinction became a mark of the human and a mark of civilization. Only the civilised are men or women. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species - as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild. *The European, bourgeois, colonial, modern man became a subject/agent, fit for rule, for public life and ruling, a being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason.* (Lugones, 2010: 743, our emphasis)

We wanted to work with the variety of spices Elmarie had brought along, including cumin, turmeric, coriander, cinnamon and nutmeg. Getting our hands dirty allowed us to touch on the embodied historicity of the spice trade and our implicated role in it.³ The discovery of spice-rich

³ During the 14th and 15th centuries, the increasing demand for spices stimulated a lucrative market in Europe that prompted European traders to establish trade routes to the East independent from those of the Arab traders who, as traditional middlemen of the spice trade, dominated the land-based routes to Asia. Nations such as Portugal and Spain were the pioneers of the so-called "age of discovery", set out to discover sea routes to Asia and in 1448, Portuguese navigator Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape. The

regions like the Spice Islands (modern-day Indonesia) led to direct colonisation by European powers. Amitav Ghosh (2021) tells this story so powerfully in his book, *The Nutmeg's Curse*, that Tammy refers to in her narrative below. Ghosh argues that the dynamics of climate change today are rooted in a centuries-old geopolitical order constructed by Western colonialism and the global capitalism it nurtured. Ghosh shows how the history of the nutmeg is one of conquest and exploitation—of both human life and the 'natural' environment. Ghosh tells the detailed disturbing story of the nutmeg as a parable for our environmental and social crisis, revealing the ways human history has always been entangled with earthly materials such as spices, tea, sugarcane, opium, and fossil fuels. Our crisis, he shows, is ultimately the result of a mechanistic view of the earth, where nature exists only as a resource for humans to use for our own ends, rather than a force of its own, full of agency and meaning.

We “got the feel” of the spices by mixing them with water as a medium to create pigmented pastes that we rubbed onto our skin. We soon discovered that not all spices are water soluble, for example, while cinnamon created a homogenous paste, turmeric for the most part, did not dissolve. This refusal to blend, can also be seen as a resistance that for Nike, was suggestive of how the Dutch not only appropriated the Indonesian wax-resist printmaking techniques, but have also become so deeply interwoven into African culture, a further expression of colonial history.

Tammy's engagement with spices was very practical - she made herself a healing ginger, lemon, turmeric, and other healing spices hot drink and joined us for the freewriting. Below are some of her thoughts about the prompt.

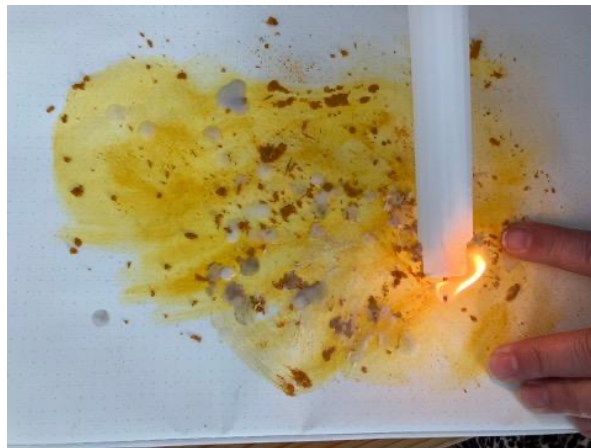
It was amazing how overlapping our narratives were and our shared thoughts about the coloniality of spice, its haunted histories and yet wonderful additions to our culinary lives and well-being. Colonialism was all about ground, earth, and the other things that were there when arriving on those oceanic travels. Get off the boat and there is the land, the ground. But of course, grounded also has other connotations. Grounded as in situated, our theories, our perspectives, our subjectivities, knowledges always grounded in a particular time and place. How we have lost the grounded in the empiricist chase of knowledge, conquering knowledge, colonising logics of the academy. But colonialism is also about tasting. Tastes of different cultures and lands transported to those with different taste and culinary possibilities, perhaps less nuanced or is that a judgement ... thinking of the nutmeg's curse and the planetary damages such a story through coloniality reveals as Amitav Ghosh tells it. So colonialism and now global capitalism which is so entangled in the former are about the capturing of taste and tasting for some over others. Thinking about how Quinoa, a staple of many Latin American people, becomes a taste for the

Dutch East India Company followed in his wake and in 1598 discovered the spice islands. In their bid to monopolise control of the spice trade, the Dutch recognised the strategic geopolitical position of the Cape and in 1652, the first Europeans to settled under the command of Jan Van Riebeeck.

wealthy, no longer affordable to the very people who first tasted it and relied on it to survive.

We were also aware of how play is associated with the 'child', also represented in the adultist colonial imaginary as in need of 'civilising' and 'developing', as taken forward by western developmental psychology (for example, Burman, 2016). Our play served as refusal of this binary, a refusal of Universal Man, so well theorised by Sylvia Wynter (2003) as key to western and colonial epistemologies, in which all those *not* white, western, male, heteronormative, human, *are* considered child-like, in a state of 'development', needing to be moulded into particular sets of normativities.

