

# Editorial

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## *Intimate archives // Autoethnographic acts: Personal surfacings, creative agencies, imagined freedoms*

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Sharing intimate spaces and stories – making them habitable in public – may be a way of breaking down distances between people in the imaginative realm that ... cross[es] over into the realm of physical space, potentially opening up new ways of thinking and feeling as well as moving, acting and relating to others (Bystrom 2013:334).

In their introduction to the special edition of *Cultural Studies* in which authors explore the interconnected relations between private lives and public cultures in contemporary South African society, editors Kerry Bystrom and Sarah Nuttall (2013:310) use the term 'intimate exposures' to describe 'a set of diverse acts that involve revealing inner aspects and places of the self and self-making' that were previously suppressed under apartheid. As they contend, '[r]evealing inner lives ... blurs common boundaries between public and private through a kind of spatial itinerancy, where things perceived to be properly confined to the home or domestic life surface in public spaces and become knitted into public discussions around these surfacings' (Bystrom & Nuttall 2013:316). Such acts of self-exposure or exposure of the private lives of others in the public realm are intertwined with the public and political realms, and, as such, can work to shape, or at least recognise, the presence of multiple public-private spheres (Bystrom & Nuttall 2013:308, 310).

As Bystrom (2013:336) notes, post-1994, South African academic and public interest in, and cultural production around, domestic, family and private life has grown owing to the shift in emphasis from the collective struggle towards examinations of selfhood to the focus on personal and subjective experience. In South Africa, narratives around personal, intimate or interior expression came to the fore in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 1996, which placed private experience and testimony firmly within the public realm

1. The Roundtable took place from 4-5 August 2016, at the FADA Gallery, University of Johannesburg. It was accompanied by the installation-based exhibitions entitled *The Arrivants*, and *The Front Room 'Inna Jo'burg'* (FADA Gallery, 30 July-28 August), by Christine Checinska and Michael McMillan respectively. At the opening, the artists collaborated on a performance entitled *Back-a-Yard*. As first-generation Black British artists, McMillan and Checinska both explore the emergence of a black British subjectivity that arose from Caribbean diasporic migration and how this subjectivity manifests in personal surfacings of the British-African-Caribbean front room and masculine dress. Checinska's navigation of the invisibility of the immigrant African diasporic subject through the intersections of culture, race and dress is analysed in Irene Bronner's review in this themed issue, in which she provides a first-hand account of her encounter with this autoethnographic exhibition.

2. While Bystrom and Nuttall refer to "intimate exposures", in this edition, the term "personal surfacings" is used to denote aspects of the private-intimate-personal that are not necessarily acts of self-exposure, or acts that expose the private lives of others in the public realm. Rather, "surfacings" alludes to the uprising and consequent visibility of that which has been sublimated, hidden, buried, unseen, forgotten.

3. The term "everyday", includes a range of diverse, non-uniform personal and/or group experience/s, and as such, has the possibility to be read both in relation to the personal and the political.

4. The term "lived-experience" is used here to denote forms of asserting creative agency in daily life by 'subjects of action, subjected to power and law ... [who] have a rich and complex consciousness; that ... are capable of challenging their oppression' (Mbembe 2001:5-6). As Achille Mbembe (2001:5) notes, the complex phenomena of state and power take place in a material sense, as opposed to ways in which they are reduced in academic disciplines to abstractions such as "discourses" or "representations".

(McGregor & Nuttall cited by Bystrom 2013:336). From this point onwards, a set of first-person narratives or 'autobiographical acts' (Nuttall & Michael 2000) emerged within the cultural sphere (Bystrom & Nuttall 2013:310). These narratives present a 'groundswell of personal stories ... candid, intimate voices that replace the grand narratives of apartheid with a proliferation of micro-narratives ...' (McGregor & Nuttall cited by Bystrom 2013:336).

Many of the articles in this themed edition emanated from papers presented, personal narratives and conversations that took place at the *Intimate archives//autobiographical acts. Personal surfacings as expressed through material culture* (2016)<sup>1</sup> Roundtable, hosted by the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre (VIAD) in 2016. A focus of the Roundtable was on how what are referred to in this edition as "personal surfacings"<sup>2</sup> (as they manifest in creative and/or everyday<sup>3</sup> cultural practices)<sup>4</sup> are routed through,

performances of the self and the articulation of personal experiences, stories and images as well as private or interior spaces in which subjectivity gets shaped; [an intimate exposure] focuses on and circulates through feeling and affective life; it is profoundly invested in objects, commodities or 'things'; it is about movement and mobility; it tends to embrace vulnerability, risk and recombination rather than following a predetermined aesthetic or political arc (Bystrom & Nuttall 2013:308).

