

THE HANDBOOK PROJECT

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Exegesis in support of practice-based Thesis
Master of Visual Arts

Auckland University of Technology

2021

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a University or other institution of higher learning.

Lindsey Jessica de Roos

21st May 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give a big thank you to my supervisors Monique Redmond and Fiona Amundsen; thank you for being open to riding this rollercoaster of a practice with me, your unwavering guidance has been crucial to my research.

To Loxene, Allan, and Jill, thank you for being my biggest supporters, and sitting through my obsessive hour long (probably more than that) discussions about race and education.

Another big thank you to Keaton and Oskar, you have been very patient and understanding with me. Thank you for always being there to gas me up.

Thank you to Harriet Stockman and the technicians for your imagination and support over the years; my projects couldn't have actualised the way they did without you.

And lastly, I'd like to thank all the Rip n' Bitch contributors for taking the radical action of resting with me as we all try to navigate University. Your involvement in this project is so important, so thank you for openness to share and for trusting me with your experiences.

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ABSTRACT

The Handbook Project is an exploration of an “unhelpful guide” for navigating arts academia and art spaces as a person of colour through a tactile and social “art practice”. This project is an intuitive and reflective journey of deinstitutionalising my mind and my making (even though I still operate within the institution), through the lens of race. My research explores how retrospective (which developed into reparative) forms of making can work towards a decolonised sense of imagination. To aid this exploration, I utilise materials that I am very familiar with when it comes to academia, such as annotations, workshops, essay writing, paper and photographs. These sit alongside conventional methods of artmaking such as photography, sculpture, and print. I introduce notions of slowness and repetition to these materials in order to disrupt my habitual behaviours with them (in the context of academia). The project is situated in the following three main concepts of freedom: the freedom-of-knowledge, the freedom-of-space, and the freedom-of-language. These “freedoms” simultaneously function as pathways and pillars to navigating the concepts of race, and the potential explorations of racial equity in context to this project. To understand how these freedoms might manifest, I move between my experiences as a student, as a mentor, and as staff (of the University) to observe and critically engage with how my BIpeersOC¹ and I can exist here safely.

¹ BIPOC – Black, Indigenous, People of Colour

INTRODUCTION

This project began in a very different place. My original research proposal for the MVA programme was based on my interest in reconnecting to my South African indigenous roots. However, I quickly had to face a hurdle that I could not foresee myself overcoming. That hurdle was that I did not have an adequate support system (contextually) to guide me through this project. This realisation and my reflections on the covert tokenisation of non-white matters made it very evident that before I could explore my identity within the University, I had to first understand how to prevent this personal investigation from becoming a traumatic experience. So, I decided to draw upon something I felt I understood well: the tools of academia and the notion of race. These tools involve writing, papermaking, publications, academic language, archival content (from my time studying and working in these institutions), poster making, photography, brainstorming, essay writing, workshops, lunch breaks and events.

Overall, this research project sits within a metaphor of a 'handbook', which refers to the handbook we receive each year during our academic study. This metaphor is the framework necessary to interact with my research. The artworks in *The Handbook* operate like pages in a narrative book; each page functions to tell a bigger story linked to my experiences of existing within an academic art institution. Therefore each "page" in this project discusses and explores very specific and inter-personal ideas that support an overarching exploration of race. I draw from experiences as a staff member and as a student to inform the content of my research. I completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts at AUT University (2017-2019), and at the same time was a student peer mentor, a teacher's assistant for a Minor paper, and currently, am an assistant Wet Lab technician. I'm interested in how these various positions can provide a platform to critique myself and, in turn, critique the environments around me.

I began by drawing upon my previous relationship with photographic practices and letter writing to form a foundation to the artworks produced throughout this project. However, as my research developed, slowly but surely, I have deinstitutionalised my making. Therefore, my practice has become intuitive and heavily process-based.

This change in the way I make actualised into a year-long papermaking practise. I explored the materiality of paper and its role within academia in the hopes of removing myself from the academic institution by introducing slowness and play. This was done to create opportunities for myself and others to break what I perceive as a very concrete academic relationship with paper, and rebuild it autonomously from the University. This practising was the first step in creating an unhelpful guide

called *The Handbook Project* as I recognised then how my everyday experiences of racism were tangled up in the unquestioned habits of academic life.

Parallel to my papermaking practice, I started the project by archiving my thoughts and experiences, it was very evident right from the start that reflection is a vital component to this research. While I was reflecting on the past, I had to simultaneously be processing the present. This archive manifests in *The Handbook* publication, and throughout this exegesis there are passages—referred to as *Some Thoughts*—which come from that publication.

To understand and explore the concept of race within the institution, I have broken down three ideas: the freedom-of-knowledge, the freedom-of-space, and the freedom-of-language. These ideas form both the physical phases of my research and the concepts for unpacking colonial notions of race within academic art institutions.

The freedom-of-knowledge

The freedom-of-knowledge is the idea of the “agency of knowledge.” The pursuit of the freedom-of-knowledge is fundamental to an epistemological decolonisation. My intent is not to undo the current learning mechanisms; they are centuries in the making – and who am I to do so. However, my question lies in the paradigms that “free” BIPOC's ways of thinking instead of changing them. I believe this is an important quality that is not fully recognised by the academic institutional body; colonial modes of learning contradict the learning that comes from BIPOC experiences. Our experiences and generational knowledge are constantly excluded from being valid resources within academic institutions. When we introduce them, we are met with great suspicion, and therefore assume a role of teaching our culture.

For this “freedom,” I knew I had to de-centralise the valued knowledge I had received over my Bachelor's degree, which meant rebuilding a database of artists, theorists and intellectuals that prioritised race in relation to making. With this new knowledge centre, I reflected (through practice) on my experiences of when my knowledge systems were racialised and othered. During this heavily reflective period of making, I began to realise that there is a hierarchy of values performed in the arts. These values are classist, gendered, systemically racist, and are carried out every day.

The freedom-of-space

The colonial educational system continues to perpetuate knowledge as an object. So, when we interact with the idea of the freedom-of-space, we think of a physical place or location. However, the freedom-of-space calls for the freedom of cultural expression and the freedom of inhabitants.

“Space” in context to this project has a similar definition to that used by Australian artist Andy Butler, in his essay on the whiteness of the Melbourne arts scene; *Safe White Spaces*²:

“There is an implicit racial hierarchy that is evident in the sheer absence of non-White people and their practices; an elevation of Western visual arts history above all else; a one-dimensional and ill-informed view of non-White experience, that nevertheless still determines how non-White people navigate the world and the spaces of the community; an idea that racism is an individual moral failing as opposed to a structural problem; and an inability to acknowledge the fact that we're all implicated in a system of structural racism that favours Whiteness. As an arts worker, I see these dynamics play out near every day.”³

The freedom-of-space was the second phase of this research and continued where I left off on the freedom-of-knowledge. I took the new critical eye that I had acquired about value systems and explored how that actualised in space. This made me question: what would a space that prioritised BIPOC look like, who is it safe for, and how would I make that happen? During this phase, the research shifted into a social practice realm, and I introduced facilitation into my practice. As I experimented, I grew to understand that the first step in making a new space was to enable reparations from the past. I had done important personal work in the freedom-of-knowledge, which helped me to come to my practice without judgement. So, I knew that I had to provide an opportunity for this to happen for others if a safe space were to be made.

The freedom-of-language

The freedom-of-language is not about overriding pre-existing ways of communicating. It feels very ironic for me to be writing so formally while arguing that my inherited way of communicating is how I

² Andy Butler, “Safe White Spaces,” *Runway Journal*, Issue 35: Space, December 3, 2017, <http://runway.org.au/safe-white-spaces>

³ Ibid.

should be writing. This pursuit in the freedom-of-language is about choice. It is at the crux of every aspect of this research; that we equip each other with the ability to have choices. I am calling for more formats in which to be involved in critical engagements that do not invalidate a discussion or particular method of discussing. All of us, to varying extents, hold creolised linguistic behaviours,⁴ and that creates so much opportunity when communicating. I unpack this creolisation through my practices of writing and community discussions of art and art concepts.