We ended the workshop with a collaborative poem/collage that brought together all of our activities of the three days.



Wax flame, close to the fire. Scattered spice, melting. Liquid, solid. Covering up the spice.

Licker-rich on my tongue.

Lekker rich on my tongue

Liquor etch on my tongue

Lacquer itch on my tongue



Lemon pips, seeds, new life, new growth, hope
Lemonsour
Honeysweet
Gingersquares nudging towards grindings of stolen spices



Fiery tastes
Grounded in centuries of extraction
Balanced, Grounded
Orange encapsulated in transparent glass
Bubbling forth fresh orange
surface tension



Marks on bodies traces ghostly materialities
Like the earliest cave paintings all of the world

Groping, grasping

Smack

Scattering, sprinkling, displacing, forced out, forced removals

Tasting with my fingers

Flavourfull.



Anti-depressant turmeric

Anti-inflammatory

Inflammatory consequences of

Start of colonialism

Stolen from the east

We are on spiced land

We are on stolen land

Eating spicy food

Dutch east india company

Cape of Good Hope

Day dreaming

Of days gone by and days to come

The play of speculative fabulation

While the poem marks an ending of our collaboration at Boulders Beach, we went on to develop further collaborative projects with Elmarie as a central participant. One of these was inspired by her idea to turn the world on its head after she played with images of Boulders Beach using Photoshop (See Figure 4).



Figure 4: Elmarie's collage.

Elmarie then created a map of Africa with the world turned upside down (See Figure 5). We plotted a route from Cape Town to Stockholm with the idea of collaborative engagement on that journey that speaks to matter. Elmarie edited the map and route by adding a sea route too as those of us engaging with oceans and beaches have much interest in the hauntologies of these space-time-matterings. The intention was to disturb the colonial civilizing gaze of map-making by flipping the map so that the south is not below and the north on top. We discussed possibilities of collaborations in Africa and noted that while there are many collaborative relationships across African countries in theory in our universities, we have not developed as strong ties in our work, with other African countries as we would hope or expect, nearly thirty years post-apartheid and its enforced isolation on us. We were also mindful that we did not want to reproduce a carving up of Africa as academics. Rather than building further empires we wanted to open up and open towards

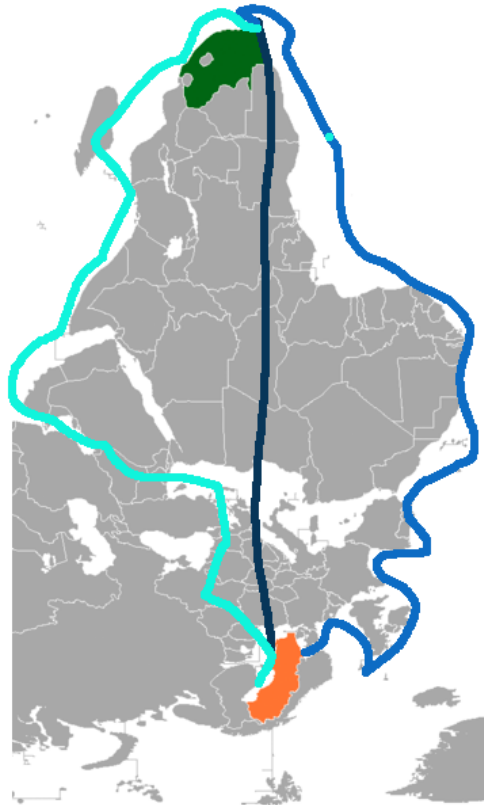


Figure 5: Turning the world upside down, the routes from Cape Town to Sweden.


Although Elmarie never attended the Swedish meeting with us in August 2022, she participated online, and the Swedish partners were similarly inspired by her responsive contributions and ideas for further collaboration. From this meeting, we envisaged further projects cognisant of unequal north-south power relations through a focus on hauntological histories and contemporary issues of inequality and environmental damage across Africa. Inspired by Anna Tsing, et al.'s *Feral Atlas* (2020) we intended to challenge Eurocentric, contemporary capitalist, anthropocentric, patriarchal, racist, and colonial forms of knowledge that rationalise inequalities and violences against humans, animals and the planet.


In this article, we have shown how our experimentation with Elmarie was conducted in a spirit of what Steven Shaviro refers to as futurity - a focus on what might emerge or develop from engaging in certain activities, from a 'perpetual *not yet*' (2024: 17-18). These experiments generated opportunities for us to further explore the affordances of play as elaborated in the discussion on lessons learned through playing with relationality; playing with affective embodiment; playing with dualisms; playing with materiality; playing with precarity; the play of decolonial praxis and the play of speculative fabulation. On our final day at Boulders Beach, we felt excited and inspired to share our learnings and discussed ideas as to how we could share our workshop experience. Even though we were stopped in the middle, interrupted and disrupted by Elmarie's untimely death, her legacy and the lessons we learned from our experimentations with serious play continue to reverberate and inspire us. While this project was stopped in the middle

by Elmarie's tragic passing, we hope this article does justice to her unique approach to pedagogy and makes explicit her profound and ongoing impact on our scholarship.

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