In light of the current turn towards examining ways in which colonial structures that underpin and are upheld within institutional spaces might be decentered within global and South African academies, authors in this themed edition explore how "personal surfacings", in their public intimacies as spaces of articulation and affective encounter, may grant visibility to, and/or potentially unsettle colonial structures and their constructions. As such, personal surfacings may be seen as spaces that create openings for, or opportunities, to make visual the structures of colonial logic. Rather than starting from a set of assumptions or theoretical critiques around the category of decoloniality (and decolonial politics), authors take the everyday practices of address – *which may or may not be decolonial depending on the relational enactments they involve* – as their points of departure. Drawing on coloniality's split between the public and the private realms as a starting point for critique, they offer and develop insight in relation to empirical examples by focusing on personal surfacings in the context of lived, everyday experience.

Authors consider how personal surfacings, as manifesting at intersecting points between private and public institutions, can be read both as expressions of personal and collective histories and narratives. These private and public institutions in which the personal surfaces include, but are not limited to, those of the home (furniture, objects, images, photographs, décor); processes of self-fashioning through the body (specifically hair-stylisation and dress); and personal-public archives. Authors engage with wider discussions around the role that personal surfacings, as manifest through their own

practices and lived experiences or those of other creative and cultural practitioners,<sup>5</sup> play in shaping senses of the self. As such, personal surfacings may be seen as moments where agency can be asserted through processes of making and remaking of identities and subjectivities in relation to particular temporal, geographic, socio-economic and political contexts.

Manifestations of personal surfacings, as they arise in everyday practices, may therefore be considered opportunities that enable processes of making and remaking of identities and subjectivities. Following Anthony Bogues (2012),<sup>6</sup> who considers agencies a means through which practices of what he terms 'freedom' may be enacted, I suggest that personal surfacings may (consciously or subconsciously) be *enacted, and critically read* as assertions of "creative agency". As opposed to the concept of "freedom" as it has been constructed in Western political philosophy and the history of thought, as a value and normative ideal, Bogues (2012:30, 43) proposes freedom as a critical human *practice; a creative activity* that is 'rooted and routed through a set of human experiences'. For Bogues (2012:43), there is no singular definition of freedom but rather a series of 'attempts to name practices in which humans engage within a set of activities'. As forms of creative activity, Bogues (2012: 41, 45, emphasis added) contends, practices of freedom operate through the 'radical imagination': they 'construct new ways of life for us as humans'; 'while political action and practice are always vital, the formations of new ways of life emerge from the ground of *humans acting, working, through politics, to get somewhere else*'.

5. "Creative and cultural practitioners" may encompass individuals, collectives and sub-cultural groups that assert forms of creative agency as part of their daily lived experiences and/or group identities, as well as visual artists and designers, amongst others, working across a range of interdisciplinary genres and media.

6. I draw here on Bogues's influential work on what constitutes the human, freedom, human emancipation and the radical imagination, or what he terms the 'Freedom Project' (Bogues 2012:29). Bogues (2012: 29, 31) speaks of freedom specifically in relation to the 'traditions of the oppressed'. According to Bogues (2012:37), the 'traditions of the oppressed' or "archives of the ordinary" contain 'both the everyday and the various processes of humanization that the "native" and the "slave" enact to live. They also include the extraordinary actions that seek to rupture in large-scale ways any dominant order'.

Bogues draws a distinction between two practices of imagination. In the first, the work of imagination can be conceived of as reproductive; 'it reproduces our ... everydayness, in ways that reinforce the various modes of our existence'. In this sense, the work of the imagination can serve to reinforce hegemony (Bogues 2012:45). Regarding the second practice, he suggests that, because the imagination is a 'faculty of capacity',

the work of the imagination operates as critical thought. It imagines and breaks the boundaries/horizons of the status quo of the everyday. In this way, the imagination ... produces new thought and desires ... freedom is about these practices of self-creation, not as a telos of self-realization nor that of noninterference, but of a form of activity and human practice (Bogues 2012:45).