The freedom-of-language is part of the first and last phase of my research. I knew that undoing many years of academic writing would be very difficult and take lots of time, so it became evident that I had to start this phase early. Throughout the past 15 months, I have explored every way (I could think of) to record my thoughts, and I plan to publish them in chronological order within *The Handbook* publication. In some ways, this phase was the easiest to work through as it was the slowest (in producing an outcome), but it was also a matter of building confidence in my art practice that was racialised and disparaged. Within these art spaces, building confidence in your voice is the most vital thing you can do.

This exegesis deliberately employs formal and informal use of language. I carefully consider both language systems and utilise them to best articulate my ideas. I reject performative notions of academia and therefore I will not consistently use formal language if it does not serve a purpose; such as my use of contractions and personal pronouns throughout this exegesis. There are also ‘writing works’ called *Some Thoughts* that are contextually relevant to the three freedoms. *Some Thoughts* were written at varying times throughout the year and don’t often sit within the rules of academic language and therefore are not grammatically accurate.

The freedoms form three of the four main chapters of this exegesis; they contain artworks, creative essays, events, and realisations within my research. But before we enter the freedoms, it is essential to understand the foundation of this project. The first chapter, “A helpful guide to entering the thinking behind my project,” aims to guide the reader through these protocols and the structure.

⁴ I refer to the concept of “creolised linguistic behaviours” to highlight the idea that we all have our own linguistic repertoire, which is continually evolving with the texts we interact with. For example, my linguistic repertoire consists of South African English, Cape Vernac, New Zealand English, Afrikaans, New Zealand art speak, academic art speak, and many more that I have not yet identified. The more I learn, the larger my linguistic repertoire will be, and this merging in linguistics is the creolisation of language.

A helpful guide to entering the thinking behind my project

The foundations for this project have developed over the past 15 months. Only now as I'm writing am I able to collate them into a cohesive document. However, I have referred to them and been conscious of their presence throughout my making. The foundations are as follows: the writings from Zimitri Erasmus and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, the conditions of my making, and *Some Thoughts* which focus on the ethical dilemma of practising in the space that I'm researching. Together these make a pseudo-manifesto for my practice and provide a stable position and set of protocols from which to make work. These protocols have fundamentally shaped the ideologies and paradigms around the project, which are further combed out in the concepts and realisations within the making. This chapter explores these foundations and how they manifest in my research.

Theories and thoughts that carried me through

South African Writer and Sociology Professor Zimitri Erasmus explores the constructs of race and education, specifically in her essays “Race Otherwise: Forging a new Humanism for South Africa”⁵ and “A Future Beyond ‘Race’: Reflections on Equity in South African Higher Education”⁶. These essays have shifted and set new paradigms to my thinking through race. Each essay critiques the current engagement with race in educational institutions and proposes ideas on how to work through race. In *Race Otherwise*, Erasmus uses three terms *the look*⁷, *the category*⁸ and *the gene*⁹ to unpack the ways we understand race and how at varying scales, we racialise people, places, and objects. She concludes that to undo this colonial, species-driven idea of the human, we have to shift our thinking of “being human” in the way that we are currently and continuously engaged in “humaning”¹⁰.

The second essay, “A future beyond race”¹¹ articulates how the current tertiary system (2010, South Africa) works primarily on two types of engagement with race. The first being the colour-blind mentality and the second being affirmative action. The essay unpacks how both systems benefit and dismantle racialism(s) in and around these institutions, most importantly, how they reinforce colonial rhetoric. She calls for institutions to “make race a political matter”¹² in every aspect of the University. This notion has manifested in my project through exploring how Eurocentric-led education disempowers BIPOC within the institution. Race as a political matter¹³ is the perspective that is present in every artwork produced throughout this research project. The works take on a very intimate relationship with the concept of race that operates as the first or initial theme that is encountered. Because, for the maker (myself), the role of race will always be present, it will be up to the viewer whether they acknowledge it.

⁵ Zimitri Erasmus, *Race Otherwise: Forging a New Humanism for South Africa* (Baltimore, Maryland: Project Muse, 2019), <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/60602/>.

⁶ Zimitri Erasmus, “A Future Beyond ‘Race’: Reflections on Equity in South African Higher Education” in *The Next Twenty-Five Years: Affirmative Action in Higher Education in the United States and South Africa* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010)

⁷ The look - is described as an old technology of race. We we look at someone and assign their ethnicity.

⁸ The category - is described as the sub categories of race, e.g White, Black, Pākehā, Māori etc. This becomes an opportunity for stereotyping oneself and others.

⁹ Zimitri Erasmus, *Race Otherwise*, XXIII.

The gene - is described to be the genetics that we hold true, and the ancestry that we invest in.

¹⁰ Ibid, XXII.

¹¹ Zimitri Erasmus, “A Future Beyond ‘Race’: Reflections on Equity in South African Higher Education”

¹² Ibid, 7.

¹³ Zimitri Erasmus, *Race Otherwise: Forging a New Humanism for South Africa*, 7. Erasmus uses Ingold to describe “humaning”

Ingold describes: “*Humaning* is a different activity from *humanising*. To *human* is a lifelong process of life-in-the-making with others. To *humanise* is to impose upon the world a preconceived meaning of the human (Ingold 2015: 115–20).”

The second scholar is a self-titled 'experimental geographer', Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who explores historical and capitalist geographies in relation to race. The fundamental basis for understanding her thinking is that "Capitalism requires inequality, and racism enshrines it."¹⁴ She calls for us to be geographers who embody "black radical consciousness"¹⁵ in that navigation, but to also be aware that as geographers (in the doing) we are creating spaces. Gilmore eloquently positions the idea of race as something that could be held and pulled apart; that it is truly something that was fabricated to benefit a group of individuals. Therefore, we can use the same imagination that built it to not only undo it, but to build a better *idea* that does not benefit any group. The ideas of "experimental geography" is operating in this project in a way that cradles opportunity for imagination, and which unfolds through collaborative making. This collaboration occurs with people and materials that actively challenge our capacity to imagine. This imaginative exploring manifests in workshops or happenings with participants, or the writing practices that I am engaging in within *The Handbook* publication.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ruth Wilson Gilmore in Goldberg, David Theo, and Francoise Verges. "Thinking Though Racisms/ Speaking to Racial Conditions Today." Symposium, March 15, 2018.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxKm2OIEHJA&t=8s>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Black consciousness is discussed by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, as the way in which black experiences are not singular but transform into a holistic consciousness. This an everyday paradigm that is moulded by the community and their intersectional experiences.

¹⁶ In addition to material covered in this exegesis, I believe it's important to also acknowledge significant artists and writers that have influenced the nature of this project and have paved the way before me. Rebecca Ann Hobbs's doctoral thesis *Ngā Puia o Ihumātao (The Volcanoes of Ihumātao)* (2017) has been an eye-opener to alternative social-led practices. It changed my thinking about what could exist as an arts practice, and it has been exciting to see how her practice creates social change.

Linda Tuhiwhai Smith's *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999) has operated as a home where I could come to when I was lost. I found her writing before I started this MVA project, and since she has continued to influence my thinking more and more. *Decolonising Methodologies* unapologetically disrupts western notions of learning and provides a stable foundation for new learnings to occur.

Okwui Enwezor's essay, *Reframing the black subject: ideology and fantasy in contemporary South African representation* outlines a very blunt reality which I live in as a colonised body. This text was exciting to engage with as it explores a South African context that I am very familiar with. It provided the wisdom and foresight around race and art that I've never seen before. This text provided invaluable understandings of race and art that I will never forget.

