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Title Page:

Ambidlala: Towards a method of *Refluxivity* in Play

Submitted by Anthea Julian Dineo Moys, to the University of Northumbria as a  
practice research thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2022

## **Abstract**

This practice research PhD is a multifaceted exploration and exposure of structural violence in play. It reveals that there is a reluctance in both my own past practice, as well as play and performance studies scholarship to examine play in relation to violence. Having lived under the apartheid regime and creating work in the post-apartheid years in South Africa has consequently meant that I am deeply sensitised to anti-exclusionary practices. My initial research question for this practice research was: how has my performance practice, that engages play as a method, been complicit with the violence of apartheid? This question challenged me to return to a past practice from 14 years ago, where blind-racial violence took place, to a work co-created in a “post”-apartheid context with Prince Khosi in his boxing gym in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2007.

Through autoethnography, semi-structured interviews and performative writing the research was conducted over three years in both the UK and South Africa. It includes three practices, the data from which I worked as material in creating the final practice research output: a polyvocal autoethnographic text which is at the heart of this thesis. From this text, I drew out three largely unexamined focal points related to the overarching theme of implicit violence in play: ambiguity, privilege and bodies. Drawing on feminist and performance studies theorists, I critically examine these three interrelated themes and their relation to implicit violence, insights from which inform the methodology of *ambidlala* and its method of *refluxivity*. *Ambidlala* (“ambi” = “both” in English and “dlala” = “play” in Zulu) is a reflexive methodology that requires critical awareness of the role of ambiguity, privilege and bodies in play in a “post”-apartheid context. In these ways, this thesis makes a unique, timely and important contribution to play and performance studies scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> The particular reasoning behind using a capital letter for “white” is elucidated upon on page 11, footnote 5 below.

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other university.

Signature.....

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# 1. Chapter 1: Introduction

This practice research PhD is a multifaceted exploration and exposure of structural violence in play. The practice research reveals that there is a reluctance in both my own past practice as well as play and performance studies scholarship to examine play in relation to violence. Drawing on feminist, performance studies and practice research approaches, this thesis locates and examines emergent themes from the practice research output, such as ambiguity, privilege and bodies in relation to the overarching theme of violence in play in a postcolonial context. Considering the context that these practices were made in, that of the “post”-apartheid<sup>2</sup> context in South Africa in 2007 and the death of George Floyd in 2020<sup>3</sup> (and countless others after and prior), this practice research is written at a time when violence, specifically racism, towards the majority of the population is still alive and well. Written during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>4</sup>, my first research question: “How has my performance practice been complicit with the violence of apartheid?”, challenged me to return to a past practice from 14 years ago with boxing coach Prince Khosi.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell writes about the invocation of “post” as in “postmodern, the postcolonial, the posthuman, and of course, the post-racial” that seem to indicate “that history has turned a corner but that the new era still remains to some extent unnameable”. He continues that this shift, can be, and often is, a “shift in perception” (2012, pp. 2–3). However, and in addition to this: as the majority of the wealth still lies with the White people in South Africa, post-apartheid is a fiction.

<sup>3</sup> The research recognizes the countless others killed at the hands of the police. For example: Collins Khosa, Adane Emmanuel, Petrus Miggels and Sibusiso Amos, who were killed by the South African Police Service (SAPS) in 2020 (Bawa, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic had a very particular isolating effect on this practice research and that it would have been a very different project if it was not written during this time.

<sup>5</sup> All the names in this thesis have been changed; however, it would be difficult to anonymise Prince entirely due to his public profile as a former professional and famous boxer. I asked George what “Khosi” means in Zulu. “It means ‘Prince’.” he answered, “from ‘N’kosana’.” Thusly, we decided “Prince” would be his pseudonym in the thesis.

Looking back on my own past practice, in this thesis, I suggest that my work might not necessarily be about developing an anti-racist toolkit for White people<sup>6</sup>, but might be about proposing *ambidlala* as a reflexive methodology, not only to see one's own White body and embodied experiences as Other, as (*an*)other way of seeing the body – further as a practice of critical reflexivity – a methodology for seeing *Otherly* in play. In these ways, this thesis makes a unique, timely and important contribution in its critical examination of play; not only as it is written about in current play and performance studies scholarship, but also introduces *ambidlala* (*ambi* = *both* and *dlala* = *play* in Zulu) as a methodology to make visible the potential violence of play in a post-apartheid context.

The research questions that guide this practice research are:

- How has my performance practice been complicit with the violence of apartheid?
- How, or in which ways, is the ambiguity of play potentially violent?
- What is the relationship between reflexivity and fluxing in play and how can this be developed as a method for anti-racist play?

Guided by these questions, through an iterative practice research approach, the PhD is made up of three practices: one practice research output which is embedded in the middle of the thesis and several critical essays that follow it. The practice research output, which takes the form of a polyvocal autoethnographic text, “The Practice on the Page”, gave forth several different themes. The primary theme that emerged for

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<sup>6</sup> As one of the main aims of this research is to expose, unmask and reveal violence I have decided to capitalize the “W” in White as well as the “B” in Black in line with Prof. Kwame Anthony Appiah (2020): “When we ignore the dialectical relation between the labels ‘Black’ and ‘White’, we treat a bloodstained product of history as a neutral, objective fact about the world. We naturalize the workings of racism” (2020, para. 17).

deeper investigation was implicit violence in play, under which the subthemes that relate to this were ambiguity, privilege and bodies in play. This praxis revealed to me that these themes cannot exist in isolation, thus resulting in a largely interdisciplinary, intersectional “magpie-esque” multimode approach as opposed to homing in on one specific area.

As the body (myself) who writes this PhD is an educated White, English-speaking, queer female South African artist from an upper socio-economic background, writing this PhD is problematic for numerous reasons. Not wanting my solo voice to be the main or only point of reference in this PhD, I included many different voices in the practice output resulting in an unfinished polyvocal autoethnography. This, in combination with the learnings from the thesis, aims to make explicit the journey or the search of the research as well as add to the language around play in imagining what the methodology of *ambidlala* and its method reflexivity, explained later, might look like.

Before engaging the practice component, I provide the reader with an introduction to who is speaking followed by a definition of key terms: play and violence, as well as a section on *ambidlala* and reflexivity. The methodology, with a specific focus on practice research, autoethnography and performative writing will orientate the reader with how I conducted the research and why I chose the methods. You will then engage the practices (by way of documentation on my website) and the practice research output (“The Practice on the Page”). After reading the practice research output, the reader will read several critical essays that, through performative writing, serve the dual purpose of locating my work in a lineage of practice and critically engaging the themes, those of ambiguity, bodies and privilege in relation to exploring and exposing implicit violence in play.

## 1.1 Let's begin with the bodies: Who is speaking? Who is playing?

As stated above, I am a 41-year-old White, queer, middle-class, educated South African female. Before undertaking this PhD, in my 15 years of creating performance work that engaged play, I was purely a practitioner, a trickster.<sup>7</sup> Primarily interested in changing things *out there* in the world through play, I did not want to engage in “weighty identity politics”. I did not have to. I grew up in the 1980s in South Africa during the 1980s State of Emergency. This was a violent period for South Africa, but I never felt this violence perpetrated onto my body. I grew up in privilege in an anti-apartheid liberal activist community, on stolen land. I grew up with a skin condition, vitiligo, which shaped how I saw race, how I too experienced othering and, thus, how I worked with people, but I am still considered as and thus benefit from being White. Because being different hurt, I turned a blind eye to difference and instead focused on the action: what we can do together.

Prince Khosi is a former South African boxing champion. Prince started boxing in 1986 and is the only South African champion with 366 wins and four losses. From 1986–1994, he boxed professionally, but in 1997 he was shot in an armed robbery, which ended his boxing career. After recovering in 1999, his dream was to open a gym. In 2004, with the help of Rhema Church, he opened his gym in Hillbrow, and this is where he started producing many champions like Rita Mkwebu, whom he trained since she was nine years old. His gym is also a safe haven for children and young people in one of the most dangerous areas in Johannesburg, providing them with a space where they can play and train in physical fitness.

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<sup>7</sup> “Trickster” as an identity and as a method will be examined in more detail in a later chapter. For now, we can understand “trickster” as an archetype, a shapeshifter, a fool who subverts structures and plays with or “fluxes” the rules of the game.

*Boxing Games* (2007) (Practice 1), was created by Prince and I in his boxing gym in one of the more dangerous areas in Johannesburg – Hillbrow – in 2007. In his gym, Prince trains 80% Black male and 20% Black female amateur and professional boxers from lower to middle-class backgrounds as well as children and young people who come to the gym after school. “Some are from South Africa and some are foreigners” (Prince, 2019). *Boxing Games* (2007) was made while I was an artist in residence for the kin:be:jozi residency project and it was also included as one of my performances for my master’s thesis.<sup>8</sup> Inspired by the collective training sessions that Prince led, over the course of two weeks, we (Prince and I) changed the rules of boxing.<sup>9</sup> Instead of two opponents fighting it out in the ring, there were now 12 amateur and professional boxers with boxing gloves on, playing the boxing game in the ring. Prince, the boxers and I would take turns shouting out different rules: “Box!” “Change!” (change partners) “Shout up to the sky!” “Fall down dead!”. On the night of the performance, after the game was played audience members could don boxing gloves and play too.

Boxing in South Africa is tied to the struggle against apartheid. The story of a boxer taking up boxing so as to make themselves a more respectable, “civil” human being is not a unique story tied to the practice of boxing (Waquant, 2004; Fleming 2011; Woodward, 2014). Believed to promote certain necessary principles like discipline, civility, respectability, self-defence and independence, boxing was seen to “cut across both linguistic and ethnic divides” and was taken up by both Johannesburg’s elites and working class (Fleming, 2011, p. 47). Nelson Mandela

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note here that the rooftop performance of *Boxing Games* (2007) was assessed for my master’s degree and will not be considered here. Rather, the initial training and boxing game that took place at the boxing gym will be the main focus for this thesis.

<sup>9</sup> I am *now* fully aware that two weeks is not enough time to really engage deeply and collaboratively with anyone. This is part of the revealing of the potential violence of my past practice that this thesis seeks to illuminate.

looked to pugilism as a practice that offered “a kind of transcendence” – a way to “keep it together” in a deranged and extremely volatile place, a practice which assisted individuals to sustain some form of sanity (Campbell, 2014, p. 124). It was a way to train the “mind of the fighter” so as to continue the fight against inequality:

The gym not only kept me physically fit and busy during my spare time but was an enjoyable form of relaxation and took my mind away from the more serious problems of race relations that harassed us at the time. The next morning I would wake up feeling fresh, strong enough to carry about my body with ease, and ready to begin the new day and face up to all the trials to which life exposes me as a Black man in my country (Mandela in Campbell 2014, p. 123).

As evidenced in the interviews with Silo and the other boxers, Prince’s gym is a place where young men and women, coming from all over the African continent, come to escape their own lives for a period of time, step into the ring and train: “He is the one who is making it easy to play in such a hard place to play in. [...] In Hillbrow, you always work with fear. So, in Hillbrow, you have to overcome your fear. If you can survive in Hillbrow, I think there is no place that you can’t survive” (Silo, 2019). While fear in Johannesburg is a daily occurrence for everybody who lives there, during the kin:be:jozi residency, when walking in the streets of Hillbrow feelings of fear became especially heightened. When we walked into Prince’s boxing ring that first day in June 2007, and upon meeting Prince for the first time, something softened in me: I noticed that I felt safe. I was attracted to working with Prince because of the space that he had made (and continues to make) every single day and, interested in the relationship between risk and play, I wanted to know how we could be safe so that we could play in an unsafe area like Hillbrow.

My work has never been made in isolation and this thesis aims to continue this practice on the page. I chose the *Boxing Games* (2007) performance because, 14 years

later, I still have a close, often wordless<sup>10</sup>, relationship with the owner of the gym in Johannesburg, the ex-champion boxing coach, Prince, and we are *still* interested in the power of shared wordless embodied experiences of collective joy. However, in the first iteration of my performance *Boxing Games* (2007), while I saw Prince as a fellow co-creator, there was no inclusion of his or any of the other players' thoughts, stories or voices. Focused on and somewhat blinded by the utopian motivations of play, there was also no reflexivity.

I am White and Prince is Black. In his text, "African modes of Self-Writing" (2002), Cameroonian philosopher and political theorist, Achille Mbembe discusses the frustration with the idea of a single "African identity".<sup>11</sup> However, he writes that he is equally dissatisfied with the notion of an unstable identity, the "all-too-familiar and clichéd rhetoric of non-substantiality, instability and indetermination is just one more inadequate way to come to grips with African imaginations of the self and the world" (2002, p. 272). He writes that these "idioms" of the self are always shifting, "are mobile, reversible and unstable. Given this element of play, they cannot be reduced to a purely biological order based on blood, race or geography" (2002, p. 272). Of course, Prince and I are not only these things, Black and White, but for the purposes of revealing violence as it is manifest in colour-blindness in play, I acknowledge this here.

In the work *Boxing Games* (2007), I was motivated by: we are all "just players" "just playing" with "other players": connected in our common humanity. In South Africa, the isiXhosa term "Ubuntu" means "I am because we are"; it was popularised

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<sup>10</sup> There are many reasons why Prince and I would choose jumping into the ring to spar over sitting and talking. Firstly, I do not speak Zulu. Secondly, Prince has a speech impediment from a past boxing injury which sometimes makes it difficult for me to understand him. Thirdly, we both find sparring much more fun.

<sup>11</sup> I myself have come into contact with this before when travelling, upon answering the question: "Where are you from?" and, after responding "South Africa", I had several people in Switzerland ask me, "Why aren't you Black?"

in the post-apartheid years by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It means “humanity”, where “[W]e create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am” (Eze, 2010). My friend Dean Hutton,<sup>12</sup> gender queer performance artist, asks me: “Do you see how through the use of ubuntu you forgive yourself for being White?” We laugh. This practice research exists in the tension, the tense laughter between the above (how I was brought up) and Richard Dyer’s warning: “There is no more powerful position than that of being “just” human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity” (2005, p. 10). We are never “just humans” “just playing”. As I will show in Chapter 2, play is haunted by the ghosts of modernity, of thousands of years of colonial brutality. Ruth Frankenberg writes:

Naming “Whiteness” displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance. Among the effects on White people both of race privilege and of the dominance of Whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility (1990, p. 6).

Rebecca Schneider writes that “[...] it is incumbent on white feminist performers to strive to make Whiteness explicitly visible in their work, or better, to make its structural invisibility visible” (1997, p. 9).<sup>13</sup> This practice research is not about taking it personally. It is about human rights and looking to my White body as a departure point, as a tool, in the process of “unmasking”, locating and naming the violence in play that has been invisible.

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<sup>12</sup> Hutton and I are friends and have been working, sometimes collaboratively, in Johannesburg since 2007. Hutton documented my ‘Anthea Moys vs’ project (2013) and recently we wrote a paper together entitled ‘The Impossibility of the Care/Free Player’ (Public Art Journal, 2022), which was presented at the ‘Hopeful Positions: Playing in Precarity’ conference at Toronto University, February, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> As argued by Audre Lorde in her seminal keynote address: ‘The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism’ (1981) as well as bell hooks (1984), but also more recently in Moon and Holling (2020), feminism without intersectionality is no different from White supremacy. This practice research endeavors to offer a rich intersectional and interdisciplinary approach to play.

## **1.2. Definition of key terms: Play and violence**

### **1.2.1 Implicit violence upholds explicit violence**

Play is not usually associated with violence.<sup>14</sup> This thesis is not concerned with topics usually associated with play such as performer training or play as improvisation, or as part of the workshop pedagogy in theatre training. It will not include game theory, video or digital games, animal play, play therapy, children's play or pedagogy. Rather, it will be focusing on implicit violence in play as it was found in play scholarship and my own past work. These forms of violence in play take various, often interconnected forms, such as the violence of non-reflexivity and othering, and the violence of "ambi" in ambiguity/ambivalence which informed the methodology of ambidlala (explained in more detail below). These forms of violence come from a time and place. The purpose of this section is to contextualise this thesis' specific approach to violence and to underline the social value of this research.

Apartheid was a brutally violent system that separated people based on the colour of their skin. It was a system that detained, maimed and killed Black, Indian, Coloured and Queer bodies over the course of its reign. In a post-apartheid South Africa, while explicit violence is arguably less visible, structural violence is still pervasive. Johan Galtung argues that most cases of structural violence can be "traced back to personal violence in their pre-history" and that "[A]n exploitative caste system or race society would be seen as the consequence of a large-scale invasion leaving a thin, but powerful top layer of the victorious group after the noise of fighting is over" (1969, p. 178). It is difficult to pinpoint and address and this is what gives it its power.

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<sup>14</sup> Explicit violence in play might look like the breaking of the rules. Zinedine Zidane's head-butting Italian defender Marco Materazzi at the FIFA World Cup in July 2006 or the numerous fights that takes place in ice hockey or American football. These are some examples of players who deliberately attempt to hurt others to gain a competitive advantage.

Despite the fact that apartheid “came to an end” in 1990, the consequences of this violence can still be felt in internalised violent, destructive and self-destructive behaviour. This is the violence in play that was present in my upbringing in apartheid South Africa and present in my work as an artist who worked with play as a method in a post-apartheid South Africa that I am trying to address in this practice research.

What do we mean by invisible (yet structural) violence? Galtung writes about the kind of violence that is committed by an actor as “personal or direct” and where there is no actor as “structural or indirect” (1969, p. 170). While no person, neither Prince nor myself, nor my mother or father, within the structure actually explicitly harmed the other, structural violence is “built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as un-equal life chances” (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). He continues:

Personal violence represents change and dynamism – not only ripples on waves, but waves on otherwise tranquil waters. Structural violence is silent, it does not show – it is essentially static, it is the tranquil waters. In a static society, personal violence will be registered, whereas structural violence may be seen as about as natural as the air around us (1969, p. 173).

Slavoj Zizek and Frank Wynne examine how structural violence informs and participates in more explicit forms of violence. Comparing this form of violence to “the notorious ‘dark matter’ of physics, the counterpart to an all-too-visible subjective violence they argue that while it may be invisible it needs to be examined if we are to understand what would otherwise seem like irrational ‘explosions of subjective violence’” (2010, p. 2). This invisible “static” and “silent” form of violence is what this research is trying to reveal in my own play practice and play scholarship.

Each and every person who lived under the apartheid regime to greater or lesser degrees experienced some form of violence. One of the most unequal societies in the

world, South Africa is still experiencing the violent effects of apartheid. Studies on the psychological distress in South Africa since 1990 and between 2002 and 2004 suggest “the cumulative burden of trauma is adversely affecting the mental health of South Africans” (Harriman et al., 2021, pp. 850–852). Kath Woodward argues that “bodies are both situated by social, cultural and political factors and are themselves situations [...]” (2009, p. 99). *This* particular thesis, adopting a practice research autoethnographic and multivocal approach, examines how this invisible structural violence, whether consciously or not, is present in the minds and “bodies as situations” that make up this practice research and how this perpetuates or hinders violence in a post-apartheid South Africa (1980–2022).

There is violence and there is joy in this practice research. Queer, feminist and diversity worker Sara Ahmed writes that the feminist killjoy<sup>15</sup> exposes violence: “[...] you have to let the violence spill all over the pages” that she is “being violent in exposing violence”, but through the exposure of violence, the killjoy is calling for “the end of the institution that makes White men” that perpetuates violence (2017, p. 253). In our interview, Prince says: “Ja, for me it was you know ... it was boxing and play ... and *LOVE* because that’s what it was too – people laughing, enjoying. Really fun! There was a peace there you know. Peace and love and boxing and play” (Khosi, 2019). In her essay “The Uses of the Erotic”, Lorde writes:

The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference (1984, p. 4).

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<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, we can link violence with kill and joy with play: The two main ideas explored in this practice research.

This practice research exists betwixt and between these conflicting notions: revealing the violence, to let it “spill all over the pages” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 253) and the “forming of bridges” through the sharing of love and joy (Lorde, 1984, p. 4). Resisting the knee-jerk reaction to act, to intervene and “help”, Zizek encourages us rather to take time to step back, critically reflect and “learn, learn and learn what causes this violence” (Lenin in Zizek, 2008, p. 6–8). This is at the heart of this thesis. It is less about doing or “helping” and more about learning, learning and learning about the structural violence behind my actions, revealing these and using this as material for new methodologies. Thus, the research offers ambidlala as a reflexive methodology for play scholarship that spills the violence to retell the story and move towards non-violence. Fourteen years later, this practice research revisits *Boxing Games*, where blind racial violence took place and seeks, through generative dialogue with Prince and past players (as evidenced in the practice research output), not only to identify violence but move towards ambidlala: a more reflexive “compassionate, sincere, violence-free playfulness which, at the same time, does not engage in a repression of difference [...]” (Nagal, 2002, p. 5).

### **1.2.2 Play and games**

In this section, I will discuss the relationship of play to games and give an explanation of how this research uses play to question, critique and interrogate games as social not just ludic structures. Sport and play are often seen to be on opposite ends of a spectrum. Rule-based, regulated “competitive, goal-oriented” and “contest-based”, most sport seems to be at odds with more playful or “ludic” dimensions (Woodward, 2009, p. 52). However, *the playing* of the game in sport evokes feelings of pleasure, states of flow and enjoyment: “We do it because we want to”, thus sport, play and games are intimately connected (Giulianotti, 2005 in Woodward, 2009, p. 44). This research

explores how play's utopian dream of social inclusion, often performed through sport, can also harbour an invisible violence. Sports' focus on inclusion rather than an acknowledgement or celebration of difference is supported by "the policies and practices that are increasingly part of the mechanisms through which diversity is promoted" (Woodward, 2009, p. 88). As with *Boxing Games* (2007), this does not bring into play or bring into power the difference of these bodies.

In this research, I am using play to critique sport and games as deeply social, not just ludic structures, in several ways. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben in *Profanations* writes that "Play breaks up the unity of the sacred" (2007, pp. 75–76) and that "[...] to profane means not simply to abolish and erase separations but to learn to put them to new use, to play with them", to play with the ambiguities that are present in play (2007, p. 87). This practice research draws on play's creative, "socially productive" and "restorative" functions, but also its ability to "rearrange" and "redefine rules" and goals, its capacity to reshape space, time, and modes of interaction (Lushetich, 2016, p. 2). This is evidenced in the first instance, in the work *Boxing Games* (2007) and in the second instance in the revisiting of the work *Boxing Games* in 2019. Joyce Carol Oates (1987) writes that while one plays tennis, cricket and football, "one doesn't *play* boxing" (1987, p. 19). In the first instance, in contradiction to Oates, I *do* "*play* boxing" by temporarily disrupting, "rearranging" or "redefining" the game of boxing proper by playing the *Boxing Game* (2007). It does this through its inclusion of all different kinds of bodies as players in the ring as opposed to two weighed-in fighters opposing one another. It plays out through the admission of numerous rules that can chop and change at a moment's notice, shouted out by the coach, but also by the boxers – thereby empowering them to "redefine" the game in the ring.

This use of play to disrupt the sport of boxing proper reveals another kind of game at play. Woodward writes: “Bodies matter in sport and sporting bodies are material. The materiality of bodies involves a complex interplay of socially constructed, symbolic and affective forces [...]” (2009, p. 3). While in the first instance, *Boxing Games* (2007) questions the sport of boxing proper, in the second instance, in the revisiting of *Boxing Games* in 2019, the polyvocal text reveals that this game too is ambiguous, is “rigged”: that in the revisiting of *Boxing Games*, the research reveals and questions the game as a social construct that is irrevocably tied to specific bodies “as situations”, in this case Black and White, male and female, lower and middle-class bodies “as situations” that harbour the violence of apartheid and post-apartheid (Woodward, 2009, p. 99). In this way, the research uses play, manifest in ambidlala, to question and interrogate the game of *Boxing Games* (2007) as that which can no longer be seen as purely a ludic structure, but a deeply social complex multi-layered experience. Ambidlala as a methodology for play scholarship is about recognising this ambiguity in play by bringing these bodies as “situations” in the game “as situated by social, cultural and political factors” into dialogue with one another (Woodward, 2009, p. 99). In doing so it “breaks up” the utopian rainbow nation “unity of the sacred”, of the fantasy of an equal playing field and creates a new unfinished, complex and polyvocal story (Agamben, 2007, pp. 75–76).

### **1.2.3 Ambiguity in play: The beginnings of *Ambidlala***

In most play and performance studies’ scholarship, the slippery word “ambiguity” is often associated with play, but it has thus far not been written about specifically in relation to violence, privilege and bodies (Sutton-Smith; 1997, Schechner; 1988; 1993; 2006, Turner; 1969; 1977; 1979; 1982; 1987). Play is ambiguous because it resists any easy definition and can thus be used in almost any arena, co-opted to almost any

rhetoric. In play scholar Brian Sutton-Smith's "The Ambiguity of Play" (1997), he asserts that play, like all cultural forms, "cannot be neutrally interpreted", thus he analyses play through what he calls the seven rhetorics of play (1997, p. 216). These are play as progress, fate and power, and the play as identity, the imaginary, the self and finally play as frivolous. Analysing play in this way not only reveals just how diverse and ambiguous the study of play is, but the process engages power in "unmasking of the tendentiousness and hegemony of these rhetorics" (1997, p. 216). While illuminating in many respects, in concert with the growth of the critical and reflexive muscle in my brain, I noticed that there was no reflexivity in his writing or where and how many of these theories of play stemmed from.

Play is also located in the realm of ambiguity in performance studies; however, here too, it does not reflexively engage with its potential violence, that of othering. Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor in her critique of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *Couple in the Cage* (1992–93) performance writes: "No matter who tells the story – the playwright, the discoverer or the government official – it stars the same White male protagonist-subject and the same Brown 'found' object" (1998, p. 162).

Richard Schechner (1985; 1988, 1993; 2006), Victor Turner (1969; 1977; 1979; 1982; 1987) and Clifford Geertz (2005) are some of the main theorists who have written about play through the observation of the other.<sup>16</sup> While play scholars Thomas S. Henricks (2006; 2015) and Sutton Smith (1997) engage privilege and power, and indeed ambiguity in their work about play, they, too, neglect to engage in any reflexivity that would implicate them in relation to power. In the practice research

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<sup>16</sup> For Schechner, it included his visits to Papua New Guinea (1988; 1985), for Turner (1969; 1977; 1985); this included his four-year presence in Zambia with the Ndembu people. For Geertz it was a visit to Bali with his wife to observe their cock fights in 1972.

output, I will show how I, too, participated in these acts of othering, objectification and non-reflexivity. Furthermore, play studies, for the most part, through its focus on freedom, fun, games, leisure and flow largely fails to question who plays, for whom and for what reasons (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; 2008, Caillois, 1958; Carse, 1989; Turner, 1982; De Koven, 2013).

This research argues that play studies, which was inextricably tied to ethnographic practices in anthropology, as Eurocentric/North American fields of study (at least in the dominant readings/scholars such as Turner and Schechner, as will be made clear in the next chapter), fail to fully account for the situatedness of the researcher, the Whiteness of the researcher in relation to colonialism, and in turn, the potential violence of the study. Thus, this practice research examines “the ambiguity of play” as a space of potential violence in its non-reflexivity and non-positionality as it is present in scholarship around play, but also in othering.

Frustration with the lack of critical or reflexive literature around the ambiguity of play fueled the second research inquiry: How or in what ways is the ambiguity of play potentially violent? Explicit physical violence is clearly visible is the sport of boxing, made possible through the following of rules for fair play, that allow little room for ambiguity. Thus, while the violence of play in boxing, such as a punch in the jaw, is visible and explicit, ambidlala investigates the more *invisible* and *implicit* forms of violence in play. “Ambi” meaning “both” or “to go in both directions” and “dlala” meaning “play” in Zulu<sup>17</sup> – “ambidlala” is a methodology that aims to locate and

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<sup>17</sup> Even though, to my shame, like most White South Africans, I cannot *speak* Zulu, I grew up with the word “dlala” and it was also used a lot in the boxing gym when we were training. It is also inspired by the street parade project in 2017: [Hey Hillbrow! Lets Dlala!](#) which I co-produced (Mann, 2017). Following the violent xenophobic attacks in Johannesburg in 2015, and the anti-xenophobic march which I along with over 30 000 people attended, the parade was about fighting xenophobia, but this time through the celebration of the incredibly rich and diverse arts and culture of the area (Swails, 2015). In these ways, for me, the word *dlala* locates the word specifically in the context of South Africa, the context from which this whole practice research stems.

expose the violence of the ambiguity of play in a post-apartheid context. The “ambi” in ambidlala is a direct reference to what is invisible, the implicit violence of the ambiguity of play that could take the form of non-reflexivity, ambivalent non-positionality and othering that is *not* written about in my master’s thesis, Sutton Smith’s *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997) or in Schechner or Turner’s texts. Thus, the ambidlala methodology offers a space for reflexivity and new language for us to speak and write about play in a post-colonial context that is aware of potential violence.

