

**Why we  
should write**

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**in the academy.**

A thesis by Djabatá Bart-Plange

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Hello,

The following will be a thesis on the writing practices here at the University of Utrecht, or at other Westernised<sup>1</sup> universities. The idea came to me quite soon after i started my bachelor in English language and culture where i was taught to write in the disciplines of both literature and linguistics. I felt the writing guidelines to be ridiculously restrictive, not even an exclamation mark was allowed to be included in my assignments! After a few years and the occasional coming into contact with critical theory on the politics of knowledge, i realised that people have been thinking about this, sharing my irritation, for decades.

The genre of academic writing that we deal with today originated from a desire to demonstrate a writer's place in the society of knowers by means of showing their contribution, write Robert Davis and Mark Shadle, "a written embodiment of modernist values" (424). In their article they mention that this style of text-based scholarship increased in popularity through the nineteenth century and was established as the norm in the early twentieth century where it developed into being more of an exercise for students in documenting existing knowledge rather than for creating new knowledge (Davis and Shadle 424). Robert Connors adds that it became a vehicle towards absolute assimilation into a discursive community, its style of thinking, its understanding of itself – shedding students' individuality in the process (322-23). Students were to present what is already known, in a format that is predetermined. As a result, argue Davis and Shadle, the students that internalise these rules develop an unwillingness or inability to think imaginatively or originally (425). Rather unfortunate, i would say, but the tragedy of Western knowledge production doesn't stop there, as i will argue in the following chapters.

The first is a chapter on contemporary hegemonic knowledge.

The second is a chapter on form in knowledge production.

Firstly, i will explore some of the foundations of Western epistemology<sup>2</sup> and how it relates to other theories of knowledge: focussing mainly on its claims to universality and objectivity that accompany the belief in its superiority, as well as on the limitations of this epistemology and on how this system reproduces colonial and patriarchal modes of understanding. Although awareness of these reproductions is not something new, the past few years have witnessed the formation of student movements that strive for a decolonisation and diversification of Westernised universities, mainly focussing on change in the curriculum rather than on the form in which knowledge is presented. In this text i examine the content of form, focussing on academic writing, and how it contributes to the recreation of patriarchal and colonial epistemologies. In the search for alternatives, i analyse some interventions put forward by queer of colour feminists. Finally, i analyse how playful experimentation with form could function as an entry point to changing these epistemologies.

In terms of the form of this thesis, it is meant to accompany the point i'm trying to make. It is written in a way that i feel is closer to who i am than regular academic writing feels. A celebration. It's a search, for a way of writing that can inspire positive change within and without the university. More on this in the following.

Enjoy.

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<sup>1</sup> I use 'Westernised' here rather than 'Western' because i refer to universities across the globe that have adopted the Western university model and similarly offer a Eurocentric curriculum.

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Hill Collins defines epistemology as "an overarching theory of knowledge. It investigates the standards used to assess knowledge or *why* we believe what we believe to be true. Far from being the apolitical study of truth, epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why" (252).

//////////////////////////////////A chapter on contemporary hegemonic knowledge//////////////////////////////////

What are we doing? How come we, in the academic field, go about knowledge production in the specific way that we do?

[By 'the specific way that we do' i refer to the rules and attitudes guiding us in this production process which should help us create knowledge academically, 'legitimately', and to those guiding us in the communication of it: academic writing. Academic writing stands on the idea that it should remain strictly separated from other literary genres and be strongly obedient to Western scientific values. These values include +) an absence of personhood: the writer is to refrain from using personal experiences as anything other than introductory anecdotes, from showing emotion or ideological motivation (the logic behind this would be that through rationality and critical distance one can subdue one's subjectivity, and therefore increase the value of one's arguments as truth claims), from making the author visible as a person; +) a positivism: strong faith in sensory observation and empirical data to accurately interpret and explain objective reality; +) progress: time, thus all events in it, is considered linear and in a state of growth or increase, knowledge grows dialectically towards a better understanding of things – academic writings are to be situated within a discussion and must refer to and be comprised of texts arguing for and against; +) a formality: 'everyday language, colloquialism, has no place in the spaces of academic writing'; +) a rejection of expressiveness or playfulness in writing; +) univocal paragraphs; +) a clarity ("Style Sheets", Wekker 58, Collins 255, Ergene, Hyland 351-2, Spencer and Arbon 26, Gong and Dragga, Davis and Shadle, Bailey).]