The White Pubes duo Zarina Muhammed and Gabrielle de la Puente are the ultimate soldiers fighting for artists rights and against the art world corruption. They're doing their fight in their way. Whenever I'd feel low about this project, *The White Pube* would bring me back up and light a fire that helped me to keep on pushing. *The White Pube* and I are on a similar journey, and they have been like older sisters throughout this project.

I'd like to acknowledge Camille Nakhid, Layla F. Saad, bell hooks, Sara Ahmed, Cassandra Barnett, Michaela Coel, and Eva Marxen. Your research and literature has made it possible for me to confidently conduct my project.

The Conditions

I knew coming into this project that I'm a product of a heavily institutionalised art course, and if I did not stay mindful of my own internalised academic behaviours I would end up re-institutionalising my pursuit in racial equity. To hold myself accountable and not get distracted I created the following non-negotiable rules, that function as the conditions of my making:

- No use of the white walls. Throughout this project, you must maintain a non-relationship with the "studio walls"; these include walls that have been painted white as a means of operating as a blank surface for artworks to be made upon or exhibited. To exhibit is not the end goal.
- The spaces that can be used are desks, the concrete pillars, and the concrete floors. These surfaces are transparent about their relationship with the institution and student welfare.
- No performative making. Do not engage with works or projects that are interested in performing ideas. The project does not call for "symbols of progress" or virtue signalling (e.g., the black square on Instagram to signify alignment with BLM). Remember that this project is invested in investigating how BIPOC can exist safely at University, not representing them.
- Engage in acts of equity not the theory of equality. This project has to be a multi-tool. And the project cannot sit only within conceptual realms, you need to be constantly thinking what are the instant,¹⁷ eventual,¹⁸ and long-term¹⁹ effects of the works; the works have to sit in those realms differently.
- The artworks being made have to be cyclic. A work's life should not fall comfortably into the role of being exhibited. It needs to continue developing and changing once you've stopped making.
- The work must try its best to not be co-opted or have preconceived ideas of operating as "valuable art". Value here is understood not as monetary, but as academic currency.
- You must be transparent. No hiding behind International Art English (IAE). Be transparent with what you do and make. And with your intentions. Say everything with your chest and be.

¹⁷ Instant – what do the contributors receive and give instantly? How will this affect their day, night, week?

¹⁸ Eventual – what are the deeper conceptual grounds that the work engages in? How can these grounds be accessed by the contributors? And is it important for them to be engaged with at all?

¹⁹ Long-term – the paradigmatic shifts that the work sits in. And, again, how am I as a facilitator guiding people through?

The first of many ethical dilemmas ²⁰

Some Thoughts

Should I be applying ethics is next to be in studio. What does it say?

As I student who utilizes identity and social dynamics about studio culture. Should I ethically be allowed here. As every part of this space informs my making. However there is a plot hole here. Regardless of my research into race and studio. The cultural dynamics of this space is going to dictate and inform how I make here. Lets say in theory this environment is overtly racist and the census here has a vendetta against women of colour, whether I'm making work about teacups or the trump presidency my experience making here is going to affect why and how I make my work. So in reality there is no escaping these issues.

One might argue that the difference here is that I have talking directly about the disparities that exist in this space.

And I have two position to that.

Firstly talking about it does not mean that the issue suddenly appears. By holding in the idea that these issues are not to be talked about signifies a prominent system of oppression at play.

Secondly these issues would be discussed regardless of the research. What this project is doing is opening up time, space and overtness to the discussion of experiences and issues.

This could be seen as ethically unjust, as this is for my project. However, it does not benefit it.

My project strictly talks from my position or members of the art/critical environments that openly discuss these issues on a public platform.

To the universities ethical standards this project is unethical as it is activism. And activism is traumatic and uncomfortable.

In order for me to get accept ethical approval, I would have to list everyone in the bva and wider art and design course as listed participants. Therefore, I would have to get consent of every participant to be open to discussion the role of race and possible side streets to this topic with every person in this course, as they all add to the dynamics of this space. And furthermore, if even one participant disagrees politically or personally with my project and what I aim to research. It would mean that I cannot continue researching this topic or this physical space. Because that anti-participant has an influence on other if not all participants and the dynamics of this space, while also changing the existing dynamics.

Ultimately this research requires everyone in this space to reconsider the position and personal relationship with race and "blackness", regardless of my project. Which is impossible.

²⁰ There is a 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128... type of escalation or rhythm to my thinking which is evident throughout all my writing, especially this text.

Lets say I do get ethics approval, with every discussion I have at uni or those who inhabit this space. I will have to precaution. That this discussion may be used in my research to varying degrees regardless whether its about political race or not.

An immediate and understandable response. To that statement would be ... how will this manifest in the research. To which I would say I have no clue. And that ethically unfair, and its not sustainable on my part. When it means that I have to maintain open, safe relationship with this space.

The spatial dynamics in studio is inherently white that perpetuates white values, because those are the values governing the art industry. And an important aspect to this course (as it is in a university) is to equip students with the skills to be an active participating artist in the visual art industry. However as a misfit in society²¹ or SoC²² you perform that whiteness by having the discussions that you have where you have to justify your choices and new ideas in what you are learning. you take it on as a truth as it is what it is. it is a value and it is what decides whether my work is valuable. So there is the knowledge that you exchange when you are talking to someone in conversation which is where that justification that happens . But also in the innocent acceptance of what is deemed to be knowledge. Because is what it absorbed, it will undoubtedly influence how and why we make the work we make full stuck we have a discussion daily with someone in that space who is performing whiteness . We have a discussion weekly with someone who we seek validation from but also reinstates that this performance of whiteness is important . They are the ones who teach us whiteness in the first place [in art practice].

So my concern then shifts to this as a student you are performing whiteness producing work in a white governing space literally and metaphorically . And the work you make gets Co-opted by the institution, which you end up projecting whiteness and the further the more dangerous it is. its during your performance you often do, not know that you're performing. you are learning it's exciting and it should be, you at University and it's fun . So only in retrospect can we see that performance happened . We are constantly in a state of looking back at all times we performed and therefore how our work performed to those standards as well. And because we are also bipoc performing what academic understandings of blackness we as bodies get Co-opted into making the same type of work year by year. I was always bewildered by the fact that every year there is a Brown girl making work about her hair including myself. Not to disrespect hair its a heavily loaded topic and a very important topic but the same type of work is being made .

And you could say that with many things but when there is a lack of facilitation around these ideas that for centuries have been deemed as unimportant and I would arguably say it still is for example there's no lecture on race . But I digress, what happens is that students who comes in year by year have to facilitate their own discussion in spite of the education that they've been

²¹ Coel, Michaela. James MacTaggart Lecture. Lecture, August 23, 2018.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odusP8gmqsg&ab_channel=EdinburghTelevisionFestival.

²² Student Of Colour.

given, and that is why it gets repeated the same type of stuff the same type of ideas the same type of discussion gets repeated. and that honest systemic level functions as a way of oppressing these individuals. What's one way to maintain your values so that you do not have to sacrifice or compromise your position. it's to make sure that the people you will place do not learn, but all that they learn, Limits their own the journey . Throw around the word decolonisation and you bipoc students will be happy in other words give them bread crumbs not a feast, we will save the feast for the white ones .

So yes, the unfortunate thing is that we are so blinded by our performance we don't know we're performing. Ask any artist at the moment if they thought their work is performing whiteness. They'd say no their work is true and honest because they put the work into it. how annoying would it be to know that the work you are making is also performing institutional values and it's not an honest output of who you are, that'd be frustrating wouldn't it? So that's why I dare you to ask because I bet you they won't know .