In these ways, ambidlala is a methodology for play that develops new reflexes. It is a methodology that is not so much about developing physical reflexes or training for the body *to* play as it is about constantly exercising the reflexive muscle in our awareness of “bodies as situations” *in* play (Woodward, 2009, p. 3). Furthermore, ambidlala calls us to fight the first reflex, which may be to retreat into a space of comfort that your privilege allows or jump up to “help” as a good White Saviour (Zizek, 2008, p. 6–8). In resisting these knee-jerk reactions, ambidlala develops reflexes that engage the more invisible game of the social, of inequality and of power in the playing of games.

### **1.3. Flux Sports as an area to study play in performance studies**

This thesis sees Flux Sports as an untapped area within which to study play. In his accumulative, ambitious and arguably extractive “broad spectrum” approach in *Performance Theory* (1988), performance studies scholar Richard Schechner has categories for game, sport, ritual and play. Offering a “tentative definition of performance” he writes that performance is “[r]itualised behaviour conditioned/permeated by play” (1988, p. 99). He compares play to ritual arguing that while ritual is stricter and more formal, play is “looser, more permissible” and that it occupies a space of “‘provisionality’, the unsteadiness, slipperiness, porosity, unreliability and ontological

riskiness of the realities projected or created by playing” (1993, p. 39). Schechner’s thesis is that “much play behaviour is adapted from hunting, that hunting is a kind of playing” (1988, p. 108). He sees this kind of playing as “strategic, future and crisis-oriented, violent and/or combative; it has winners and losers, [...]” (1988, p. 107).<sup>18</sup> In this sense, we could say that this view of play would fall within Sutton Smith’s “progressive rhetoric of play” in its analyses of play for its biological function (1997, p. 9). While Schechner wrote about Happenings and some of the Fluxus artists’ works such as Alan Kaprow and John Cage (2006), there is no writing about Flux *Sports*.

Unsatisfied with the writings about play in both play and performance studies scholarship, I looked elsewhere, and located my performances, that work with the rules of the game in sports, within a lineage of practice: Flux Sports. Flux Sports was one of the outputs from the 1960s Eurocentric avant-garde art movement: Fluxus. In direct reference to popular sports that any player can access, Flux Sports “engage the player in a clash of opposites by asking him/her to pursue the goal of the game in ways and by means that are either nonsensical or entirely counterproductive” (Lushetich, 2011, p. 31). An example is Flux artist Bici Hendrick’s *Stilt Soccer*, where players play soccer on stilts. In one of the essays that follow the practice research output, I critically examine Flux Sports, addressing the themes of ambiguity, bodies and privilege as they relate to implicit structural violence in play.

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<sup>18</sup> Schechner’s theory of “dark play” is also of interest in this practice research’s exploration of play’s ambiguity and its potential for violence. Schechner’s definition of the player engaged in dark play is that s/he “[...] plays out alternate selves. The play frame may be so disturbed or disrupted that the players themselves are not sure if they are playing or not” (1993, p. 39). Dark play is when people are aware that they are playing with a certain amount of risk, often at someone else’s expense, a “Kick me” sign on someone’s back being an obvious example<sup>18</sup>. “Dark play subverts order, dissolves frames, and breaks its own rules” [...]. Schechner writes that its aims are “deceit, disruption, excess and gratification” and that it is “truly subversive, its agendas always hidden” (2002, p. 107). The invisibility of the structural violence of Whiteness, and how this invisibility is part of its power has been written about extensively by numerous scholars (hooks; 1995, Ahmed; 2017, Dyer; 2015, DiAngelo; 2020, Frankenberg; 1993, Mitchell, 2012). While beyond the current scope of this practice research, there is certainly room for further analysis here in examining structural racial violence.

While location in a lineage is important, even more important to note is that Flux Sports and *Boxing Games* (2007), were made in very different contexts. Play is a central feature of Flux Sports and my practice; however, a crucial difference is how play is understood to uphold and challenge structures of power and violence. An acknowledgement of this is critical as it feeds into one of the central themes that this research engages, notably bodies in play – who plays for whom and what purpose, depending on the context in which they find themselves. Flux Sports, similar to my own past practice, did not critically engage in any form of identity politics, those who play Flux Sports are “just players” “just playing”. This thesis then is concerned with the more *invisible*, implicit violence of the structures at play *in play* as they were present in my past practice and the scholarship around play. In these ways, this practice research, which takes place in a post-apartheid South Africa and the UK, offers a critical examination of Flux Sports, giving us an opportunity to study structures of play rather than observing the playing Other.

By extension, cognisant of the potential violence of othering, this practice research is *not* about the participants’ experience of play. Instead, I turn the focus back on myself and use this as a departure point, a springboard for exploring violence in play and moving towards developing new methods and language for antiracist play. Black, lesbian, poet, writer, mother and warrior Audre Lorde writes: “[...] we do not develop tools for using our differences as springboards for creative change within our lives” (2009, p. 203). Ambidlala is a methodology that is about developing reflexive tools, “for using our differences as springboards for creative change within our lives” (Ibid.).

## 1.4. From fluxing to *Refluxivity*



Figure 1: *94.7 Cycle Challenge* (2006), which took place early one morning, where I rode South Africa's largest cycling race on a stationary exercise bike for an hour in Johannesburg disrupts this appetitive process, the neoliberal push for us to be better, faster, fitter go-getters in the world.

The shift from fluxing to re-fluxing emerged from a desire for a word that could embody both the fluxing tactics of the trickster and much needed reflexivity in play. I did not want to abandon my fluxing tactics entirely and wanted to explore more deeply how they could be used in concert with reflexivity.

The word “fluxing” is present in this thesis and functions in a variety of ways. The creation of the fundamental concept of “flux”: “The theory of impermanence and change” can be attributed to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535–475 BCE): “You cannot step into the same river twice because the flow of the river insures that new water constantly replaces the old” (Schechner, 2002, p. 22). The word “flux” refers to fluidity, fluctuation, instability and to change: “things are in a state of flux”. Fluxus, a highly *social praxis*, playfully disrupted, or “*fluxed*”, the “normal” “‘procedures’ of western cultural practices and behaviours’ such as a wedding or a concert or a sport” (Stiles, 1993, p. 95). Fluxus fluxed the taken for granted the norm. Fluxing, always in reference to the original, is about revealing or unmasking how the

processes and contents of life, art and work were deeply interconnected (Ibid.). As is evidenced in the image above, I fluxed the rules of a cycling race.

I include this performance work *94.7 Cycle Challenge* (2006) to demonstrate my trickster methods, the way I was working a year before *Boxing Games* (2007) was made. The trickster, “more than other members of his species, experiences the world as a constant process of flux, of becoming rather than being; this is why, for the fool, certainties are always illusory” (my highlights, Prentki, 2012, p. 4).<sup>19</sup> Here, like *Stilt Soccer*, I *fluxed* the rules of race to reveal the win/lose “certainties” we unconsciously follow (Ibid.). The ambidlala methodology is a reflexive methodology that allows me to reflect on the work as: breaking the rules comes with a certain amount of power; I fluxed the race *because I had nothing to lose*, while for some who perhaps have different bodies, perhaps breaking the rules is riskier.

This is important because ambidlala is not an applied theatre methodology. As a White South African wary of the “White Savior” complex, I looked to Tim Prentki, who critically engages the definition of applied theatre: “There is an unspoken and unwritten assumption that art improves the quality of life” (2012, p. 201).<sup>20</sup> He asserts that applied theatre is based upon a “deficit model” – that people who need applied theatre are “lacking something” that middle-class people have. Arguably then, the applied arts have a troubled history “predicated upon a colonial model where the

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<sup>19</sup> Often, I would choose a sport, then watch that sport, learn it (often with the participants) and then change it slightly so as to make the game unwinnable, so that we could play to keep on playing as opposed to play to win.

<sup>20</sup> Aware of this contradiction between the potential that theatre has for imagining a new, more just world, and the ambiguous trickster or fool who resists any easy solution is at the heart of Augusto Boal’s “Joker System” that was developed as part of the Arena theatre in 1966. Tim Prentki acknowledges that the Joker as a *character* is not actually what is important in this process, but that the label of the Joker is actually referring to an actual *function* (2012, p. 204). The function is to interrupt the game, question the rules, subvert and disrupt. Unfortunately, Prentki asserts, in the work of many NGOs, Boal’s original dream for the function of the Joker, the trickster as guardian of the generative uncertainty in the “space-between”, has been relegated to that of solutions-oriented successes where the Joker is “more helpful facilitator than ambiguous, shape-shifting fool” (Ibid).

centre prescribes what is good for the periphery” (Ibid). This resonates with what Tuck and Yang call “settler moves to innocence”: “Settler moves to innocence are those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege” (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 9). Thus, ambidlala is not just fluxing with care, the privileged “helping” or making space for the underprivileged, but rather offers us a reflexive space and self-fluxing methods, i.e. refluxing methods (explained below) to explore potential violence in play.

By locating my work in the lineage of practice – that of Flux Sports – I adopted the term fluxing to illustrate my methods, i.e. trickster tactics. Fluxus and my past practice make the familiar *unfamiliar*, like soccer on stilts or the rules of the race or 12 people in the ring instead of two, we flux the rules, making the “normal” *strange*, we look upon it anew. Can this practice be adopted for anti-racist methods in play? Dyer challenges White people to make themselves strange to denormalise Whiteness. He contends that “[...] White people create the dominant images of the world and don’t quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image” and that it is seen as *normal* and not seen as *White* (Dyer, 2005, p. 12). Channelling W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), Dyer writes that White people need to develop another kind of vision, to see themselves as *not normal*, to “make themselves *strange*” (my italics, Dyer, 2005, p. 12). As opposed to fluxing the rules of the game “out there”, i.e. “just humans” “just playing”, ambidlala offers a more reflexive methodology for play that recognises that we are never “just players” “just playing”. Ambidlala is about rechannelling this way of working, i.e. fluxing, and turning it back on the self, thus *refluxing* the White self, to “make themselves *strange*” (Ibid.).

A form of this *fluxing* is evidenced in the practice research output: “The Practice on the Page”<sup>21</sup> where, through performative writing and polyvocal autoethnography, the text reclaims the polyvocal, plurality and shape-shifting nature of fluxing, of the trickster. By including a variety of voices in the polyvocal autoethnographic text, I flux the solo voice (my own) by making space for multiple truths as opposed to one. Hunt and Holmes in their article “Everyday Decolonization: Living a Decolonizing Queer Politics” (2015), quote Paulette Regan (2010):

Settler stories as counter-narratives that create decolonizing space are both interior and relational. As such, they require us to risk revealing ourselves as vulnerable “not-knowers” who are willing to examine our dual positions as colonizer-perpetrators and colonizer-allies (Regan, 2010, p. 28).

Ambidlala is a reflexive methodology that recognises that we are all “vulnerable ‘not-knowers’” in play (Ibid.). Ambidlala heeds Tuck and Yang’s (2012) warnings of “settler moves to innocence” and its acknowledgement of our positionality as “vulnerable ‘not-knowers’” as both “colonizer-perpetrators and colonizer-allies” (Regan, 2010, p. 28) is no longer only a trickster method of fluxing the rules of the game in sport “out there”, but gives us the reflexive space for unmasking and fluxing the self in play. Ambidlala gives me permission to *re-flux* myself and develop reflexive methods to see *otherly* in play. Just as Fluxus and my past practice “*fluxed*”, the “‘normal procedures’ of western cultural practices and behaviours” (Stiles, 1993, p. 95), I am now turning back and fluxing the self, unmasking the taken for granted normality of Whiteness. This is the relationship between reflexivity and fluxing which

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<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, while most autoethnography privileges one solo voice, with the help of Prince, Mbesta Reeds and everyone who participated in this project, in line with tricksters’ investment in “nonrepresentational texts”, where they “deprivilege[s] singular narratives”, the practice research output attempts to demonstrate the act of privileging many voices, many stories, all of them true and untrue (Salinas, 2013, p. 147).

informs *refluxivity*. It is only through this practical process, the refluxing, that we engage the more conceptual or theoretical underpinnings of ambidlala.

Finally, in this thesis I have used performative writing to flux standard academic writing. In a post-positivist sense, the writing does not aim to find a finite secure positioning as is evidenced in more standard academic texts, but is rather located in the space of flux. Comparing it to a “fracture” in (or perhaps, I might add, a fluxing of?) academic scholarship, Ronald J. Pelias writes that performative writing “expands the notions of what constitutes disciplinary knowledge” (2009, p. 417) and argues that it “welcomes the body into the mind’s dwellings” (Ibid.). I chose performative writing and created/curated the poly-autoethnographic text and the critical essays that follow it, because I wanted to bring the sweaty brow and held breath in-between sparring into contact with theory. I wanted to bring the vulnerability, shame and violence of the practice into contact with external structures embedded in words on the page. In these ways, performative writing has assisted me in fluxing academic writing and making the reflexive embodied methodology of ambidlala more visible.

## Chapter 2: Play is Haunted by the Violence of Modernity

You know that whole thing about “Oh, there was no voice of the other because there were no Black anthropologists here”, et cetera. What we are asking for is that the hegemonic discourses, the holders of hegemonic discourse should de-hegemonize their position and themselves learn how to occupy the subject position of the other [...] (Spivak, 1990, p. 121).<sup>22</sup>

This chapter specifically addresses, contextualises and foregrounds the main overarching theme, that of implicit violence, and, more specifically, as it relates to bodies in play. This is an important chapter for the thesis to contextualise the artistic works and themes examined in the critical essays. In line with the above in interrogating one of the themes that this practice research deals with, i.e. violence and bodies in play, the sub-questions that guide this chapter include:

- How has my settler ancestry, body and my practice, participated in the violence of othering?
- How has play scholarship participated in the violence of othering?
- What kinds of bodies are creating the scholarship and through which methods?
- Which bodies are the object of the scholarship?

Play and performance studies have been criticised as being imperialist (Duncan, 1988; Beresin, 2021, Epskamp; 2003, Raznovich, D, Schechner, R., Barba, E., Tomoko, K., Yuichiro, T, Huizhu Sun, W., Taylor, D., Gómez-Peña, G. 2007, Cevera; 2017). The chapter critically articulates how these practices, which often stemmed from

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<sup>22</sup> Post-colonial scholar, literary theorist, and feminist critic Gayatri Spivak in *The Postcolonial Critic* (1990) in an interview with Frances Bartkowski of Wesleyan University after hearing Spivak speak at the “Cultural Construction of Race Conference” in Sydney, Australia 1985.

anthropology, are about categorising and codifying bodies, privileging and othering bodies. By extension, organised sport is, in part, about codifying and making docile an otherwise unruly set of bodies (racial, national, classed bodies). Thus, like play studies, my past work (that engages both play, sport and bodies), complicated by my settler ancestry, is caught in this history and also needs to be examined through the lens of modernity.

As I am an educated middle-class White writer writing within the realm of academia and performance studies, returning to and reflecting upon past practice that involves Black boxers from a lower socio-economic background, this process is particularly problematic as it has the capacity to participate in the violence of othering again. Here, almost in answer to my earlier question: “which bodies are doing the scholarship for whom?” I draw on Schneider to locate this disappearance as a form of violence:

[...] historically, the anthropologist and the sexologist disappeared in the text that exposed an other, though that text was precisely what the anthropologist, the sexologist, spoke to create his own, and his culture’s civilized distinction (Schneider, 1997, p. 137).

Thus, the location of violence is in the disappearance, in non-reflexivity, remaining in comfortable ambiguity that does not engage difference. This practice research is not about observing boxers and how they experience play. It is about turning the gaze back on my White self, locating violence in a past practice and creating a new story through more inclusive non-violent methods.

## **2.1 Getting to know my settler ancestry**

“So, were your ancestors slave traders then?” Susan, my fellow PhD student asks me in one of our Friday sessions. A question I am grateful for as it sent me on a (albeit

very overdue) journey to find more about my own settler past. Schneider (1997) writes about notions of gender and race as haunting our bodies like ghosts saying that rather than trying to find some pure “unghosted origin” we need “to bring them out of the shadows, and into the scene where they always already exist, to make them apparent as *players*” (Schneider, 1997, p. 23). An excerpt from one of my ghosts, my settler ancestry: James Butler’s diary dated on 30 April 1877 reads:

30.04.1877 Monday [196th] day. Fine. Hot.  
Sunday School Picnic and Annual Meeting. ‘We sang “God save the queen” altogether but could hear the K\_\_\_\_\_<sup>23</sup> voices above all the others singing our National anthem beautifully. A procession was formed outside the chapel in the following order, Commemoration school, West Hill, Fort England, Dutch, K\_\_\_\_\_ walking two and two. The procession was quite an imposing one extending quite a long distance. We left the chapel about noon and marched to the cricket field.

A circle of K\_\_\_\_\_ several deep were very intent for several hours watching dancing: two or three females would enter the ring and go through a number of very peculiar paces, putting themselves in remarkable postures and apparently sought to show off their dresses to the best possible advantage. Meanwhile those forming the circle kept up a monotonous kind of sing song and clapped their hands I suppose to keep time’ (Butler 1877 in Garner, 1983, p. 174–175).

This is an excerpt from my ggg<sup>24</sup> grandfather: my grandmother’s grandfather’s diary entries from the late 1800s included in a master’s thesis I found online submitted at Rhodes University, South Africa in 1980. In the thesis were all his diary entries between the years 1877 until his death in 1923. At the age of 22, James Butler left London and arrived on South African soil for health reasons in 1876. He was a Quaker,

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<sup>23</sup> In the 1800s this was a term that was used to describe the natives in the area. Now, this is a derogatory term for Black people, which I refuse to include in this writing. However, I am aware that I am exercising my power and privilege to literally “white out” a term that my grandfather used. Is this not a way to protect myself? Is this a move towards comfortable privilege? I assert here that it is done with care as I do not want to cause any further harm.

<sup>24</sup> ggg = great great great grandfather, however I feel uncomfortable making these capital “Gs” so am using “g” instead, as inspired by South African Comedian Trevor Noah who questions why Great Britain is called “Great” (Noah, 2015, at 01:35).

teetotaler, started a newspaper business and “was to find in a small South African town opportunity for philanthropy of a specifically Quaker kind” (Garner, 1983, p. 72). He had “**a talent for observation**. The diary hints at his future, the Eastern Cape was to provide a unique setting for that future” (my highlights, Ibid.). Upon reading my settler ancestral diary entries, I found resonances between this way of writing and the writings of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner ...

In 1988, Schechner writes about The Elema of New Guinea who celebrate a cycle called the *Hevehe*:

As each mask starts dancing, groups of women and children detach themselves from the large crowd and dance around masks worn by fathers, husbands, brothers and sons. The women carry green twigs and they flick the legs of the mask-dancers (1988, p. 37–39).

Turner writes about the Ndembu of North Western Zambia:

While splashing goes on, the male adults on the right and the female adults on the left sing songs from the great life-crisis and initiation rites of the Ndembu: from Mukanda, boys’ circumcision; Alung’ong’i, the rites of a funerary initiation; Kayong’u, initiation into divining; Nkula, a traditional women’s cult; and Wuyang’a, initiation into hunters’ cults (1977, p. 35).

This linking of my settler ancestor’s observations of the other and that of Schechner and Turner, while not written for the same purpose, enact a form of violence, that of both a lack of self-reflexivity *and*, in the case of the latter, extraction for the creation of theory. During the 1960s and 1970s, there was much cross-pollination between the fields of anthropology and theatre/performance. This began largely through the friendship of Turner and Schechner (but also between Turner and play scholar Sutton-

Smith), resulting in *one* of the beginnings of the interdisciplinary area of performance studies,<sup>25</sup> but also many theories of play.

Considering Turner's time in Zambia with the Ndembu people was during the end of the colonial period, Turner's work has been criticised by some (but not many) for his lack of critical self-reflexivity and engagement with the colonial situation of the time<sup>26</sup> (Jules-Rosette, 1994, p. 162). In her article "Decentering Ethnography: Victor Turner's Vision of Anthropology" (1994), Jules-Rosette discusses Turner's use of reflexivity and how he "reformulates social drama in the context of reflexivity", where reflexivity "shifts from a form of personal accountability to a type of collective reflection and cultural coding" where he advises anthropologists to pay special attention to that which is "extraordinary and rare": these included myths, ritual symbols and the "exotic" and "bizarre" (Turner, 1977c:65 in Jules-Rosette, 1994, p. 172). However, in line with the reflexive methodology of *ambidlala*, he does not turn this reflexivity to work on himself: "In the light of his keen interest in reflexivity, it is unusual that Turner often stopped short of examining his own anthropological stance with regard to his Ndembu informants" (1994, p. 174). She writes that "Turner appears partially blind to the social and political impact of his presence among the Ndembu at such a highly charged period" and that his work with the Ndembu was "played out against the backdrop of an eternal ethnographic present" (Ibid).

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<sup>25</sup> There are other beginnings as discussed in Shannon Jackson's "Professing Performance Disciplinary Genealogies" (2001).

<sup>26</sup> One of the arguments that Victor Chirevo Kwenda argues in his PhD "True colors: A critical assessment of Victor Turner's study of Ndembu religion" (1993) was that Turner's study of the Ndembu "pay[s] no attention to the question of the meaning of world and of the human in the colonial situation" (1993, p. i).

### **A flashback from the practice research output:**

*I walked in and struck up a conversation with champion boxer Prince Khosi. I told him that I was an artist who worked with performance, what the project was about and that I would like to learn how to box with the intention of the project possibly developing into a new kind of game/performance.*

*Deep down, I feel like I am ... and will always be doomed to be the eternal tourist.*

*Doomed I tell you. Doomed!*

### **2.2 Locating implicit violence in play and performance studies scholarship**

The above text aimed to make clear the link between my settler ancestry writings and the play and performance studies scholarship. As an entry point, I now look further back to modernisation and the classification of bodies. I do this not only to make clear the motivations for the non-violent methods used in this practice research, but also to foreground the importance of this study in its location of violence in play and its proposed offer of more conscious non-violent methods. To not perpetuate violence and proceed with care, I look to Solomon Lennox and Sarah Crews, who in their book *Boxing and Performance* (2020) study boxing *as* performance and argue that the performance of boxing needs to be “understood through the ghosts of modernity” (2020, p. 14).

At the outset of the nineteenth century, the concept of European moral and cultural superiority was at its height with its self-appointed mission intent on civilising the uncivilised, taming the barbaric, the savage, through colonisation (Heraclides & Dialla, 2015, p. 31). Introduced in the eighteenth century by French naturalist Georges

Buffon and German anthropologist Johann Blumenbach, the concept of “race” came to classify people hierarchically (Ibid). Benefitting from the beginning stages of social Darwinism, the “White race” was categorised as superior, while “Asians, Africans and native Americans, due to poor diet and too much sun, were regarded less evolved, ‘inferior races’” (Heraclides & Dialla, 2015, p. 32). Besnier and Brownell write of a “scientific” experiment that was conducted at an “Anthropological Day” in 1904 in Chicago which showcased “athletic performances of ‘savages’ at the fair” that were “recorded for comparison with those of ‘civilised men’ in the Olympic Games” (Brownell, 2008a in Besnier & Brownell, 2012, p. 445). Linked with the progress of modernity, it is not a far leap to link sport with the project of civilising of certain bodies as was evidenced in practices like muscular Christianity.

Sport is a performance of power and identity; and often, as I will show in the critical essays further on in the thesis, a performance to keep certain structures and people *in power* and certain “others” disempowered. Like Lennox and Crews, Besnier and Brownell posit that an analysis of sport is impossible without an analysis of modernity: “[...] the emergence of modernity” [...] “the concomitant ideological transformations of the body and self all figured centrally in the colonial project” (2012, p. 448). In the early anthropological studies of the 1900s, there was increased interest in “activities that seemed nonpurposeful” such as play; and that play, games and sport were positioned “along an evolutionary continuum from ‘savage’ to ‘civilised’” (Besnier & Brownell, 2012, p. 444). Understanding how sport and play are linked to our theme of bodies in play is critical in exposing the potential implicit violence in play in Flux Sport and my own past practice.

The civilising promise of sport, the liberating promise of play is still bought into today. Sports operate as a kind of “civil religion” (Henricks 2015, p. 177) and the play scholarship of the twentieth century is “largely the history of colonial or

subordinated peoples shedding their own folklife for imitations of the play identity of their conquerors” (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 96). Building upon this, Natasha Lushetich quotes Richard Giulianotti in the comparison of today’s sport practice with “the logic of, based on the notions of individualism, goal-oriented action, the work ethic, and the pairing of achieved results with success, and of success with virtue” (Lushetich, 2011, p. 31). She asserts that this proposes an image of sport as a “results-driven, goal-oriented, time-efficient, laborious-thus-virtuous, body-shaping (or body-building) activity far removed from playfulness” (Lushetich, 2011, p. 31). Connecting this with boxing, Lennox and Crews, in their narrative analysis of boxers, posit that boxers, through their “repetitive practices of the sport” invest, perhaps unknowingly or uncritically, in the civilising promise of the sport. The belief of the boxers that they examine here is the belief tied to the progressive project of modernity: If I practice hard enough the sport has the capacity to “refashion the individual, taming and controlling unsavoury behaviour, to produce a publicly recognised respectable citizen” (Lennox & Crews, 2020, p. 23). In these ways we can understand how sport was/is used (externally and internally) as a civilising tool.

The implicit racial violence in play scholarship is an under researched area. While sport (in comparison to play) can perhaps be seen more obviously as a civilising tool to control, dominate and civilise the Other, this practice research argues that play, too, can colonise and participates in violence. In her article “A more serious introduction: A critique of the inherent racism in early comparative play theory” (2021), Anna Beresin locates the violence in Huizinga’s text where play was aligned with “the savage”: “In this sphere of sacred play, the child and the poet are at home with the savage” (Huizinga, 1949, p. 26 and in Beresin, 2021, p. 135). She continues: “[...] anthropology, sociology, psychology – all emerge from the comparativist colonial tradition rooted in slavery and colonialism” (2021, p. 136). Again, which

bodies are doing the scholarship for whom? As monumental sculptures fall around us, like the Cecil John Rhodes<sup>27</sup> statue in Cape Town that instigated the #feesmustfall student movement, Beresin asks: “The question emerges, what will we do with the monumentally compromised history of our [play] scholarship?” (2021, p. 136). This practice research is not about contesting these theories in and of themselves or painting the above-mentioned White male researchers as violent, evil White men. Rather, it is about locating the violence of their colonial practices of othering, *how* the theories of play emerged so as to not perpetuate this further. By doing this, the research also moves towards creating new language for play scholarship, for us to use when we speak about play in relation to ambiguity, privilege, bodies and violence in “post”-apartheid/“post”-colonial contexts.

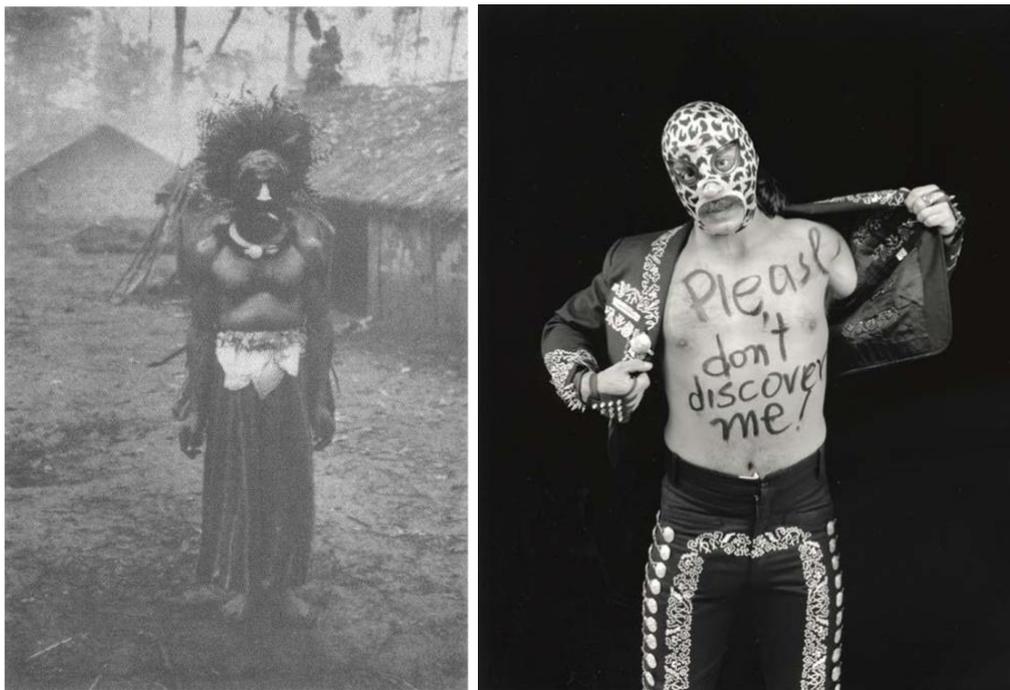


Figure 2 and 3: ‘A highlands Papua New Guinea man takes a break from dancing (see chapter 4, ‘From ritual to theater and back: the efficacy– entertainment braid’)’ (Schechner describing an image, 1988, n.p.). ‘Please don’t discover me!’ Work by Guillermo Gómez-Peña (1998), permission given by Walker Art Museum.