Knowledge and knowledge production are often understood as a cure for ignorance, its oppositional state. However, ignorance is more specifically an ignorance of a certain kind of knowledge and knowledge is rather the overcoming of a specific kind of ignorance, Boaventura de Sousa Santos states. The acquisition of knowledge is not necessarily a step towards a better understanding of truth. When knowledge is acquired, in order to replace a previous understanding, it simultaneously creates an ignorance of the previously held idea (an ignoring or forgetting). If this is indeed the case, ignorance is not necessarily a starting point or an earlier stage in knowledge production – it could also be a point of arrival, an outcome of the forgetfulness or unlearning implied in a learning process (Santos). Rationalist thinking, for example, is acquired through an unlearning of other-than-purely-rational thinking. Rationalists, writes Jan Aart Scholte in *Globalization: a Critical Introduction*, argue that only through rational thinking we can discover single, definitive, objective truths and that it is therefore the only valid knowledge (150). Santos, on the other hand, writes that all knowledges have internal and external limits. Internal limits refer to the restrictions regarding the kinds of intervention in the world a knowledge system renders possible. That which is not yet known, but could someday be known using a given kind of knowledge, determines the internal limits. External limits refer to what is not and cannot be known using a given knowledge system. These limits are made visible by the recognition of alternative interventions made possible by other forms of knowledge {an example: in an attempt to understand an animal one may choose to approach the matter through a distance between analysing subject and analysed object. An internal limit could be the limitations of used devices – what can the microscopes of today make visible. An external limit could be that this approach does not strive for empathy or development of one's emotional intelligence}. [Hegemonic knowledge has as one of its features that it does not recognise external limits (Santos)]. Through a knowledge system – in how it defines the world, our position in it, etc. – a world is shaped: Different modes of understanding will have different consequences on the world – on how it is seen and on how it is manipulated (Santos).

Truth claims are inherently tied to a person's specific place in time, space, society, and language. As such, all modes of knowing are irreconcilably situated and partial. A conversation between the works of René Descartes and Donna Haraway may help to further clarify the situated nature of human knowledge. In Descartes's famous phrase "I think, therefore I am", written in 1637, it is the 'I' of the subject that symbolises a break from previous authorities on absolute knowledge – the dethroned authority being the Christian God (Grosfoguel 75). In the same work, Descartes argues that the mind is separate from the body and therefore unconditioned by the body. By virtue of not being influenced by anything physical or earthly, the mind can produce a universal knowledge, equivalent to a God's eye view – an objective truth that stands throughout the nights of time – thought as something not situated in time, space and a body. What Descartes's philosophy does not address is that the 'I' of "I think, therefore I am" does not stand for all the world's individuals (Grosfoguel 75-87). This imagined 'I', argues Donna Haraway, refers to those that thought of themselves as the most rational of the most mature culture: white men (575; see also Collins 253, Grosfoguel). What is left out are the embodied others: those who are not allowed *not* to have a body: a finite view situated in the physical, in the subjective. What Haraway argues is that a finite view situated in the physical is the inescapable condition for all humans and that all knowledge claims and knowing subjects are radically, historically contingent (579).

[The previous paragraphs may hint at a relativism, one that argues that the currently held idea of there being a hierarchical system of knowledge is a false one, and that instead all knowledges are equally valid and invalid. This, however, is not the argument of this text. These paragraphs serve as a reminder of the shortcomings, malleability, and contingency of knowledge and knowledge production. An absence of hierarchies would imply an impossibility of any relation between knowledge and social transformation (Santos). Pragmatically, different knowledges bring about different ends. In this sense, knowledge producers have a responsibility to critically reflect on what future they are contributing to, whose causes they are furthering, and why.]

