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PRACTICE-LED WRITING ROUNDTABLE

30-31 JANUARY 2014

**FADA BUILDING, 1ST FLOOR, ROOM 103
BUNTING ROAD CAMPUS
UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG**



VISUAL IDENTITIES IN ART AND DESIGN RESEARCH CENTRE
FACULTY OF ART, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE, UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

PRACTICE-LED WRITING **ROUNDTABLE PROGRAMME**

THURSDAY 30 JANUARY 2014

08h00-08h30	REGISTRATION
09h00-10h30	SESSION 1 Chair: Dr Bronwyn Law-Viljoen
09h00-09h05	Welcome: Prof Federico Freschi
09h05-09h15	Introduction: Tracy Murinik & Leora Farber
09h15-09h35	Prof Allan Munro Read the play, see the play, make the play: three different languages
09h35-09h55	Dr des. Fiona Siegenthaler Socially interested practice-based art and scholarly writing – towards an ‘ethnographic turn’
09h55-10h15	Prof Thaddeus Metz The role of the arts at a public university: elements of wisdom
10h15-10h35	Roundtable discussion
10h35-10h55	TEA
11h00-13h00	SESSION 2
11h00-12h30	Dr Nathaniel Stern Creating research creation: thinking 21 st century art and design scholarship
12h30-13h00	Roundtable discussion
13h00-14h00	LUNCH

14h00-15h40

SESSION 3

Chair: James Sey

14h00-14h20

Prof David Andrew

In conversation with Brenden Gray and Quinten Williams

14h20-14h40

Dr Bronwyn Law-Viljoen

14h40-15h00

John Roome

15h00-15h20

Dr Louise Hall

15h20-15h40

TEA

15h40-16h10

Roundtable discussion

ABSTRACTS

TRACY MURINIK

Introduction

Increasingly, in the South African academy, practice-led research (PLR) is becoming not only a recognised, but a necessarily acknowledged means of furthering research in the fields of art and design. While the University of Johannesburg's Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, along with several other national and international institutions, promotes PLR as a point of positionality in its teaching and research, emphasis has, to date, been on PLR as an approach to creative outputs. Comparatively little discussion about possible PLR approaches to textual outputs, and how these have the potential to manifest new forms of, and forums for, non-traditional writing and publication have taken place. Such positions would necessarily impact on issues such as what may be recognised as written outputs for higher degree purposes in universities and by institutions such as the Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET), as well as how such outputs may be appraised by assessors, peer-reviewers, editors and publishers.

Presentations and discussions in this roundtable consider and propose possibilities for writing using PLR approaches, with particular emphasis on how these approaches may be deployed by PLR practitioners working in art and design fields, and more broadly across the spectrum of visual representation. Key questions posed to the roundtable are:

- How can PLR approaches to writing be used to model new forms of textual outputs in art and design?
- What are possible PLR approaches in writing?
- How are articles that employ these approaches to be appraised by assessors, peer-reviewers, editors and publishers?

- What is required in order for PLR-based writing forms to be acknowledged as scholarly outputs?
- By whom should these PLR-based writing forms be recognised?

Discussions aim to further existing debates around the possibilities of shifting paradigms for DoHET accredited outputs and how to create new precedents in an institution in terms of writing for higher degree purposes. Practice-led PhDs have been, and are being, established in Visual Arts in institutions across the country. However, even those that are established are still in fledgling stages, and need to be evaluated in terms of their requirements, structure, as well as their assessment processes and evaluation criteria, based on feedback from candidates who have completed the degree.

TRACY MURINIK is an arts writer, curator and editor. She is currently Research and Projects Director in the Visual Identities in Art and Design (VIAD) Research Centre, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Johannesburg and a VIAD Research Associate.

PROF ALLAN MUNRO

Read the play, see the play, make the play: three different languages

In this presentation, I consider the viability and potential methodologies that might be adopted in PLR writing through which an artist/designer/practitioner's research and insights may be pursued with agency and acknowledgement in the academic space. I propose that PLR is a powerful methodological approach through which knowledge can become 'new knowledge' which can be interpreted and weighed against existing 'knowledge'. While much of this process is already being undertaken in the Arts, it is not traditionally done by the practitioners – presentation of the generation of 'textually represented new knowledge' is usually demonstrated through the work of arts theorists, critics, historians, and the like, in communion with the extant artwork. Controversially, therefore, the consequence of this is that these theorists and critics would not be able to generate this 'new knowledge' if the artists did not provide the product that leads to the textual explication of the new knowledge 'latent' in the artwork. In the national dispensation, therefore, the 'makers', who provide the stimuli for the 'thinkers and writers' are disadvantaged.