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<sup>27</sup> Cecil John Rhodes was a racist and a staunch British Imperialist: “I contend that we are the first race in the world, and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race” (Rhodes, 2022).

Sometimes the conquered group refuses to play the “White man’s games” (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 98). Sutton-Smith calls this “the rhetoric of *counterludic identity*”, where the subordinated group has *used the colonial game* to assert their own power; the games were for *their* sake, not for the games’ sake, becoming “games for the vindication of the powerless” (Ibid.). Gomez-Peña’s subversive performance is a refusal to play the colonial game, but it is also a request, like Spivak’s, a long overdue demand for White audiences, practitioners, “holders of hegemonic discourse” and colonial practices to rather look back and “discover” themselves, to see *themselves* as strange, to develop a practice of seeing *otherly* (Spivak, 1990, p. 121).

In the first Steve Biko memorial lecture “Iph’ Indlela? Finding our way into the future” (2000) Cape Town professor and fiction writer, Njabulo S. Ndebele writes about the potential and power that the White body has – the White body<sup>28</sup> “is a beneficiary of the protectiveness assured by international Whiteness” and, so he states, “it has an opportunity to write a new chapter in world history” [...] “Putting itself at risk, it will have to declare that it is home now, sharing in the vulnerability of other compatriot bodies” (2000, p. 53). He continues:

[...] the quest for a new White humanity will begin to emerge from a voluntary engagement, by those caught in the culture of Whiteness of their own making, with the ethical and moral implications of being situated at the interface between inherited, problematic privilege, on the one hand, and on the other, the blinding sterility at the center of the ‘heart of Whiteness’ (2000, p. 46–47).

This writing engages the complicated nature of being “caught in the culture of Whiteness” of my own making, my own privilege and its relation to existing power

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<sup>28</sup> Even here, writing about my White body on the same page as Steve Biko’s body feels strange, uneasy, out of place. I realize I am focusing on the act of writing (the White narrative), but I cannot escape the original query: will all the White people in the room please be quiet now and listen or what is it that you really want to say here and why should we listen?

structures (Ibid.). In this process of reflexing and fluxing the self, the practice research acknowledges the power of ubuntu and I-Thou relations. However, this practice research argues that if I want to develop anti-racist positionality in play, ambidlala celebrates Gomez-Peña's subversive performances as trickster tactics, but also locates and interrogates practices that are operating in play like trickster as metaphor, like slippery ambiguity as sometimes evidenced in its passive state of indifference as the "all-too-familiar and clichéd rhetoric of nonsubstantiality, instability and indetermination" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 272). Lorde encourages us: "We must define our differences so that we may someday live beyond them, rather than change them" (Lorde, 2009, pp. 203–204).

Ambidlala is a methodology, a "sweaty concept" that has "come out of a bodily experience that is trying. The task is to stay with the difficulty, to keep exploring and exposing this difficulty" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 13). In engaging reflexivity *and* fluxing the self, I am exploring and exposing these difficulties. Feminist teacher and author bell hooks writes, and I paraphrase her words, that the "process of repositioning has the power to deconstruct practices of racism" and is a "critical intervention" that then ...

... allows for the recognition that progressive White people who are anti-racist might be able to understand the way in which their cultural practice reinscribes White supremacy without promoting paralyzing guilt or denial (hooks, 2015, p. 177–178).

This "critical intervention" in the White imagination has inspired the method of reflexivity – that which acknowledges the dangers of "paralyzing guilt" and looks to both reflexivity and fluxing as an interconnected practice for play (Ibid.). At the heart of this research is the act of turning the observation back on myself as the eternal tourist, to turn our "talent[s] for observation" back *on ourselves* as White people, as eternally strange so as to develop a new way of seeing *otherly* in play (Garner, 1983, p. 72).

## Chapter 3: Methodology

An understanding of the multilayered nonlinearity of this methodology is critical for this practice research. As such, there are many components that make up this chapter. The chapter will explain my particular use of practice research and the terminology used within, and briefly describe the practices and outline each in a table for easy reference. I will then explain (and critique) the methods used in this practice research project: semi-structured interviews, autoethnography and as sub-themes, reflexivity and vulnerability and how these function in tandem with the practice research output.

### 3.1. Practice research as method

Practice research as method is central to understanding this PhD. For theoretical and methodological guidance on practice research, I draw on Robin Nelson (2013) and, for a more up-to-date approach, James Bully and Özden Şahin's report on practice research (2021). In this report, they define practice research as a kind of research where the practice, which could be a combination of performance documentation and writing, is the "the significant method conveyed in a research output" and that "practice research enables researchers to share the ways of knowing that emerge in practice" (Bully & Şahin, 2021, p. 4). For clarity, this practice research uses two main descriptive terms and their application that they have outlined:

1. Practice (by way of documentation): In this thesis, the primary function of these photographs and videos is to evidence and contextualise the project and add to the felt embodied experience of reading the practice

research output, i.e. they do not and cannot function in isolation as art works in and of themselves.<sup>29</sup>

1. *Boxing Games* video (2007), photos, kin:be:jozi blog.
  2. Revisiting of Practice 1: video (2019), photos, writing.
  3. Photos of Wellcome Trust workshops (2020), writing.
2. Practice Research Output: This can be seen as the “main course” of the thesis, where through autoethnography and performative writing and the support of the practices, i.e. the documentation, the practice research output demonstrates how the practice is the significant method of the research. On the PRAG UK (Practice Research Advisory Group UK) it states that the output “[...] is the way in which the piece of creative work finds (or invents) the appropriate formal embodiment for the research questions it raises” (PRAG, 2022). Considering the hindering conditions such as the level of crime in Hillbrow and the COVID19 pandemic, other possible outputs (on-site performance, film, etc.) were not possible. Thus, the most “appropriate formal embodiment” for me in this practice research, is the weaving of all of the material from the interviews and autoethnographic writing together, resulting in “The Practice on the Page”, the polyvocal autoethnographic text.

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<sup>29</sup> Aware of Peggy Phelan’s argument that “[P]erformance’s only life is in the present” and that performance “becomes itself through disappearance” (1993, p. 146), this practice research is not concerned with what is or is not a performance, and whether these photos are, or are not, a performance.

Practice research is about iterative processes, linking practice to power structures with a desire to improve practice. For Cotterrell, practice research is “about actually trying to reveal something of the intention and the search, as much as describing the result” (Cotterrell in Bulley & Şahin, 2021, p. 5). For performance theorist and researcher Ben Spatz, practice research is “understanding your practice in terms of its knowledge structures” (Spatz in Bulley & Şahin, 2021, p. 5). Practice researcher and social worker Claudia Bernard adds that “practice research can also be about improving practice” (Bernard in Bulley & Şahin, 2021, p. 6). These three selected understandings resonate strongly with the practice research output, “The Practice on the Page”, revealing “something of the intention and the search”, the critical essays following the practice research output then explore the themes that emerged from this search as departure points and, through performative writing, link them to existing “knowledge structures” in the critical essays. Finally, through engaging in reflexivity and critical examination of my own practice, it seeks to “improve practice” (Ibid.).

Nelson makes explicit several terms “ways of knowing” in practice research: “liquid knowing”, “knowing how”, “knowing what” and “knowing that” (2013, pp. 52–60). The underlying notion of “liquid knowledge” runs throughout this practice research and is defined by performance artist Marina Abramovic as: “[...] knowledge ... comes from experience. I call this kind of experience ‘liquid knowledge’ ... It is something that runs through your system” (Abramovic in Nelson, 2013, p. 52). As is evidenced on my website, it is important to note in this thesis, that I have been a practising performance artist for over 15 years, resulting in a certain kind of “liquid knowing” from experience. I also associate this “liquid knowing” with the 14-year friendship I have with Prince and my life as a 41-year-old White South African. Nelson associates this liquid knowing with the “knowing how”: the procedural, embodied knowledge that comes with practice research. Following on

from this, Nelson locates the “knowing what” as the mid-process of practice research: how the researcher makes “the tacit know-how explicit” (2013, p. 58). In this thesis, this “mid-process” is evidenced in the practice research output and, engaging deep reflexivity, embodies the search for new knowledge in this practice research. The critical essays that follow the practice research output (that evidence the “knowing how” and “knowing what”), exemplify what Nelson calls the “knowing that”, i.e. referring to external knowledge structures or critical frameworks (Nelson, 2013, p. 60).<sup>30</sup>

### 3.2 Table and outline of practices

For ease of reference at this point in the thesis, I have categorised each practice in a table which outlines each practice, my motivation and role within each, the methods I adopted, and data collected, the final analysis of this data located in the practice research output, but also in the critical essays that make up the rest of this thesis. Below, I briefly describe each practice and, thereafter, explain the methods used.

**TABLE OF PRACTICES**

	<b>PRACTICE 1 BOXING GAMES 2007</b>	<b>PRACTICE 2 BOXING GAMES 2019</b>	<b>PRACTICE 3 BOXING GAMES 2020</b>	<b>PRACTICE RESEARCH OUTPUT The Practice on the Page</b>
<b>WHY? EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL MOTIVATIONS</b>	Responding to residency as commissioned artist in residence. To connect and learn from people different	PhD research for Northumbria Uni. To revisit and learn about what I did there, what happened, to potentially repair. To	Hired as a play facilitator, responding to a brief – my client being the Wellcome Trust. To test out Boxing Games in this	To engage the research questions. To retell the story of Boxing Games anew with many different voices as opposed to one.

<sup>30</sup> For this thesis it may be helpful to consider my “liquid knowing”, my “know how” as a trickster method which I associate with *fluxing*. This trickster method/fluxing which, upon returning to my work that I made before this thesis and engaging reflexivity, has been critiqued, resulting in the “knowing what” (*what* happened there?) to illuminate new insights, i.e. new methods for play: the “knowing that” in the academy (Nelson, 2013, p. 58–60).

	<p>to me. To learn through doing, listening, playing. To create something meaningful together through play, that was not just about winning.</p> <p>Important: Practice 1 <i>Boxing Games</i> (2007), was a performance work created for an artistic residency which I am reflecting on in this PhD thesis. The rooftop performance of <i>Boxing Games</i> (2007), which can be seen in the last part of the video of <i>Boxing Games</i> (2007), is not under discussion for this PhD thesis.</p>	<p>interview Prince and past and present players. To break the single story. To learn through doing, listening, playing. To learn about vulnerability, power, and privilege in relation to my body in that space.</p>	<p>space with weekend festival attendees. To learn through doing, listening, playing. To share knowledge in a research environment. To engage people in thinking about play and power.</p>	<p>To make visible and heard what was not heard before. To practice reflexivity. To reflect and reflex on the three practices. To make visible the felt experience of practices 1, 2 and 3 on the page in this thesis. To contextualise practice. To connect the practice with power structures. To demonstrate what ambidlala and <i>refluxivity</i> might look and feel like.</p>
ROLE, DURATION	Artist, three weeks training, Two performances.	Researcher-practitioner Four visits and re-enactments.	Facilitator Researcher Two one-hour workshops.	PhD student, co-author.
CONTEXT (WHERE)	Boxing Gym, Hillbrow, Johannesburg.	Boxing Gym, Hillbrow, Johannesburg.	Wellcome Trust, London.	Gateshead, U.K and Johannesburg, South Africa.
METHODS ADOPTED	Participant, artist, learner/trainee, <del>observer</del> practitioner. Iterative process. Performing as a way of knowing: “knowing how” the procedural, embodied	Participant observer, autoethnography , semi-structured interviews. Autoethnographic writing after the practice, critical reflexivity:	Participant observer, autoethnography. Autoethnographic writing after the practice, critical reflexivity: “knowing what” the mid-process (Nelson, 2013, p. 58) and “knowing	Creative Analytical Practice polyvocal autoethnography.

	knowledge (Nelson, 2013, p. 58).	“knowing what” the mid-process (Nelson, 2013, p. 58) and “knowing that”. referring to critical frameworks (Nelson, 2013, p. 60).	that” referring to critical frameworks (Nelson, 2013, p. 60).	
DATA	Video and photos, my writings, website, blog.	Three interviews with three participants from 2007 practice, interview with boxers from 2019 practice, photos, videos, reflective writing, website.	Photos, email correspondence, reflective writing, website.	Field notes, recordings, participant-observer notes, free writing before, during and after practices, kin:be:jozi blog. The interviews. Mbesta Reeds’ writing. I also drew on the rest of the data from practices 1, 2 and 3.

### Outline of practices 1, 2 and 3

The first iteration of *Boxing Games* (2007), explained in the introduction, will be our main focus for this thesis. Practice 1 was recorded with a blog, photos, my writings from the time and a video documenting the process and the final performance. These documents, in collaboration with my memory and the interviews, have assisted me in creating the autoethnographic writing for Practice 1. Since the first day I walked into Prince’s gym, we have remained close and have worked on several other projects together over the course of these 14 years. As Ellis notes, there is no “leaving the field” in a “friendship-as-method” approach<sup>31</sup> (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015, p. 61).

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<sup>31</sup> I need to acknowledge the discomfort I feel in saying our friendship is some kind of ‘method’, used for another goal, however it is equally necessary to acknowledge the fact that returning to the gym as a researcher brings with it different methods.

Upon starting this practice research PhD, Practice 2 involved me revisiting the gym in Johannesburg, conducting three semi-structured interviews and playing the boxing game again with three of Prince's boxers. Practice 2 was unfortunately cut short because during the interview with Prince, there was an incident with three young men and a gun, and I was fearful for my safety. Despite this, in fact in gratitude for this, this practice revealed new insights about my positionality in relation to notions of bodies, race, gender, status, privilege and power – things that I was blind to in practice 13 years earlier. This, in turn led me to look inward, and autoethnography became an incredibly helpful tool which, through purposeful vulnerability, brought forth new insights. The practice was recorded with photos, videos and my own writing.

In Practice 3, I shifted gear to that of the play facilitator, where I led two workshops: experiential products designed for participants' to find out "what play is to them" in 60 minutes, as part of the Wellcome Trust's "Play Well" weekend festival in London, February 2020. The two workshops included a short talk, the playing of the boxing game in combination with two improvisational theatre games and a discussion thereafter. The practice was recorded with photos, videos, audio recordings and my own writing. The primary methods used for all of these practices was writing before, during and after. I wanted to notice the experience of myself playing the *Boxing Game* in this context and compare it to my experience of the *Boxing Game* in Johannesburg. Again, it is important to note that this practice research is not about the participant's individual experiences of play; however I do include some of their comments in the practice research output that, I feel, speak to the research inquiries. Practically, this third practice in combination with this thesis serves the dual function in demonstrating my shift from pure practitioner to practice researcher and as an exercise in disseminating my practice research in a research context. In other words, the Wellcome Trust itself being an institution of research in health and humanities

areas, with a festival dedicated to exploring play, I felt, was a space more conducive to sharing research, than, for example, in Prince's Boxing Club.

### The practice research output: The practice on the page

The piece of Creative Analytical Practice writing weaves together all the written data: writing, interviews, photos and senses, smells and sounds, etc. from all of the practices into one polyvocal autoethnographic text. In discussing “the performative turn” in anthropological studies, performance studies scholar and ethnographer Dwight Conquergood (1989) writes about a shift – a “commitment to process”– over measurable scientific product:

Instead of pinning down concepts, researchers attempt to listen over time to the unfolding voices, nuances, and intonations of performed meaning. This process-centered way of thinking and talking about culture alerts ethnographers to the irreducible and evanescent dynamics of social life – all the forces that resist closure (1989, p. 82–83).

He asks: “What are the performative resources for interrupting master scripts?” (1989, p. 84). To further flux and interrupt my own voice and accounts of practices 1, 2 and 3, I also commissioned Prince's cousin Mbesta Reeds to interview Prince in Zulu, where he asked Prince questions about Practice 1 (2007) and Practice 2 (2019). I also include voices from the Wellcome Trust workshop in discussing themes of power. To be clear, their voices are not only there to interrupt my narrative. They are critical to understanding the complexity and intersectionality, the many interweaving and interconnected layers that this practice research encompasses.

Below I explain the methods, why I chose them and how they assisted me in articulating the research inquiries. After this, you will engage practices 1, 2 and 3 by way of documentation and then read the practice research output.

### 3.3 Methods

This three-year practice research project has been an iterative reflexive trickster and magpie-esque journey, highlighting “interdisciplinarity in its inquiry” (Nelson, 2013, p. 27, p. 49). Trickster methods are aligned with qualitative methods, where instead of “privileging a single method or approach to the practice of inquiry”, researchers become more like “bricoleurs” and “shape shifters”, adopting different roles and using whatever frameworks, strategies and techniques appropriate for “the ever-changing exigencies of the research context, and the shifting praxis goals [...]” (Kamberelis, 2003, p. 675). Thus, this practice research has not been a linear process and is not about “deep mining” one specific area, but rather adopts a magpie-esque approach, *resonating* with many methods and theories.

Nelson’s suggestion of the use of the word “resonance” has assisted me in “connecting the dots” and making sense of this magpie-esque approach. In engaging relations between “different modes of knowing” that, according to Nelson’s model, are not so much about being “subject to commensurate criteria of validity but which might affirm each other by way of *resonance*” (my italics, Nelson, 2013, p. 58). Resonating with several (mostly anti-racist, feminist and performance studies) theories, participants’ stories and memories, it is more like a non-hierarchical, non-linear, interconnected web; a magpie-like play of ideas that engage “multiperspectival, interdisciplinary readings rather than full exploration of a narrow and highly specialist database” (Nelson, 2013, p. 54). As such, this research process has revealed to me that it is impossible to home in narrowly on *one* area or one theme as they are all interconnected. However, for clarity, while trying to follow the rules of the suggested segregated sections of the PhD: introduction, methodology, literature review, etc., rather, each chapter in this thesis critically engages a theme that emerged from the

practices' research output: those of ambiguity, privilege and bodies as they relate to implicit violence in play, and like the magpie, offers an important gift to the nest of knowledge formation.

### 3.4. Interviews as “Material” for the polyvocal text

In my 2007 master's thesis, my 26-year-old self writes:

The work *Boxing Games* (2007) changed the rules of boxing *with other boxers*. In Johannesburg 2007, upon walking back to the studio one day from an outing as part of the kin:be:jozi residency project, I came upon Prince Khosi's boxing ring. The boxing ring is a safe haven for children and adults in Hillbrow – quite a dangerous part of Johannesburg. I walked in and struck up a conversation with champion boxer Prince Khosi. I told him that I was an artist who worked with performance, what the project was about and that I would like to learn how to box with the intention of the project possibly developing into a new kind of game/performance. We agreed upon the rules of working together: time spent, compensation, documentation, etc. And then, for two weeks I trained with Prince, learned the rules of boxing and worked, played and fought with the other boxers. After this time of training together we, (the boxers and I) decided to change the rules of boxing, [...].

Written 14 years ago for my master's thesis, there was only one voice: my own. Madison writes: “When the gaze is on one's own navel one cannot see the ground upon which one stands or significant others standing nearby” (2006, p. 321). To see this as a “teachable moment”<sup>32</sup> and not repeat this, I conducted several interviews to include more voices and tell a different story. I interviewed Dan (my fellow trainee) and Katja (the other resident artist from Switzerland) in 2019 about the 2007 practice. I also interviewed my family and the community that I grew up with. Prince was formally interviewed three times: in 2019, in 2021 by Mbesta Reeds (explained below) and informally when I returned to South Africa to share the final research with him in

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<sup>32</sup> Mitchell refers to Barack Obama's teachable moments as an invocation to “identify events and episodes that offer themselves up for teaching and learning” (Mitchell, 2012, p. 1 & 7).

2021–2022. The process has been a back-and-forth generative one, where he has had opportunity to discuss with me at any point along the way.

The interview techniques adopted were that of the semi-structured and interactive interview. The semi-structured interview is a “hybrid method” where the questions can flow from fully formed interview questions to more theoretically driven questions as the interview occurs. The interview “allows for considerable reciprocity between the participant and the researcher”, where both can ask one another for clarification to enhance meaning-making (Galletta, 2013, p. 24). The semi-structured interactive interview consists of an interaction “in which researchers and participants share personal/cultural experiences and tell (and perhaps write) their stories in the context of their relationship” (Adams et al., p.55). This was relevant in the sense that Prince and I have a 14-year relationship and we discussed many things before, during and after the interview.

I have also included excerpts from a final interview with Prince reflecting on Practice 1 (2007) and Practice 2 (2019), conducted by Mbesta Reeds, Prince’s cousin. In reflecting on both of the practices, Mbesta in a sense, became Prince’s pen. Reeds, who is a writer and lives with Prince, had sent me some writing to look over for feedback. Seeing this as a possibly generative experience for all of us, with the support of the university, I commissioned Mbesta to interview Prince in Zulu, transcribe it and rewrite it in English. These interviews gave me strands of material memory of these different voices with which I attempted to weave a new story evocative of the time. Interested in the complexity and overlapping nature of stories, the inclusion of many voices is an important decision to not tell “the single story” (Adichie, 2009). Nelson advocates for this fluid weaving together of “fragmented persona”, saying that:

Rather than representing the world and its inhabitants in a representational model analogous to that of traditional science, the presentation of fragmented persona in fluid environments literally plays out **a new way of seeing**, illustrating another link between a conceptual framework and praxis (my highlights, Nelson, 2013, p. 55).

Through the use of Creative Analytical Practice, i.e. autoethnography and performative writing, the practice research output weaves all these fragments of memories together not only to break and complicate my own narrative, but to further illustrate this link between the written component, “conceptual framework and praxis” in the re-imagining of trickster and fluxing in play (Ibid). The fragmentation also serves to break or deconstruct the space of comfort in the single story, offering up previously unexamined themes in play for deeper investigation.

Finally, it was important to me that this research not only include many voices, but also for Prince and Mbesta to be financially compensated, both of whom were paid for their time. Upon returning to the gym in late 2021, it was incredibly heartwarming for me to see that Prince had put up mirrors in his gym and had started a takeaway kitchen at the back – a secondary source of income, such additions made possible through the financial contribution from Northumbria University.<sup>33</sup>

### **3.5 Autoethnography: Reflexivity and vulnerability**

“The term autoethnography involves the *self* (auto), *culture* (ethno) and *writing* (graphy)” (Adams et al., 2015, p. 46). It is an “inside out” process and practice, a process of looking inward – our thoughts, feelings, experiences, and identities – “and *outward* – into our relationships, communities and cultures” and, as researchers, taking people on this journey (Ibid). Autoethnography “is reflexive and positions the

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<sup>33</sup> I write this in full awareness of Zizek’s notion of the violence of the liberal communist: “Charity is the humanitarian mask hiding the face of economic exploitation” (Zizek 2010, p. 19). It may indeed be argued that this thesis participates in this violence.

researcher within the study, in that the author of an autoethnography is both subject and researcher” (Coffey, 2002 in Lapadat 2017, p. 589). For Tami Spry, autoethnography is a form of “self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (2001, p. 710). I use this “situatedness of self with others in social contexts” as a critical departure point in the practice research output (Ibid.).

Brett Smith and Andrew Sparkes (2020) have written extensively about the accessibility of Creative Analytical Practice and the usefulness of adopting the methods of creative non-fiction, storytelling and evocative autoethnography to tell interesting and captivating stories about data. Adams et al. (2015) argue that “[S]uch techniques make research more *valuable* because more than a select and trained few will read the work” (2015, p. 42). This speaks to my approach in this practice research. I wanted the writing to be accessible to those who participated in the research, namely Prince, but also others who I interviewed.

The autoethnographic method is not an easy one and exists, indeed functions in, as and with performance as struggle. It is worth taking note of the challenges of this approach in adopting this “self-revealing text” (Sparkes, 2020, p. 291). Most autoethnography, the main method used in this practice research, involves the sole researcher often as the only writer of the text. I am wary and weary of the cliché of the White woman telling her story, of the White woman savior complex, of centering Whiteness.<sup>34</sup> “Speaking for Others” or for the self is a contentious issue as Linda Alcoff argues in her text, “The Problem of Speaking for Others” (1991–1992). While the problematics of speaking *for* others is quite obvious in terms of perpetuating violent and imperialist practice, in choosing *not* to speak for others, i.e. only to tell my

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<sup>34</sup> Additionally, and here I would like to be explicit, the problems I face because of my skin condition do not in any way compare to the past and continued violence perpetrated onto Black bodies. However, this practice research PhD has forced me to examine the inner workings of my performance practice.

own story, she argues, is equally problematic. She sees this as a “retreat”, as an act of “abandoning my political responsibility to speak out against oppression, a responsibility incurred by the very fact of my privilege?” Is it best then that I just “move over and get out the way?” (1991–1992, p. 8).<sup>35</sup> This practice research heeds Alcott’s advice and strives, as it has done over these years, “to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others” (my highlights, 1991–1992, p. 23). Only speaking about my experience is a form of privileged comfort, however ignoring my body as part of the material that makes up the practice would also be a privileged act of making Whiteness and with it privilege and power invisible as was the case in Practice 1.<sup>36</sup>

Using autoethnography has meant that I needed to wrestle with problems to do with power, voice, representation, ethics and subjectivity on a regular basis (Sparkes & Smith, 2020). I would add to this list, vulnerability, as I have found this process an incredibly revealing and tender one. In sum, I connect all of this, that is: struggle, vulnerability, wrestling with power, voice and responsibility to the word: *reflexivity*. Thus, autoethnography is essentially a *reflexive* process where you sit and write with uncertainty, where you are turning yourself inside out and becoming vulnerable (something my past self and none of the play or performance studies scholars, at least those that I have referenced, did in our writing).

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<sup>35</sup> In the spirit of play perhaps “sense-making” is the revealing of “non-sense making” process, where psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1976) asserts the ability to sit with nonsense in play is necessary for any kind of sense to emerge.

<sup>36</sup> This is an issue that is dealt with in two articles where Luke Buckland (2018) in his article “Learning to live in this strange place” critically engages Samantha Vice’s “How do I live in this strange place” (2010). While the former author advises that White South Africans “ought to feel shame” and “engage with humility and political silence in projects of personal transformation though private, critical self-examination” (Buckland, 2018, p. 144) the latter provides actionable “recommendations” that *do not* involve remaining in silence.

Be Ground.  
Be crumbled, so wildflowers will come up where you are.  
You've been stony for too many years.  
Try something different.  
Surrender.  
— Jalaluddin Rumi  
(Moys, 2020)

This vulnerability, however, has to take us somewhere. “The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake” (Behar in Adams et al., 2015, p. 40). Reflexivity is a critical and very important component in this practice research. If autoethnography is reflexive (Coffey, 2002 in Lapadat 2017, p. 589), and if reflexivity is one of the main components of the method of reflexivity and the methodology of ambidlala, it is important to define what I mean when I speak of reflexivity. Furthermore, its use is essential as a point of reference as linked to violence: something the writers of play did not do; engage in reflexivity and turn the gaze back on themselves. Madison (2006, 2011) emphasises the labour of reflexivity as a critical exercise in autoethnography where the researcher retreats “inward to contemplate *how* she or he is contemplating actions and meaning” (Madison, 2011, p. 129). Drawing on hauntology, Katy Shaw writes: “The critical practice of hauntology turns to the past to make sense of the present, to understand how we got to this place and how to build a better future” (Shaw, 2018, p. 3). She contends that this looking back is not a passive but an active act: “[...] a call for responsibility” (Shaw, 2016, p. 11). Similarly, reflexivity for queer performance studies scholar Bernadette Calafell (2013) refers to “an intersectional critique, an illumination of power and acknowledging one’s responsibility in all of this” (2013,

p. 6–7).<sup>37</sup> In her text, Calafell refers to Richard G. Jones (2010), who sees reflexivity as being a kind of labour, and it is worth quoting in full here as I see it as a guide for the autoethnographic writing in the practice research output:

Part of telling my story means first being reflexive regarding my intersecting identities, and to acknowledge the disadvantages and privileges that come with them ... Self-reflection might scratch the surface, but self-reflexivity cuts to the bone. It implicates you. Reflexivity is uncomfortable because it forces you to acknowledge that you are complicit in the perpetuation of oppression ... Reflexivity has got to hurt. Reflexivity is laborious (Jones in Calafell, 2013, p. 10).

Similarly, for Madison, reflexivity is an act of labour. At the heart of Madison's text "The Labor of Reflexivity" (2011) is her investigation into what happens *after* we have done the labour of reflexivity and "how the 'the self-reference' can actually be employed, can actually labour, even be productively exploited, for the benefit of larger numbers than just ourselves" (2011, p. 129). She is searching for the lasting ripple effects of reflexivity, is querying "why the self-reference matters" and "what the self-reference does to matter" in "searching for the labor of self-reflexivity that will lead us to a band of Others [...]" (2011, p. 129). This search for the lasting ripple, these questions are critical to this practice research. In the ambidlala methodology, *refluxivity* is this lasting ripple for me, a reflexive process bringing me closer to "a band of Others [...]" (Ibid.).