[In the previous paragraphs i touched on some important characteristics of contemporary hegemonic knowledge: the progressive narrative that underpins knowledge production and disembodiment. These characteristics function as some of the cornerstones in the Western culture's self-image and its justification for supremacy and domination. The idea of disembodiment argues that this way of producing knowledge is the only form of production that is untainted by subjectivity, or superstition. In this logic, those that practise the Western style would be the only ones that are able to see the world as it really is, and therefore they would be the only ones to have authority in determining what things are and how they should be dealt with. The progressive narrative of knowledge production ties into the West's linear and universal conception of time and human development. If other cultures did not go through a period similar to what we call the Enlightenment or if they do not produce knowledge in a similar way, it is considered that they have not done so *yet*. As such they are considered behind or primitive, while the West is considered more modern and advanced and it should therefore rule over others (or other peoples should adopt Western culture) in order to raise them out of their supposed infancy. Without these claims to objectivity and modernity it becomes very hard to justify Western domination over others.]

What are we doing? How come we, in the academic field, go about knowledge production in the specific way that we do?

In an attempt to answer the question of why we at the University of Utrecht, for example, tend to favour Western knowledge production over another, we should revisit the historical process that places Western-style knowledge production at the peak of legitimacy. Ramón Grosfoguel argues

that this development was made possible because of three of Europe's genocides and its creation of racism: 1) that of the Jewish and Muslim communities in Southern Europe (the final conquest of Al-Andalus in the late fifteenth century), 2) that of the indigenous peoples in the Americas, and 3) the genocide of women in Europe as part of the witch hunt of the sixteenth century. With genocide comes epistemicide: the destruction of the victim's world-view and culture; as well as the creation of the coloniser's identity on the basis of its relation to what it deems the subordinate culture.

- ⊗ The conquest of Al-Andalus had as its purpose the expansion of the Catholic monarchy and the destruction of the sultanate of Granada (Grosfoguel 78). Its slogan was "purity of blood", not in terms of race (which was a later invention) but of religion. Propagated through this project was the idea that there exists a hierarchy of religions with Catholicism at the top, and thus a hierarchy of peoples as religious subjects, categorised according to their religious beliefs. Jewish and Muslim peoples had to either die or convert and leave their 'inferior' cultures behind.
- ⊗ Arriving on the American continent, Christopher Columbus described the indigenous people as appearing to have no sect (Grosfoguel 81). Europeans were new to this concept. To the Christian imaginary of the time, people not having a religion implied that they did not have a God to endow them with a soul. Having a soul was considered to be that which separated humans from animals. Previously, peoples in Europe had been discriminated for worshipping the 'wrong God' – their religious identity was in question, not their humanity (Grosfoguel 79). Columbus's description of American people led Europeans to debate among themselves on whether American peoples were human or not, which extended to the debate on degrees of humanity across cultures and the formation of race as a concept. Their conclusion was that white, Christian Europeans were the most human and therefore closest to divinity. African peoples were positioned at the bottom of this ranking. With that came the justification to wipe out, to subordinate, to enslave, and to 'civilise' other peoples by forcing European culture onto them (the white man's burden: epistemicide).
- ⊗ Until more or less the seventeenth century, there existed communities of women in European lands who were organised along communal-based forms of economics and politics, holding ancient Indo-European knowledge on medicine, astronomy, ethics, biology, etc., who were accused of being witches and evil (Federici, Grosfoguel 85). Grosfoguel argues that the extermination of these matriarchal communities was a strategy of the Christian-centric patriarchy to end autonomous communal forms of land ownership and forms of living that questioned the authority and theology of the Church (85-86).
- ⊗ After the onsets of these genocides Descartes formulated his philosophy in seventeenth century Amsterdam, a major centre of global capital and empire. The phrase "I think, therefore I am" comes from a person who sees himself as the centre of the world, the 'Imperial Being', argues Grosfoguel (77). The phrase exists at the grace of being preceded by 150 years of "I conquer, therefore I am"/"I exterminate, therefore I am" (Grosfoguel 77).

Today, Here, 2018, In Westernised universities, the canon of thought is based on the works produced by only a few men hailing from only a few countries, all of them situated in the West of the world – particularly Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States (Grosfoguel 74). The canonical works are depicted as THE works worth paying attention to. These are the works that speak while others listen. Similarly to economic, political, and social relations, epistemological power relations remain configured along colonial interactions – the colonial centre speaks, the subaltern periphery listens (Mendieta 148). "[F]orms of knowing, cognising, theorising, and representing the world are rendered asymmetrical by the coloniality of the power that authorises or

deauthorises, legitimates or delegitimates, certain epistemic frameworks and assertions” (Mendieta 148).