Similarly, creative agencies, as enactments of reproductive imagination, may be read in terms of the ways in which cultural practitioners engage, play with, uphold, or reinforce prevailing neo-colonial Northern and Western normative constructs (such as sexuality, age, race, gender, class) which are usually structured around a set of hierarchically ordered binary oppositions and the mechanisms of power that define and enable these

7. "Culture" is understood as constituted through the constructs of race, gender and class.

8. Hunter (2015:5) develops the idea of 'relational politics' in her work on the state as part of a philosophical project that develops a way of understanding how neoliberal neocolonial power, or what she calls 'neoliberal whiteness', works through affect and emotion to enact normative social relations through the collapse of the material and symbolic dimensions of the social. For these purposes, she defines relational politics as 'the everyday actions, investments and practices of the multiple and shifting range of people and other material and symbolic objects that make up the state' (Hunter 215:5). According to Hunter (2015:16), 'it is this real, messy and uncontrollable agency [generated through emotion and affect] constitutive of the everyday state' that challenges the normatively categorically ordered institutional practices of the formalised state. Everyday intimacies as enacted through dynamic intersecting relational investments in categorical positionings through power and vulnerability (classed, gendered, racialised, sexualised and generational) drive the dynamic politics of institutional life. They challenge Manichean categories by creating differently ordered material and symbolic practices via culturally constituted affect and emotion. Hunter thus provides a way of thinking about formal institutional life as relationally rather than categorically ordered, as always already imbued with practices and investments which potentially work outside of neoliberal neocolonial dynamics.

9. Toni Morrison (2007) explains the term "rememory" as the act of remembering a memory, of invoking a past reality, or of calling to mind something once known but forgotten. "Re-membling" signifies a reconstruction of memories that form part of self-making and self-knowing processes.

10. While Michael Fischer (1986) refers to autoethnography as 'contemporary ethnic autobiography', many alternative definitions exist, most of which are congruent with one another (see for instance Chang 2008; Denzin 2006). As a research method, autoethnography is appropriate to the thematic of this edition as it offers a reflexive account of personal experience that is

constructs. Power is seen to involve those forms of social relations that are privileged (such as capitalism, neoliberalism, colonialism, imperialism, apartheid, patriarchy), and through which prevailing hetero-normative, naturalised or homogenous cultural<sup>7</sup> identity constructs are established, exercised, maintained and upheld. At the same time, creative agencies that draw on the imagination as a "faculty of capacity" may be considered in light of ways in which they can create openings or opportunities for decolonial interventions: moments in which these categorical constructs can be negotiated, subverted, ruptured or resisted, thereby highlighting the workings of, and questioning, the power-relations that they embody.

If read through the lenses of Bogue's conceptions of freedom and imagination, creative agencies are processes that can be understood as a form of 'relational politics'<sup>8</sup> (Hunter 2015), which produce newly configured subjectivities that may fall outside of normative racial, cultural and gendered practices, whilst also having the potential to assert, uphold, unsettle or counter them. The theme of personal surfacings, as openings for creative agencies and imagined freedoms, as articulated through the authors' personal voices, are interwoven throughout the articles in this edition.

## Registers of intimacy

The edition opens with Sarah Nuttall's meditative piece in which she considers an array of registers within which the intimate, the interior, and the self-reflexive may be understood and read, both in and beyond contemporary South Africa. In her eloquent portrayal, these registers of intimacy are interwoven through the surfacings of selfhood, exposure, skin, opacity-transparency, reciprocity, relations between humans and plants and other-than-humans. Drawing on critical insights from academic inquiry in the fields of art and literature, and weaving these into a highly personalised narrative writing style, she sets up an imagined dialogue with the reader, evoking an intimacy between herself, the reader, and the material that is being reflected upon. In seeking out a 'new way of writing thought' (Nuttall 2017), Nuttall sets the tone for other kinds of intimacies that unfold through the authors' articulations of personal surfacings that are foregrounded through personal narratives, (re)collected lived experiences, (re)memoring<sup>9</sup> (Morrison 2007), histories and affect. As such, many of the writers present various forms of "non-traditional" academic writing, drawing on autoethnographic<sup>10</sup> approaches, narrative inquiry, or other forms of self-reflexive writing on their own or other cultural practitioners' artistic and everyday practices. Personal surfacings are therefore expressed through the material discussed,<sup>11</sup> as well as in the authors' approaches to narrative – becoming, 'part of the process of self-telling, that is, to expound an aspect of autobiography of oneself through narratives' (Tulloch 2010:276).