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<sup>37</sup> As preface to the next section, this "labour of reflexivity" is for those in the minority in the world, i.e. this process is FOR the privileged not for those, the majority of the human race, who are, and continue to be, challenged by socio-economic factors.

## Engaging the Practices

You will now turn to the practice by way of the documentation as it is present on my website: [www.anthemoys.com/](http://www.anthemoys.com/) after which you will read the practice research output below. When on my website home page, scroll down to the bottom and click on “Practice Research PhD”. From there you will be able to familiarise yourself with the documentation of the practices: Practice 1: the video of the *Boxing Games* (2007) needs to be watched first. Following this you can then view Practice 2 and Practice 3. These documents should give you sensory reference points that you can return to, if necessary, when reading the practice research output: “The Practice on the Page”. After you have engaged the documentation of the practices on the website and read the practice research output, I suggest a break from the thesis to let the sensory experience seep in before reading the rest of the thesis. Go for a run. Take a nap. Have a cup of tea.

Link to website: [www.anthemoys.com](http://www.anthemoys.com)

Link to practice research page: <https://www.anthemoys.com/phd>

## Chapter 4: “The Practice on the Page”

### 4.1 Introduction

Returning to my research questions as a guide:

- How has my performance practice been complicit with the violence of apartheid?
- How or in what ways is the ambiguity of play potentially violent?
- What is the relationship between reflexivity and fluxing in play and how can this be developed as a practice for anti-racist play?

This chapter is the practice research output and as such is at the heart of this practice research PhD. As the title “The Practice on the Page” suggests, this chapter aims to make explicit my “know-how”, the tacit, intuitive and raw vulnerability of the practices. Through Creative Analytical Practices of autoethnography and performative writing the chapter engages each of these research questions, showing how the three themes of ambiguity, privilege and bodies as they relate to implicit violence in play emerged. In these ways, the chapter embodies the search for new knowledge, showing how ambidlala and its method of reflexivity came about.

In engaging the third research question, the chapter explores the tension between reflexivity and fluxing. Madison is searching for “what the self-reference does to matter” in “searching for the labor of self-reflexivity that will lead us to a band of Others [...]” (Madison, 2011, p. 129). The methodology of ambidlala is inspired by this search and this kind of performative writing seeks to reclaim the fluidity of fluxing, the trickster in play so as to bring us closer “to a band of Others” (Ibid.):

“[W]here situations seem to be locking into fixed positions, the fool uses the device of play [...]” to work with or flux the structures as “materials presented to him” (Prentki, 2012, p. 4). The “materials” that I have worked with to create this output are the rules of standard academic writing, the interviews, Reeds’ writings (2020) and my own autoethnographic writing. In an attempt to always situate the practice to external structures, I use performative writing to interrupt/flux my narrative with Ahmed’s words (2007; 2010; 2017). I do this not only to interrupt and flux the power of the solo voice, but also to look upon myself as not “just playing”, always connected to power, not neutral, and in line with the concept of seeing *otherly* in play, as *strange*. In these ways, this work engages plurality in reflexing the White self and, at the same time seeks to privilege these other voices and bodies in play, creating more complex and nuanced stories.

Finally, the writing aims to contextualise the project, familiarise the reader with the contrasting environments within which the practices took place, but also how it was made through my eyes and through the eyes of some of the key players involved. Performance writing occupies a space “where tensions are felt and uncovered”, where the personal converses with the political (Pelias, 2009, p. 420). For Phelan, performative writing does not need to be autobiographical, but rather “needs to ‘enact’ something that cannot be carried by exposition alone” (Phelan, 1995, p. 186). The writing aims “to dwell within multiple perspectives, to celebrate an interplay of voices, to privilege dialogue” and celebrates “the fragmentary, the uncertain” (Pelias, 2009, p. 419). Inspired by this, the methodology of ambidlala looks to the bodies in play and draws on these voices as “a potent database for understanding the political and that hegemonic systems write on individual bodies” (Pelias, 2009, p. 420). Fluxing the self, therefore, brings us closer “to a band of Others [...]” (Madison, 2011, p. 129). In engaging the research questions, working with the data as material, i.e. the interviews,

Reeds' writing and my own autoethnographic writings, the polyvocal performative text draws on this "potent database" resulting in a weaving in and out of different time periods, an interruptive chorus of many voices, of love, sweat, skin, burning tires and many fires.

The chapter asks you the reader to go on a journey with me, with us, in an exploration of violence and ambiguous play in an apartheid and "post"-apartheid South Africa, returning again to Regan's request for settler stories that embrace the duality "colonizer-perpetrators and colonizer-allies" (Regan, 2010 in Hunt & Holmes, 2015, p. 166) and author Chimamande Adichie's request for a diversity of stories:

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity (Adichie, 2009).

Note: To assist the reader, I have used different fonts for different voices:

- Apartheid Childhood & Teenage self (1980s) in Courier New.
- Post-apartheid self (1994–2019) past self in Tahoma.
- Mother in Baskerville.
- The PhD Candidate writing this thesis (2019 – 2022) in Times New Roman.
- *In Athelas Italic: Sara Ahmed.*
- Prince in Calibri Light.
- Mbesta Reeds (Prince's cousin) in Helvetica.
- Silo (boxer at Prince's gym, 2019) in Bookman Old Style.
- Dan (boxing participant 2007) in Monaco.
- Katja (boxing participant 2007) in Consolas.

## 4.2: The Practice on the Page: Hillbrow and Hillcrest: Sanctuaries for Play

### HILLBROW, 2019

“What the fuck?!” I shout at my phone screen, as the third Uber cancels on me. I breathe in and out trying to remain calm, but secretly inside I start to get worried: what if I can’t get home? What if my folks have to come and pick me up? What if *they* get hijacked? On the next and final attempt, I message the driver frantically before he has a chance to cancel: “Hi! Please don’t cancel on me! All the drivers have cancelled on me! I am begging you.” He replies he is on his way. Even though Prince waits with me, I still feel a bit nervous waiting there outside of the safe space of the gym. I wait there with him, pretending I’m totally cool, I’m fiiiiine, all good!

The Uber arrives, I hop in, and he drives away speedily, I look back at Prince and we wave to each other as we always do until we are both out of sight.

“Yoh!” the driver looks at me incredulously with a nervous smile, eyebrows raised. “This area is not good for a White girl! What are you doing here?!” I explain that I am visiting an old friend at a boxing club and doing a project there. I thank him again for coming to collect me.

Hillbrow: not the easiest place to walk in for an “umlungu<sup>38</sup>”, a White person and, for that matter, a White *female* person. In the Aljezeera documentary film about Hillbrow *Between Heaven and Hell* (2012) a DJ at Hillbrow’s Flamingo Club comments: “There’s a belief that when you see a Whitie you know there’s money,” he

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<sup>38</sup> Translates to ‘White person’ in Zulu.

says, explaining that White people are often the victims of violence as a result. In the time of Apartheid, pre-1994, Hillbrow was a very wealthy area. After the 1994 elections, Hillbrow became the epicenter for people in Africa, as all the White people (including my grandparents and their daughter, my mother) left the area, Hillbrow became the “melting pot” of Africa – the place you could escape hardship in your own country and start over in another. Despite the terrible xenophobic attacks in 2008 and 2019, this is still the case in Hillbrow with people from all over Africa – Zimbabwe, Malawi, the DRC and Nigeria making Hillbrow their home. Over the years, the area has been largely forgotten and slowly and sadly has degenerated into one of the most dangerous areas in Johannesburg.

“It’s much too risky during this time, yoh!” the Uber driver says to me. “You must be careful! You see all the criminals are doing their Christmas shopping, you see?!” he laughs nervously and I remember the typical Jo’burg driver survival practice: the engine revving at any stopping period, always in first gear and ready to go, adopting 360 vision with eyes in the back of his head, watching out for any possible hijacking attempts from any side of the vehicle, “But because you asked so nicely, I came”. I said I was so grateful and thanked him again as he, an angel in an Uber, drove me home to Craighall Park. I’m fiiiine. I’m good! I tell myself. But there is a reason why I am not. I am angry at myself that I am *not* feeling fine, brave and content. I *used to* be so... confident in this place. What has happened here?

*Two hours earlier...*

I have not seen Prince in over a year. This is my first day back at the gym. Taxis are speeding past down Claim Street, a group of school kids peer in at me through the fence as they walk past on the street. Besides the man selling sweets and fruits at the entrance and the table we are sitting at, not much has changed. We break apart the chicken and stuff it into some rolls as we catch up. He informs me of the new developments that are planned for the gym. I am thrilled – this is what he has been working on for so long now. Finally, some movement. I tell him about the project I am busy with, my life as a student again, and the revisiting of the *Boxing Games* project. After our lunch, I show him all the forms and explain their various functions. We have been communicating for some time now about it, so it is no surprise to him.

Moving inside the gym, he introduces me to Silo and two of the other boxers who regularly train every morning at the gym. He explains to them who I am and what I would like to do here and asks if they might want to play the boxing game? Surprisingly to me, they are familiar with the boxing game as Prince uses it often in his training sessions. They say they are interested in participating. Moving through the gym, making our way back out, he points up to a picture hanging above the door frame. I look up at the framed image of my 26-year-old self and Prince 13 years ago. Neither of us were looking into the camera but were intently focused primarily on the activity of Prince carefully wrapping my hands, making sure I am safe to train, to fight, to play.



Figure 4: Prince and me in his gym, standing below the picture of us from 14 years ago (2019).

“You are like family here! I have missed you,” Prince says, as we hug and make our way outside the gym to where the ring is. When Prince was growing up, he found boxing was something that he had a natural affinity for. His adoptive mother, a White lady, used to drop him in Brixton, a suburb in Johannesburg, for training. Blind in his right eye, an injured jaw which results in a slight slur in his speech, a limp in his step from an old injury in his leg, Prince’s body is a battlefield. An amateur boxer in South Africa, Prince ‘The Brick’ they call him, has been in many fights, but he has also literally had to *fight* for his life. In 1998, however, there was a robbery at the gym and he was dragged out, shot in the leg, pushed over a hill and left for dead. The next day, some street

children found him there, called for help and literally saved his life. Since then, Prince has dedicated his life, not only to training champion boxers, especially female boxers like Risa Mzuzi whom he trained since she was nine but also to creating a safe space, a sanctuary for children and women where they can come and play as well as learn how to protect themselves in the world.

“Here in this place [Hillbrow],” says Silo, one of the boxers who lives at the gym and helps Prince with the day-to-day, “it does not allow us to play. So that’s what Prince Khosi is doing here. He is the one who is making it easy to play in such a hard place to play in. [...] In Hillbrow you always work with fear. So, in Hillbrow you have to overcome your fear. If you can survive in Hillbrow I think there is no place that you can’t survive” (Silo, 2019).

“On the balcony.” My mom said, “My mother was going to jump from the balcony in our flat in Hillbrow. I think the block of flats was called Primrose Terrace” (Moys, D. 2021).

**Hillcrest: “The top line of a hill” (Mirriam-Webster, 2021), 1980s:**

“We were having a meeting about non-violent action in the rondavel” my mom remembers, where my mom used to hold her therapy practice, “when a ‘tap tap tap’ came at the window. There stood a six-year-old Joshua tapping his toy machine gun on the glass: “Come play mom!” (Moys, D. 2021).

The 1980s in South Africa was a time of increasing unprecedented civilian unrest, militarisation, state repression, economic crises and social change. The National Party responded aggressively to this unrest with cruel, coercive measures and unspeakable insidious casual violence. A State of Emergency was called, not once but many times and it felt like a civil war was on the horizon. It was a time, a decade before the 1994 elections, where few people believed that freedom would come without a violent and drawn-out revolution (Falkoff, 2016, p. 7). This was the context I was brought up in, in this “State of Emergency”, in apartheid South Africa and I was brought up in a community that fought as well as benefited from the system. This shaped me into who I am today. Cultural studies scholar Dr Nicky Falkoff (2016) in her book *The End of Whiteness*, quotes Frankenburg: “Any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses” (2016, p. 12). Because my family is White, this “system of differentiation”, this system of apartheid, allowed us to benefit from the system which is designed to support the growth and lives of White people while inhibiting, diminishing and making dispensable those of colour. This is the same system which brutalised and inflicted pain and violence on so many families: ripping them apart spatially, psychologically, physically, emotionally. My family could move freely in South Africa (but also in the world), unquestioned, without the risk of being asked if we had permission to be there or of being detained without trial. In these ways this is not a unique story of a White family in South Africa. However, this was not a single White family that spoke only to other White families. “They were intentionally confronting the realities of the time.” says Susie McGregor, Josie’s daughter, five years my senior who I grew up with, speaking of the adults who took care of us, “So, whereas a lot of other White families were blinkered and were kind of “don’t tell me because I don’t want to know”, this was: here the realities are,

and we can work towards changing it and making it different [...]” (McGregor, S. 2019).

The White adults that I grew up with were educated, protected, could vote and buy (stolen) land. In the early 1980s, wanting to live in community, share resources and childcare, my parents and two other White liberal activist families Josie and Marie, bought a plot of land together on the periphery of Johannesburg, which they referred to as Hillcrest or “the plot”. This former nursery, “Hillcrest,” was a sanctuary, a home to many animals and plants, four White families and the three Black families. The Black adults that I grew up with could not vote or buy property and lived and worked far away from their family. Together, they cared for the land, and they cared for each other. “The plot stood for community, safety for Mma Anne and Ingrid,” Marie writes, “a values-driven approach to living in a country under fire” (Brown, M. 2019). Everyone who lived on and visited this plot was involved in fighting apartheid through direct or indirect activism, be it the trauma counselling that my mom did at the fire station down the road or by working with the Black Sash<sup>39</sup> or the United Democratic Front<sup>40</sup> (UDF). “There was also a lot of laughter on the property, a lot of music, a lot of jokes. I remember a lot of tears as well. But it was all shared [...]” (McGregor, S. 2019). Care: a necessary practice in a time of brutal violence. Hillcrest became a sanctuary, a place where people could hide from the police and recuperate if needed.

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<sup>39</sup> Founded in 1955 the Black Sash was a human rights non-violent resistance organization for White women.

<sup>40</sup> The UDF was a non-racial alliance made up of approximately 400 civic, students’, church, women’s and various other affiliations. Several UDF meetings were held at the plot and often UDF members were taken in when they needed to hide from the police.

**“City Desired” conference, Town Hall, Cape Town, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2014:**

My imposter and I cough and take a sip of water, staring at the bright lights trapped in the low ceiling. This room is way too big. No table in front of me, just sitting here on a metal chair, my projected presentation to my left, I feel completely exposed. These staring eyes and notebooks on laps way too close ... breathe.

“The trickster is invested in creating new stories in the world.” I am talking about my work for a conference on imagining public art in cities. I continue: “In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* the author Paulo Freire defines praxis as reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed’ (1970, p. 126). However, Salinas observes praxis to be less directional and as “unstable, moving somewhat unpredictably through stages of theory and practice” and that similarly, Trickster’s embodied praxis is also unpredictable (Salinas, 2011, p. 144). I locate my praxis somewhere in between these two.

I breathe in and continue: “Aware of this contradiction between the potential that theatre has for imagining a new, more just world and the ambiguous fool who resists any easy solution is at the heart of Augusto Boal’s ‘Joker System’ that was developed as part of the Arena theatre in 1966.” Prof. Tim Prentki acknowledges that the Joker as a *character* is not actually what is important in this process, but that the label of the Joker is actually referring to an actual *function* (2012, p. 204). The function is to interrupt the game, question the rules, subvert and disrupt. Unfortunately, Prentki asserts, in the

work of many NGOs, Boal's original dream for the function of the Joker, the trickster as guardian of the generative uncertainty in the "space-between", has been relegated to that of solutions-oriented successes where the Joker is more helpful facilitator than ambiguous, shape-shifting fool (Ibid.)."

I finish reading my paper, breathe in and out. Look up.

"Thank you very much." A soft polite smattering of applause from 10 pairs of hands. "Are there any questions?"

A young White man, dressed in a suit that is a tad too small and tight for him, raises his hand. I can't remember what his question was, but he ends off by saying "Yeah, so I think you should really affiliate your project with UNESCO's organisation: 'Sport for Peace'. I think it would really be beneficial there."

I sigh. "Thank you," I say.

Another young Brown man, raises his hand: "Thank you for your talk" he says, "Please can you tell me, how did you get to do all these things? How did you get all these opportunities?"

"Thank you for your question." I reply, "To be honest, I work hard and I apply to everything. This is how I got all these things, yeah, I work hard." He nods and says thank you. His friend, also a man of colour, looks down and sadly shakes his head as he reaches down to pick up his bag and leave. Something feels unsettled in me, but I cannot place my finger on it.

**15 July, 2021**

“How did we get through those days in the '70s and '80s?” My mom asks my father, while watching the seven o'clock news about the violent lootings taking place in South Africa.

“We turned toward each other” (Moys, M and D. 2020).



Figure 5: My parents on their way out to an anti-apartheid activist dress up party dressed up as “White idiots with tunnel vision”.

My father and mother were both in the business of repair. Before I was born, in the '70s, in their corduroy pants, long hair and sandals they travelled the world researching communities: how can we live together in peace?

My mother is the bravest person I know. Her superpowers are listening and vulnerability: how to be in relation. My mom's work was dedicated to repairing relationships, assisting the process of turning toward each other as a trauma counsellor and marriage therapist. She taught me how to be not only a good friend, but a fierce friend. She taught me that “you teach people how to treat you”, how to see the common humanity in people, how to remember my dreams in the morning. There she stands in

the kitchen in her robe, still sleepy, making tea, on her way back to bed to “finish her dream”: catching her archetypes by their tails and tying them to her life.

My dad, in addition to his job as a lecturer at Wits, loved to invent and *fix things*. The piece of wood that held the fridge door with the notes of instruction, the duct-taped VCR, our zips in old jackets, the leaky fridge, the broken teapot or plate, the repurposed belt that was tied with a rope to the side of the porta pool so that you could swim lengths, not going anywhere. It makes sense that this place they created was invested in the practice of repair, of repairing each other.

“It is amazing that this place actually exists” Siphso said to my mom as he breathed out while walking around Hillcrest, wide eyed. Siphso, a friend of my mom from the course she was doing at the university, who had been tortured very badly by the police came out to the plot one day. She remembers: “He said “this is like a lilies’ leaf.” Now if you remember Lilies Leaf was the farm where all the ANC were arrested in Rivonia and then ensued the famous Rivonia trial where Mandela was convicted and where so many of them were sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island. The trial hung by a thread, we all thought they were going to get the death sentence. But that’s what this young man said, “this place is like a lilies’ leaf”, a refuge, a safe house, a sanctuary a place of safety respect, a different place” (Moys, D. 2021).



Figure 2. ‘Wit voete’ on the beach, aged 6.

Figure 3. Vitiligo hand photograph by Adrienne Hill Sanctuary.

Author Sonya Renee Taylor, in her book *The Body is not an Apology* (2018) asks: “When was the first time you noticed you or someone else was different? What did you make the difference mean about you? What did you make it mean about them?”

**Skin and running: After-school swimming, JHB, SA, 1980s**

“*Hey, wit voete!*” the older boys jeer at me from the side of the school pool. It translates to “Hey, white-feet!” At least the boys say it out aloud, telling it like it is. I much prefer this to the whispering girls who fall silent when my strange-skinned body enters the changing room. Their sudden silence more painful, a sharp cut, cutting me off.

**Coloured in, Johannesburg, 2013:**

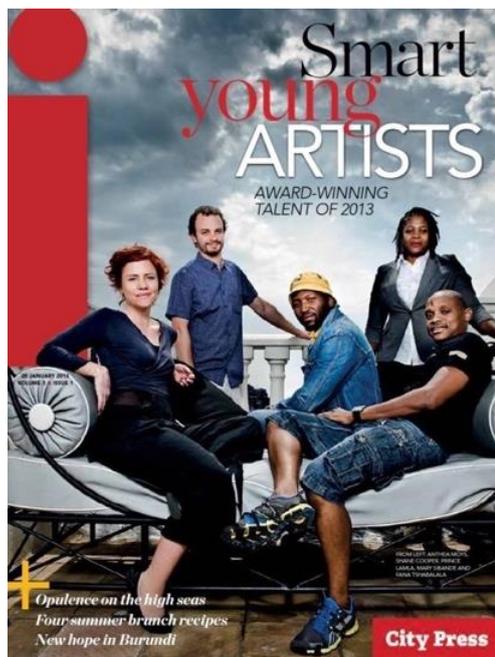


Figure 8. City Press cover magazine.

"Have you seen what they did to your feet?" Geoffrey, my boyfriend at the time, asks me.

"No... why?"

"Look!" He points to his screen; I lean over to look at my smoothed over photoshopped feet. My *wit voete* have vanished! My difference violently erased into sameness, into Whiteness.

I laugh ... "What the hell?!"

"Do you want to do something? Write to them maybe?"

"No. I don't have time right now. Maybe later. I mean, it's too late anyway! The damage is done!"

"Ok" he says; Geoff is a writer. "Well, I can write it for you if you like?"

"No really, it's fine. Thanks."

Vitiligo is an autoimmune disease of the skin wherein the White blood cells attack the melanocytes (pigment-producing cells), which then die or stop producing melanin. It started on my feet when I turned four, and from there the White, patchy map spread all over my body. In our family it has been passed down from my grandparents to my mother and then to my brother and me. Growing up with vitiligo, I was told that what really mattered was *on the inside, not to judge a book by its cover/colour* and that *colour is just one part of the story*. I mention this here, not only to show that I, too, have experienced othering, the feeling of being *different* and "other", but, more importantly, I relay these vignettes as functional tools to show how this conditioning contributed to shaping my racial world view. "Race, in other words, is something we see through, like a frame, a window, a screen, or a lens, rather than something we look at" (Mitchell, 2012, p. xii).

“Well, the vitiligo seems to be progressing steadily on your hands and feet. At least not on your face!” Dr Smith, the dermatologist says. He then takes a look at my 15-year-old inflamed blotched red face under the glaring White circle of light, telling me that “exercise and avoiding things like ice cream will help with the acne.” For the vitiligo, well, there is no cure, but ... “just try stay out of the sun, lassie!” Taking note of the word “exercise”, I start running with my dad. When he was my age, his acne was so bad his face was the image in the dermatologist handbook for how bad it could get.

*“A sweaty concept might come out of a bodily experience that is trying. The task is to stay with the difficulty, to keep exploring and exposing this difficulty”*

*(Ahmed, 2017, p. 13).*

My first date with a boy. His name is Gordon. He wants to take me to dinner at Mike’s Kitchen. I picture the light highlighting the tiny volcanoes on my cheeks and forehead, the white on my hands as I hold the menu. I want to ask him if he runs. But choose the less weird option and ask him if we can go for a walk at the Waterfront instead? He says sure. Relief; to be *walking with* as opposed to being *looked at*.

In the car on the way home from varsity I say to my mom: “I’m so sick of all this art dealing with identity politics! Its over! Can’t we just let go and get on with it?”

My dad and I run in shorts and t-shirts around the block, then around many blocks. When my dad stops running, I continue the practice, putting in the reps, three or four times a week. "Do you ever time yourself or set a destination?" I asked him once, "No," he replies, "When I am tired, I just slow down to a walk. Then, when ready, I pick up the pace again." No winning. No pressure. Just practice. Later, the running takes on a different purpose ...

"You are like a cow, an Nguni cow." says Adam, my DJ boyfriend at the time, a blunt instrument who had minimal vocabulary skills for compliments. Shame. He doesn't like me going into town. A 26-year-old arts student, a dancer and a runner, I am a hopeful, activist feminist. I am invincible! Unbreakable! In my blinkered liberal world view, I say things like "People are scared to walk in the city! I want to be able to walk in my city, in our city". I don't want to be another White person who is poop-scared of the city. I want to prove all those scaredy-cat White folks (and my stupid boyfriend) walled up and trapped in their boring electric fenced off comfort zones that they are wrong! I want to inspire them to come play outside.

*But deep down... I am really scared.*

*Scared of what?*

*Scared of being attacked or hijacked. Scared of being raped.*

*And embarrassed and ashamed that I feel this at the same time.*

*Deep down, I feel like I am... and will always be doomed to be the  
eternal tourist.*

*Doomed I tell you. Doomed!*

So, like most women in Johannesburg, I make sure I am prepared for when I *move through it* in a particular way. When walking in the city I walk quickly, with purpose and direction – no faffing! No dillydallying! Even though I know I have a good relationship with the city, I return home to the northern suburbs, the eternal tourist, after these temporary visits. But, in order not to get raped or hijacked I must not *look* or *act* like I am a tourist by looking lost. I must know where I am going, and even if I don't, I need to pretend I do. In fact, I found that it was more effective to run. I leave my phone in the car, put my bank card in my bra and, like most women in the world, run with my keys in my right hand, the biggest key pointed out through my first two fingers in case I need to poke an attacker's eye out. This protective running practice has multiple benefits:

1. I look like I know where I am going.
2. I look like I am busy with exercise.
3. I look like I am already being chased by someone else, a man.

This last one requires me to run faster.

On 23 February 2020, Ahmaud Arbery was shot in the back while he was out running in Georgia, USA (Evelyn, 2021). On the 21 March 1960, 69 Black protesters were shot in the back while they ran away from the apartheid police. This is known as the Sharpeville Massacre. On the day, a group of around 7 000 people gathered to protest the pass laws. The pass laws date back to the 1700s when enslaved people in the Cape had to have a pass to show that they were allowed to work there. The pass laws which came into effect in 1948 (repealed in 1986) gave police the power to demand that Black people present their passbooks at any time. If they were in the wrong place at

the wrong time, they were detained without trial. Often this meant a disappearance; a death sentence.

### **Switzerland, 2005:**

In early 2006, a year before the *Boxing Games* project, my friend Donna and I arrive in Sierre, Switzerland to participate in the MAPS (Master of Arts in the Public Sphere) project.

“Where are you from?” a White Swiss lady asks Donna. Donna is Black.

“South Africa.” Donna replies.

“And you?” she asks, looking at me. I am White.

“I am also from South Africa.” I reply.

“What? That’s strange!” She exclaims, eyes wide. “Why aren’t you Black?”

Donna and I look at each other incredulously, in shock at this woman’s apparent lack of knowledge of colonialism. We breathe in and we breathe out and ... we laugh.

She invites us to perform “a South African performance” at her club. To a confused but receptive audience, we performed a Spanish dance to African drums *on purpose*, to play with and challenge what on earth “a South African performance” might indeed be. We fluxed her request. We fluxed our identities.

**Hillbrow, Kin:Be:Jozi, 2007:**

In June 2007, South African artist Athi-Patra Ruga and I were invited to be the Johannesburg based artists-in-residence on a project of exchange between Kinshasa, Bern and Johannesburg called Kin:Be:Jozi. Led by the Joubert Park Project<sup>41</sup> (JPP), the idea was for "a group of artists from each city to come together in each city":

to develop a kind of travelling dialogue, that would arise out of the engagement between the artists, the geographic distances and specific moments in the life of each city. As such the project was open-ended, an experiment (Kin:Be:Jozi, 2007).

The artists were introduced to the east end grid of Johannesburg. We were warned not to walk alone in the street and at night not at all. So, in the daylight hours, for six weeks, we explored the area as a group, visiting important spaces such as Drill Hall and Ponte as well as private strip clubs, Congolese restaurants, the vacant Ster City cinema, the "Top of Africa" in the Carlton – which inspired us all in different ways, contributing to our creative process. Katja Weismann, the Swiss artist in residence, remembers the time being largely about "a lot of doing and very little thinking" (2019).

I introduce myself on the blog:

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<sup>41</sup> It's important to note that the project was led by JPP a project that had been working in the inner city for decades before the project. JPP was familiar with the inner workings of the city and the people who lived, worked and played there. As much as the artists were perhaps "tourists", the holding structure was rooted in the city.