In textual presentation the central tension is between (capturing) the emerging nature of the research process, and the (reflecting on and representing) 'text development in hindsight'. In this regard, critically, the use of language to clarify the difference between assertion claims and truth claims needs to be foregrounded. An epistemological engagement with the making process is critical for the reflection process, and for the locating of the new knowledge. *Through PLR the maker rather than the external commentator, is centralised in such a research (writing) process* (emphasis added). The key concern, therefore, is in the change of medium and, consequently, the problems of language.

ALLAN MUNRO is a retired Research Professor from the Tshwane University of Technology. He served on the DoHET subcommittee interrogating the accreditation of artistic outputs. He has published in the domain of PLR and related issues, as well as on Ethics in Research, and has supervised a number of Masters and Doctorates across a wide range of the arts. He is a practising playwright, and is therefore fully aware of the problems of convincing and persuasive language in action! He holds a Masters and a PhD from The Ohio State University.

DR DES. FIONA SIEGENTHALER

Socially interested practice-based art and scholarly writing – towards an 'ethnographic turn'

While many artists have introduced ethnographic approaches in their work both in terms of their subject and their methods, this is not necessarily the case with scholarly research in contemporary art. Contemporary art practices often emphasise the interest in cultural and social practice and processual exchange as opposed to the production of images or artworks in the representative tradition. They are described variously as 'participative art', 'dialogical art', 'activist art', 'relational art', and so on. However, when scholars write about these practices, they often analyse them not so much on the basis of the very process and practice, but rather on the basis of visual and written material provided by these artists in publications and exhibitions. In consequence, scholars and critics often write about the documentation/representation of a practice-based artwork, and not so much about the art work itself. However, the particular processuality of the artworks affords that the writer/critic participate in the process in order to actually experience it. Established methods in art history, therefore, require additional approaches. The questions and observations I pose in this forum call for an ethnographic turn in art scholarship that complements established approaches with methods and research questions derived from social anthropology and sociology, such as participation, observation and qualitative studies in social and aesthetic production, reception and perception. This sketch of an 'ethnographic turn', however, also involves new questions and problems, such as: what does it mean to write as an academic about art genres that transgress the representative field and instead are practice-based? What can a trained art historian say about contemporary art that prefers social practice to representation? What does this imply for the academic writing and methodological practice as such? Does an art scholar necessarily become an ethnographer? Does art based on social practice and practice-led research produce practice-led research by academics? What is the difference between these forms of practice, writing and research?

FIONA SIEGENTHALER is a post-doc Senior Lecturer, Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Basel, Switzerland and a Research Associate in the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Johannesburg. She teaches a wide range of courses in African art history, visual culture, performance studies, cultural studies and visual anthropology. With a background in art history (MA 2005) and social anthropology (PhD 2012) her research interest lies in the intersection of social sciences and the humanities, and contemporary visual and performance arts in Africa in particular. She has work experience in academia as well as in art galleries, art education, art criticism, and curatorial practice. She is co-editor, together with Corina Caduff and Tan Wälchli, of the 2010 volume, *Art and artistic research, Zurich Yearbook of the Arts 6*. Zurich: Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess.

PROF THADDEUS METZ

The role of the arts at a public university: elements of wisdom

What should a public university, particularly one in a developing country, ultimately be aiming to achieve with its teaching and research, and how do the arts relate to these final ends? In seeking to answer these questions, I consider how one might sketch a new account of the final ends of a public university as that which would clearly provide space for engagement with art, and prizes wisdom – where wisdom is not merely a matter of

knowledge and practical benefit resulting from it, but also comprises an intellectual, emotional and perceptual orientation toward value.

THADDEUS METZ is Research Professor and Head of the Philosophy Department, University of Johannesburg. He is an A-rated NRF researcher, and has authored more than 100 journal articles, book chapters and encyclopaedia entries on a wide array of topics in ethics and political philosophy. His book, *Meaning in life: an analytic study* (2013) was published by Oxford University Press, Oxford.

DR NATHANIEL STERN

Creating research creation: thinking 21st century art and design scholarship

This workshop begins with an in-depth discussion of contemporary arts and design research approaches in the academy, and how they are implemented in various institutions worldwide. The discussion is followed by a brainstorm session to imagine, and begin moving towards, a research future that incorporates practice-based and practice-led research. This session leads to a discussion on how these practices can, and do, lead to various forms of non-traditional publication, such as autoethnography (as ethnographic, art educational, art and design, or action research), narrative inquiry, or artists/designer's statements for both individual works and overall practices. We continue with the pragmatics of the differences and similarities between academic papers on the one hand, and inquiries into art and design practice on the other. Finally, we close with a discussion about writing as a part of an ongoing art and design practice – rather than an afterthought – and by workshopping examples of potential writing for publications with participants.