Although many in the West agree that racism and sexism are bad, people often remain wilfully ignorant of the more insidious ways in which racism and sexism are reproduced. Similarly, although universities and the institutions that finance their research have moved away from supporting more overt forms of racist/sexist discourse (e.g., physical anthropology or eugenics), their practices of financing and valorisation prioritise certain knowledges and bodies to the exclusion of others (Collins 351-6). True, some universities, e.g. the University of Utrecht, do house feminist and decolonial courses in which hegemonic knowledge is critiqued and alternatives are discussed. However, most courses of the university remain largely Eurocentric and male-oriented. There is no proper dialogue between these critiques of hegemonic knowledge and the disciplines critiqued.

These sentiments are shared by contemporary student movements such as FeesMustFall in Cape Town, Why is My Curriculum White in London, and University of Colour in Amsterdam (to name a few) that call for the decolonisation and democratisation of the university. Although they sprouted in different contexts, what these movements share is a dissatisfaction with their university’s exclusionary practices, which operate along colonial/patriarchal/neoliberal axes (Xaba, Mbembe, Elgot, Abou el Magd, University of Colour). According to the mission statements of these student initiatives, a decolonisation and democratisation of the Westernised university calls for a change in many of its building blocks: tuition fees should drop to a zero to enable access to students with less financial power, grading systems should be anonymous so that works rather than names are graded, and importantly, measures should be taken to end the university’s reproduction of colonial and patriarchal epistemologies. The Diversity Commission of the University of Amsterdam, which was formed in response to student movements’ demand for diversification, calls for the inclusion of more non-Eurocentric and other-than-male perspectives into the curriculum [in the humanities, social sciences, as well as in the beta faculties] as well as for the diversification in university staff (Wekker et al. 18-9). Another student movement, London’s Decolonising Our Minds Society helped decentre philosophers like Locke, Kant, and Heidegger from their World Philosophies curriculum to make space for non-eurocentric perspectives (Malik). (For a list of other, practical ways to decolonise and democratise your university, see *Let’s Do Diversity* by Wekker et al., and University of Colour.) This diversification of content is not merely an inclusion of other voices, it comes with a questioning of what knowledge *is* – it means being critical towards the framework of narratives, assumptions, and power structures that underlie the definition and justification of our theory of knowledge. What tools – what language – do we use to define and analyse our theory of knowledge: academic, formal? As language is the tool that codifies/makes understandable and communicates these understandings, we should also be critical towards the limitations, allowances, meaning, and effect of the form of knowledge production. The mentioned student movements strongly focus on decolonising and diversifying the content of university curricula. However, what is often left unaddressed is the coloniality and sexism embedded in the *form* of knowledge production. In the following chapter i argue why a change in form may also contribute to the challenging of the university’s problematic epistemologies.

//////////////////////////////////A chapter on form in knowledge production//////////////////////////////////

Language stands, or floats, in between raw experiential information, and an understanding of things; A tool that influences our interaction with people and things; to create an order of living, together. By language i refer not only to words, but also to style, the rules that guide it: Language as objects or features that transmit meaning: signs. The words we use, the way we say them, our position in an organisation, our hair, stance, hands in the pockets are read by others: ‘who is this person?’, ‘where do they come from?’, ‘is this person worth my time?’. These signs that someone holds are read and used to guess their position socially, or politically, for example, and their worth as a thinker, worker, mother, and other functions. This statement also goes in the realm of writing. The make-up of a text, the context in which it is presented, style, its genre are read to determine the function of a text, how it should be approached, its level of importance. If these signs, like words, can be read – if form carries meaning, then “matters of form are matters of content” (Bammer and Joers 2).

So what are we saying when we speak *academic* writing?