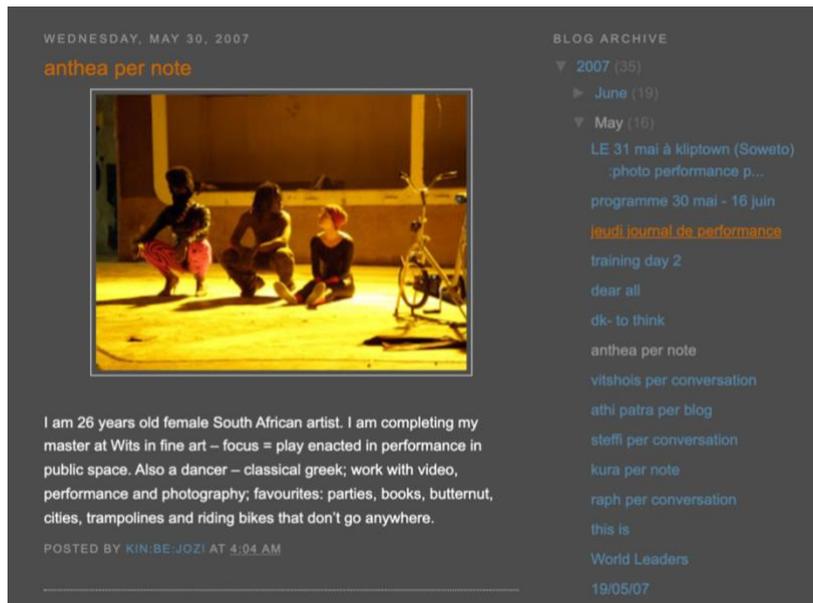


Figure 9: Screenshot (13/07/2021) from Kin:Be:Jozi blog: Sitting with two of the other kin:be:jozi artists in residence, Athi Patra Ruga (JHB) and Vitshois Mwilambwe (DRC) in an abandoned cinema in downtown Johannesburg, June 2007.

The Kin:Be:Jozi residency project was unique in its approach for that time in that it was not about community theatre, applied theatre or creating performance *for* a theatre. Site-specific public performance art was still relatively new at that time in the city, with most artists working in more traditional spaces. We were all incredibly impulsive and spontaneous and the project provided us with a safe support structure where we could respond site-specifically to different locations in the city in playful, experimental and process-driven ways. In many ways, the JPP, the producers of the project, created a safe mediating point between the artist and the site or the people the artist wanted to work with. The *Boxing Games* project emerged within this context.



Figure 10: Dan and me, training at the gym, video still (2007).

“For me it was not only about keeping you safe” replies Dan (2019), a younger Black man from Angola who lived (and still lives) in an area near Hillbrow at the time, employed by the kin:be:jozi residency project. I interviewed him about his role in the kin:be:jozi residency project. Every morning, for three weeks Dan used to run with Katja and me from August House in Doornfontein to the boxing gym in Hillbrow. Working with several of the artists involved, he says: “I was doing what I was supposed to do but I was also learning” (Dan, 2019). When we arrived at the gym he wanted to box too, and so, often, we trained together. Towards the end of the project, he worked with one of the other Swiss musician artists in residence on the sound for the *Boxing Games* video. There was this kind of freedom in the project where he could choose to participate in other ways as he saw fit: boxer, performer, musician, rapper and, in his words: “care-taker” (and was paid to do so).

### **Prince’s gym, February, 2022:**

“Coming here... yoh. This is a dangerous place!” Dan says. We embrace. The interview with Dan in 2019 was on the phone so, I have not seen him in 14 years. It is wonderful to see him in person. “I had to change my clothes before coming here.” Dan is wearing

a blue overall jacket, like a painter might wear. “To make myself look... you know a bit more... rough” (Dan, 2022).

“It was back in 2007 when they first met”, Reeds, Prince’s cousin writes, “the thing that captured him was her dress code. He depicts it as “funny”. At her age, and the fact that she was a White girl, alone, in one of the most dangerous places baffled him” (Reeds, 2021).

**Hillbrow, 2007:**

*Why did I wear all these bright colours? I think as I walk briskly through the streets with Dan and Katja. I mean I already "stick out like a sore thumb" in this city – such a fucking Whitie! I wish I was Black. I wish I could just disappear and blend in. I have lived here my whole life and I don't really know this city; I can't even walk through it without a guide/guard. I feel like an eternal tourist. I can't wait till we are at the gym, then I can relax a bit.*

“Hello my sister, hello my brother!” Eno, one of the Congolese coaches who works with Prince, welcomes Dan and me into the gym. We arrive energised and full of adrenaline from the brisk cold winter’s walk. We greet the rest of the boxers – today there are eight of us – and then we begin our training. The routine includes this jumping dance-like warm up “[...] like a dance or a trance that we all were immersed in before we jumped into the ring” (Katja, 2019). It then progresses into sit ups, lunges and shadow boxing. Prince and Eno’s incredibly rhythmic training, the sounds of their voices as a

stable solid repetitive guide – pulsating and reverberating from inside the circle outward – was like a techno beat with shifts and kicks and a deep foot stomping bass. The only words that were spoken being: “One two, one two!” “Breathe in! And breathe out!” In a space of movement: my comfort zone.

FRIDAY, JUNE 8, 2007

notes for sat



"To me, boxing is like a ballet, except there's no music, no choreography, and the dancers hit each other."

- Jack Handey

POSTED BY KIN:BE:JOZI AT 8:57 AM

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Figure 11: Screenshot (13/07/2021) from kin:be:jozi blog: training outside the gym in the streets, Hillbrow, Johannesburg, June 2007.

## Hillcrest, 1980s:



Figure 12: Susie, Joan's daughter, and me, in our tyre houses, and Nteku, the gardener's son, coming to join us (1984).

Nteku and I, about five years old, need help to make our tyre towers. Standing in the middle of the first tyre on the ground, Susie places the tyres, over my head, tyre by tyre, one by one, around my body from head to toe, slowly building the tyre house up. She repeats the process for Nteku and then builds her own one and clambers in. Inside my tyre house, my safehouse, talking to myself and my toys, I put my treasures from the outside world onto the shelves - rocks and grasses, flowers, my old doll Lucy and other odds and ends. If I stand up on my tiptoes I can peer out at the world. When I go back down, I can hear Nteku and others speaking in their own languages, in their own tyre houses next to me. I wonder what they are saying. In our own different worlds of play, we have conversations with

one another without really seeing or understanding each other.

“With our boxes of matches, and our necklaces, we shall liberate this country!” Winnie Mandela on the 6pm news. In 1985, I was five years old, when Maki Skosana, the first of many, was killed via necklacing on 20 July (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1997). Her sister, Moloko, said that “she was burned to death with a tyre around her neck [...]” She told the commission that there was also “a large rock on her face as well as her chest”, “glass in her vagina” and that “her legs were taken apart” (Moloko, 1997).

Home from school, down in the garden with the poplar trees, I push the tyre swing and then quickly lie on the ground in a corpse position, imagining a line drawn around my body as I have seen in the movies. When in position, I scream ‘Joshuaaaaa!’ I lie incredibly still, the sound of the swing whooshing back and forth above me. I close my eyes and wait. Playing dead. My brother comes and stands above me looking down “Anti! Antiiiiiii!” he pokes and prods me and then, when I do not move, he runs back to the house and screams for mom: “MAAAAAA! Anti fell off the swing! She’s dead!” As I hear him leave, I jump up onto the swing, laughing, pretending nothing has happened. I was just playing! Unsure of the truth, we both get a mouthful at dinner, no ice cream for either of us.

When I got to the grave site, when you look at your sister's body, you do feel it in your own body. You feel something as a sibling. Then I saw her body. I approached her from the feet and I could identify the feet, I could identify her as my sister, but I could not see her face because there was a large rock on her face as well as her chest and I went around to try and identify the body. I was disgusted at the way she was killed. I looked at the body (Moloko, 1997).

On the dirt road, our faces smudged purple from mulberries, dusty hair and criss-cross scratched shins, we wait till sunset. I am sitting in the sand playing with Nteku and several of the other children who live on the plot - all different ages and races - from four to 15 years old. We play up at the giant, ancient mulberry tree by Ingrid's shebeen,<sup>42</sup> and we slide down the foofie slide, dogs (and Quackers the goose who thinks he is a dog) barking at our heels on the way. Here, at Hillcrest, there is always something to do outside and someone new to explore the outside with, a daily occurrence where I spent the first 16 years of my life.

The red-topped grasses catch the dying light of the day, we know it's going to rain; we can smell it and we can see and hear all the termites are out gathering pieces of grass and then disappearing into holes in the ground or in their termite mounds. Sometimes they fly around - flying ants they are called - their iridescent wings lit up - golden, shimmering. A sunset feast for swallows as they dip and dive in the peach light. They are at once

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<sup>42</sup> A shebeen is an unlicensed bar in South Africa.

mesmerising, these flying ants, and also irritating, flying blindly towards our faces and getting stuck in our hair. Sometimes we catch them in our grubby fingers, we violently take their wings and legs off, dismembering them we fry them over a fire we have made: a crunchy evening snack. Other times, the older boys light small firecrackers, stuff them in their holes and then we all run like hell to the other side of the road - waiting for the tiny explosion - BANG!

"A," my dad asks, "Please go turn on the pump."

Its evening time, just before dinner. Dark outside. I am about eight years old and scared, but also, for some reason I enjoy this nightly game. I walk down to the pump, the light from the kitchen window fades behind me. When I get to the little brick building housing the pump, I stand on the ledge looking in, wanting my eyes to adjust faster to the dark, trying to see the switch. As I reach out into the darkness, feeling around, I see my hand disappear, I bring it back with a tiny scream in the back of my throat, imagining that I am losing my hand, I make believe, make belief, that it is being pulled, cut off by that darkness. After turning it on, when running back, I imagine that darkness that erased my hand chasing after me, running at my back. I run as fast as I possibly can, carefully navigating the steps and uneven ground as I reach the

kitchen door handle and breathlessly slam the door shut behind me.

Dad asks if I am ok. "Yeah..." I say, looking back out through the glass, my breath misting up the window. Nothing there. Nothing at all.

In 1988, the late Father John Osmer<sup>43</sup>, an ANC (African National Congress) activist and friend of my mother's, lost his hand in a parcel bomb: a bomb hidden in a package of Sechaba ANC magazines sent by the security police. In 1989, activist, musician and Wits anthropology lecturer, David Webster, a good friend and comrade of many people including my parents, who used to visit us, was assassinated in his driveway in Troyeville, Johannesburg. I note these people here as these stories are the ones close to home, friends of my parents. This is not the trauma Olympics, but he (Webster) would agree in pointing out that while he was one of the first White activists to be eliminated (1989), there were of course countless Black, Brown and queer bodies that had been systematically, and that *are still being* systematically erased<sup>44</sup>. People were and still are being dismembered or simply made invisible. Removed from their loved ones, violently uprooted, erased, they lost their dignity, their body parts, their loved ones and their lives ...

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<sup>43</sup> As I write this today on June 16<sup>th</sup> (South Africa's Youth Day commemorating the 1976 Soweto student uprisings) in 2021, I hear that John has died from COVID19 in Lusaka, Zambia. My mom told me that apparently, after the parcel bomb, John said: "Well at least I'm left-handed!"

<sup>44</sup> Femicide in South Africa being one example where every three hours a woman is killed (Wilkenson, 2019).

**Hillbrow, 2007:**



Figure 13: Prince wrapping my hands in the gym before sparring (2007).



Figure 14: Boxers (names unknown) and me running in Hillbrow. Photographer: Chris Saunders (2007)

Running up this never-ending hill, cold on our cheeks, early morning smoke coming out of our mouths and noses: we are the Hillbrow Running Dragons!

They are not looking at me, I am not looking at them. We are looking ahead, together, moving through. Moving through these streets, with these men, these boxers, our shared interest in this simple act energises me. I forget about the colourful clothes I am wearing, I forget about myself, my femaleness, my Whiteness. Even though we are outside in the street, I am not afraid and feel completely at ease and safe, side by side with the other boxers. Not just safe: fire in my belly, connected and really, really *alive*.

*“To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world begins. One fits, and by fitting the surfaces of bodies disappears from view” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 158).*

**Feeling Strange: Out of Place in a Place, 2019:**

Fourteen years later, at home in my bed, after the first day back at the gym, after the scary incident, I write:

What the hell is happening ...  
Something has been ruptured, interrupted  
Feeling so ... starkly visible, out of place  
Feeling unsafe and insecure in my own White skin and female body  
Feeling unsafe and insecure in the boxing ring  
Feeling unsafe and insecure in the area of “research”  
Feeling unsafe and insecure in the area of “art”  
Feeling like the great pretender, an imposter in my own body  
Doubt has seeped into and shaken all the knowns, shaking the  
foundations

**Hillbrow, 2019: Earlier that day: The scary incident**

Peacocks? It can't be, I think as Prince and I walk outside to a quieter area for the interview and sit on a broken concrete bench in the sun in the parking lot just outside the gym. Peacocks in Hillbrow? It's a strange sound, like an anxious warning echoing down the streets and I can't place which direction it's coming from. Mischievously, the breeze pokes fun at me, trying my best to be a good researcher, stealing some of the ethics forms right out of my fingers. "Eish!", we say, laughing, we run to stamp on them, catching them before they fly away. Seated, smiling, papers in order and under control, Prince and I take a breath. I click record on my phone that is somewhat hidden between my legs and begin to explain, in more detail, the parameters of this research project to Prince.



Figure 15: Prince Khosi and me at his Boxing Gym, Hillbrow 2019.

“Considering the crime in Hillbrow, Anthea coming back was a nice experience. She again proved to be a people person; she was not a racist to anyone she met. He [Prince] describes her as a free spirit, who came back and forth in Hillbrow freely not caring about the happenings in South Africa, instead, welcoming and loving everybody regardless of the colour of their skin, where they came from, or which language they spoke” (Reeds, 2021).

In the distance, I see three young men approaching, the air of movement, the way they are walking together, the three of them, unnerves me a bit, but I quickly berate myself for being a bit scared and tell myself that I am sure they are just some nice guys out for a stroll and that they will move on past us. I focus on the text and continue talking. Quite quickly, though, they are suddenly in front of us, swaying slightly, eyes wide with whatever substance is swirling in their bloodstream, looking me up and down. *Why did I wear these shorts?!* I think. My heart racing, the hairs on the back of my neck stand up and I begin to sweat.

The tallest young man comes directly up to Prince and starts roughhousing him physically, speaking in Zulu and kind of punching him jeeringly in both arms, while looking sideways at me. I do not understand what they are saying but it feels like a familiar taunt from men I have experienced in the past: “Hey man who is this pretty lady you are dating hey? Having a good time hey, hey, hey? ‘Nudge nudge, wink wink’” kind of jest. I want to run.

“Prince chuckles when he thinks back to how Anthea was scared. He, himself, knew them so he was not frightened, he convinced her they were safe. The guys ended up making jokes and left. Unfortunately, one of the guys was gunned down and died in December of 2020” (Reeds, 2021).

Prince, the “gentle giant” as my mom calls him, a man of peace, keeps his cool, is not smiling but is not engaging in any direct confrontation either. He does not get up, but gently almost submissively pushes their hands away, and remains sitting right by my side. I trust him. For what seems like an age, but in the recording is less than a minute, they weave in and out and around us these three young men, like hyenas, laughing and jeering. Finally, they seem to tire of this and move on. But just before they leave, one of them looks directly at me and laughing wildly, pulls out a small silver gun out of the front of his jeans and waves it around, laughing. As they move on, like a pack of wolves back into the peacock-screaming streets, almost as if to reassure me, they shout:

“He is our father! We *just playing!*”

“He is also *my* father!” I shout back, but they are already gone.

“For me, I don’t know how to explain it, for me you have come to be a family to me, like we are really family. You are really family to us. What you have done is that the gym is still there. So, it is like a big family to us” (Prince, 2019).

“His tone takes a sadder note when he continues to describe Anthea.” Reeds writes. “To him, she reminded him of his adoptive mother, a White woman” (Reeds, 2021).

### **Hillcrest, 1980s:**

My mom remembers Mma Anne, one of my carers: “You used to climb up to her” (Moys, D. 2021). I do not remember the warmth of her back pressed against the front of my small body. Her breathing, moving body. I do not remember her changing my nappy. I have glimpses of her ShweShwe blue dress and strong legs as she stands stirring the tomato and onion sauce to go with the pap in the kitchen. We will eat this food together with Josh, my brother outside in the garden. I have memories of her laugh. A strong Ha! Like a clap in the sky and then followed by a ripple of giggles. Her patience and care with us, her hugs, her smile, her gentleness. Originally coming from a place where she was physically abused at work, Mma Anne came to live on the plot and work for my parents, caring for me and my brother. I remember her crying, the wailing. I do not remember how her children died. While there was healing, protection and genuine support for her and her family, she was still so far away from her own five children, who lived in Lesotho, two of whom died during these years.

*“Black feminists such as bell hooks teach us that some women – Black and working-class women – are not even entitled to be proximate to the fantasy, though they may be instrumental in enabling others to approximate its form” (Ahmed, 2010 p. 51).*

“You know, you loved her so much. And she loved you!” my mom remembers, “You know when people asked you what you wanted to be when you were ‘grown up’ you used to tell them you wanted to be a maid?” (Moys, D. 2021).

It’s my best friend, Nicole’s birthday party. Among all the princesses, dolled up in their mothers’ clothes, I am the only maid there. Dressed in a large blue uniform, I arrive with my broom, made from a bunch of veld grasses tied together at the top with a piece of string. Nicole doesn’t care and neither do I.

“What’s wrong with your feet?” a classmate asks me, to which Nicole replies: “What’s wrong with your face?” My first driving teacher at eight years old, Nicole, knows how to take care of herself and makes sure she takes care of me too. She keeps herself together, pulled up and tucked in, her feet firmly on the ground; sense to my nonsense. She teaches me to hold onto my sleeves when putting on my jacket. She reminds me to wait for my change at the tuck shop. She always has the time and knows my address by heart. We roll peppermints in the mud and feed them as ‘chocolate sweets’ to my brother. When she comes for

sleepovers, our midnight feast of Niknaks and marshmallows  
scrunched up into our faded Mickey Mouse nighties, we creep  
out into the dead of night. Giggling, we feast in the veld,  
stuffing the orange, pink and white delights into our  
mouths, prickles of grass sticking into our bums. At St  
John's festival we sing a song about fires on hills, 'On  
The Hills The Fires Are Burning' and hold hands before we  
jump over the flames together, a yearly ritual at school  
to say good bye to the past...

*On the hills the fires are burning  
Flickering flames are leaping turning  
Hand in hand we all advance  
To seek the warmth to join the dance  
Rise, too, my soul, enduring light  
And, flame-like burn, forever bright.*



Figure 16: Kim Berman, *Blazing trail II*, Monotype, (2009).

"Umlilo! Umlilo!" shouts Ingrid. "Fire, Fire!"

"Little A!" calls Zed, Josie's son. I am 10. "Come - we need your help here!"

The veld is burning, we can hear the crackling and it's moving fast on the east side of the property towards the houses. We are each given a wet blanket to fight the flames. On go the pieces of cloth around our noses and mouths and, if there are enough, the balaclavas. Some of us wear these to assist in disguising Marie's friends - the two UDF members who are hiding on the plot - who are also helping us put out the fire, for fear that they might be recognised and reported by the fire fighters. As is the most effective way to fight a fire, we form a line and work systematically, bashing the flames, as a team. The smell of smoke fills our noses. It is scary because the fire moves so fast, but I am not afraid because I am with all the adults, humans much larger and stronger than me and I am in the middle - Mma Ingrid to my left and Dad to my right and we bash and hit the unruly flames with all our might. Finally, our efforts have paid off, the fire defeated, pitch black ground remaining and with pitch black faces - all of us - we rejoice our winning! A temporary joy during a time of many, many fires.

### **Hillbrow, 2007: The Boxing Game!**

“So, I’m thinking,” breathless after one of our training sessions, “what if we try some different things out in the ring?” I say to Prince. “What if it becomes a game so that we are not boxing one on one in the ring but doing other things too, like changing partners, shouting up into the sky or falling down? Like in the training? So, you and I will shout different rules and we will all follow, ok? So, it’s kind of like a different kind of training with all of us in the ring, like a game in the ring ... a boxing game? What do you think Prince?”

“I thought maybe she is a crazy one’ was how Prince described her when they started the games” (Reeds, 2021).

“I remember one thing” Katja says “I think sometimes you tried to give some rules in to the play to kind of make or shape it somehow, to make an experiment, to give other rules that they normally do and ... I am not so sure how good it worked ... if it didn’t work well then they just went on with how they normally train” (Katja, 2019).

“She never cared about whoever (race) it was that she dealt with” Prince says, “Their free spirit allowed them to see people beyond colour and race. His mind wanders back to their first meeting in 2007 [...]” (Reeds, 2021).

As the games progressed, he began understanding the whole process. They (Prince and some of his boxing students) were starting to see the advantages of why they did the games. It was an exercise.

He explained, “we were getting fit, that was the most important thing”. [...] “He explains the similarities between the games and boxing as a sport. The reaction time it took one to, ‘Run! Jump! Sleep!’, makes one always think fast, even in boxing. ‘Jab! Left hook and right!’ He refers to the games as *Fun Boxing Games*. Anthea infused the sport and arts to make something ‘enjoyable’” (Reeds, 2021).

“The atmosphere was one of togetherness; Blacks, Whites and Indians, together as one was a rare event in modern South Africa. This opened up Prince’s mind, the different cultures working together. They rolled together in the dirt, touching each other, nobody cared about the colour of their skin” (Reeds, 2019).





Figure 17 & 18. Boxers and I (names unknown) rolling and lying on the floor of the boxing gym during the boxing game. Photographer: Chris Saunders (2007)

“You were kind of inviting everyone to join a ... a play. And of course, then it was important that the boss - like Prince - it was clear that he was the guy that was communicating the ideas to the people who normally come for training and yeah - and I think he liked us, and he found his own words to kind of involve them” (Katja, 2019).

“I’d say that that was the best part.” Dan remembers, “because yes you came with the concept, right? The concept was yours and everything like that, but when you were there in the ring it was like everybody for himself – you can do whatever you want to do because you can see that we were boxing but we were dancing at the same time and like laughing and playing at the same time – everything was just happening there!” (2019).

Over the course of the week before the performance, we practice with different rules: changing partners, rolling on the floor, tag: running to catch one another, shouting up into the sky, falling down and playing dead. Our training becomes the *Boxing Game*, the *Boxing Game* becomes the training ...

“Ja so that it was not just boxing – that there are other ways to move in this boxing ring.

It was not a failure

Everybody was ... *in*, in a way

It was very playful

How we were together

They didn’t say no

I think they just ... did ...

Ja I really don’t remember well

But then we were boxing, dancing or whatever

Think we also had music sometimes

And its then more

Not like serious art project

But more like a party

Ja so ...

Not so um, ja, in that sense it was a little experiment

Probably not so much for them

But they were also proud - the material was in the exhibition

They were invited to come

I think that Prince was really happy about the videos

Ja because he was proud that his boxing club was part of an art project

It is my memory of it.”

(Katja, 2019)

### London, 2020: Wellcome Trust Workshops

On my way to London, I messaged Prince in Johannesburg before the workshops. If he couldn't be there in person, perhaps some of his rules could? He replied with a stream of suggestions some of which I used in the boxing game.

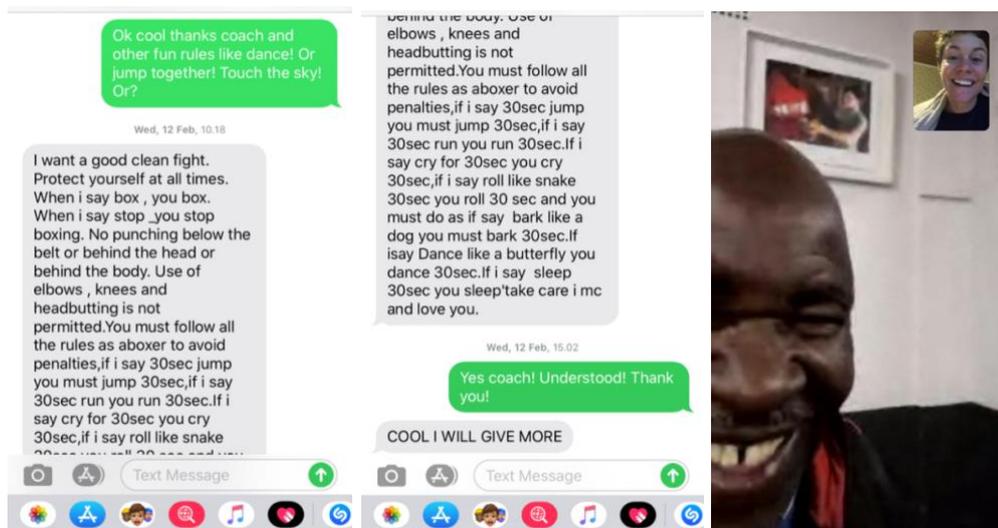


Figure 19 & 20: Messages from Prince before the Wellcome workshops, London, 2020. Prince and I facetiming the night before, Newcastle, 2020.

The Wellcome Trust frames their weekend festival dedicated to play in these words:  
*“Come out to play at this weekend of games, conversations and workshops exploring who gets to play, who is represented in play, and why play is so important for us all.*

The aims of the festival were to:

*Explore the relevance of play to adults*

- *Use an intersectional approach to address the injustices of play – who gets to play and who is represented in play?*
- *Key message – play is important and play is for all*
- *Create spaces for people to come to play together*
- *Encourage audiences to participate in types of activities they might not normally, i.e. through making a weekend with a variety of formats, we hope to create cross-over of audiences. So someone who comes for a talk may join a game, or someone who is experienced at larping may attend a performance.”* (Wellcome Collection, 2019).

Upon recommendation from a past workshop participant, I was invited to participate in the Wellcome Trust’s “Play Well” weekend festival, which took place on 15 and 16 February 2020. In trying to think what to offer this festival, my workshop was largely inspired by Henricks’ question: “What kinds of people get to perform what kinds of activities with whom before what kinds of others – and what meanings are attached to those events?” (2015, p. 180). Through the playing of specific games, I wanted people to be conscious about *feeling* powerful – their power to change the rules – and to feel what it was like to feel *powerless*. I wanted them to *feel* this for themselves, for it to

emerge ... through play. This intention is important as it influenced the games I chose for these workshops.

The description of my workshop entitled *Play to Win or Play to Keep on Playing* read: *What you'll do: Come find out what play is to you. Hear about Anthea Moys' artistic practice, which changes the rules of the game in sport and reimagines winning. Then play some of her favourite games that explore different forms of play – competitive, make-believe and risky – one of which is about playing with the rules of boxing! All the Very Best Players will receive certificates and medals, of course. Suitable for all fitness levels but please wear comfortable clothes and shoes because you will be moving around. The games are suitable for people ages 18+. (Wellcome Collection 2019).*



Figure 21: Brand new boxing gloves, borrowed from Sol Star Boxing Club in London, lying on the floor in plain view as people enter the room.

In the risk assessment form, it states: On both days before the playing of the game, participants will be made aware of the risks involved in boxing. They will then be explained the difference between the sport boxing and my performance art project: boxing games. The rules of the game and the risks involved will be outlined: no boxing of the actual body, no boxing of the head, but rather to aim for boxing of the other boxing gloves, in a sparring kind of fashion, and that it is more a boxing dance with each other as opposed to two people in a ring fighting. Thus, in this context, while they may represent violence, the boxing gloves were used as protection as well as play thing.

For Zee, a 40-year-old White sociology student who was in email correspondence with me after the workshop, the gloves lined up for people to see as she entered the room played an important role:

“So ... coming into the room,” says Zee (2020), “seeing the boxing gloves, because I knew what the set up was, [...] I got the sense like probably it wouldn’t come to a place where I would feel like that [any kind of *real* boxing] was happening. So, in terms of safety, I did feel safe, but it was kind of like a product of how it was situated – the institution that it was in, the fact that it was in a broader like play festival, the fact that it was academic, made me think that there was a human centeredness to it here. But if I had walked into the room and there were guns down, I probably would have felt similarly like okay – probably not loaded and we probably not gonna shoot each other” (Zee, 2020).

After a 10-13 minute talk about my artistic practice, so as to contextualise my work in relation to the current practice research, I then explained my research methods in line with the informed consent forms. As with the *Boxing Games* (2019), in Johannesburg, people had a chance to ask questions before and after the event. Those

who wanted to participate in the workshop then signed the consent forms and proceeded into the space.



Figure 22: Playing the Alien Game.

To my surprise, on both days after the talk, most of the participants make a bee line for the boxing gloves to put them on and start playing with them. Responding to this, I lead some improvisational boxing warmups. Then, for some reason, quite spontaneously I decide to choose a game that is not on my list. It is called the “Alien Game”. My co-facilitator Roberto is excellent at this game. After this experience, I realised I am not. The game involves stepping into the middle of the circle and pretending you are an alien, a strange alien who has just landed here from another planet. You need to make strange alien movements and sounds and be completely *abnormal*: out of your comfort zone. As pictured above, I am pretending I am an alien, trying to hop around on one leg and I am making strange high-pitched noises. The alien is looking for their friend. You can meet the alien – i.e. be the aliens friend – by copying exactly what the alien is doing, meeting them in their game. The alien in the circle then takes the place of their friend who then steps in and pretends they are

another kind of alien, looking for their friend. The game encourages silliness and meeting the other in their silliness, their strangeness.

After this we then played two games. The rules from each of these games would then all be mixed together to create another version of the Boxing Game. The two games that were played before the Boxing Game were two improvisational theatre games: “Yes, Let’s!” and “Flocking”.