Honestly, I can sit here and say that I'm not 100% convinced that my work was not being made to fit the values of academic art. Had I made it at home or had I made it around my family my community what would it look like? what would it function for or who? That never asked myself. because realistically what does then sheets of play with images that will fade out very easily do for my family do for my healing . That work was made under the circumstances off an assignment under my choosing . And did have to come to an acceptance though that my work was not accessible or palatable for the audiences that come to these spaces more the valued audiences account of these spaces first up add to be with you OK with the fact that the work was not going to be understood . That was my first step into making work that served me in my healing . As students who do identity or identity politics or whatever time we've been given we need to understand why do we make the work we make?

THE FREEDOM-OF-KNOWLEDGE

In this project, I aim to continually unpack and critique the pedagogies and the curriculum used during my undergraduate degree (Bachelor of Visual Arts), including the way in which they were beneficial to my learning but also destabilised my spirit.

When it comes to the theory that we were taught, I begin to question why the fundamentals to learning social politics are based on theorists such as Karl Marx, John Berger, and Roland Barthes. Why are theorists such as Franz Fanon, Edward Said, bell hooks not included in the curriculum at all, or reserved for students who have a cultural component to their work? I wonder why the relationships between these theorists are not explored?

This reflection sparked more questions, such as why do we learn the history of feminism up to the 90s and yet, not unpack and critique the concepts of white feminism, intersectional feminism and black feminism? Lastly, why do we not discuss the role of race in relation to these topics? When race is spoken about, are ideas of criminality, trauma, and otherness being reinforced? When race is discussed, is it to accommodate a white curriculum or is the prioritisation of BIPOC experiences being considered?

I am interested in questioning further how this content is delivered and then focused into a handful of essays that are supposed to constitute our theoretical knowledge. Does this format reinforce the idea that knowledge is an object that is bestowed upon us, that theory is still a tool that can be used when we choose? My research is an attempt to unpack this way of thinking around knowledge through the concept of “humaning”.²³ Erasmus proposes that the process of becoming human is being in a constant state of learning. So, for me, it meant embracing the idea that: I know nothing and that I have everything to learn.

I knew that this freedom (the freedom-of-knowledge) would develop into a durational component that would be practiced throughout the entirety of my project. It was important that I start with this freedom first. To decolonise myself epistemologically, would require a practising of small and big steps. And, re-framing my centre of knowledge meant rebuilding a library of people to guide me

²³ David Theo Goldberg and Francose Verges, “Thinking Though Racisms/ Speaking to Racial Conditions Today,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxKm2OIEHJA&t=8s>.

through this project. In the first chapter, I referred to Zimitri Erasmus and Ruth Wilson Gilmore as being core, however, a database of people was developed from this yearning to know and understand more. This occurred during the 2020 wave of the Black Lives Matter movement, when I was already collecting resources and material on the topic of race.

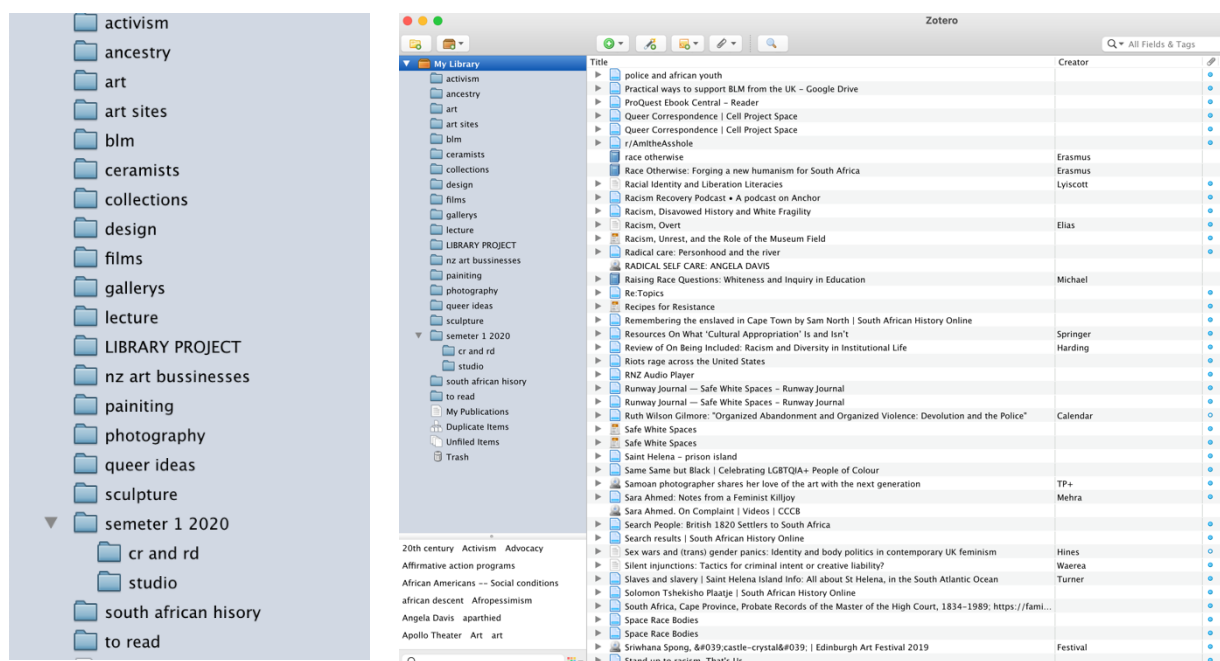


Figure 1, Zotero library, 2021, screenshot

Racial Gazes

Once my University peers realised that my practice involved such an in-depth look into race, I started getting oddly specific questions about race and how I was going to answer these problems. After some time spent unpacking, I realised that their questioning was actually about their personal turmoil with these issues. I found this completely okay, and it, in fact, made me understand the importance of healing from deeply traumatic experiences of race before high-diving into it within an academic context. This experience helped shape the first body of work that I made within this project. I knew that I had to engage directly with my racialised experiences in order to create a starting point of navigating the role of race within arts academia.

I'm sorry, but why are you coming for me and not my ideas is three "pages", consisting of one tricolour film image.²⁴ Each page is made out of recycled assignments, research, test prints, and

²⁴ Tricolour film is the first recognised process of colour photography making, where three black and white film images are taken with red, green and blue filters. When these three images are dyed to their corresponding colour and overlaid, a colour image appears.

guidelines from the past three years of my undergraduate degree studies. The pages are made through the paper-pulp process, in which I rip up these documents, blend them, and then mix them into a bath of water. These pages essentially comprise a mesh of any evidence that I existed in an academic institution. What exists on these pages are images that were made with a black and white film, and have gone through the tricolour process. These processes were an exploration in mechanisms of slowness,²⁵ in order to re-experience the racialised events that occurred in these spaces with a deeper connection to my “black consciousness” in both my making and in my healing.

These images, and their accompanying processes, were the first of many works where I engaged in the making for therapeutic purposes: I don’t intend to reveal what happened in these spaces and honestly, I shouldn’t. It is important to withhold information from the public if giving that information would put myself in a vulnerable position. This was one of the pivotal realisations that reframed my thinking around making, and which went against what I had learnt in my undergraduate degree. Often, I fall into a position of educating people about the topics of race when my work has no intention of doing so. This is a position many BIStudentsOC find themselves within, especially in group or critique discussions). Often the people around us in these situations (who express whiteness) do not have an entry way into our practice that does not contest their learnt behaviours and habits of academia, which were founded on a racist rhetoric.

I did find photographing these spaces reparative, and making paper out of old assignments very emotionally liberating. To not only be able to equip myself with the language and hindsight to talk about these events, but to also just “talk” to them, and to re-experience these memories in a form that offered clarity and closure. Overall, I became interested in the relationship the “assignmentising”²⁶ of experiences, the ways in which the “studio culture”²⁷ impacts the making of work, and the potential for that work to become racialised.²⁸

²⁵ “Slowness” can be broken down into the ways in which I purposefully slow down a particular process and work through mindfulness strategies for internal balance and clarity.