It turns out that academics generally don’t consider themselves to be writers (Scheman 41, Bammer and Joers 2, 11). Writers are the ones that write for pleasure, their own and/or the reader’s – scholars, instead, are thinkers and are read not for their words but for their ideas, supposedly. In this logic there exist at least two separable realms: there is the purely rational writing, and then there is the art of words. Creativity, Playfulness, Pleasure, Emotion belong in the latter realm – valid, Western knowledge and professionalism in the former. If you, as an academic, call yourself a writer or write like one, your peers and others might, based on form alone, consider your work to be unserious, thus not academic, thus less valuable. As mentioned by Angelika Bammer and Gloria Wekker, through the use of a specific language we become part of the group that uses that language, we show affiliation with that group and thus our work latches onto the status and authority that group is believed to hold (Bammer 58-9, Wekker, ‘Area’ 59). In the case of academic work this means that to communicate academically, is to imply an association with the Western canon of thinkers which is presented as most rational, most efficient, and paramount – proximity to this canon determines seriousness and value. The academic genre of writing is supposed to show authority by appealing to and upholding the existing narrative of there being this hierarchy in knowledge and knowledge production. Furthermore, with academic writing continuing to profile itself as conservatively formal and scientific, continuing to reproduce the narrative of said hierarchy, it continues to disregard emotion, playfulness, and other knowledges as generally less valuable. [As such, a discipline’s language, narratives, style, jargon not only function as its membership card: a discipline’s discourse is its very being (Wekker 59). Only through a proficiency in a discipline’s discourse, one is able to become part of its tribe and join the conversation. From such a position of status – through its discourse – the criteria of its knowledge are constructed, as well as the justification of its practices, the formulation of research questions, what the object of analysis is and how it should be approached (Foucault). The content of a discipline is in its form. A discipline’s discourse also functions as a gate: those who have not internalised its specialised language are excluded.

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am a woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself – a Black woman warrior poet doing my work – come to ask you, are you doing yours? (Lorde, ‘Transformation’ 41-2).

‘Myself’ as a threat to the order of people and knowledges.]

‘Myself’ as a violation of categories, a crossing of boundaries, ever changing. --The tyrannies swallowed are the Western hegemonic, academic discourses; discourses that allocate many to the lower levels of humanity. Yet, if you do not learn and use this discourse (which stands as the most legitimate) those in positions of authority will not acknowledge your words (Collins 253). The dilemma here is that if you want to introduce knowledge claims that contest those produced by elite white men, you have to do so in their language, therefore – complying with their idea that only Western academic knowledge production is valid. Rather than introducing thorough change, you reproduce that tyranny.

‘Myself’ as a violation of categories, a crossing of boundaries, ever changing. --The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the formation of feminist and Black nationalist movements, both aiming to create a more just, democratic society. On the other hand, both of these movements were mainly focussing on their particular axis of discrimination and violence, and normalising oppressions they saw as separate: feminist movements normalised white supremacy, Black nationalist movements normalised heteropatriarchy. And it was because of this, writes Roderick A. Ferguson, that Black, queer revolutionary women of this period, who found that both of these movements were not fighting for actual, radical liberation, developed tactics with which to tackle oppressions without recreating a centre and marginalised peoples (110-9). (“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” – another quote by Audre Lorde, emphasising how everyone is situated at the crossroads of multiple axes of oppression and privilege, and about how in order to effectively, thoroughly end the marginalisation of people, intersecting oppressions have to be dealt with simultaneously (‘Learning’).) Ferguson argues that Western culture is the site of these multiple axes of oppression and privilege as it dictates which identity is ideal – White, male, straight, and upper class in our case – as well as what the definition is of these characteristics (2-3). Feminist and Black nationalist movements from the sixties challenged particular parts of this ideal, however while respectively reproducing a single, fixed, partly new, ideal identity. As a result of constructing such an identity, these movements, similar to the culture they were challenging, aimed for homogeneity, normativity, and essence – therefore reproducing an intolerance to certain differences (Ferguson 118). It is because of the understanding of how culture is constructed to neutralise difference, Ferguson writes, that Black feminists, and in particular queer of colour feminists turned to the imagination as an important tool for cultural change, to create practices and formulations that fundamentally change how we relate and think of difference in each other (Ferguson 117-9). Through theorising the imagination as a political weapon and a social practice they encouraged a criticality towards existing practices, narratives, and formulations, precisely because the overlapping gender, sexual, class, and racial exclusion lies in what is thought to be normal and thus ideal/natural. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* Arjun Appadurai further describes the implications of understanding the imagination as a social practice:

The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms which direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (this not relevant to the lives of ordinary people) and no mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organised field of social practices, a form of work (both in the sense of labour and of culturally organised practice) (Appadurai 31).