Example of “Yes, Let’s” game:

- Player one offers: We are in the garden spinning around.
- Player two responds: Yes, let’s!
- Both players entertain the playful activity – no matter how silly it may seem – for a certain amount of time until the next player suggests the next activity. In

addition to Prince’s, people added rules like:

- *Bumper cars!*
- *Box in slow motion!*
- *Lie down and breathe!* (This was the last rule at the end of the session, and it was a perfect place to stop, rest and breathe!)



Figures 23 & 24: Some of the Wellcome Workshop participants playing “I know, Let’s” and some not playing “I know, Let’s”.

After “Yes, Let’s!” we played the flocking game, which is essentially an ensemble technique which involves the whole group working together like a school of fish or flock of birds. It involves leading, following and really listening to the group. We then donned boxing gloves and played the Boxing Game – combining the general “rules” of both of these games: adding rules, saying yes, leading and following and listening

to the group. Playing the game as a team but then adding different rules, essentially saying “yes, let’s” to the suggestion and trying it out together.



Figure 25: Flocking with the Wellcome Trust workshop participants.

**Earlier that day, Wellcome Trust, February, 2020:**

I arrive with coffee in my blood stream and wait at reception for Anthea (yes, the assistant assigned to me has the same name as me. Must be a good sign). She is to meet me to take me to the room I will be working in. After listening to her explaining how everything works and sorting out the audio-visual equipment, I take off my boots and slide around the room a bit in my stockings, taking it all in.

Hold up! There are a few more *very important* things to sort out – the forms! The forms that people will be signing upon entry. Apparently, upon signing these forms, the participants are effectively risk assessed! They will be magically protected! Or so the forms claim. They are informed that this project has been ethically approved by the university, but also that the necessary procedures for their health and safety

within this institution have been processed and have received the stamp of approval.

A strange series of images of a whole bunch of buttoned up shiny White people ...

*“We could say that any project that aims to dismantle or challenge the categories that are made invisible through privilege is bound to participate in the object of its critique” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 149–150).*

A scene from a 1950s Technicolour musical starts to play in my head...

Watch out!

You could get thirsty!

Watch out!

You could trip on a cable!

Watch out!

You could bash your shin on a chair!

You could also get bashed in the face by another participant!

Indeed ...

Is this health and safety approved? Yes!

Don't worry, don't you worry! You signed the forms!

Good. I feel safe now. So, it is all ok then!

Your armour is made of paper and words and dotted lines awaiting your signature

This will protect you from any health and safety risks

Is this health and safety approved? Yes!

Don't worry, don't you worry! You signed the forms!

You are fool proof protected!

Don't worry! Just sign here and trust me. Trust us.

You all trust each other

You trust me and the space you were

A room full of awkwardly smiling strangers with boxing gloves on.

This is a stamped certified and approved space full of stamped certified signed and approved activities such as this regulated, risk-assessed, sanctioned and authorised play.

Is someone taking responsibility for this?

Good.

I feel safe now.

Let's 'play'.

### **Hillbrow, 2007: the night of the performance**

"Let's play!" I shout into the circle that we have made, our hands in the center: go team! We have just finished a warmup in the gym in the side room next to the boxing ring. Donning our gloves, jumping on the spot up and down, we nervously look out at our audience: a group of people from the local area, some of my friends, some people from the arts brave enough to withstand the cold and their own very real fears of coming into Hillbrow at night. Standing around the old boxing ring, they wait.

It's funny; while I remember the training up to this night, the night of the performance is less clear; nervous energy clouds my memories. I remember making sure there is enough water and food readily available, trying to secure cables, organising some lights for the action and at the last

minute giving some direction to the video guy. We chose the referee on the night.

“Ah yes! I was the referee!” Katja says, “I love this role! I was even wearing red! I remember I could do it because I couldn’t fight otherwise, if I wasn’t pregnant, I would have gone into the ring of course. I liked very much that there were other women boxers. Not only the men fighting” (Katja, 2019).  
Our pregnant referee. We give her the whistle.

We jog out of the gym in a row and make our way up the steps or just clamour through the ropes. We stand on the edges, the periphery, some of us hanging on the ropes, looking into each other’s eyes. Nervous energy, grinning.

Sweat building up underneath my arm pits, dry mouth.

Prreeeeep! The whistle blows. And we are off!

Jabbing, blocking, ducking, diving, shuffling, laughing.

I am in the game, I really don’t know what is coming next, but I just go with it and I’m thinking ...

No. I am not thinking at all.

I am completely in the sweat and smiles of my body with these other sweating smiling bodies.

Prreeeeep! Change!

New partner, new face, new blind boxing game.

Prreeeeep!

New rule! We pause and shout up into the sky.

Prreeeeeep! Change!

New partner, new face, new attacks, new blocks.

Punching, blocking, breathing, shuffling, sweating, laughing.

Following the rules. Breaking them.

I am nowhere else but here, in my body, in my eyes and in my laugh, in my smile and seeing theirs.

A dynamic interplay of exchange.

"More like a party!"

"Everything was just happening there!"

Prreeeeeep!

Leaning back, ribs opening to the roof of the gym, our bellies out, ribs splayed like wings, sighing aloud up into the night air.

Falling down. A welcome collapse. A short-lived rest.

A small but strong applause.

We continue to lie, just looking up at the ceiling of the gym

Chest horizons rising up and down, eyes glistening

Quiet. Relief.

Then we jump up and hug.

After the performance, which lasts no longer than about five minutes, the performance expands, and we invite anyone from the audience to don some gloves and play. We get some takers and continue the game. Prince and I embrace a sweaty breathless embrace, invigorated and alive. After the games,

“they had a braai at the Hillbrow Boxing Club. Everyone enjoyed themselves. She left Hillbrow around 9 pm and that further goes to show she was a very free spirit” [...]. “Soon after, he and Anthea struck a friendship that would survive over the years. They ran together, did boxing together. The tone of his voice takes a different note, one of gratitude and affectation. “I love her, lots of love because she opened doors for me. More people (Whites) started to notice and come, until today. She made me a role model for Hillbrow” [...]. “My gym is standing like this because of Anthea!” He laughs and snaps his fingers, “when she came, it just boom(ed) like that!” (Reeds, 2021).

#### **Hillbrow, 2019 after the scary incident:**

Back to the interview, the sun is getting hotter, and Prince and I move inside.

“For me this project,” Prince says, “when you start to come in the gym, [...] it was really the first time for a White person to come inside my gym so [...] very nice to meet you. When we start the project, I thought this was a play, a joke, but then I saw that it was really serious, and I am so happy because what that project did is that it brought more people into the gym; opened more doors for me and that was very amazing to me. We were not supposed to stop, we were supposed to do more things with that project. When you see Black and White, they are together you know? It was very wonderful for me. That project – it shows peace and love. So, I am very happy for that project” (Khosi, 2019).

I acknowledge and mirror back what he has said, confirming that I have heard him right. The words “we were not supposed to stop, we were supposed to do more things with that project” hit home. I think: why *did* I stop? Why *didn't* I continue? Because I wanted to do other things, go to other places, meet new people, learn more.

I ask, “Do you think this was still boxing?”

“Ja, for me it was, you know, it was boxing ... and play and ... love. Because that's what it was too – people laughing, enjoying, really fun ... people laughing, enjoying. There was a peace there you know. Peace and love and boxing and play [...]. So, it was a new thing in boxing – not just about fighting but also about playing [...]. We were even dancing! We can do dancing in there. It was very fun” (Khosi, P. 2019).

I then ask Prince what I have wanted to ask him for a long time: “Did you ever feel like you were taken advantage of? Like I took advantage of you? Did you feel bad at any time? You can be honest.”

He replies: “No, no for me that project I was so happy. You know like let's say I come on TV or something. But it's not about TV or advertising. It's not about money. It's about how to make yourself known. That's why many people they fail because they are looking for money. No, it's about how to get yourself known. Black and White together doing something. We need stuff like this for peace. We need love and we need peace. We need to be together. To enjoy life. It's not about the money. Love is first. Just enjoy life. Love one another” (Khosi, 2019).

Prince continues, “And the games we were playing I use them in the training! Fast! Jump! Up! Down! Back run! Using the same games as we did back in the project. I think if we can continue doing more of these projects that would be good. To continue to help our community” (Khosi, 2019).

I complete the interview with Prince and move back into the gym. I stay and box for a while longer and then my body starts to feel like lead, so ... heavy. It must be the shock from the men with the gun. I call it a day and embark on the lame futile swearing attempt to get my angel Uber home. At home, in my reflective writing I ask myself: Do you have anything else you would like to add?

I wish I had spent more time there.

I feel ashamed and guilty that I did not engage more, that I was not fully present.

Having three drugged-up young guys waving a gun around in my face is no joke, is not *just playing* for me. Things can turn very bad very fast in a place like that, in the blink of an eye.

I need to consider that care of the self is a real factor here.

I feel exhausted, tired, heavy, scared and then sad. I feel really stuck.

I did not give the second time enough space to breathe. I am regretful. I was a coward. I was not brave. Where has my brave heart gone? Almost paralysed by fear, guilt and shame, my heart is just not *in* it. I did not feel like people were doing it because they really wanted to. Did they really want to 13 years ago? Did you ask then? Did you care *then*?

*“We might even expect such projects to fail, and be prepared to witness this failure as productive”*

(Ahmed, 2007, p. 149–150).

*“Fragility: when being breakable stops something from happening”*

(Ahmed, 2017, p. 168).

The aftermath of fear morphs into shame, guilt and sadness and feels heavy in the body. A stone. It affects my limbs, my gut, my heart. A stone in the body.

There is a lagging  
Feet dragging  
A pulling down and away from  
A shameful curling up  
Collapsible, as if to be folded away  
I do not return the next day.  
I do not return the next day after this.  
I am stuck. In shock, yes, but also...  
I am numb: ambivalent about everything, frozen in fragility, shamefully  
stubborn, moving towards the safety and comfort of ... indifference.  
I want to be comfortably silent.  
I am angry. I break. I leak. I cry. I am so *fucking fragile!* I avoid. I defer.

*The feminist killjoy is a leaky container.*

*She is right there.*

*There she is; all teary.*

*What a mess*

(Ahmed, 2017, p. 171).

## **An interlude:**

Sociologist Avery Gordon describes the term haunting as:

those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind spot comes into view (Gordon, 2008, xvi).

My return to the gym in 2019 was a jarring uncomfortable experience where I became alienated, estranged from my past self and past methods: play felt impossible or “forced”, what was in my blind spot: colour, race, identity, difference, privilege came harshly into view and I came to look upon myself as strange, as *otherly*.

Haunting is a frightening experience. It always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present. But haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done (Gordon, 2008, p. xvi).

The return to past practice, bringing up my ghosts, revealed to me that reflexivity needed something else so as not to move into a rigid space of guilt, and move towards the “something-to-be-done” (Gordon, 2008, p. xvi). Lorde writes: “I have no creative use for guilt, yours or my own” and that “[G]uilt is not a response to anger; it is a response to one’s own actions or lack of action” (2007, p. 130). Most often, unfortunately, Lorde argues: “Guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication:” what sociologist Robin DiAngelo (2018) might call “White fragility”, “it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness” (Lorde, 2007, p. 130). Guilt can be a stagnant, hard, and stony side effect of reflexivity if it is not worked or fluxed *as material* for change. Thus, I found that fluxing saved

this possible stagnant side-effect of reflexivity. I flux myself to engage *with difference*, so as not to move into a comfortable navel-gazing privileged space of *indifference*.

### **Locating fragility, capitalism and Patricia:**

*“Activism might need us to involve losing confidence in ourselves, letting ourselves recognise how we too can be the problem” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 175).*

My grandmother’s teeth fell out when she was 21, she was so poor. She stole the salt and sugar and sometimes forks from Wimpy. She wrapped every last bite of food in serviettes, it was always Christmas in her little fridge full of wrapped up presents, so afraid that she might go hungry again. A heavy bunch of gold and silver keys always attached to her belt, weighing her down, she kept all her favourite clothes folded and wrapped up in yellow Checkers plastic bags locked safely in the boot of their caramel Toyota Corolla. “Just in cases,” she would say. Never to be worn. She shouted at the Black staff at her old age home, at my brother ... accusing *them* of stealing her gold chain. She gave me necklaces and asked for them back the next day. When her husband died, she fell in love with a man who *finally* danced with her in her red dress. He died while washing his socks. She died after lunch one day, full belly, while sitting, wedged in between two friends. Her fear of loss, of losing her teeth again makes her fearful, makes her fragile. Patricia, fearful, White, suicidal, racist, dancing Patricia, and the violence of capitalism expressed in her habits, her inherited habits, *are in me*.

**In our garden at home, JHB, S.A, 2009:**

We, my family and friends, are having a picnic in our garden on the Sunday after the opening of my first solo show. We are eating, drinking, laughing. The dappled sunlight falls on the picnic blankets and on my friends' faces. I go in the house to get more chips for our dips and my friend Thandi, who is Black, is there, pouring herself a drink.

"Hey love, did you read the review by Mary Corrigan, of your show, in the paper?" she asks me, as I walk in the house.

Before I have time to answer, my mom shouts from across the room:

"She didn't *get it!*"

Just to me, out of earshot of my mom: "You should read it." Thandi says, "It's really good ... and important."

"I will." I replied.

For years, I never did.

**Feeling Strange Again, Hillbrow, 2019:**

Adopting a cerebral investigative approach, on day four, the next Monday, I entered the gym headfirst. I bring more ethics forms, pictures of the 2007 project, apples and oranges, and water. Everything except the signed ethics forms, these pieces of A4 white paper, so foreign in this gym, disappears within half an hour. I explain the project again excitedly, I explain what happened here 13 years ago and answer any questions any of the boxers have. Even though most of the boxers are keen to play, I feel strange about

asking these boxers to temporarily abandon their practice and now immerse themselves into mine. I feel strange. Unlike my brave, forth-right, joyful 26-year-old self, I feel disruptive. Interruptive<sup>45</sup>. Why should they stop what they are doing for me? It's a very different engagement. It's painstakingly earnest and considerate. Very ... *careful*. A tiptoeing, a "sorry" here and a "sorry" there<sup>46</sup>. It does not feel like Prince and me making something together.

*"Perhaps to become careful, to be full of care, is to become anxious about the potential to break something else" [...] "The more you try, the more you seem to slip up" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 169).*

I *must* play – for the research. Granted, I am feeling the repercussions of the incident and my body feels heavy: lumbering around the gym, like a clumsy primary coloured school child, a white-footed clown in a giant red t-shirt with small strange blue shorts and yellow shoes. There is no kin:be:jozi safety net or structure, no Dan or Katja. It seems I got the memo for "Another White Lady Feeling Alone and Sorry for Herself" because I am wearing a red t-shirt with the number 1 on the front and TEAM MOYS on the back. "Ugh ... Sorry – whose team? It's *just you gir!*" I hear my friend and fellow clown Roberto in my head. This approximately 5-foot 39-year-old White female body with a naively nervous smile pasted and stretched across a face on a head that

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<sup>45</sup> Strange how this was indeed the title for my master's exhibition: *Interruption*.

<sup>46</sup> South Africans, perhaps White South Africans, are known to say "sorry" a lot. A brushing of elbows in the supermarket, getting in someone's way or even just beginning a sentence "Sorry ... but your name again?"

desperately needs a haircut, trying, so earnestly to do this again. I am feeling  
... I feel ...

Really, really strange. Disembodied.

No.

Shit.

I am a stranger to myself.

Stranger danger in unknown territory.

An imposter in this researcher body.

An imposter in this old artist body.

An imposter in this gym.

Piercingly uncomfortable in this strange skin.

Foundations have been shaken, destabilised, broken, dis-membered

from my certainty

My TEAM MOYS number '1' T Shirt is fading, is in the process of dying

But I am haunted by her, haunted by a stranger, a stone in my belly,

in my shoe.

Three days later, day five, I finally return to the gym. The three boxers are there already, moving around in the ring. Their enthusiasm surprises, inspires and fortifies me. After locating some gloves for me to wear, Prince and I enter the ring. This old ring, the same one from 13 years ago, feels and sounds like it is going to collapse at any second, precariously it holds the five of us up.

After a brief warm up with three balloons, punching them into the air, Prince shouts: "Ok! Let's play the Boxing Game!" and appoints himself as the referee – meaning that he shouts out an instruction and then blows the whistle for us to begin.

"Change (partners)!"

“Shout out!”

“Fall down!”

“Box!”

“Dance!”

“Roar like a lion!”

After playing this for a while, we take a break and I invite the other boxers to give any other rules they might want to include in the game. They add:

“Hang on the ropes!”

“Tap in! Tap out!” A rule that involved four boxers in the ring, some on the sides and then “tapping in” and “tapping out” so some could rest while others fought. While we were actually playing, it was all energy, laughter, movement, wide eyes, smiles, laughter, sweat, exhaustion, breath ...

We change partners, and I am with one of the boxers who shouts out:

“Box for real!”

I am smiling.

I can't see if he is, his eyes focused and staring piercingly at me just above his gloves which are held up in the correct stance, covering his mouth.

Heart rate increasing, my breath is short.

Taller than me, his muscles outlined beneath his thin tight grey shirt, his punches come at me swift and precise, dynamic bursts of furious blows, come right at me. Yoh! This guy is strong! I move quickly to the left and right, dodging where I can. This is play, but also, I really need to protect myself here. Boxing *for real!*

For a fleeting moment I am a little afraid.

Briefly, I imagine the impossible: I imagine myself being hit, really hard in the face and blood streaming out of my nose and mouth. Whack! Thump! The boxing gloves are right there – in front of my nose and inches away from my strange desire for my Whiteness to be punctured, stained, broken open.

I imagine hitting him back and getting the same result. I imagine this as a wake up, a shake up – there is this sense that my body is untouchable, that I am so goddamn protected, this bubble I exist within, I almost *want* it to be pierced open, and I want to be strong, for both of us to bleed – and to be colourfully bruised, like the punching game with Nicole in the back of the car when I was six. I know this will never happen, *would* never happen in this world. A veil, a shield, my White body, my privilege protects me.

**London, Wellcome Trust, 2020:**



Figure 26: Explaining *Boxing Games* (2007) after the workshop.

After the games, we return to the coloured plastic chairs scattered around the room. I show the *Boxing Games* project and we discuss what just happened.

“So, how was that for you?” I ask the group.

Liz, a friend of mine who is a 40-year-old Brazilian woman, raises her hand: “There is something quite attractive to break the rules or invent your own rules or to feel the need to do, to be what everybody else is doing. To change the game to make everybody do what you are doing, that’s very powerful [...]” (Liz, 2020).

I nod enthusiastically. “Yes, so changing the rules is a powerful act ...”

“Yes ... it felt incredibly strange for me, because it’s not often I get to change the rules, for people to agree and follow me, to feel powerful.”

“I feel like power is inescapable in these games” a man chimes in, “You can break rules but then another set of rules always seem to emerge.”

After a bit of silence, a White man in his fifties or early-sixties who introduces himself as Ted says: “Yes, I found that with the “I Know, Let’s” game I became more competitive in trying to be more imaginative!”

He continues: “Rather than just letting myself go, I don’t want to make myself look like a prat, so what I’m going to do is do something really outrageous, unique and amazing and so I’ll be forever remembered for it! I won!”

“You lose the game by becoming competitive!” I laugh and say, “But you have made another one: competitive “Yes, let’s make-believe”!”

Someone else shouts out: “That’s a good competition!”

He continues: “Indeed – so you have to make sure” (and here my mansplaining alarm bells are ringing) “that doesn’t quite happen – everyone liked my idea best, therefore I won that one!”

We all laugh ...

Then a designer in the audience speaks up after the end of his comment where he compliments my facilitation skills in making everyone feel safe. He asks: “What is the value of this research? Perhaps this might be useful in a boxing gym?”

I explain how Prince still uses the boxing game as part of his training in the gym. Ted chimes in again, almost to my defence: “The value for me for the moment is that I had a great time and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I did not have to win anything. I was not declared a loser, and it was just that moment in time. That’s good enough for me.”

**Sunday evening, February 2020, on the train back to Newcastle, I am writing in my notebook:**

I remember a tense moment with Rob, my fellow play facilitator, on our play retreat we led in South Africa in November, 2019: in the reflection session after one of the games, the only person of colour on the retreat, asks: “Why is it that she asks this and no-one else? Is it because privileged White people are arguably closer to accessing play?”

Wellcome felt like *forced* play. It was too short.

There was a sense of like a nervous energy as well, like, I didn’t have enough time, and there were just too many games.

El asked in her email: “What if the game really did disintegrate or dry up?” I feel like I didn’t give enough time or trust really to let that happen. Fear of the void. Of empty open space, of silence. The addiction to entertain to create laughter to instil joy; forced play. God forbid anyone gets uncomfortable!

Damn Greg for fighting with me all night the night before.

Damn myself for letting him.

He almost hit me.

“Sleeping” with the patriarchy! Makes me angry.

**Hillbrow, 2019, standing in the ring:**

After the game there is heavy breathing, sweat, glistening muscles and a breeze. It was too short – we stand in a breathless circle in the ring, sweating. I asked the three boxers how they felt. Responses included: relaxed, good and they said that there were “some unexpected warm-ups” (Silo, 2019).

“So why did it feel good?” I asked Silo.

“Because I was playing with something [boxing] I love the most and that I do it every day so today it became different because it became in such a way that I am playing *with* it. I am making a game out of this. So that’s why it was fun for me. I box every day but today I was *forced to play* something that I *do* every day. So, it became very different. And I had to put a lot of energy without thinking like I am putting any energy, you see? So, it was very cool. It was a nice exercise” (Silo, 2019, my italics).

After the interview with the three boxers, I hang around at the gym and Prince and I spar a bit more, laughing about how old we are getting, how unfit I am ...

I remember, I am reminded.  
I am not alone.  
I am not just an '1'.  
I re – member with my self, with Prince.  
Our hug, our laughing breaks my rigid fragility.  
Shatters the stony silence in my body.  
I don't really want to talk, neither does he.  
We play, we exercise, we put in the reps.  
'One, two. One two ...'

You will now return to the thesis and engage the themes that have emerged out of this practice research output in three critical essays. Under the main overarching theme of implicit violence to which each of these secondary themes is connected are: ambiguity, bodies, and privilege in play. Cognisant of the intersectionality of this project and the interconnectivity of these themes, for clarity, each of the following chapters engages a theme. In each of the chapters there will be points of reference, flash backs, to the practice research output, the aim being to continually link these external knowledge structures to the practice, where the themes and insights originated from, so as to create meaning.

## Chapter 5: Practice Review | Critical Essays

### 5.1 Introduction/orientation:

This practice review not only functions to situate my work in a “lineage of practice”, putting my practice research into dialogue with an extant body of performance works, but also employs performative writing to engage theory aligned to my research themes and inquiries (Nelson, 2013, p. 103).<sup>47</sup> The Practice on the Page, i.e. the polyvocal autoethnography and these critical essays that follow it are inspired by performative writing and autoethnography in their post-positivist quest to offer alternative ways of knowing. Inspired by the writing of Madison (1999), Spry (2001), and Pelias (2005), but also Peggy Phelan (1995), these authors look to the self as source for new knowledge, embodying the dual purpose as both “positional possibility”, and as something that radiates outwards, “in the space of recognition and resonance” from the text (Pelias, 2005, p. 419–420). In addition to these authors, there is a precedent for this kind of writing as is evidenced in the book *Concrete and Dust: Mapping the Sexual Terrains of Los Angeles* (2012) by Jeanine M. Mingé and Amber Lynn Zimmerman. The authors use performative writing as a kind of “collage” of interviews, theory, images and creative writing that make up “a hybrid arts-based autoethnographic method” inviting the reader into an evocative, multisensory, polyvocal intertextual landscape (Mingé & Zimmerman, 2012, p. xv).

Writing the practice research output and weaving it into theory has not been a simple task. Madison writes that the “theory/performance coupling is not an easy assignment. Performance thrills me, theory does not. I would surely lose myself without performance, but I cannot live well without theory” (1999, p. 109). In

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<sup>47</sup> On account of Nelson’s (2013) challenge that literature reviews might not be the best or only way forward for practice research PhDs, I have chosen the suggested ‘practice review’ to locate my praxis in a lineage of practice (Nelson, 2013, p. 103).

“Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis” (2001), Spry divides up the writing in the paper into “BEING THERE” (in the location, with the people, in this case she was in Chile) and “BEING HERE” (with you the reader, on the page, in academia, in the realm of scholarship). In this way she is consistent critical reflexivity, calling “on the body as a site of scholarly awareness” (2001, p. 706). Similarly, I attempt this firstly in the practice research output with the many voices in a variety of different locations and time periods, interrupted with Ahmed’s words and secondly, I try to do this, however unsuccessfully (I am still learning)<sup>48</sup>, in the critical essays in the next section. I recognise that this kind of writing, where the body bursts in on theory, is not to everyone’s taste. As I have more of a background in practice as opposed to writing academically, I aim to develop this kind of writing.

Furthermore, in line with the practice research approach in understanding my “practice in terms of its knowledge structures” (Spatz in Bulley & Şahin, 2021, p. 5), the chapters are also critical essays in their own right: engaging emergent themes from the practice research output, those of ambiguity, bodies and privilege as they relate to implicit violence in play, which, in conjunction with feminist theory, I examine to “improve practice” (Bernard in Bulley & Şahin, 2021, p. 6). For example, guided by one of my research questions: *how is ambiguity as “fluxing” potentially violent in play?* the first section of this practice review locates my work in a lineage of practice: that of Flux Sport, however it also engages the theme of implicit violence as it is present in fluxing, as was discussed in the introduction and chapter two. Further, in moving towards imagining the method of reflexivity, the section critiques my own practice and Flux Sport as exercises that needed both reflexivity *and* fluxing thus

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<sup>48</sup> Some proofreaders might say: don’t put yourself down like this in the writing. In line with the post-positivist motivations and in the exposure of vulnerability of the practice, I am actively leaning into the space of being a constant “vulnerable not-knower”, a learner, *not* an expert, in this imperfect unfinished creation (Regan, 2010, p. 28).

engaging the question: *what is the relationship between fluxing and reflexivity in play and how can this be developed as a practice for anti-racist play?*

To engage the themes that emerged in the practice research output, I draw on the following theorists to assist me in linking my practice to external structures. Firstly, in locating my work in a lineage of practice, the writing about Flux Sports will also be about an examination of **ambiguity** as “fluxing” in play as potentially violent, I draw on the work of Natasha Lushetich (2011; 2014) and Ahmed’s “A Phenomenology of Whiteness” (2007) with her feminist killjoy approach (2017). I align the killjoy with the trickster as an unmasking and revealing agent i.e. fluxing the self. To engage the theme of **bodies** in play, in addition to the above, I draw on performance studies scholars Rebecca Schneider (1997) and Diana Taylor (1998) in a critical examination of Flux Sports, my own work, Latino performance artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s *Couple in a Cage* (1998) and the work of South African genderqueer artist Hutton’s *Fuck White People* (2017). Finally, I draw on play scholars Sutton-Smith (1997) and Henricks’ (2015), but also hooks (2015) and Richard E. Jones (2010) in their examination of **privilege** in play in critical conversation with my own work *Nessun Dorma* (2008).

## **5.2 Location in a Lineage and ambiguity as “fluxing” in play**

To my knowledge, Natasha Lushetich (2011; 2014) and Ken Friedman (2016) are the only writers who thus far have published writing about Flux Sports in connection with play theories. In light of this, Lushetich’s text “‘Ludus Populi’: The Practice of Nonsense” (2011) will be my main departure point, offering a productive counter to the male writers who write about play. The below writing in this part of the practice review is a “homage to” her writing and, using it as a departure point, hopes to build upon it.

Lushetich's text "'Ludus Populi': The Practice of Nonsense" (2011) is a rich in-depth and interdisciplinary study of Flux Sports through the lenses of game, deconstructionist, and sociological theory. Her study of Flux Sports is primarily through the lens of Jacques Derrida's concept of *difference* (1983)<sup>49</sup> and *blind tactics*, and Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*, *field* and *doxa*. For the purposes of this research, I will be focusing on her writing about structure as it relates to the interconnected themes of ambiguity, bodies and violence in play.

While Fluxus is not the main focus of this research, it is important to note that Flux Sports is an offshoot from the Fluxus movement and if this thesis is to contribute to the scholarship and genealogy of Flux Sports, it is helpful to provide a brief outline of the Fluxus movement. True to its name, in many ways, the movement was always *in flux*. Resistant to the monolithic impenetrable movement of Abstract Expressionism that preceded it and inspired rather by the more playful malleability of Dada<sup>50</sup> and Surrealism, Fluxus was one of the most inclusive avant-garde art movements of its time (Wilmer, 2017, p. 60). Fluxus produced a multitude of concerts, sight-seeing tours and unusual ways to play with instruments and games in the 1960s and 1970s. Californian West Fluxus leader, Ken Friedman outlines the characteristics of Fluxus as: "Globalism, unity of art and life, intermedia, experimentalism, chance, playfulness, simplicity, implicativeness, exemplativism, specificity, presence in time, and musicality" (Friedman in Wilmer, 2017, pp. 59–60). It was a movement always "on the move," a nomadic formation of artists whose media was *intermedia*, whose

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<sup>49</sup> I am aware that this is potentially an untapped area in this practice research PhD. As Lushetich has examined Flux Sports through this lens, I have adopted another approach: that of addressing Flux Sports through the themes that emerged from the practice research output such as ambiguity, privilege and bodies in play.