²⁶ “Assignmentising” is the way in which we take a particular idea, narrative, experience, or concept and mould it into the criteria, languages and taught behaviours of an academic assignment.

²⁷ “Studio Culture” is the social and cultural behaviours that exist in the arts education environments.

²⁸ “Racialised events” encompass the spectrum of microaggressions to macroaggressions, where race in regard to my identity becomes questioned and critiqued, instead of ideas of race as a concept that sit within the work.



Figure 2 Page 1, I'm sorry, but why are you coming for me and not my ideas, 2020, 500 x 400 mm, Inkjet print on Recycled paper



Figure 3 Page 2, I'm sorry, but why are you coming for me and not my ideas, 2020, 500 x 400 mm, Inkjet print on Recycled paper

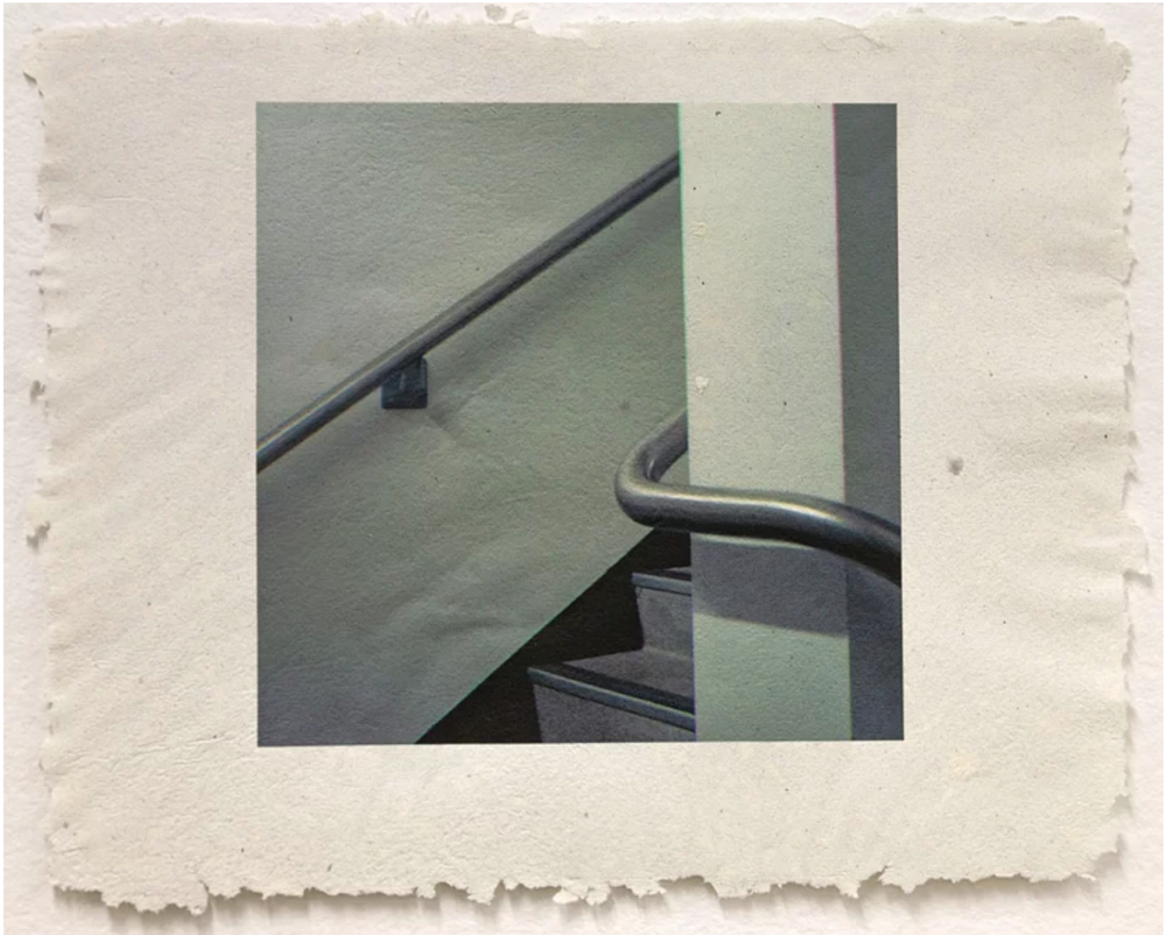


Figure 4 Page 3, I'm sorry, but why are you coming for me and not my ideas, 2020, 500 x 400 mm, Inkjet print on Recycled paper

Paper making – the first era

Little did I know that this process of papermaking would continue to be a primary component for my project. In the first era of papermaking, I became obsessed with the idea that the paper could operate as a metaphorical map for the project.

Here are *Some Thoughts* on the relationship between the paper and the image:

The paper will dictate the way the picture lands. It shows that the paper is autonomous over the image. It no longer becomes a blank canvas that is waiting to be filled, because it is already filled with the wisdom and experiences of the work that came before its new life. The paper is active, living. Not just a material of absorption. It has its own histories and stories that are private and intimate, but its interwoven nature is present on the surface. When you pull one piece out it all pulls apart into paper dust. It's as if the paper is telling you a story, that teases the viewer, making them question their role. Is this a story for them to know?

The actual image is grey, flat, an absent space. A space where learning and growing conducts itself. It's a metaphor for the way we see ourselves as students, how we are taught to see ourselves. Simply vessels waiting to be filled, waiting to be equipped. And yet when the image is on paper, it hits differently. The paper manipulates the tones. The pinks, greens, blues and greys, all shift. It's the marriage of the ink to paper that dictates that this stairwell. This grey empty stairwell is not the concrete facade that we neglect, it's also that student. It's real, it's watching, it's listening.

Paper brainstorms

The Paper brainstorms consist of several large pieces of handmade paper, which have been assembled by using a smaller screen where each pulled paper is then tiled with the layers overlapping layers. I then go through a period of patchwork, where I reinforce any spots on the page that are susceptible to tearing. Once the paper is dry, I manually feed it through a large inkjet printer, which prints out the tricolour photographs. Lastly, the paper is then written over with Markers and ballpoint pens, to which it is then folded into a manageable size.

The work that came next functioned as a natural trajectory for the making component of the project, which was to go bigger. If you were to ask me why bigger was the solution, I would only be able to tell you that it was the option often given as the next step in a student's project. My understanding of this was that the bigger the work, the more spectacular it would be. It always seemed like it was the way for our work to be more valuable and validated. "Cool, now go bigger" is a phrase that I feel like I've

heard on multiple occasions. This is one of the values that is interwoven in the Bachelor of Visual Arts course, and it's a value that does not examine the nature of a project but students' ability and skill. This is where I feel as though my practice as a student is not autonomous from the institution.

There are two phases to these brainstorms; they started as exhibition-ready prints which then developed into over-sized folded pieces of handmade paper that currently live under my desk.



Figure 5 Brainstorm 1 and 2 installation, 2020, 1m x 2.3m x 1.8m, Inkjet prints on recycled paper with writings and tape.

Before the brainstorm



Figure 6 brainstorm 1, 2020, mm, Inkjet prints on Recycled paper

Before the brainstorm, I meticulously but intuitively placed the images on the large-scale handmade pages to continue this idea of mapping. I wanted the images to highlight the nature of the paper, but once I had installed the work (back in the space where I had made the paper), I started to observe how the work was performing institutional values as articulated by the response from the people in the spaces. I started to recognise language that had been recycled and reused as praise towards students' artworks, for example: "minimal, elegant, clean". I couldn't help but think about these words in the binary of whiteness and blackness. These words often existed around the language of whiteness as a neutral space – and maybe in the context of artwork, this is a space that can easily articulate ideas for critical analysis. I had also recently listened to a philosophy and lifestyle podcast episode by Bobo and Flex on appropriation; an idea lingered as I was experiencing this realisation:

"White people have been in a position of power of assets, language, and agency. This manifests today in even just that, the colour white. We associate white with good or neutrals and those

connotations are not bad. But when we think about black there are connotations of bad, filthy, uncivil. This is where blackness is associated with me, with something negative.