NATHANIEL STERN is Associate Professor of Art and Design, Peck School of the Arts, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and a Research Associate in the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Johannesburg. He holds a degree in Art and Design from Cornell University, a Masters of Professional Studies in Interactive Telecommunications from New York University, and a PhD from the Electronic and Electrical Engineering Department at Trinity College Dublin. Stern has produced and collaborated on projects ranging from ecological, participatory and online interventions, interactive, immersive and mixed reality environments, to prints, sculptures, videos, performances and hybrid forms. His book, *Interactive art and embodiment: the implicit body as performance* (Gylphi, 2013), takes a close look at the stakes for interactive and digital art, and his ongoing work in industry has helped launch many new businesses, products and ideas. Stern's recent and upcoming publications with Gylphi Limited, MIT Press and Blackwell/Wiley, focus on the performance of philosophy with interactive art, while his art projects include interactive installations, performative printmaking and hybrid video forms.

PROF DAVID ANDREW

In conversation with Brenden Gray and Quinten Williams

With the ongoing emphasis on creative and practice-led research at the Wits School of Arts, I have become interested in forms of writing that complement, extend and trouble the so-called 'practical component' required of the MAFA degree. These forms of writing are becoming increasingly and necessarily diverse, often reaching far beyond the narrow confines of what is standard practice in the academy. Here I refer to a number of

examples and more specifically the creative research projects by Brenden Gray (MAFA 2010) and Quinten Williams (MAFA 2013), and more specifically their writing, to test possibilities and ambitions for different forms of 'academic' rigour.

DAVID ANDREW is Associate Professor and Head of the Division of Visual Arts, Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University). He lectures in Fine Arts and Arts Education.

BRENDEN GRAY is an artist, graphic design educator art critic and researcher, and Lecturer in the Graphic Design Department, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Johannesburg.

QUINTEN WILLIAMS is a Masters Student at the Wits School of Arts, Wits University.

DR BRONWYN LAW-VILJOEN

The Creative Writing programme at Wits University recently initiated the PhD in Creative Writing with a view to establishing a place for a practice-led PhD in the School of Literature, Language and Media. While not explicitly making use of the term 'practice-led', the 'standing orders' for the PhD in Creative Writing require the submission for the degree to comprise both a creative work and a thesis in which the creative work is considered in various theoretical, aesthetic and/or other contexts. In other words, the student must demonstrate a relationship, in the total submission for the PhD, between creative work and theoretical arguments in relation to that work.

I examine selected precedents for the PhD in Creative Writing set by other institutions (mostly outside of South Africa), to consider this PhD in relation to similar degrees in other disciplines; interrogate the need (or otherwise) to present and describe this degree as explicitly 'practice-led'; point to challenges of evaluation of the PhD, and question the perceived need for a theoretical framework for such a degree.

BRONWYN LAW-VILJOEN holds a PhD in Literature from New York University. She is Senior Lecturer and Head of Creative Writing, School of Literature, Language and Media, Wits University; co-founder and editor of Fourthwall Books; and a former editor of *Art South Africa* magazine. She has contributed to and edited many books on art, design and architecture in South Africa, and has written essays on South African art and photography for magazines, journals, newspapers and books both locally and internationally.

JOHN ROOME

I identify and discuss some of the challenges that I faced when converting my experiences as a visual practitioner/researcher into an academic text for doctoral degree purposes. These include: 'finding' rather than 'solving' problems; developing a suitable conceptual framework; the emergence of appropriate methodologies; and ensuring trustworthiness.

JOHN ROOME is Senior Lecturer and Programme Coordinator for Fine Art, Durban University of Technology. His interests include drawing (particularly digital drawing and animation using basic software), printmaking, painting and hand-papermaking. He has a Master's Degree in Fine Art from Rhodes University, and is currently completing a practice-led D.Tech through the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

DR LOUISE HALL

I draw on my experience of having completed a PLR PhD in Visual Art. In particular, I consider some of the challenges encountered and insights gained with respect to writing within this research model.