not only autobiographical, but also reflects the subject's understanding of her 'personal history [as] implicated in larger social formations and historical processes' (Russell 1999). According to Allan Munro (2011:161), because autoethnography falls within the paradigm of qualitative research methods, *it draws on the ontological position that the world is experienced and therefore can only be tangentially described and predicted. The epistemological strategy that goes with this ontological paradigm is one of interpretation rather than facts and definitive conclusions. Given this, the position of the researcher within his or her own paradigm needs to be embedded in the research process and taken to be part of that research process.*

11. Neville Hoad's (2007) theorisation of intimacy in an African context is relevant here. Hoad (2007:xxxii-xxxiii; cited by Bystrom 2013:352) notes that the term "intimacies" can serve as a *frame for negotiating those various scales of analysis (transnational, national, local, personal) in the language of imagination and affect ... bypass[ing] many of the difficulties in talking about the socially mediated experience of desire and embodiment in a global context that have plagued the older ... vocabularies of psychoanalysis, or anthropological reductions of these experiences to kinship patterns.*

12. Burke's installation comprises an extensive archive of objects, artefacts, memorabilia, usually stored in his Birmingham home. While his archive is a personal one, it also records a diverse history of African-Caribbean migration and settlement in Britain from the mid-twentieth century to 2015.

## Autotopographies

This is the story of a house. It has been lived in by many people. Our grandmother Baba, made this house living space [*sic*]. She was certain that the way we lived was shaped by objects, the way we looked at them, the way they were placed around us. She was certain that we were shaped by space. ... Her house is a place where I am learning to look at things, where I am learning how to belong in space. In rooms full of objects, crowded with things, I am learning to recognize myself (bell hooks 1995:65).

In their study exploring the values behind archiving practices in the home, David Kirk and Abigail Sellen (2010) draw links between the role of sentimental artefacts which are kept (as opposed to objects that are accumulated) and the invocation of memory, the construction of identities, and the work of making a home "homely". Their exploration makes an important contribution to understandings of how living spaces become populated with objects that hold significance to their owners, and how individuals relate to, and self-identify through, those objects. Looking at ways in which people create a 'domestic topography of sentimental artifacts as an external expression of aspects of self-identity', Kirk and Sellen use Jennifer Gonzalez's (1995:134; cited by Kirk & Sellen 2010:10:6) notion of 'autotopography':

In the creation of an autotopography – which does not include all personal property but only those objects seen to signify an "individual" identity – the material world is called upon to present a physical map of memory, history and belief. The autobiographical object therefore becomes a prosthetic device: an addition, a trace, and a replacement for the intangible aspects of desire, identification and social relations.

If adopted as an analytical tool for research, use of the term "autotopography" frames the home from the perspective of a unitary relationship between a person and their environment – a space in which identities, subjectivities and personal-collective histories are expressed through artifacts that carry emotional, cultural, religious and political values. This notion of the home as autotopography is borne out in Michael McMillan's and Shoni Netshia's self-reflexive (re)collections of their childhood homes (in London and Johannesburg respectively), as well as in Christine Checinska's reflections on her encounter with the artist Vanley Burke's personal archive that was displayed as an installation in the IKON, Birmingham, entitled *At Home with Vanley Burke* (2015).<sup>12</sup> In these authors' writings, the home is presented as 'a site for exploring individual histories, memories, traumas, feelings, desires and styles of living. It is about self-fashioning, and about forging or testing ties with specific and immediate others' (Bystrom 2013:336).

For example, McMillan reflects on the process of realising his installation-based exhibition entitled *The Front Room 'Inna Joburg'* (2016, FADA Gallery, Johannesburg). As an instance of spatial itinerancy, McMillan's staging of a recreated African-Caribbean front room offers a form of personal surfacings that enables members of the public to enter into the privacy of a living space, or as Meg Samuelson (cited by Bystrom & Nuttall 2013:316) puts it in relation to a different context, to imaginatively (and in the case of McMillan's installation, physically), '[walk] through the door and [inhabit] the house'. Here, the domestic interior – a space historically gendered as feminine – is exteriorised and made visible in the public realm of the gallery. In a gesture of hospitality, the artist welcomes the viewer into the personal space of his childhood, in which his emotions, memories and familial histories are embedded. In so doing, he invites the viewer to experience points of relation to, and identification with, their own relationally enacted lived-experiences. The interplay between these points of relation and the associations they may evoke, might spark, or indicate, points of sameness and difference between colonial and post-colonial contexts, potentially revealing multiple contingent senses of being-in-the world.