So white privilege is your proximity to whiteness. Within institutions you might not be necessarily privileged but you'll have or be held to a high regard (of whiteness) more so if you are black.”²⁹

This proximity to whiteness is something I knew about for a while, as a tactic of surviving white spaces. University Professor Jonathan Jansen also explores the notion of nearness beyond proximity,³⁰ however not of space, but of ideology. Often there are phrases thrown around (in the context of apartheid South Africa), like “we grew up on the farm together, we even speak Isizulu,”³¹ or more commonly “I’m friends with black people, my partner’s black.” This languaging is used to justify cross-cultural relationships from white perspectives; however, nearness goes beyond being in the same space with one another. It considers who has to change or assimilate in order to exist in those same spaces, or, more so, whose ideology on life has to be performed. In my life, this looks like how well I can easily mimic a “New Zealand accent” and gestures that are associated with Pākehā (according to white narratives). More so, that I pass for white, which I think is ultimately a defining factor for the amount of racialised experiences I have every day.

This languaging around my practice is how I recognised systemic racist narratives that exist within art dialogue, and it started to have a more overt role in my making experience within the institution. It was exciting to recognise this influence, because it meant that I knew exactly what to do next.

Earlier I mentioned the importance of withholding information as protection, however, this position also makes my experiences palatable. I’ve seen many times when viewers enter the work, realise it’s to do with identity and culture, categorise the work as cultural, and become absent or check out. So, I decided to tell my stories, wants, and thoughts in the form of a brainstorm, which would require time and patience for anyone who tried to read it. A long enough amount of time is required for a viewer to consider their position as a stranger reading my story, before simply walking away and letting it go.

²⁹ Bobo Matjila and Flex Mami, “Why is Cultural Appropriation Prioritized over Black Genocide?” Bobo and Flex Show, n.d., <https://open.spotify.com/episode/3DJ7x0cBHm2fbNFuzQGoRE>. 15 June 2020.

³⁰ Jonathan Jansen. “In Search of Liberation Pedagogy in South Africa.” *The Journal of Education* 172, no. 2 (April 1, 1990): 62–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002205749017200206>.

³¹ Isizulu is one of the eleven national languages of South Africa, and is one of the three most commonly spoken native languages. This example is used in reference to the languages spoken by the maids and workers on the white-owned farms.

After the brainstorm



Figure 9 brainstorm 1, 2020, mm, Inkjet Prints on Recycled paper with writings in ballpoint pens



Figure 9 brainstorm 1, 2020, folded

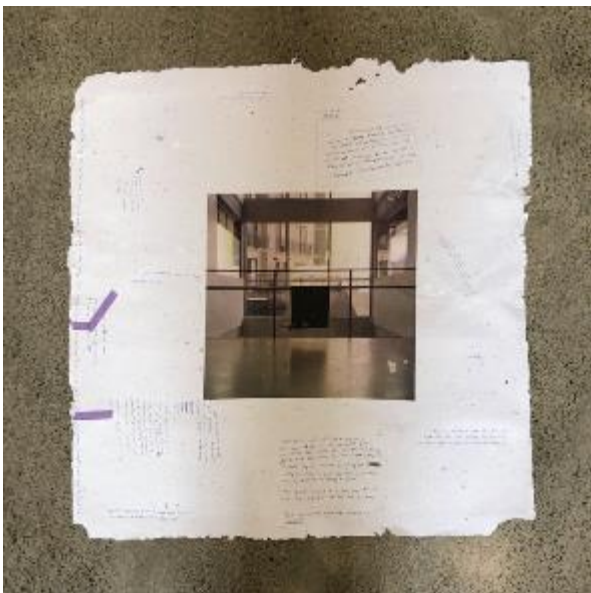


Figure 9 brainstorm 2, 2020, Inkjet Print on recycled paper with writings in ballpoint pen and felt tip marker

The making of the brainstorms took place over several days and involved impulsively written paragraphs or sentences of my experiences within the spaces I photographed. I also did some brainstorms in the space where I made the paper, which was a public space. This foyer space³² ended up becoming an important makeshift studio for my practice, as it had unvarnished concrete floors that were able to absorb the water in the papermaking process and dry the paper evenly. But as the

³² AUTs WM building, third floor.

days went on, and more strangers interacted with me during my papermaking, I began to realise that I was making both paper and staging a performance. I seem to not be able to escape the performativity that comes with being in studio. I found I somehow attracted unwanted and unsolicited opinions on my work as I was making. And I then started to realise that feeling free to provide opinions is another value that exists in the programme³³. Opinion giving in relationship to the performativity of the space, made it clear to me that there is a performance of critique.

Critique and the values of the space

To best explain how I understand critique and the values of the space, here are *Some More Thoughts*:

The value of critique

There is an underlying femme energy to the work I make. I was asked recently can you tell when an artwork was made by man or woman? Which is a problematic sentence in itself for many reasons, but I won't get into that as it will distract from the point I'm wanting to make. Which is that what I understood this person to be really asking is if there are materials that stereotypically men or women make with. My answer to either of those questions is no.

However, I bring this point up as I often get the comment that my work is elegant, and I've never really contested this until recently. The work in some way is perceived to be very conventionally (and somewhat misogynistically) femme. It's elegant, fragile, with light pastel colours and it's minimal. These external opinions seem too often account to the value systems that underly the artistic communities' ideas of good art.

What I did notice however, was the change in tone towards my work when I started the brainstorm. Once I made the process public and I disrupted the values by writing on the imagery, ripping the paper and folding it, it seemed to be an overwhelming response of regret when the work did not meet those expectations, which contributes to the fact that it is not an inherently free space to make within.

I've been thinking about how we are trained in a particular field with skills in that very specific area. We analyse the work, strip it apart and rebuild it. The longer we spend time with the work we swap ideas, composition, layout and colours.

Training, training, training to make work bigger and better. All for that "ahh, that's satisfying to look at. That's well composed and elegant". However, this rhetoric is a cold and self-serving engagement with the work, and for what reason should the work be bigger, brighter and bolder without considering the natural trajectory of the practice?

³³ We are encouraged to support one another but I suspect it has been internalised that the best way to do this is by offering continuous and somewhat unsolicited critical opinions.

Also why is it that we enter the work from technical grounds to find a connection? Is that everyone's purpose to engage with art. I mean, I'm in an environment where unsolicited advice is so common, that I don't realise I'm receiving it or giving it. Have I (amongst many) developed a habit of support comes the form of criticism.

Performativity

This new understanding of critique made me realise how much of a performance critical analysis is. Since then, I've been having discussions with peers and strangers, not for the sake of this research, but just to understand what a critical discussion can look like outside of an institution. It's a lot of fun; I got the game *reflex*, which is a critical thinking game. It asked questions like: Do aliens exist and why, or why not? What do you think the apocalypse will look like? Are you happy with the person you're becoming? I've played this game over the past year and even came up with my own questions, such as "do you make your identity, or does the identity make you". The game ended up becoming a practice of critical imagination that was fun and fulfilling. I can now reflect on my past four years of studying and see how the tactics of this performance of critique function. The voice of critical analysis in institutions is dangerous, it gaslights³⁴, and it can be used with malicious intent to break down a student. Often, this happens in critique environments that are not facilitated with the intent to safely unpack the ideas that students are exploring.