LOUISE HALL is an artist who has exhibited her work in solo and group shows both nationally and internationally, and has sold work to private and public collectors in South Africa and overseas. She recently completed a practice-led PhD at the Centre for Visual Art, University of KwaZulu-Natal. She obtained her Masters in Fine Art *cum laude* at the same institution in 2007. She has art teaching experience at high school, university and adult education levels. She is also an experienced facilitator, having worked in the development facilitation context in KwaZulu-Natal. She was a founder member of DWEB, an NGO that worked with rural craftswomen and developed a participatory training methodology using drawing as a central component. This methodology was published as a resource guide titled *Drawing our lives* (2001).

FRIDAY 31 JANUARY 2014

09h00-10h25

SESSION 1

Chair: Prof Keyan Tomaselli

09h00-09h05

Introduction: Chair

09h05-09h25

Terry Kurgan

09h25-09h45

Alex Oppen

09h45-10h05

Prof Raimi Gbadamosi

In the Land of Bling, the Jeweller is King

10h05-10h25

Roundtable discussion

10h25-10h40

TEA

10h40-11h00

SESSION 2

Chair: Dr Nathaniel Stern

10h40-10h55

Dr Leora Farber

Other criteria

10h55-11h15

Prof Keyan Tomaselli

11h15-12h15

Wrap-up roundtable discussion

Chair: Tracy Murinik

12h15-12h30

Closing comments and thanks

ABSTRACTS

TERRY KURGAN

My art practice is always about photography. Even when it's not photography, it's about photography – in an attempt to devise a more complicated and multi-layered reading practice that penetrates through and beyond the photograph's opaque, resistant surface. This work often engages the viewer through a combination of image and written word. But, my writing has always performed a support role in the service of my primary identity as a visual artist and as a person who communicates through a diverse range of visual media.

In this presentation, I discuss the early stages of a new project – a series of linked narrative non-fiction essays that grow directly out of many years of my practice. The primary medium is the writing itself and all visual material, largely drawing and photography, becomes the evocative object that generates the writing to begin with. Writing and drawing are closely related to each other, and even though they are generally considered to be quite separate disciplines, for the maker, there can be a similarity of process as words glide into drawings, and drawn marks become recognisable as letters or words.

TERRY KURGAN is based in Johannesburg and is a Research Associate in the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Johannesburg. She runs an active studio and public sphere practice and has created a diverse body of work that explores notions of intimacy, pushing the boundaries between 'the private' and 'the public' in the South African cultural domain. Domestic photography is a central theme in her practice and she works across a broad range of media, from drawing, printmaking and photography to enlisting public participation in a practice that produces human interaction and social experiences. Her book, *Hotel Yeoville* (2013) was published by Fourthwall Books, Johannesburg.

ALEX OPPER

I discuss the most recent iteration of an ongoing body of my practice-led artistic research – under the title of 'Undoing Architecture' – developed over the past five years, with particular reference to my recent public inter-active solo exhibition *Separ(n)ation*. In it, I attempt to 'collect' and re-frame a range of fence-driven scenarios of delineation and (re)territorialisation. These constructed situations offered a way of teasing out and spatially translating productive tensions between process and product(s). The manifold manifestations which encompass the environment-like exhibition unsettlingly mirror the socio-political undercurrents of Johannesburg's ongoing preoccupations with security and defence. The 'language' of the exhibition oscillates between material-specific layers of meanings; meanings stemming from my readings of the conscious and subconscious built-environment as well as contributions and projections of the actors who collectively make and shape the city. The project seeks to provoke a radical rethinking of existing discourses and clichés associated with Johannesburg's well-known obsession with 'security' and 'defence'.

ALEX OPPER is an artist, architect, writer and educator. He is Senior Lecturer and Director of the Architectural Masters programme in the Department of Architecture, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Johannesburg.

PROF RAIMI GBADAMOSI

In the Land of Bling, the Jeweller is King

Desiderius Erasmus is credited with the original from which my title is taken, not that it matters terribly, the sentiment remains the same in this adapted version. In my case, all there is are sights for the sighted, it is the hunger the eye exhibits, the constant desire for spectacle that engage more than me, and artists are supposed to write (there is an implicit ultimatum) to meet this demand. The Land of Bling is petulant and avaricious, it needs shine, it needs glamour, and once the role for the artist is set, there is no turning back.

Artists write because they have something to say, or because the realm of the visual leaves some room for contestable difference, some room for interpretation that the artist wants to control. And this limitation of meaning is useful; it hands over the revelation of new meanings of artworks to another, to the expert.

Division of labour, it is. Artists make art, this is the mantra, and when they complicate the arrangement by using words, schisms and cracks appear in the established order. Artists too are complicit in this manipulation, they too use words to escape their own limitations, and in a logocentric understanding, the hierarchy of authority in knowledge production still places the word at the top of the pile, even in the face of contradictory understandings of what it takes to affect a great number of people's worldview. The *zeitgeist* probably pays more attention to Jay-Z than to the words that fall from the pens of equally named politicians.