In the context of academic knowledge production, the normal and natural is a positivist conception of knowledge, together with the idea that true knowledge is/should be something separate/separable from emotion, ideology/politics, and subjectivity. African-American women, however, had different understandings of knowledge, writes Patricia Hill Collins (251-6). In her book *Black Feminist Thought* she mentions that as a result of being excluded from academia, as a refusal to swallow the tyrannies mentioned by Lorde, feminists of colour have been creating their own epistemologies based on their understanding of humanity and difference. With the understanding that valid knowledge is not something separate from emotion, ideology/politics, and subjectivity, writers in this tradition, unafraid to embrace these features, turned to other ways of knowledge production that allowed for different people to be different. Rather than writing in the academic tradition, which was not made to house these features, many turned to crossings and combinations of writing genres and disciplines, including, crucially, creative writing:

In “Poetry Is Not a Luxury”, Audre Lorde explains the virtues of and need for poetry not only in terms of accessing often ignored, yet essential elements of our humanity, but also in terms of creating new language, creating different ways of understanding, and of changing our desires. “For within living structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanisation, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were expected to kneel to thought as women were expected to kneel to men” (Lorde 39). For a very long time now, understanding our emotional selves, and making the effort to communicate them, have been put aside as unproductive, and irrational. Lorde argues that through poetry – as a “revelatory distillation of experience, not ... sterile wordplay” – we can come into contact with our deeper emotions, make them sharable, and educate ourselves to respect them (37-8). In the coming into contact with these emotions, we become sensitised with ourselves. We get to know ourselves better through making poetry, Lorde argues, because it forces us to ask ‘What do i really feel?’, ‘What do i really desire?’ (Schultz). She states that answers to these questions are likely to be different from feelings or desires prescribed/instilled by external forces, e.g. state and capital. Because of this, the poet and those listening feel compelled to move towards liberatory action. As such it is a political tool. Poetry is a creative engagement with language that allows us to codify differently, an other way of translating, creating new understandings of what we apply it to because it creates language, argues Lorde (37-8). Furthermore, as Lorde shows in many of her essays in *Sister Outsider*, poetry can also be more than that. When she combines poetic elements with theory, her work communicates both ideas as well as feeling. It creates an understanding that includes the possibility to empathise, something that is more difficult to include in Western academic writing.

Similarly, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and other works by Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana writer, theorist, and poet, tend to exhibit a crossing of genres and disciplines. In Tara Lockhart’s reflection on Anzaldúa’s work, she argues that Anzaldúa’s writing practice comes from the questioning of Western conceptions of identity, knowledge, and writing. In the Western tradition there is often a dualism, a conceptualisation through opposition and exclusivity: mind and body, either masculine or feminine, if it’s not empirical then it’s not factual, you either write academically or in a less truthful genre. Anzaldúa, drawing from Native-American epistemologies, understands these concepts differently. She argues that these oppositional states are not mutually exclusive, rather they overlap, mix, and collaborate in various degrees – the human condition is one of hybridity (Anzaldúa 71-3, Lockhart). As Western dualism and positivism dismiss central components of our humanity and the hybrid state of things, Anzaldúa aims to rectify these losses in her writing by communicating through multiple facets of her self – interlocking different writing styles and disciplines, such as, history, poetry, philosophy, linguistics, and cultural theory through a mixture of both English and variations of Spanish. By writing in the language of multiple disciplines, as well as in

multiple languages, she is able to provide a representation of the human experience that is more true to its multi-dimensional condition. As such, through her search for herself, through fully presenting herself, her work shows that the Western approach to knowledge production is not, and shouldn't be, the only option: there are multiple ways of accessing, describing, and understanding the world that we live in. Anzaldúa's works not only problematise the borders that constitute a discipline or genre (is it necessary to separate the rational from the emotional, or the subject from the object, or the artistic from the functional?), it makes the reader question the neutrality, supremacy, and limitations of the Western conception of real knowledge.