<sup>50</sup> I am aware that the inclusion of Dada, specifically Tristan Tzara's colonial and racist writings (see Fusco, 1994, p. 149-150) are problematic in this practice research and I acknowledge further research is needed here with regards to critically deconstructing play, privilege and bodies in the Dada, Surrealist and Abstract Expressionist movements. For now, this is beyond the scope of this research.

discipline was *anti-disciplinary*, that started in New York in the 1960s and extended across the globe to the rest of the USA, Western and Eastern Europe and Asia (Wilmer, 2017, p. 60). However, inclusive as it strove to be, it was still a Eurocentric, predominantly White and male-dominated art movement (O'Dell; 1997, Stiles; 1993, Lushetich; 2014).

While Flux Sports did not include any kind of identity politics, Fluxus was very much a social experiment: they certainly did *do things together*, it was a special kind of “*social praxis*” (Stiles, 1993, p. 93). This is an important fact to acknowledge for this practice research: acknowledging the fact that Fluxus, along with DADA and Surrealism, included and did not ignore the social body. Stiles sees Fluxus as a deeply positive movement in that it is “both of and for the body, of and for society” (1993, p. 65), mostly as a kind of performance art, locating it in the context of Live Art, Body Art, and Happenings. A lot of these Fluxus performances were often described by George Maciunas, seen as the leader of the movement as “gags” (Maciunas, 1977).

As discussed in the introduction, Fluxus playfully disrupted, or “*fluxed*,” the “normal” “‘procedures’ of western cultural practices and behaviours” such as a wedding or a concert, or a sport. They fluxed the taken for granted, the norm. By making the familiar *unfamiliar*, they made the “normal”, *strange*. We change our view and look upon it anew. Some examples of these Flux events include Billie Hutching and George Maciunas’ *Black and White* (1976), where, in breaking down traditional gender roles and reimagining heteronormative traditions, they swapped clothes at their wedding ceremony. Another example is Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* (1964) where she asked audience members to come up and cut away her clothing as she sat motionless and completely passive, both performing the passive self and/or objectification of the “other” (Stiles, 1993, p. 81). Takako Saito’s *Smell Chess* (1965), which was included in the Flux Olympiad, engaged the participant’s body in a kind of intimate “cerebral

erotics” (Stiles, 1993, p. 79). Benjamin Patterson’s *Whipped Cream Piece (Lick Piece)* (1964) was instructions for a body (the artist Lette Eisenhauer volunteered) to lie down passively, be covered with whipped cream and for anyone to lick it off. The work suggests communal erotic pleasure but also, read in a more contemporary light, ensues “sexist overtones<sup>51</sup>” (Stiles, 1993, p. 85). These works evidence how Fluxus engaged the body in a variety of ways. Stiles notes, however, that issues of sex, race, class or violence were present in Fluxus performance but of “a sublimated kind” which can be set apart from the more explicit “overtly hedonistic qualities” present in other works of the time such as Carolee Schneemann (who was excommunicated from the movement by Maciunas) (Ibid.). It is important to note here that while there were two art works by female Flux artists: Bici Hendricks’ *Stilt Soccer* and Takako Saito’s *Smell Chess* (1965), Flux Sports did not include or explicitly refer to any kind of social, political body in the works.

In her chapter “Social Rites and Rituals” in *Fluxus: A Practice of Duality* (2014), where Lushetich discusses some of these Flux Rites like the wedding, Lushetich draws on Kitaro Nishida (1958) in a discussion of self and other. Lushetich asserts that

[T]he other is not objectified as that which negates the identity of the self and thus affirms it by not being Black, White, male, female, young or old, nor is the relationship between self and other that of an intersubjective community, or discursive understanding (2014, p. 172).

Instead, the “I-Thou” relationship operates as dualistically where the self is both “simultaneously individual and social” (2014, p. 173). Lushetich’s writing resonates

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<sup>51</sup> This is an interesting work to take note of from an *intersectional* perspective. While Patterson was not supported by the Fluxus artists in his activities in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, this work seems to objectify the female body covered in cream to be consumed, thus rendering the female body passive and commodified. Why didn’t *he* lie down and be covered with cream?

with my motivations for creating the work *Boxing Games* (2007): “Instead of taking a positional and substantive attitude to the other – which “freezes” the other and in which the self’s identity is affirmed by negating the identity of the other – the self is in-relationship” (Lushetich, 2014, p. 173). I can relate to this in my work, in not wanting to see Prince as different to me, to “freeze” him as Black and “Other” and additionally avoiding an acknowledgement of my Whiteness and privilege, I wanted to make work *with him*. He, however, definitely saw me as White. Stating in his interviews with me and Mbesta: “She was the first White person to walk into my gym” and “It was about Black and White coming together” (Khosi, 2019 in Reeds, 2020). Thus, ambidlala is a reflexive methodology that recognises the dangers of both “freezing” identities and unconscious non-reflexive “fluxing” in play and aims to turn this fluxing practice back on my White self, to see myself as strange, where, in reflexivity I see how “the personal becomes the political” in play (Stiles, 1993, p. 95).

Flux Sports was one of Fluxus’ outputs. Lushetich describes Flux Sports as that which finds a comfortable space in-between the “rigid goal-orientedness of sport” and the more liberated forms of play (Lushetich, 2011, p. 31). In her text (2011), Lushetich analyses the *The Flux Olympiad* that took place at the Tate Modern in 2008. The Olympiad celebrated Fluxus leader George Maciunas’ dream to hold an annual Flux Olympics, which was a whole weekend dedicated to bizarre reimagining of popular sports by Fluxus artists. Flux Sports can be seen as inspired by Dadaist artist Marcel Duchamp’s notion that “art is a game” as a form of “art amusement” or entertainment, i.e. *ludus populi*: popular games (Lushetich, 2011, p. 24). In direct reference to popular sports that any player can access, Flux Sports “engage the player in a clash of opposites by asking him/her to pursue the goal of the game in ways and by means that are either nonsensical or entirely counterproductive” (Lushetich, 2011, p. 31). In this way they interrupt the “hierarchical divide between the means of the game – for example, the

boxing gloves, the ball – and its ends – for example, knocking one’s opponent out or scoring a goal” (Ibid.). An example is Bici Hendrick’s *Stilt Soccer* where players have to play soccer on stilts. Because the components and the structure of the game have changed, this changes the way the players play the game resulting in a proliferation of different games as opposed to just one kind of game. It could be a make-believe game on stilts, or it could be a “dance-like improvisation” or “competitive” game. Drawing on Derrida, Lushetich examines these works and writes: “[...] *différance* is a rupture in both linguistic and logical structures that, by exposing the endless play and proliferation of differences, prevents reduction to an ultimate meaning or an ultimate position” (my highlights, Lushetich, 2011, p. 28). This *deferring* can be seen as an act to reveal the continuous play of difference.<sup>52</sup> In this practice research, this deferring, if not engaging *with* difference, for example, difference of bodies in play, can also be seen as an act of *indifference*, and thus violence in play.

### **5.3. Flux kits and my practice**

In making explicit the difference between my practice and Flux Sport in their engagement with bodies in play, I want to bring Lushetich’s examination of the Flux Kit into conversation with Ahmed’s killjoy kit. Flux Kits were essentially “portable performance scores”, neat, compact play kits designed by more than one Flux artist – encouraging limitless improvisation from the player, including “a variety of actions, from rope-jumping and match-lighting to poem-composing and organ-playing” (Lushetich, 2011, p. 23). This practice research resonates *at a higher frequency* with

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<sup>52</sup> This ‘fundamental undecidability’, this play of difference and endless deferring, Lushetich argues, is made possible through the adoption of blind tactics.

Ahmed's "killjoy survival kit" (2017, p. 236). Ahmed advises to fill our killjoy kits with stories, authors, emotions/feelings, laughter, dancing, joy, other killjoys and, following on from this: one's positionality – we need other killjoys in our kit as "[I]t helps us to recognise how we too can be the problem; we too can be involved in erasing the contributions or chances of others" (2017, p. 244).

"Black and White together doing something. We need stuff like this for peace. We need love and we need peace. We need to be together. To enjoy life. It's not about the money. Love is first. Just enjoy life. Love one another"  
(Khosi, 2019).

A killjoy kit is not only about playing games. It lets the world seep in and fortifies us, keeps us safe, fosters self-care and care for other killjoys as "[W]e need each other to survive" (2017, p. 235).

#### **5.4. Fluxing as ambiguous play**

For some Fluxus artists the personal could not be separated from the political. It seems that Fluxus artist Henry Flynt's activities and commitment to the Civil Rights movement in 1963 that were "stridently political and overtly committed to exposing and denouncing all forms of cultural imperialism" were not the Fluxus norm and were even disregarded (Stiles, 1993, p. 78). The only Black Flux artist Benjamin Patterson is important to note as he was one of the lesser-known founding members of the movement. Patterson had to quit making art to support his family and is important to note in this research as evidence of the movement's involvement with, or lack thereof, identity politics or social activism. Patterson writes about his time during the civil rights movement in the USA:

It was a time (according to me) **when no artist should sit on the fence**. But in general, I think Fluxus did sit on the fence [...] I must state that I never got a telephone call from 'Fluxus Central' asking me to join next Saturday's 'March on Washington' – for any purpose [...] And, yes, I did march – not every weekend but enough to get a good taste of tear gas (my highlights, Patterson, 1991 in Young, 2014, p. 175).

Concerning any commitment to political engagement from the movement, Patterson's words, especially "no artist should sit on the fence" are words that this research interprets as positions of ambiguity in play: positions of comfortable privilege that, through the act of deferring do not engage difference (Patterson, 1991 in Young, 2014, p. 175). For the purposes of engaging the research question in reflexing on my past practice: How is ambiguity as "fluxing" potentially violent in play? This "sitting on the fence" is an ambiguous/ambivalent position, a position of privilege and is thus complicit and potentially violent. One could argue that these bodies in play: Patterson, along with side-lined female artists (see Butcher, 2018) could not play for play's sake because there was too much *at stake*.

Equally, one could argue that artists survived through humour and playing in their art as is evidenced in conceptual artist Adrian Piper's work, "Notes on Funk" (1985). The work was essentially about teaching White people how to dance to funk. Piper writes that her "immediate aim in staging the large-scale performance (preferably 60 people or more) was to enable everyone present to GET DOWN AND PARTY. TOGETHER" (Piper in Bishop, 1985, p. 130–134). Through this act one of the goals was to combat feelings of alienation (her own and those of her participants) as a result of being "accumulated" into White culture. The ambiguity of play in the methodology of ambidlala lies in recognising and feeling the tension between Patterson's "sitting on the fence" (Patterson, 1991 in Young, 2014, p. 175) and Piper's lets "GET DOWN AND PARTY. TOGETHER" (Piper in Bishop, 1985, p. 130–134).

Ambidlala is the reclaimed functionality of the fluxing trickster as both “colonizer-perpetrator[s] and colonizer-ally” (Regan, 2010, p. 28).

Perhaps alluding to this “sitting on the fence”, the slogan “Your Silence is Violence”<sup>53</sup> painted on the placards at the Black Lives Matter protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in early 2020 highlights the kind of violence as it manifests in indifference, ambivalence and ambiguity in play, that this practice research seeks to illuminate. “Your Silence is Violence” are words inspired by Lorde: “Your silence will not protect you” (1984, p. 41 in Ahmed, 2017, p. 260). Ahmed writes that this silence might not protect you, but it does protect those who perpetuate the violence. In our silence we are complicit, thus violent and we are protecting those who do the same. Ahmed’s feminist killjoy “comes to exist as a figure, a way of containing damage, because she speaks about damage” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 260). Gordon writes: “Haunting always harbours the violence, the witchcraft and denial that made it, and the exile of our longing, the Utopian” (2008, p. 207). The longing for us to live beyond our differences:

... what really mattered was *on the inside*, not to judge a book by its cover/colour and that colour is just one part of the story.

I don’t want to be another White person who is poop-scared of the city. I want to prove all those scaredy-cat White folks (and my stupid boyfriend) walled up and trapped in their boring, electric, fenced-off comfort zones that they are wrong! I want to inspire them to come play outside.

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<sup>53</sup> These words are inspired by the Audre Lorde’s essay, ‘The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action’ (1977; 2017).

“He [Prince] describes her as a free spirit, who came back and forth in Hillbrow freely, not caring about the happenings in South Africa, instead, welcoming and loving everybody regardless of the colour of their skin, where they came from, or which language they spoke” (Reeds, 2021).

In returning to practice and rewriting it: “speak[ing] about the damage”, *Boxing Games* (2007) was ambiguous in that it was generative and authentic in its “Utopian longing” to transcend difference through play, and it also “harbour(ed) the violence” i.e. colour-blind *indifference* in play (Ibid.). When we are actively engaged in ambiguity, for instance if we are deciding between two options, we are *engaging difference*. This practice research examines the more passive complicit, silent and invisible side of remaining ambiguous, thus taking a position of *indifference* and how this can be violent – a tool of oppression in play.

### **5.5. Bodies in play: Blind tactics**

To play these Flux Sports, Lushetich explains that we need “blind tactics” (2011, p. 34). Blind tactics are the temporary unity of chance-bound uncertainty and rule or law-bound certainty that, if adopted, change the shape of the game by accommodating what might take place between this unity: between something unknown and its call for the player to improvise and take a decisive action. As the name suggests, *Stilt Soccer* involves players on stilts trying to play soccer and are thus forced to improvise their movements. Because the game has obviously changed with the incorporation of stilts, it is no longer about strength and speed as is usually the case in soccer. Lushetich asserts that unless one is a trained stilt walker, “it is impossible to form any idea of the development of the game prior to becoming involved in it, and that the only useful tactic is indeed the non-strategic “blind” kind” (2011, p. 34). Thus, blind tactics are

also about taking a chance, stepping in, playing blindly and seeing what will happen, and, through this process of trial and error, figure out how best to play as you go along.

Viewed in a different context, perhaps blind tactics are used as a way to adapt, a survival tactic. Lushetich's analysis of the differences between art and sport enables me to contextualise my work that was made in a "post"-apartheid South Africa and how different this is to Flux Sports. For the most part, art functions to elicit "new insights", it is a unique act created by "gifted professionals" and sometimes provides us with "lasting shift(s) in consciousness" (Lushetich, 2011, p. 25). Games and sports on the other hand have a "tension-releasing function insofar as they provide the participant with relaxation and distraction" and "offer predominantly sensorial enjoyment and thus no more than instant gratification" (Ibid.).

Located in one of the most dangerous suburbs in Johannesburg, South Africa, Prince's gym is a sanctuary for the community in Hillbrow, for men, women and children in the area: "He is the one who is making it easy to play in such a hard place to play in [...]" (Silo, 2019). Thus, for Prince and his boxers, the sport and training is indeed a welcome escape – a "tension-releasing function" (Lushetich, 2011, p. 25), but it is *also* a way to survive. The change of the objects, like the stilts in *Stilt Soccer* shifts the way the players play the game, and thus change the game. Equally, the boxing glove, the object in *Boxing Games*, while not intentionally changed *physically*, is not used for the purpose it is designed: to knock your opponent out, but is now being *played with to play*. Sometimes, though, at Prince's gym, we *ran out* of boxing gloves and so some players only had one boxing glove when they played. This did not happen at the Wellcome Trust, for example, where we had all the materials we needed on hand at our disposal.

In the risk assessment form, it states:

The rules of the game and the risks involved will be outlined: no boxing of the actual body, no boxing of the head, but rather to aim for boxing of the other boxing gloves, in a sparring kind of fashion, and that it is more a boxing dance with each other as opposed to two people in a ring, fighting. Thus, in this context, while they may represent violence, the boxing gloves were used as protection as well as playthings.

“Hillbrow is a cool place with many kinds of people. It’s a place where everyone is targeting money and girls, so everybody is doing anything to get what he wants anytime he wants [...] You have to fight for what you want. In Hillbrow you always work with fear. So, in Hillbrow, you have to overcome your fear. If you can survive in Hillbrow, I think there is no place that you can’t survive” (Silo, 2019).

This comparison (in the text, but also in the practice) reveals how the social world seeps into the area of play, changing the objects and thus the way the game is played. Living in a dangerous area and lack of access to equipment, resulting in a change of objects, might result in players adopting blind tactics as a necessary creative adaptation (or survival blind tactic perhaps?) of the game. Perhaps adopting “blind tactics” is a creative part of our survival? This is critical as it highlights the different bodies in play, asking: who plays for whom and what purpose, depending on the context they find themselves in? This is a question I did not ask myself in 2007.

### **5.6. Bodies in play: Bodies made ready for whose game?**

Drawing on Lushetich’s examination of Flux artists’ use of the readymade, I use this as a critical lens to examine the potential violence of othering and objectification inherent in play studies. Games like boxing, chess, soccer or a race are all “dramaturgical structures Flux Sports utilise as ready-mades” (Lushetich, 2011, p. 31).

An example of a readymade is Marcel Duchamp's urinal, an everyday object that he bought in a hardware store, which he then reassigned as a "ready-made", by signing it and calling it art, thus reassigning its purpose, its function to art. In John Cage's *4'33''* (1952), he reassigns the purpose of the orchestra where he instructed the musicians to sit with their instruments in silence for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. The work foregrounds the background and "invites the listener/spectator to a multi-sensorial appreciation of all events in time-space, dissolves the structure by dissolving the frame" (Lushetich, 2011, p. 29). Lushetich argues that Flux Sports, "follows closely in the footsteps of Duchamp and Cage, in the sense that it collapses the structurality of structure" (2011, p. 30). In a sense, readymades need the structure to make the background visible. By bringing the background into the foreground it "dissolves the structure by dissolving the frame" (Lushetich, 2011, p. 29), but it is not entirely structure-less in its reference, its connection to the original: the orchestra "old music" or the sport of boxing or soccer or, as I shall explore below, the violent science of ethnography.



Figure 27: *Couple in a Cage* (1992–1993)

If ethnography were a kind of sport or a kind of “ready-made” making activity, the performance *Couple in The Cage: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992–1993) reveals that it is a brutally violent and inhumane one. The performance, which toured to five countries, exhibited the two Latino performance artists, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña as “cultural specimens” in a golden cage outside and inside various museums of natural history. The first performance was to “celebrate” the quincentenary arrival of Christopher Columbus on America’s shores and its goal was to reveal the colonial violence of exploitation, exhibition and captivity of indigenous people. Examined here, at a very real cost to their own bodies, *Couple in the Cage* (1992–93) attempts to reveal the act of ethnography not only as *strange*, but as violent in the dehumanisation of non-White human beings in history. The first on the artists’ list being in “1493: An Arawak brought back from the Caribbean by Columbus is left on display in the Spanish Court for two years until he dies of sadness” to the most recent in “1992: A Black woman midget is exhibited at the Minnesota State Fair, billed as ‘Tiny Teesha, the Island Princess’” (Fusco, 1994, p. 146–147). Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor likens their performance, how they objectified and used their own bodies to “what Brecht would have called ‘quotable’ gestures” in that their performance drew from a range of stereotypical ethnographic studies from world fairs, freak and circus shows and “pseudo-scientific displays”, writing that “[A]s ‘objects’ Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña out-fetished the fetish” (1998, p. 165). This is important because it links in with the history of modernity as discussed in the chapter on modernity. The artists have approached the research act of ethnography in the same way Duchamp approached the object, by *performing* as the objectified Other.

Colonialism extracted, Whitewashed and stripped any personal sense of individuality away from its captives. Ahmed in “A Phenomenology of Whiteness”

asserts: “Colonialism makes the world ‘White’, which is of course a world ‘ready’ for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach” (2007, p. 153–54). In line with Sutton-Smith’s “rhetoric of *counterludic identity*” (Sutton Smith, 1997, p. 98), where the subordinated group has *used the colonial game* to assert their own power, the trickster artists reviewed here engaged difference head on and *fluxed* the colonial game of ethnography as “quotable gesture” by taking a vow of silence and performing “anything the spectator wanted them to be, except human” (Taylor, 1998, p. 165). The artists perform themselves as these certain objects, *made ready* via performing this violent game and thus become a *ready-made* for this Whitewashed world, as “cultural artifact, as sexual object, as threatening alterity, as scientific specimen, as living proof of radical difference” to be examined and made sense of by “experts” (Ibid.).

*Couple in a Cage* presents itself like a sideshow for people to delight in. In actuality, it participates in redirecting the show, shifting the gaze to the audience. In other words, it creates a parody of Western stereotypes of what “primitive” people do, rather than normalising it: Fusco and Gomez-Peña’s performance was about highlighting “the theatricality of colonialism” (Taylor, 1998, p. 167). Hooks evidences the violence of ethnography with terrorism:

They do not imagine that the way Whiteness makes its presence felt in Black life, most often as terrorising imposition, a power that wounds, hurts, tortures, is a reality that disrupts the fantasy of Whiteness as representing goodness (hooks, 2015, p. 169).

The work effectively “disrupts the fantasy of Whiteness as representing goodness” (Ibid.). Fusco writes that their cage “became the metaphor for our condition, linking the racism implicit in ethnographic paradigms of discovery with the exoticising rhetoric of “world beat” multiculturalism”: “We sought a strategically effective way to

examine the limits of the “happy multi-culturalism” that currently reigns in cultural institutions [...]” (1994, p. 145). On the surface it is a performance of “the exotic Other” as a trick or in disguise so as to study us, the White audience looking in and at and at the same time reveal this act as terrorising – as violent.

The work powerfully engages “reverse ethnography” to illuminate racism and pierces the facades of “diversity” and “multiculturalism” (Dyer, 2005, p. 111–12). Dyer says that it is imperative for us to continue studying Whiteness and not be seduced by attempts at “inclusion” and “diversity”: “Postmodern multiculturalism may have genuinely opened up a space for the voices of the other [...] but it may also simultaneously function as a side-show for White people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them” (2005, p. 111–12). In reference, I think of one of South Africa’s “Rainbow Nation” performances of unity when the late ex-president Nelson Mandela wore the South African Springbok rugby jersey<sup>54</sup> in 1995, in a deeply divided country barely recovering from massive trauma, where a “fantasy of cooperation is floated [...]” (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 95). Ahmed writes: “We could also think of postrace as a fantasy through which racism operates: as if racism is behind us because we no longer believe in race [...]” (2017, p. 5).

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<sup>54</sup> I also think of South African comedian Trevor Noah’s description of the violence of colonialism in relation to sport in what he says is ironically named: the ‘Commonwealth Games’: “It’s colonization done right, and the British did it perfectly. Yeah, because now we’re friends. We all speak the same languages. We even have games where we participate together, the Commonwealth Games, ironically named. There was nothing common about it. All the wealth was in one place.  
Great Britain: “Right, let’s forget everything that happened and let’s play some games together.”  
Jamaica: “No we’re never gonna join and y’all don’t want to admit what you did to us, we’re not gonna play your games. Give us back our sugar. Give us back our people. Give us back our gold.”  
GB: “Well we can’t do that. That’s ridiculous! But come and run with us.”  
Jamaica: “Will you give us back the gold?”  
GB: “No we won’t. But we’ll let you win it back one medal at a time.” (Noah, 2015).

In the car on the way home from university. I am in my first year.  
I say to my mom: "I'm so sick of all this art dealing with identity politics! Its  
over! Can't we just let go and get on with it?"

*"In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present"*  
(Sharpe, 2016, p. 33).

The only person of colour on the retreat,  
in the reflection session after one of the games asks:  
"What if I don't want to play?"  
Why is it that she asks this and no-one else?

In this sense play works as a kind of violent "make-believe", a masking over in the service of an unattainable impossible fantasy: "We're just playing!" This kind of utopian play as I have experienced in my own practice, I argue, can *also* be a performance of power, the power of using play to hide or playwash<sup>55</sup> over implicit violence. In reference to one of my research questions, how is the ambiguity of play potentially violent? In not engaging difference, in not engaging in reflexivity, this is one of the ways play is ambiguous and how it has the potential to be violent in its ambiguity.

Lushetich's "foregrounding the background" as part of the process of "collapsing the structurality of the structure" (2011, p. 30) can also be interpreted I argue in Hutton's work, *Fuck White People* (2017). Hutton's work somewhat

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<sup>55</sup> My friend and play colleague Mathias Poulson, leader of the CounterPlay festival in Aarhus, Denmark came up with the term "playwashing" to describe "the situation where a company or organization spends more time and money claiming to be "playful" through advertising and marketing than actually implementing strategies and business practices that cultivate a playful culture in said organization" (2016). This could be a ping pong table in the lunchroom, for instance. In this instance, however, I use the term to wash over difference, to use play as a cover, where people co-opt the cover of play for alternative non-transparent motivations.

fulfils Schneider's request "to make its" [i.e. the White body] "structural invisibility visible" (Schneider, 1997, p. 9). In the act of revealing and making Whiteness strange,<sup>56</sup> Hutton describes themselves as "a South African genderqueer artist who works with their Fat Queer White Trans body in performances as Goldendean, a nude, gold-painted avatar making playful gestures in public to gather an audience in conversation and play with them" (Hutton, 2017). In another manifestation of Goldendean they appear dressed in a suit emblazoned with the words "FUCK WHITE PEOPLE":

[...] as both a catalyst to start everyday conversations around White supremacy, racism and privilege, and as a decolonial gesture with an aim to destabilizing predominately White spaces, to make Whiteness visible, to reveal its centralized position and to perform visible allyship to anti-racism efforts to advance social justice (Hutton, 2017, np.).

These words, *Fuck White People*, are not theirs but were the words of Wits student, Zama Mthunzi, who was wearing a t-shirt with the words "Being Black is Shit" on the front and "Fuck White People" on the back at one of the #feesmustfall protests at Wits University in 2016 (Hutton, 2017, np.). After conversation with Mthunzi, Hutton then made a three-piece suit and posters with these words and wore it as part of their performances and performance lecture series where they discuss the work with audiences. In speaking about her students, bell hooks writes:

Their [her White students] amazement that Black people watch White people with a critical "ethnographic" gaze, is itself an expression of racism [...] Often their rage erupts because they believe that all ways of looking that highlight difference subvert the Liberal belief in a universal subjectivity (we are all just people) that they think will make racism disappear. They have a deep emotional investment in the myth of "sameness," even as their actions reflect the primacy of Whiteness as a sign informing who they are and how they think (hooks, 2015, p. 167).

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<sup>56</sup> Even though Hutton's body is actually ambiguous, they do not identify as a *female* or *feminist*, I refer to this work in its demonstration of calling attention to Whiteness and making it strange.

If we remember, Dyer’s challenge to White people to make themselves strange to denormalise Whiteness, saying that White people need to develop another kind of vision, to see themselves as *not normal*, to “make themselves *strange*” to see *otherly* (Dyer, 2005, p. 12). Hutton fluxes Whiteness by bringing the taken-for-granted background “normality” of Whiteness, foregrounding it explicitly through their suit and then using this to stimulate conversation through their lectures, through active dialogue.



Figure 29: Hutton giving a lecture wearing their “Fuck White People” suit, (2017).

In an interview with them in 2021, they asked me: “Hi Ant! So ...” grinning, “How have you failed Whiteness today?” which reminds me of how Lorde writes about this “Whiteness” as the “mythical norm”: “White, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure” (Lorde, 2009, p. 203). In this work, and many others

of theirs, Hutton, at great risk to themselves<sup>57</sup>, reveals or unmask Whiteness by making the “structural invisibility” of Whiteness visible by locating it on their own body and wearing it as a White genderqueer artist. In their work #fuckwhitepeople they are explicitly playing with their White body, so they used play as a revealing, *unmasking* tool. Linking this back to my research questions: How has my performance practice been complicit with the violence of apartheid? While in critical reflexivity on my own earlier performances, in not wanting to draw attention to difference.

“*Hey wit voete!*”

I arguably used play as a masking or *deferring* tool. Here is another example whereby if ambiguity, if not engaging *with* difference becomes *indifferent*, and thus complicit and potentially violent. Lorde writes:

[...] as you acknowledge your difference and examine how you wish to use it and for what—the creative power of difference explored—then you can focus it toward a future which we must each commit ourselves to in some particular way if it is to come to pass at all. [...] We must define our differences so that we may someday live beyond them [...] (2009, p. 204).

Ambidlala does not defer or look away. In adopting reflexivity, it seeks to be “the creative power of difference explored” (Ibid.), thus contributing to the question: What is the relationship between reflexivity and fluxing in play and how can this be developed as a practice for anti-racist play?

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<sup>57</sup> Sometimes, they must be at a secret location and stream the lecture/performance as they have received death threats from people in South Africa and abroad.