These (often entangled) points of sameness and difference can function on a trans-African-African diasporic level, as artifacts with colonial origins are adapted and transformed as a means of negotiating shifting forms of identity, frequently through process of cross-cultural exchange. They are made poignantly present through Netshia's discussion of the ubiquitous, "insignificant" crocheted doily, which featured prominently in the African-Caribbean front room, and similarly forms an important part of the décor in some South African black middle-class homes, such as the one in where Netshia grew up. From Netshia's reflections on the décor of her mother's home and that of a family friend's in Soweto, it becomes evident that, in both the British-African-Caribbean and South African contexts, the doily, and the way in which it frames the objects displayed on it, become a means of conveying visual narratives of *respectability*: notions of selfhood, pride, self-respect, dignity, social status and good moral standing. In both contexts, use of the doily as a form of personal surfacing can be seen as an enactment of creative agency: a means of reclaiming personal and collective histories with a sense of ownership and pride and/or as a means of articulating respect for family values, cultural heritage and tradition.

In her autoethnographic account of experiencing Vanely Burke's archive, both in his home and at the IKON gallery, Checinska touches on ways in which artifacts can trigger affect by evoking personal and collective memories, sentiments and emotions. For her, the particular kind of African-Caribbean domesticity Burke references evokes processes of remembering fragments of her childhood home in England, and the need for a sense of "at-home-ness", often characteristic of displaced diasporic communities. For Checinska,

Burke's archive acts as a catalyst to explore the relationship between personal-private-intimate and public-collective cultural histories. As a site of memory, Burke's archive; of personal surfacings in the form of "everyday" objects collected over time functions as a source of individual and collective knowledges. Imbued with value, preciousness, and forming traces and markers for memory, these objects become a means of revisiting and reframing fractured histories, providing an impetus to reflect, explore and articulate personal and collective narratives of adaptation and belonging.

## Hair stories

In Shirley Tate's, Hlonipha Mokoena's and Edwin Mahandu's writings, Black hair and its stylisation is situated as a site self-fashioning; a transnational personal surfacing that can be read, albeit not uncontroversially, an expression of creative agency. Both Tate (a Black British woman of African-Caribbean descent) and Mokoena (a Black South African-born woman) present autoethnographic accounts of "hair stories" – their life-long and on-going personal experiences of having to negotiate difficult questions around their hair in relation to racialised conventions and perceptions of beauty, appropriateness and acceptability. Their readings of "hair stories" as surfacings point to the symbolic, political, material and affective connections made between hair, "race", and racism within white regimes. These connections are often manifest through attacks on what, in white regimes, is considered to be natural Black hair's "unruly" strands, textures and styles. Tate and Mokoena point to the transnational nature of these attacks in their analysis of, and reference to, case studies of Black school children in South Africa, the United States and the United Kingdom, who have been victims of institutional racism for violations of conduct in relation to their hair and its stylisation. The examples they cite show that Black natural hair is vulnerable to political, aesthetic, psychic, social and affective attack by the ideology, politics and practice of what Tate (2017) refers to as 'the white/whitened state' as it operates through school policies.

Mokoena (2017) uses the incident at Pretoria Girls High School in 2016 as a departure point for her complex and nuanced reflection on 'the volatility of Black hair', both in South Africa and elsewhere. She posits the (arguably) controversial claim that the politics of Black hair are reproduced not only by regimes of whiteness, but entrenched in cosmetic consumption, American media and pop-culture and within black communities themselves. In so doing, Mokoena foregrounds how practices of self-fashioning through hair-stylisation can uphold, unsettle or counter normative racial, cultural and gendered practices. At the core of her argument lies the assertion that

the black “hair story” is a new mode – enabled by YouTube, vlogging and other social media – through which young Black women express their rejection of the conformity that is often implied in social and written regulations of their hair.