While Lorde and Anzaldua, in different ways, intervene into matters of form and style by calling for a crossing of disciplinary boundaries – and particularly the boundary between theoretical and creative writing – bell hooks questions the boundary between academic and everyday language, 'high' and 'low' language. In *Teaching to Transgress*, she writes that academics write to be read by academics and other professionals – therefore creating texts that are often highly abstract, jargonistic, difficult to read and containing obscure references as other academics often regard these characteristics as superior → as a result, she argues, they create spaces and discourses that are inaccessible to those who have not learned the language of the elite (64). These are among the key methods of separation and hierarchisation. They hinder conversation, debate, collaboration between those inside the academy and those outside of it. On the other hand, bell hooks continues, early conceptualisations of feminist theory insisted that it was vital that it enabled feminist practice (63). Here, there is an understanding of the responsibility of academic work and an awareness of its effects in relation to society. For bell hooks theory is a social practice – a necessary and inseparable element within a holistic framework of liberatory activism, and thus also of oppression (69). It is important as an academic, or student, to ask yourself 'why do i write?' and 'who do i write for?'. Writing in a way that creates an openness to others and engages/welcomes them in the conversation, the direction of study, and the creation of more immediate practical solutions to problems in the field (to name a few options), could help reduce the exclusion inherent to the traditional academic style and its authoritarian nature could be overcome. What do you think?

[Of course, questions like 'Why do i write?', 'Who do i write for?' may be fun to ask, but for many their answers lie in the reward system for professional knowledge producers. With the market playing an important role in this reward system, academics are often forced to rely either on corporations demanding certain conclusions or omissions, as well as on presenting flashy conclusions in order to get published, which is more important than providing helpful information or accurately representing findings, because it is through publications that people acquire status necessary for job opportunities (Vrieze 28). What to do when spectacle and profit maximalisation are steering the academy? Change becomes more difficult; hence more necessary.]

Before these critiques of academic writing are heard and accepted by Western academics, they need to be confronted with the limits and contingency of their epistemology. In other words, they need to unlearn the idea of their knowledge, their voice, their style of writing being more valuable, more functional than other forms. Gayatri Spivak's concept of 'unlearning privilege' is a useful reference here. This concept, as described in Ilan Kapoor's 'Hyper-self-reflexive development? Spivak on representing the Third World 'Other'', refers to the retracing of the events that lead to our prejudices, our learning habits, and our desire to correct, teach, theorise, develop, colonise, appropriate, use, record, inscribe, enlighten, and to see these desires for what they are: a desire for mastery and domination (641-2). Spivak argues that this process of unlearning should be



Playful experimentation with writing allows each person to think about and argue for their individual writing style. As a result it may retain a student's curiosity and willingness to explore. Having gone through years of Western education, academics and students are likely to have internalised parts of the writing style that accompanies patriarchal and colonial modes of thinking. Conscious experimentation with writing, conscious of the implications of the Western style, not only makes for an awareness of where and how these harmful/limiting traditions are reproduced, it also allows for breaks with the tradition in each person's individual style and pace. (This change does not necessarily have to be an immediate, radical break from the Western tradition, as it also allows for a gradual shift away from this tradition. The option of a gradual shift is important because it facilitates getting used to change – it facilitates the internalising of different ways of writing, and thus different ways of thinking.)

The encouraging of individual exploration in academic writing rather than the encouraging of everyone following a fixed formula of characteristics ensures that difference is to be cherished and celebrated. As in the tactics of queer of colour feminists, this could help end the reproduction of a fixed, singular ideal – used as the only measure of value – which is in other words, the reproduction of a centre from which to dismiss the marginal or the Other. Together with the questioning of existing practices, experimentation in academic writing may create an openness to practices of knowledge production by marginalised groups; a willingness to listen not just because they speak in the language of our discourse.

(If you are a student you may wonder how experimenting in your writing assignments could contribute anything worthwhile, since you do not have the platform of an established academic. However, as Francis Adyanga Akena states, knowledge is not just transmitted from teachers or academic literature to learners (606). Knowledge is also produced and spread in educational settings by participants of all levels of the educational system, for example, through discussions, problem solving, and peer reviewing. There is always an area of influence, even if it is smaller than desired.)

Playful experimentation and the crossing of boundaries can be an exercise in looking for different language, different ways of relating to objects of analysis, other ways of meaning making. It is a continuous exercise of searching; a training of the imagination; an embrace of the unescapable state of *not* knowing.

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