## 5.7. Privilege and play

*I want to make my privilege explicit:*

*You grew up in love and felt safe with both parents who put food on the table, who read to you at night, who supported you: “Follow your bliss!” “You are infinite!*

*You contain multitudes!”*

*You grew up with a multitude of different children all different ages and races.*

*You went to a private school that believed in your unique individuality.*

*You went traveling from early age with your family and alone and developed a deep curiosity for the world and the people living in it.*

*You liked boys and sometimes, often, they liked you back.*

*You started working at 15 and had numerous jobs such as waitress, retail assistant, hostess, assistant art director, events and project manager, transcriber.*

*You went to university and completed a master’s degree.*

*You were always close to opportunities – just a small reach away.*

*You were never questioned when you took out loans so you could study overseas and travelled for your work – expanding and extending your network.*

This chapter engages one of my themes: that of how privilege (which is inextricably connected to violence and bodies) is present in play. Through the lens of ambidlala, I examine my own performance *Nessun Dorma: None Shall Sleep Tonight* (2008) and, for theoretical guidance, draw on play scholar Henricks (2015), teacher and feminist bell hooks (2015) and queer theorist Richard E. Jones (2010). The chapter seeks to make explicit how privilege was present in my past practice and how this is connected to violence in play.

In 2008, I was invited to participate in a group exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery where I was asked to respond to the title: “The World’s Most Dangerous Ideas”. I thought: I live in one of the most dangerous cities in the world, I thought, my idea was to sleep the night in Joubert Park just outside the gallery which happened to

be one of the most dangerous parks in Johannesburg. Working in this park previously I knew that many unemployed people slept in this park during the day and were “removed” at 6pm when the park closed. The performance involved me relocating my bed from the safe, more affluent northern suburbs, where I lived, to the park. The performance also included four Tactical Security guards from the area where I lived, one at each post of my bed. It is important to note that the security guards were older Black men, who preferred not to be named<sup>58</sup> and were all from a lower social-economic status than I, who probably really did protect me while I slept in my bed at home. It also included two professional opera singers, Rheinald Moagi and Khotso Tsekeletsa, who stood on two raised plinths and sang Puccini’s aria: “Nessun Dorma”. The opera resonated through the park and into the surrounding area and people came into the park from the street to see where the sound was coming from. During their singing, I read “Don’t Panic! Don’t leave for Perth! Stories from South Africans” and a book on Utopia.

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<sup>58</sup> Upon returning to South Africa, I contacted the Security company in trying to locate the men in these photos to ask them about that experience, ask them if they felt the same and make amends if necessary. Unfortunately, after several attempts there was no success in finding them. Again, I realize that the not naming is an act of violence: whilst the Opera singers were considered ‘artists’ who must be named, the guards remained unnamed, fading into the background, but critical in making my presence in the foreground felt.



Figure 30: *Nessun Dorma: 'None Shall Sleep Tonight'* (2008)<sup>59</sup>

While this performance does not explicitly engage play or sport as material, this work remains critical for this practice research in revealing part of my identity as a privileged White person in South Africa. In his article: “Putting Privilege into Practice Through ‘Intersectional Reflexivity’: Ruminations, Interventions, and Possibilities” (2010) Jones acknowledges different kinds of privilege which I identify with: White privilege, able-bodied privilege and further unearned social circumstances. Additionally, he recognises how while it may be a laborious painful exercise to engage in reflexivity, I can still return to the comfort of my privileges (outlined above) and that “it is a privilege to not have my performance always already marked as marginal” (Jones, 2010, p. 124). The reflexive methodology of *ambidlala* allows me to see that while I was motivated by the risky activity, i.e. I was not motivated in this performance to

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<sup>59</sup> At some point in the research process, I covered the faces of the guards in the image with blue dots so as to protect their identity. But this also seemed violent, an act of privileged erasure. The guard on the right *looks back* at the camera. I want to imagine this looking back as an act of resistance as discussed in bell hooks’ book ‘Talking Back: Thinking Feminist Thinking Black’ (2015). Thus, in line with reflexivity I have left the images unaltered.

make White privilege explicit, the somewhat unconscious result (in true trickster or fluxing fashion) was a performance that did exactly this: making explicit and starkly visible the comfort, security, and privilege that I, and many White South Africans experience every night. In addition, reading these books about utopia and Perth (books I *was* actually reading at the time) symbolises the privilege and, with it, the freedom that a typical middle to upper class South African White person, often has: to leave the chaos, travel, emigrate, relocate, and remain in comfort.

Indeed, most play scholarship sees play as being associated with individual happiness, freedom and thus leisure. While heavily criticised (Anchor; 1978, Duncan; 1988, Motte; 2009, Henricks; 2020), Dutch historian Johan Huizinga is still seen as one of the founders of modern cultural history and his book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1949) is one of the most influential and major contributions to play scholarship in challenging the puritanical and work-centered ethics of the time. Huizinga's incredibly radical pursuit to identify play, not only as a biological function (as preparation for adult life), but as a *function of culture* is important for the growth of play scholarship (Sutton Smith, 1997, p. 202). However, even if Huizinga's efforts were to define play in a universalist kind of way, as the texts of Margaret Duncan (1988) and Sutton-Smith (1997) reveal, he ends up idealising and sacralising play. By saying play is "[...] a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life [...]" (Huizinga, 2016, p. 13), Duncan asserts that this is an elitist view of play: "Huizinga's privileging of play entails enormous costs. It assumes that a subordinate class will do the dirty work so that a privileged class can play" (1988, p. 36). I did this in *Boxing Games* (2007) and *Nessun Dorma* (2008): the work exists "outside ordinary life". I did, however, use their "ordinary lives and bodies" to assist my play.

Those who have wealth and power (the majority of the wealth is still held by White people in South Africa, for example) have free time and thus leisure time and this is often associated with play (Stats SA, 2020). In his chapter *Play, Power and Privilege*, Henricks engages play in relation to conflict theory:

Conflict theory's central theme – that people have differential access to society's valued resources – is important for play studies. What individuals choose to do is related to what they are encouraged or permitted to do. Real play is only sometimes a gathering of equals (2015, p. 181).

Briefly, I imagine the impossible:  
I imagine myself being hit, really hard in the face  
and blood streaming out of my nose and mouth.  
Whack! Thump!  
The boxing gloves are right there –  
in front of my nose  
and inches away  
from my strange desire  
for my Whiteness to be punctured,  
stained,  
broken  
open.

In discussing Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1934) Henricks describes this kind of leisure, which can also be attributed to art, turns into a certain kind of (and I add: *White*) "barbarism": "the world of horses, guns, and dogs revivifies patterns of military strength and economic predation that are the foundation of the upper class" (2015, p.180). Turner writes about "leisure time", likening it to two kinds of freedom: "*freedom from*" and "*freedom to*" (1982, p. 36). As an individual, in terms of work, *freedom from* refers to "*freedom from* the forced chronologically regulated rhythms of

factory and office and a chance to recuperate and enjoy natural, biological rhythms again”<sup>60</sup> (1982, p. 36–37).

On the 23 February 2020, Ahmaud Arbery was shot in the back while he was out running in Georgia, USA (Evelyn, 2021).

Additionally, leisure is also “*freedom to enter [...]*” “[*freedom to*] generate new symbolic worlds of entertainment, sports, games, diversions of all kinds” and it is also “*freedom to transcend social structural limitations, freedom to play... with ideas, with fantasies, with words, [...]*” (italics in original, 1982, p. 37). Or, in direct reference to the book I was holding in my performance: “Don’t Panic! Don’t Leave for Perth”, freedom to play with the rules of where I can sleep at night and freedom to up and leave when I please.

My family could move freely in South Africa (but also in the world), unquestioned, without the risk of being asked if we had permission to be there or of being detained without trial.

For hooks, in writing about her travel experiences where she was held and strip searched in various European and Australian airports, this idea of “freedom to enter”, to *move through*, triggers feelings of terror: “To travel, I must always move through fear, to confront terror” (hooks, 2015, p. 174). Mary Corrigan, the South African art critic, writes about *Nessun Dorma* in her review of my first solo exhibition entitled “At My Own Risk”:

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<sup>60</sup> An example of this “chance to recuperate” could be seen in performance artist, activist Tricia Hersey’s work, which is a form of political resistance against “capitalist grind culture”. Hersey’s organization The Nap Ministry “examines the liberating power of naps” stating “Our REST is our resistance” (Hersey, 2021).

The risk value, so to speak, of sleeping in the notorious Joubert Park, on the edge of Hillbrow, is directly attached to her status as an affluent White. Impoverished people sleep in this park daily without it being construed as a statement (Corrigall, 2009).

In discussing the meaningfulness of play, Henricks says that “[...] play can be described as a quest by subjectivity to forestall the claims of otherness and to subvert them for its own purposes” (my highlights, 2015, p. 76). The focus was on *my* safety or *my* “most dangerous idea”, *my*, i.e. White people’s, sleeplessness in the title: “None Shall Sleep Tonight”, but also the guards’ lack of sleep who guarded me. In other words, play can be an individualistic opportunity potentially for self-discovery ...

“How did you get all these opportunities?”

“To be honest, I work hard, and I apply to everything.

This is how I got all these things,  
yeah, I work hard.”

*“(Opportunity: from the Latin Ob-, meaning “toward,” and portu(m), meaning “port”: What is opportunity in the wake, and how is opportunity always framed?)”*

*(Sharpe, 2016, p. 28).*

... potentially at the expense of “Others”, of difference and aims to destabilise and overturn them for play’s own purposes. *Nessun Dorma* (2008) was arguably an individualistic opportunistic subjective quest where I imposed my White female body into a space with Other Black unnamed men who were paid to stand at each post of my bed.

Privilege is “*freedom to [...] play ... with ideas, with fantasies, with words, [...]*” (italics in original, 1982, p. 37). The freedom to play *with words* ... I think back to my poem about the workshop attendees at the Wellcome Trust ...

A strange series of images of a whole bunch of buttoned-up shiny White people from a 1950s Technicolour musical starts to play in my head ...

Watch out!

This writing about the Wellcome Trust practice serves several functions. In critiquing the autoethnographic writing, specifically the “Watch out!” poem, it evidences my shift from pure practitioner to *practice researcher*. In the critique of my own practice research, I want the analysis here to be more about this shift to practice researcher and less about the assumed privilege of the participants at the Wellcome Trust.

The inclusion of the “Watch out!” poem in the autoethnographic writing for the Wellcome collection practice is problematic in its potential perpetuation of violence. To explain, I revert to Taylor’s article where she critiques the many facets of the *Couple in the Cage* (1992–93) performance. She reiterates how, in this performance of reverse ethnography, the artists turn the spotlight on the once-invisible spectator in ethnography, who in keeping a “unidirectional gaze”, they make them into “main player[s]” (Taylor, 1998, p. 163 and p. 166). Towards the end of her article, Taylor contends that there is a “double staging” of the people in the performance and the film which is one of the reasons why this performance is so controversial (1998, p. 166). By double staging she is referring to the various ways the viewers exist in one production “tourists, consumers, dupes, or colonizers” – how they were “actors in another” i.e. in the film where they were filmed, often caught off guard, responding to the work. The violence gets reproduced again: the watcher of the video is the “unseen

seer”: “We can laugh at others’ reactions. We know; they don’t. The hierarchies and epistemologies that the performance attacked are in danger of being reproduced” (1998, p. 170). While entertaining to read and I wrote it because it really gives an idea just how different the context is to Prince’s boxing gym, it is not ethical to lump all of the participants under one heading: “White privileged individuals.” In calling them *all* privileged White people, without interviewing them, am I not othering these people who agreed to play my games, stripping them of any individuality or say in the matter? This is my critique of my poem that I wrote in the autoethnographic writing demonstrating the shift from pure practitioner to practice researcher.

## CONCLUSION

This practice research PhD, through an iterative practice research and qualitative approach, set out to engage three interrelated research questions:

- How has my performance practice been complicit with the violence of apartheid?
- How or in what ways is the ambiguity of play potentially violent?
- What is the relationship between reflexivity and fluxing in play and how can this be developed as a method for anti-racist play?

The research journey took place at my desk in Gateshead, in the UK and in Johannesburg, South Africa. Through an auto-ethnographic and qualitative approach, research data was collected and co-constructed over a period of three years. It included three practices and one practice research output located at the heart of this thesis. In this way one of the aims of this thesis is to synthesise practice and research and thus evidence the shift from pure practitioner to practice researcher. In addition to my own autoethnographic writings, I conducted several semi-structured interviews with past players from the 2007 *Boxing Games* performance and, to create more distance from my own voice and add many voices, I also commissioned Mbesta Reeds to interview Prince, excerpts of which are included in the practice research output. In drawing out three main themes from the practice research output, those of ambiguity, bodies and privilege as they relate to implicit violence in play, I was able to link the practice research output to external knowledge structures and, through a feminist and performance studies lens, examine each theme in connection with other artists' works.

At the outset of the thesis, it was important to identify who the bodies are that are playing, speaking, and writing. I make explicit who I am, my identity as a White, previously advantaged South African (something I did not do in my master's thesis) and I make explicit who Prince is, whose voice is also in the practice research output. With the assistance of Dyer (2005), Schneider (1998), Taylor (1998), Hutton (2021) and Ahmed (2017), I acknowledge the falsity of the privileged statement, "we are all just players just playing together", the utopian dream of play, and I draw on Ahmed's feminist killjoy who calls on killjoys to expose and unmask violence for it to "spill all over the pages" (2017, p. 253). In support of engaging in reflexivity, I draw on Lorde who writes: "[...] we do not develop tools for using our differences as springboards for creative change within our lives" (2009, p. 203). This whole research journey can be seen as moving towards developing tools, i.e. the method of reflexivity, "for using our differences as springboards for creative change within our lives" (Ibid.). In light of these thinkers, *ambidlala* is a reflexive methodology for play where I look to my White body as a departure point, a springboard, not only to locate implicit violence in play – as it was present in my past practice, but also to engage in reflexivity, a practice in reflexivity that engages difference.

This practice research makes a unique contribution, as it is the first project of its kind to fully consider implicit violence as it is found in play scholarship and my own practice. Chapter 5: "Locating Implicit Violence in Play Scholarship: Bodies in Play", in its exploration and exposing of violence as it is found in the dehumanising strategies of modernity, is an important chapter in explicitly locating violence in play in relation to bodies. Considering the time period within which the texts about play were written, there is no explicit reference to the themes of coloniality or the positionality of the (for the most part, White male Eurocentric) researcher or the methods he used. For the most part, none of these texts explicitly or critically engage

ambiguity, bodies, privilege or violence in play. I thought I might find a more critical engagement with play in the exploration of the ambiguity of play, in Sutton Smith's "The Ambiguity of Play" (1997) or in Henricks's texts; however, I was still unsuccessful in my search. Similarly, I found that there was a reluctance in my past play practice to engage in any reflexivity. The journey of the research challenged me to reflex on my own settler heritage for the first time, locating this violence in my settler ggg father's diary and I found that some of the writings in Jim Butler's diary had a similar resemblance to the non-reflexive writings of Turner and Schechner in their observation of the Other. Thus, I found that there was a reluctance in both my own past practice as well as play and performance studies scholarship to directly engage in reflexivity in relation to our troubled colonial pasts. These frustrations fuelled my research inquiries. I desired a word, concept or methodology that was cognisant of the fact that play, as it is found in my own past practice and in the scholarship of play, is haunted by the dehumanising violence of modernity and the brutality of colonialism.

In locating and naming the violence, I move towards non-violence. I make clear how play is haunted by modernity, that as a White body I can never be "just playing", that the White body is never "just" a neutral body. Like the anthropologists who study play, who "disappeared in the text that exposed an other" (Schneider, 1997, p. 137), I make clear what this practice research does not want to perpetuate. This matters because it is important to locate and name this violence and to locate this *as a practice* so as not to perpetuate further non-reflexive, thus potentially violent research and move towards approaches that are more non-violent, anti-exclusionary and anti-racist. In finding that the history of play is haunted by the dehumanising violence of modernity, I locate violence and thus move towards practices of non-violence for play. Thus, the chapter foregrounded the urgency and importance of this research arguing

that new language, like the word “ambidlala”, is needed for play scholarship for us to use when we speak about play in relation to ambiguity, privilege, bodies, and violence in “post”-apartheid or/and “post”-colonial contexts.

This was an important turning point in the research journey because it served to inform a critical decision: that I will not be observing Others in this practice research. Rather, I will look to my White body not only as the vessel that held within it implicit violence, but as a reference point, a “springboard” from which to learn from. In line with Ndebele (2000), Lorde (1981, 2007, 2009, 2017), Spivak (1990) and hooks’ (1984) requests, assisted by the methods of interviews and autoethnography, and Calafell (2013), Spry (2001) and Madison (2011), I turn the gaze back on myself. In fear of centering Whiteness, however, I realised that this decision does not come without its difficulties.

The methodology chapter, Chapter 3, makes explicit the problematics of the method of autoethnography as the primary method for this practice research. I discuss the problem of “[...] speaking for others” (Alcoff, 1991–1992) and call on Calafell (2013), Spry (2001) and Madison (2006; 2011), but also Gordon (2008), Shaw (2018) and Sharpe (2016) to assist me in understanding that my practice is haunted by the violence of modernity and that the labour of reflexivity has to take us somewhere. Returning to past practice, locating the violence there such as non-reflexivity and othering, was a painful laborious experience, but it also challenged me to take the practice somewhere else.

Madison’s search for “why the self-reference matters” and “what the self-reference does to matter” in “searching for the labor of self-reflexivity that will lead us to a band of Others [...]”, I found particularly inspiring for the methodology of ambidlala and the method of reflexivity (2011, p. 129). Ambidlala allowed for a reflexive engagement with past practice yielded new insights for both George and me

about the first iteration of *Boxing Games* (2007). In this sense, I found that it is important to engage in reflexivity, not only to improve practice, but also, as an extension, to improve *relationship*. Through this process George and I have grown closer and there is a level of trust and partnership that I honour and am grateful for. It was as important for me as it was for him, for me to return, to pay respect and for us to retell the story: to do better.

While fluxing the rules of the game “out there” are always possible as shown in my past practice and Flux Sport, it is also important and necessary to turn the gaze back and flux ourselves. In getting to know my settler past, I confirm in a very real way, *in my body*, Regan’s request that we remain forever in the fluxing position as “colonizer-perpetrators and colonizer-allies” (2010, p. 28). In light of Tuck and Yang’s warnings of “settler moves to innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 9), this practice research seeks to *reclaim* the trickster or fluxing as function (Prentki, 2012, p. 204). Tricksters as archetypes that occupy dual positions always in flux: as “colonizer-perpetrators and colonizer-allies” (Regan, 2010, p. 28). Thus, synthesised with my practice, I offer new understandings for trickster and fluxing as it relates to play.

The practices as engaged with on my website function to contextualise the project and offer *sensory* reference points for the practice research output. “‘Making sense’ is a central aspect of knowing: this is not only a sense making, but also a sensory exploration: practice is an active method of research that acknowledges each practitioner’s unique perspective” (Bully & Şahin, 2021, p. 12). The video of *Boxing Games* (2007), the sounds and visuals therein, makes explicit the context of South Africa, the gym that we trained in, the training sessions in the street and the final boxing games performance on the night. This, as well as the photos of practices 1, 2 and 3 are not stand alone works, but function as “springboards” in conversation with

the overlapping creative vignettes in *The Practice on the Page* (Lorde, 2009, p. 203). This aims to “make sense” and make explicit the “know-how”, the tacit, intuitive and embodied vulnerability of the practices.

The practice research output explores implicit and explicit violence as it is manifest in the theme of bodies, but also privilege in play. I believe this practice research output as a polyvocal autoethnographic text is the first of its kind in its inclusion of many stories from people who lived, worked, and played (sometimes apart and sometimes together) during and after the apartheid regime. The aim of the overlapping vignettes function to show the complexity of the project, through my eyes and aims to acknowledge and privilege the voices of some of the key players involved. It shows the story of my upbringing as a White person with a skin condition in South Africa’s apartheid and “post”-apartheid years. In the telling of my narrative however, I continually try to interrupt myself, the self-story, creating a juxtaposition between the safe and secure world of play I grew up in and the insidious violence on the periphery, perpetrated onto Black bodies, like Prince’s, but also on Mma Anne who took care of me, far away from her children, three of whom died. This is important to show because it not only reveals the very different worlds that Prince and I inhabit, but that our bodies are haunted by the very real structural violence of modernity, that we bring this into the ring with us, we bring this into play. It also makes clear the emergent themes: those of bodies and privilege as they relate to violence in play. An acknowledgment of this is critical as it ties the bodies in this practice to the practice research output, thus informing new, more non-violent methods for us to use in play.

As discussed earlier, the critical essays following the practice research output, function not only to locate the practice in a lineage of practice, but also attempt, through Creative Analytical Practice and performative writing, to synthesise theory with practice. The extracted flashbacks from the polyvocal autoethnography expose

the themes, and I connect them to exterior existing knowledge structures to offer *another* richer understanding of the practice research output. Similarly, drawing on feminist and performance studies approaches, these critical essays enrich the practice research output in examining these themes through the work of fellow trickster artists and their fluxing methods.

The first inquiry: *How has my past performance work, or more specifically the fluxing ambiguous methods therein, been complicit with the violence of apartheid?* led me on a journey to explore Flux Sports. Both *Flux Sports* and my own performances work (*Boxing Games*) with the material of sport; however, there are some crucial differences. In many ways my work *is* a form of Flux Sport in the ways that we (Fluxus artists and myself) both approach a structure and seek, through the means of “blind tactics” to flux it. We flux to make the normal *strange*: the soccer is now on stilts; I ride the race going nowhere, Prince and I work together in changing the rules of Boxing, etc. However, my work is different to Flux Sports not only because of the inclusion of our specific bodies (Prince and I) as players *and* creators *in the work*, but also the political “post”-apartheid context within which it was made, *how* it was made and the relationships that still exist over time.

In looking to Flux Sport as an area within which to locate my practice and study play, I offer three new ways of studying play. Firstly, I highlight Flux Sports as an under-researched area that engages Schechner’s categories in performance studies, those of play, game, sport, and ritual, in conversation with my research themes, those of ambiguity, privilege, bodies and violence. Secondly, I found that in doing so, I shifted the gaze away from the usual themes associated with play: freedom, fun, and infiniteness, and in doing so, carved out a space for this important research in its contribution of a “post”-colonial or anti-colonial study of play that is not a study of the playing “Other”. Finally, in critiquing Flux Sports and my own past practice,

I provide writing in the form of interviews: a chorus of unique perspectives from the global south.

In reference to my next research inquiry: *How can the ambiguity of play be potentially violent?* with its focus on freedom, fun and flow, my past work and Flux Sports largely failed to question who plays, for whom, and for what reasons, depending on the contexts they find themselves in. For the most part, our work did not include or explicitly reference any kind of *body politic*; we were not conscious of potential violence, privilege, and bodies at play in play and certainly did not explicitly consciously engage these themes in our work. In engaging my last research question: *What is the relationship between reflexivity and fluxing and how can this be developed for antiracist play?* I located Ben Patterson's words: "sitting on the fence" as an ambiguous/ambivalent position, a position of privilege that in not engaging difference is *indifferent*, thus complicit and potentially violent. I found that the goal is not to disregard fluxus or fluxing, but to turn this fluxing practice back on my White self, to developing another way of seeing *otherly* in play, to see myself as strange, where in ambidlala, I am cognisant of the dual position as both "coloniser-perpetrators and coloniser-allies" (Regan, 2010, p. 28).

Through exploring and exposing violence in play I move towards imagining new language for play scholarship and practice. In examining the emergent theme of bodies as it relates to implicit violence in play in the works: *Couple in the Cage* (1992–93) and *FWP* (2017), cognisant of the learnings about violence from the chapter on modernity, it is clear how these trickster artists, at risk to their own bodies, have fluxed "the movement in the materials presented to" them using their trickster tactic as a revealing, *unmasking* tool: exploring and exposing the brutal, dehumanising, violent history of ethnography and of Whiteness (Ibid.).

A question which Henricks poses, that engages one of my themes, that of privilege, which this practice-research circled back to was: “What kinds of people get to perform what kinds of activities with whom before what kinds of others – and what meanings are attached to those events?” He asserts that while play might indeed be a “vehicle of self-realisation” as his book and my master’s thesis claimed, this process oftentimes privileges someone directing them in “publicly valued directions”, while the rest “are blocked or scuttled off along entirely different paths” (Henricks, 2015, p. 180). Sharpe writes about those bodies as being caught forever in the wake of the engine of racism: “Racism, the engine that drives the ship of state’s national and imperial projects [...] cuts through all of our lives and deaths inside and outside the nation, in the wake of its purposeful flow” (2016, p. 29). While for some bodies this experience of freedom: “freedom to” and “freedom from” is more accessible in play, for other Black and Brown bodies caught “in the wake” of progress, trawling with feelings of terror, this is less possible (Ibid). The ambidlala methodology is a reflexive methodology for play where I can acknowledge that we as players are never “just humans” “just playing” together. But that we bring with us the knowledge that play, playing together is stained, haunted by histories of violence.

As written about in the practice research output and in the reflexive analysis of my own performance work, I see how I too have participated in extractive, exploitative and thus violent processes of othering. The section on privilege makes explicit my inherited privilege and critiques my work *Nessun Dorma* (2008) as an unconscious performance of privilege at the expense of unnamed Black bodies, thus exposing the violence of othering and objectification. With the assistance of Taylor’s (1998) critique of the video documenting the audience of *Couple in a Cage*, I also arguably perpetuated the same processes of othering in the “Watch out!” poem that lumped *all* of the Wellcome participants as privileged. These are some examples of the potential

violence of the ambiguity of play that is not written about in a play or performance studies context that these chapters, in dialogue with my practice research output, seek to make visible. This research thus locates these acts of exclusion and non-reflexivity as ambiguous play, as forms of potential implicit violence in play that an ambidlala player would be aware of. As suggested in the introduction, this work might not necessarily be about developing an antiracist toolkit for White people but might be about proposing strangeness/making strange as a way not to see one's own White body and embodied experiences as Other, but as (*an*)other way of seeing the body – as a practice of critical reflexivity – a methodology for seeing *otherly* in play. This critical analysis of privilege in conversation with play as it is present in my own past practice contributes to a “post”-apartheid and “post”-colonial examination of play and is valuable to any practitioner interested in this subject.

### **Limitations**

In my predominant focus on interrogating the violence of racism in play, this practice research still has many blind spots. This practice research does not sufficiently engage gender in relation to power. While I adopt a feminist lens, this practice research is limited in its lack of intersectionality. As argued by hooks (1984), Lorde (1981), but also more recently in Moon and Holling (2020), feminism without intersectionality is no different from White supremacy. In its resistance to the White heteronormative patriarchal norm, the oppressive structure that is the violence which this practice research has revealed, I see queerness in the work of Goldendean as resistance embodied in play. I see queerness in George's dream: “Black and White together doing something. We need stuff like this for peace. We need love and we need peace. We need to be together. To enjoy life. It's not about the money. Love is first. Just enjoy

life. Love one another” (Khosi, 2019). Further research into how play could be studied through an intersectional and queer lens would be beneficial.

One could argue that this practice research could have been a new performance work that Prince and I created. In the revisiting of the gym my stable secure world was shaken. I knew that I did not want to create a work with the same problematic methods. In the conversations with Prince and in my writing, I realised that this very process of revisiting of the old, being in reflexivity and in dialogue *with* many voices, is creating new work, *is* the “new work”. From this process, evidenced in the polyvocal autoethnography, emerged *ambidlala* and the practice of *refluxivity*.

At the outset of this practice research PhD I embarked on an iterative journey to explore and expose how my play practice was complicit with apartheid. On this journey, as a result from the critical engagement with theory and the practices, further, more specific inquiries emerged resulting in a complex and interdisciplinary exploration and exposure of violence as they are present in ambiguity, privilege and bodies in play. In locating implicit violence in the forms of colour-blindness, non-reflexivity and othering in the texts around play, in my settler heritage and past work, the practice research argued that play is haunted by the violence of modernity. As such it makes clear that play cannot be engaged with in isolation from its troubled colonial past. Thus, in light of this, the practice research offers a methodology that is aware of the implicit violence as it is present (and not written about) in the ambiguity of play. Informed by my scholarly research into the ambiguity of play synthesised with my practice research output as it is felt in the many bodies, our thoughts, stories, and memories that have contributed to this research, this practice research project is the first of its kind to offer up new language for play embodied in the methodology of *ambidlala*: a reflexive methodology that seeks to make visible the potential violence of the ambiguity of play in a “post”-apartheid context. The method of *refluxivity* is

not only a method that moves towards non-violent play, but is ultimately an embodiment of the transformation from pure fluxing to refluxing, from pure practitioner to practice researcher. For those who need it, this practice research can be accessed as an example of research into play that, in the location of violence, aims to move towards less violent and anti-exclusionary methods. Each of these components has relevance for any scholars or practitioners who are critically engaging play in a “post”-colonial context and beyond.

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