In his portrayal of hair and hair-stylisation as it features in Tendai Huchu’s novel, *The hairdresser of Harare* (2010), Mhandu presents an alternative to the conventional tradition which Tate and Mokoena draw upon, in which hair-stylisation is seen as site of struggle and contestation, and is inextricably interconnected with racial constructs. Rather, he argues, hair-stylisation, as a form of self-fashioning and an assertion of creative agency, demonstrates an individual’s capacity to identify with, relate to and experience “the good life”; to participate in the ‘Art-of-Living’ (Veenhoven 2003 cited by Mhandu 2017) and other versions of human flourishing in a multi-ethnic environment. As such, he posits, hair-stylisation is an expressive genre that has the capacity to carry messages that enrich the self in various spaces of dialogue, and which can convey meaning to, and of, the self.

## Self-making, self-telling

In his reading of the artist Zanele Muholi’s series of self-portraits entitled *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2016-), Ashraf Jamal (2017) puts forward the provocative contention that this body of work – in which Muholi photographically theatricalises and enacts facets of her Black identity – presents a ‘vital alternative to a programmatic and reductive identity politics’. In contrast to ways in which Muholi’s image-repertoire has largely been defined through a racially and sexually determined readings, which run the risk of reductiveness, Jamal contends that in this series, Muholi takes an unflinchingly personalised approach to exploring and articulating her Blackness. While the politics of race and sexuality remain central to her project, in this series, the need to redefine and re-imagine the Black body is foregrounded. In Jamal’s view, here Muholi is working against a reactionary return to black essentialism, the rendition of “tropes of Blackness” (such as the “Black body in pain”), and the concomitant racial divisiveness which the return to black self-determination has fostered, by adopting a deeply self-reflective, yet simultaneously playful approach.

As Muholi notes, ‘in *Somnyama Ngonyama*, I have embarked on a discomfiting self-defining journey, rethinking the culture of the selfie, self-representation and self-expression’. Yet, while her images are clearly self-portraits that comment on the ‘dailiness of self-fashioning’ (Jamal 2017), they also reference the collective, in that each photograph is a commentary on ‘a specific event in South Africa’s political history, ranging from the advent of the mining industry, to the fame (or infamy) of the “Black



Madonna”, to the massacre of miners at Marikana; from family to society and back again’. In Jamal’s (2017) reading, through these seemingly ‘self-consciously pleasurable re-enactments’, Muholi has arrived at a “radical moment”, where blackness [is presented] as innovation and pleasure, freed from a grotesque history of hurt’ (Jamal 2017).

Kent Williams also offers an alternative reading in her analysis of artworks by Judith Mason and Wanja Kimani, both of whom feature the dress-as-motif. Instead of reading the dress as a signifier of femininity, and positioning it in terms of the conventional macro-political (gendered, cultural, racial and socio-economic) identities it might evoke, Williams explores the concept of dress as mediator or interface through which multiple surfacings of the self are activated. For both artists, the dress becomes a site through which to express and negotiate narratives of personal pain; a vehicle through which to engage ideas of loss, trauma, memory and belonging. Tracing the dress through the notions of address and redress in relation to Mason’s and Kimani’s work, Williams evokes the dress as a site of tension, where various narratives of the self intertwine.

## Past-present, public-private

Personal and collective processes of refiguring the ‘self’ may be linked to Hal Foster’s (2006 [2004]) concept of the “archival impulse” – the idea that by confronting the archive, new systems of knowledge can be created. Albeit in differing ways, Maureen de Jager’s, Siona O’Connell’s and Andrew Hennlich’s writings offer glimpses into how personal or autoethnographic narratives might work to counter, present alternatives to, or address omissions in, so-called “objective” or “truthful” accounts contained in officially sanctioned historical archives. All three writers point to the importance of, and issues surrounding, addressing the apartheid archive in the production and presentation of “different kinds of knowledges”. In addressing the apartheid archive, they reflect back on the past from within the present, whilst looking towards the future-to-come.

In her reflective piece, de Jager ‘(re)focuses’ on the trauma of the South African War (1899-1902). Her encounter with the War is refracted through different sets of archives: her great-grandmother, Maria’s, handwritten 56-page memoir, in which she recounts her experience of having been captured by British soldiers in 1901 and interned in the Winburg Concentration Camp, and documents contained in the Western Cape and United Kingdom National Archives. These offer critical accounts of the War, but do so through the lenses of colonial agendas and ideologies pervasive at the time. Similarly, Maria’s narrative does not portray an unequivocally truthful experience, but rather, as De Jager (2017) puts it, ‘the visage generated by her own sense-making, mediated by time and language, to be mediated again and again by the reader’s interpretative lenses’.