Within this research, I recognise that there are multiple layers of performance within myself and my practice. This got me thinking about the performativity during the Black Lives Matter protests. Matjila explains this performativity well:

"To be an anti-racist has become a moral responsibility, and instead of just being anti-racist, you are now morally responsible to be an anti-racist, and that's the problem. Moral responsibility is a contradiction. Cus, Once a moral act becomes an obligation it's no longer a moral act, because now it's a performance and the purpose if a performance to entertain, whereas the purpose of morality is to improve. So if you are performing activism, then actually

³⁴ Within the context of this project and art spaces, gaslighting can look like performative care. For example, within critiques, gaslighting involves using vague, highly sophisticated and inaccessible language. It is dressed in rhetorical questions and is presented passively, leaving the person being critiqued confused and embarrassed.

your activism is nothing more than a playground for white voyeurism and what mass entertainment of black genocide.”³⁵

So, this brought up a dilemma: that here I was engaging in a “performative practice”_that explores how to exist safely as a person of colour within the institution. And that seemed contradictory, so I knew I had to make some radical changes to the way I went about my art making. I did not want this project to be a year-long *symbol of progress*.³⁶ Like the Instagram black square³⁷, the symbol of progress is a scam that reinforces white supremacy. It is virtue signalling that produces a fallacy for escaping the guilt and responsibility of the problems being addressed. Symbols of progress are dangerous as it’s gaslighting that presents a facade of change and not progress towards a solution to the issue at hand – and therefore is a tactic of white saviourism, which contributes to white supremacy.

³⁵ Bobo Matjila and Flex Mami, “Do you think black lives actually matter?”, June 15 2020. Bobo and Flex Show, Podcast. <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2DUwvqvnY3PzeZlsWz2utd>. 48:30.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ During the 2020 wave of black lives matter movement, a trend on instagram of each account holder posting a black square to stand in solidarity with the black lives matter movement went global and viral.

THE FREEDOM-OF-SPACE

To be able to be free in a particular space begs the question of who occupies those spaces? If the social dynamics in those spaces (regardless of whether BIPOC are allowed in or not) are made with and for whiteness, then not only are colonial languages and ideas reinforced, they're also the standard for existing in those spaces – demanding conformity or risk being alienated. I want to explore the idea of safe spaces and who they are safe for. What would it look like if I were able to be unapologetic about my cultural behaviours, and if I did so, would that silence other ways of being? What would it look like to be able to create environments that do not prioritise a particular racial group, but instead diversity as a concept? What does true diversity in art spaces look like?

The problem of a safe space

People of colour all have individual experiences that contribute to a collective whole. What I fear about creating safe spaces is that a new cultural capital will develop, which could be more dangerous than the cultural capital that exists within whiteness. To further explain what I mean, I want to make it clear that people of colour make up most of the majority of the world. We stem from different nations and subgroups within those nations. We come from different classes, genders, sexualities, and abilities. And more importantly, we all have our own unique political views and ideologies. Great unity comes from having BIPOC communities, however a great divide can also occur. For me to say that I can provide a safe space for all BIPOC students within the institution would be a complete lie. I'm an immigrant from South Africa with mixed race descent, who is pansexual, cis-gendered, female, and passes for white, who stems from a middle-class home, and does not have any medical conditions that hinder my engagement in society. Those are the things I can account for. I do not have any agency to speak for anyone else, and therefore I cannot claim to provide a safe space for anyone else. This enigma of providing a safe space inherently poses a problem for me providing a BIPOC safe space, because who is it really safe for?

I had to change my thinking around providing safety. And I remembered an episode of Bobo and Flex in which I recall Matjila saying, “pleasure is the ultimate form of resistance for black women, because we have always been denied it.”³⁸ I started to think about this sentence in relation to my project; what is the ultimate form of resistance to the institution as a student? My answer was rest. I was not

³⁸ Bobo Matjila and Flex Mami, “Why Is Cultural Appropriation Prioritized over Black Genocide?” Bobo and Flex Show, n.d., <https://open.spotify.com/episode/3DJ7x0cBHm2fbNFuzQGoRE>.

going to provide a safe space within the University as it's impossible, but I could create pockets of time to safely rest that would not be co-opted by the University's "wellness" programme. If I was going to get into the freedom-of-space, I knew I had to work with people, more so than I had done before. It also seemed to be the best way of me exiting performative making.

One day I asked some of my peers in studio if they felt like ripping up paper with me. This was after-hours and I had lots of paper to rip up, and I thought, why not? What ended up happening was that all of us experienced a cathartic release from everything that had happened on that day. We chatted for hours and got through all of the documents that I had at the time. I realised that I was going to keep doing this with more students, because this is how I could provide a somewhat safe space without facing the paradox of a "safe space".

Rip n' Bitch



Figure 10 Rip n' Bitch poster, 2020, inkjet print, copy 10

I came up with a plan to hold four workshops, where students could come by during lunch (midday) with their old assignments and assessments and rip them up. Before each session, I ordered pizza and snacks, and went hunting around the art and design building for any pillows I could find. I held these workshops once a week on the same day/time in the Visual Arts foyer (level four), so everyone knew I'd be there. To best explain these workshops, I can break them down into three core themes: *The Evidence Document*; *Playing in our Mess*; and *A Labour of Love*. The name Rip n' Bitch derives from

external views that my project was about complaining without seeking a solution³⁹. Yes, there is a component to it that is about complaining, but it is also a solution.⁴⁰

The Evidence Document

The first theme was *The Evidence Document*, which involved a process of releasing the student from academic performance. This looks like ripping up any material that a student had produced or printed for an assignment. I use the term evidence document because any document made for an assignment is produced to evidence our learning, and I want to differentiate that from the handmade paper because, in the end, it's not the same thing. The paper I make is a space for creative expression, whereas the evidence document is a performance of knowledge.

The evidence document also has a role in *The Handbook* publication, which is an essay that explores the dynamics between students and University assignments. However, in the context of my papermaking practice, it's a very physical thing. It's whatever content people bring to the Rip n' Bitch workshops to rip up. The Rip n' Bitch workshops took place in the two months leading up to the undergraduate mid-year deadlines. I set up these sessions during midday lunch; students could come along with paper, and there would be cushions and pizza provided. This meant that students did not have to stress about getting lunch (because even that's something that can become stressful during assessment times). These sessions created a space in the Art and Design building where students did not have to think about uni⁴¹, but could immediately go back to their work if they wanted to.

Here are *Some Thoughts* on the topic of the evidence document.

Evidence is an important factor when marking students. Despite seeing the work or the project what was more or equally as important to assert a numerical value to their work was them evidencing of how they got to their outcome. And I found that an interesting idea. That this gesture or providing evidence like your on trial in court expands into the wider holistic ideas that reside within academia. Liberal humanist pedagogies rely on evidencing knowledge than learning itself. And I mean this is probably a symptom of a crisis in the measurement of our learning as is, but I digress. Because when you actually truly understand something its hard to explain where you got it from. The source of your knowledge slips away because you've cared for it and you've watched it grow into something bigger than yourself.

³⁹ This also relates to the Stitch n' Bitch social sewing groups, where people would knit and talk in Stitch n' Bitch clubs.

⁴⁰ feministkilljoys. "Why Complain?" *Feministkilljoys* (blog), July 22, 2019. <https://feministkilljoys.com/2019/07/22/why-complain/>.

⁴¹ Uni is a multifunctional word: it's both a place and a subject matter.