It is clear that the imagined artist does not write, that they use words to do things that pictures will not allow them to, that they use words to create images that real writers do not. Those artists are interlopers, the ghost in the machine that allows words a place in the imagination rather than remaining stolid carriers of authoritative data.

I speak about The Land of Bling; there is still some sparkle left for the artist.

RAIMI GBADAMOSI is an artist, writer and curator, and Associate Professor in the Wits School of Arts, Wits University. He received his Doctorate in Fine Art from the Slade School of Fine Art, London. He is a member of the Interdisciplinary Research Group 'AfroEuropeans', University of Leon, Spain, and the 'Black Body' group, Goldsmiths College, London. He is on the editorial board of *Third Text*, and the boards of *Elastic Residence*, London, and *Relational*, Bristol.

DR LEORA FARBER

Other criteria

I briefly reflect on my experience as a consultant editor for two themed issues of *Critical Arts* 27(5 & 6) published in 2013, titled 'Revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art'. The editions are guest edited by An van Dienderen, Kris Rutten & Ronald Soetaert (Ghent University College, School of Arts). In these themed issues, theorists, artists and

critics engage critically with various ethnographic perspectives in their own work using PLR approaches to writing. In addition to the full research papers, the editors also invited short statements and reflections by artists about their practice.

I make reference to common understandings and 'mis-understandings' about what constitutes PLR-based writing approaches made by peer-reviewers, and consider the peer-reviewed (but not DoHET accredited) online publication titled the *Journal of Artistic Practice*. See in particular, Mäkelä, M., Nimkulrat, N., Dash, DP. & Nsenga, FX (eds). 2011. On Reflecting and Making in Artistic Research Practice. *Journal of Research Practice* 7(1). [O]. Available: <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/issue/view/15>

LEORA FARBER is the executive director of the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Johannesburg. In her capacity as director and as an artist/academic, she has been actively involved in the development of PLR in South African institutions. In 2009, she convened the international colloquium, *On making: integrating approaches to practice-led research in art and design* that led to her editing the 2010 volume of the same title. The publication comprises a collection of selected papers presented at the colloquium and invited contributions from leading South African artists, practitioners, educators and academics working in the field of PLR. She presented a paper at the *Art of Research* //conference (2009) and a keynote address at the *DATA as Art-ART as data* conference, (2011) both held at the University of Art & Design Helsinki. Farber completed her practice-led DPhil in Fine Art at the University of Pretoria in 2013. She acted as consultant editor for Van. Dienderen, AN, Rutten, K & Soetaert, R (eds). 2013. Revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art. *Critical Arts* 27(5 & 6). [O]. Available: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcrc20?open=27&repitition=0#vol_27

PROF KEYAN TOMASELLI

In this presentation, I outline and discuss my experience of editing/publishing PLR-based articles and books, with reference to my experiences of peer-reviewing/publishing articles drawing on creative and unconventional writing genres, especially in the area of indigeneity studies. My experience of editing two peer-reviewed journals (*Critical Arts* and *Journal of African Cinemas*) and a newly inaugurated UNISA Press book series that opens spaces for creative-analytical writing that unlocks the future, form the background to this discussion. A new instrumentalism coursing through ethics committees threatens however to alienate writing and writers from using PLR from their subjects, turning them (and authors themselves) into objects. The issues, contradictions and ethics arising from both the promise of PLR and institutional threats to it are examined in relation to actual examples. Some examples of PLR can be found in the following special editions:

Van. Dienderen, AN, Rutten, K & Soetaert, R (eds). 2013. Revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art. *Critical Arts* 27(5 & 6). [O]. Available:

http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcrc20?open=27&repitition=0#vol_27

Causey, A & Tomaselli, K (eds). 2012. Transgressions north and south: tourism researchers as tourists and travelers. *Critical Arts* 26(3).

[O]. Available: http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rcrc20/26/3#.Us6Lo_8aKDY

Causey, A. (ed). 2012. Ethnographic side-roads: exploring ethnographic flukes. *Critical Arts* 26(2). [O]. Available:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rcrc20/26/2#.Us6NjP8aKDY>

KEYAN TOMASELLI is editor of *Writing in the san/d: autoethnographic explorations amongst indigenous South Africans* (2007) published by Alta Mira, Plymouth. He has published in two handbooks on autoethnography and is currently completing an anthology on methods, quirks and confusion in the academic sector.

NOTES