De Jager's own ambivalent apprehensions of the War, and her positionality in relation to it as a white woman of Afrikaner descent, is mediated through these 'partial' accounts. For her, 'refocusing' – the act of looking retrospectively at the past from constantly shifting viewpoints in the present – is a form of 'doing history' (De Jager 2017): a mediated, subjective, embodied experience that simultaneously locates and dis-locates her in relation to the personal and public archives she engages with.

Hennlich shows how, in her collage-based artwork, South African artist Julia Rosa Clark similarly conceptualises new connections between past and present. Driven by what she terms 'traditions of improvised practice' (Clark cited by Hennlich 2017), Clark's obsessive collections of everyday objects, of junk, of the thrown away and throw away, forms the primary medium and content of her work. In his engagement with Clark's archival practice, or 'collector's asylum' of the discarded and the disposable, Hennlich (2017) explores what he calls the impetus to 'work through the materiality of the object', and, in so doing, to 'invent new readings borne from the object's contact between past and present, personal and public'. In this process of to-ing and fro-ing, the present is haunted by the past and vice versa. This reciprocal 'haunting' takes on particular relevance in relation to objects that bear reference to South African history: Clark's repurposing of the discarded remnants of colonialism and apartheid reconstructs a sense of perpetual haunting that, in contemporary South Africa, remains ever-present. Perhaps, then, the Clark's repurposing might be viewed as a response to Bogue's (2010) notion of 'historical catastrophe', where the events of the past reverberate in, and work to shape the present.

O'Connell looks at what Bogue (2012:36) calls the 'archive of the ordinary' – an archive that reflects what Walter Benjamin (cited by Bogue 2012:30) calls 'traditions of the oppressed'. As O'Connell (2017) notes, the archive of the oppressed prompts recognition of the modes of survival of those who were dominated, and consideration of 'how they reconstructed/reconfigured a world for themselves in which they could see themselves as human'. O'Connell's focus is on the "ordinary" lives of those racially oppressed under apartheid, as pictured through the lenses of street photographers working for the "Movie Snaps" company in Cape Town from the late 1930s to the early 1980s. In her analysis of images depicting South Africans historically designated as "Coloured" and "Black", O'Connell shows how, despite their subjugated status, the subjects' pride in their form of dress, awareness of fashion and dignified poses reflect a claim to "humanness"; they portray individuals as they wish to represent themselves be seen, particularly within visual narratives of respectability. In these instances, personal surfacings become a means to negotiate, challenge and/or assert a form of independence from colonial, western images of dehumanisation, degradation, objectification and disempowerment. O'Connell (2017) thus sees these cameo performances of identity, as captured by Movie Snaps, as imaging the creative agency of humans who 'carved their own lives and

moments of freedom’.

It is, perhaps, in the intersecting spaces between the vectors of personal surfacings, creative agencies and their relation to Bogue’s (2012) conceptions of “imagination” and “freedom” that the relevance of the writings featured in this edition lies. In their pluralities, their discontinuities, and their public intimacies as spaces of articulation and affective encounter, personal surfacings may provide opportunities for the enactment of creative agencies that, in turn, might suggest ways of rethinking of humanness and freedom. Creative agencies that draw on the imagination as a “faculty of capacity” might be considered as catalysts for the creation of openings or opportunities for decolonial interventions: moments in which categorical binary constructs and the power relations that these embody can be negotiated, subverted, ruptured or resisted. Recognition of archives of the ordinary, such as Burke’s “archive of the self”, McMillan’s recreated front room, Netshia’s remembering of the role of the doily in her childhood home, or Muholi’s reconfigured archive in which she fashions herself on a daily basis, provide glimpses of how freedom might have been, or is being, imagined, in terms that are not necessarily conducive to understandings through critical analysis alone. As such, instances of personal surfacings are of critical importance in that they may challenge the ways in which knowledges of the past, and of the present, are produced. In light of South Africa’s fraught historical legacies of injustice, personal surfacings enable possibilities for social transformation by opening up space for those excluded from, or marginalised in, colonial and apartheid archives to “reclaim the past” through acknowledgement of their voices and experiences, and prompt the telling of different narratives and alternative histories of thought that can offer insight into larger questions of humanness, self-representation and imagined freedoms.<sup>13</sup>

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