Now I don't intend on being another student of colour regurgitating decolonial epistemologies (there's nothing wrong with that actually) because there are way more academics that have pioneered this stuff and can articulate better this than myself. (go google it)

And this isn't new we know this. This is why I'm up here talking to you know. This is why we are engaging in an exegesis. And I'm sure we all engaged in some type of conversation that questions these performative acts within academia. Suffice to say that we do learn from them and a lot of good can come from language our ideas. But im hesitant to believe that this is the best option that we are putting ourselves through. When writing this document our mindset is not so much to explain what we are doing. know how to do that, because when we talk to our peers about our projects its different to what we have written. So in reality this evidence document becomes a way to present eloquently that we have covered all the necessary bases of what is most valued within art academia. We cannot deny the fact that there are very common plot holes in the way that we language ourselves when explaining our work. And yet the parts that are elaborated on the most. Are our performative/aesthetic ethics that need to coincide or be better than those who are marking us, our reclaiming of taste by overglamorising everyday emotions, theoretical and methodological basis that underpins a greater idea that the work in its entirety just scrapes the surface on, and I think the most dangerous one of it all transcribing personal experience that is what the work is actually based on into a muted and dull work of academic language. And this one in particular is not separate from practice. It's a hard pill to swallow but we are not making our own art. Im sure you as postgrad students have seen this and you as lectures who have existed in this field for a much longer time are very familiar with the fact that grad shows look the same every year. That we are all chapters in the same book despite the fact that we all have very separate and unique stories to tell.

Why is it that our practices are homogenous. And when you've realised that and you start to pull a thread that will eventually unravel. When we engage with the evidence documents we don't talk about how we came about this idea. What inspired it, on a side note you and I both know it wasn't that really dense theoretical text about touch. And so if its not this formal thing what about it excited you, what about it made you go I want to know more about this. This to me proves how the evidence is more about how well you can language external ideas about your project.

Because you and I both know you were not thinking about that particular theorist when you we're making.

I intended for the Rip n' Bitch workshops to function as a safe space for students to rest, and to release any stresses that were gained that day. And I ended every workshop with a promise of making paper out of everything that was ripped.



Figure 11 Rip n' Bitch workshop two, 21st October 2020, Level 3 foyer of the WE Building at AUT. For the safety of the contributors involved I have not photographed their faces throughout the workshops.

Despite it being a time of rest, a lot of great creative making came from those workshops. Everyone ripped in their own way, some people ripped in strips, others in tiny pieces, and some chose specific colours. This signified to me as a facilitator how effective ripping was as a task. It was also non-hierarchical; there's no point in comparing how you rip to someone else, because in the end all the paper is going to be blitzed. Consequently, there was an opportunity to experience a very tactile form of conversation, which did not invoke anxiety or stress. For the most part, the conversations were not to do with uni at all, but instead about topics true and honest to our lives outside of the University. I also specified that "bitch" can mean many things, this was the energy that I wanted to bring to the space. For example, if silence was a student's form of bitching then that was ok. It could mean whatever anyone wanted it to mean. The part of the project where I think bitching was explored the most was when the collaborators⁴² came by and said nothing at all. I didn't expect much from the silence when I mentioned it, but those who didn't say anything expressed the most: in the way that

⁴² The participants in the workshops are called collaborators throughout the project because they provided physical work and labour to make the paper and helped build a safe space for being.

they ripped paper and in the way that they rested, they clearly came in to recharge themselves so that they could carry on.

In total there were four Rip n' Bitch events between October and November, 2020. I saw how important it was to have a student-run space for rest that was not owned and controlled by the University. At first there was apprehension about ripping up what is seen as valuable material, but over time people became more comfortable and more open in expressing, via ripping in that space. And a lot of joy came out of releasing ourselves from those documents and those values, even just for an hour.



Figure 12 Paper piles, Rip n' Bitch Workshops, October 2020,



Figure 13 Paper piles 2, Rip n' Bitch Workshops, October 2020

Paper making – the second era

Playing in our Mess

The second theme, *Playing in our Mess* is also the second era of my papermaking journey. At this point in my practice, I had developed a very intimate and intuitive relationship with the paper, and I had begun to recognise the greater metaphorical role that it has in the context of the reconciliation of rest and race.

Playing in our Mess is about sitting with the remains of the paper throughout each step of the paper pulling⁴³ process in order to be replenished. It's a slow process that aims for us to get wet in an institution that's consistently drying us out. The best way to discuss what the title *Playing in our Mess* means is by explaining the papermaking process. This theme is inspired by the *Spit/e Collective*,⁴⁴ who explore these ideas of wetness and dryness in relationship to institutions and how the institution dehydrates us.

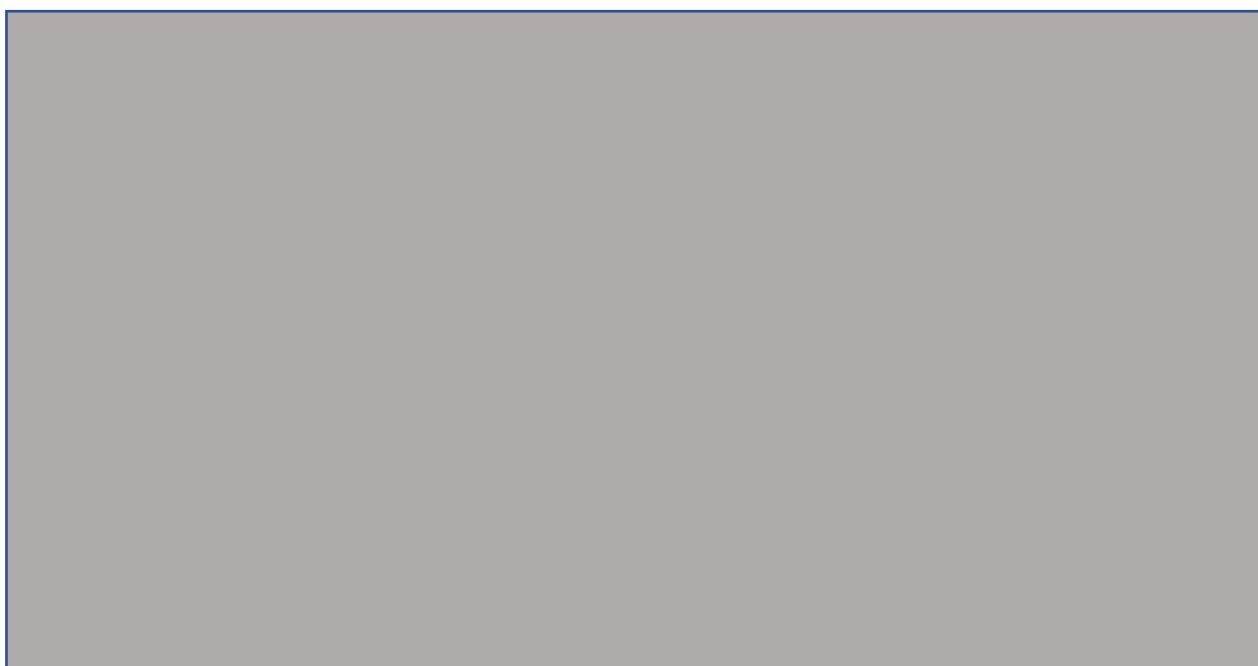


Figure 14 Spit/e Collective Blog post, RM Website, June 2020, Screenshot, <https://rm.org.nz/current-resident/>.

⁴³ Paper Pulling is when the ripped up paper is ready to be reformed into usable paper.

⁴⁴ Spit/e Collective, "Archive Residency – RM," RM Gallery website, *Past Residencies* (blog), July 15, 2020, <https://rm.org.nz/current-resident/>.

Soaking and mulching of the documents – In this step, the documents take a warm bath, releasing any odours, pigments, chemicals, and, most importantly, the form of the evidence document.



Figure 15 Paper process photographs (mulching), May 2020.

Mixing – The mulch then enters a large bath of water where it moves freely. In order for the mulch to be distributed equally over the screens, the paper has been mixed with a very specific speed and rhythm; it's active and responsive, and this is when I and the paper start to dance.

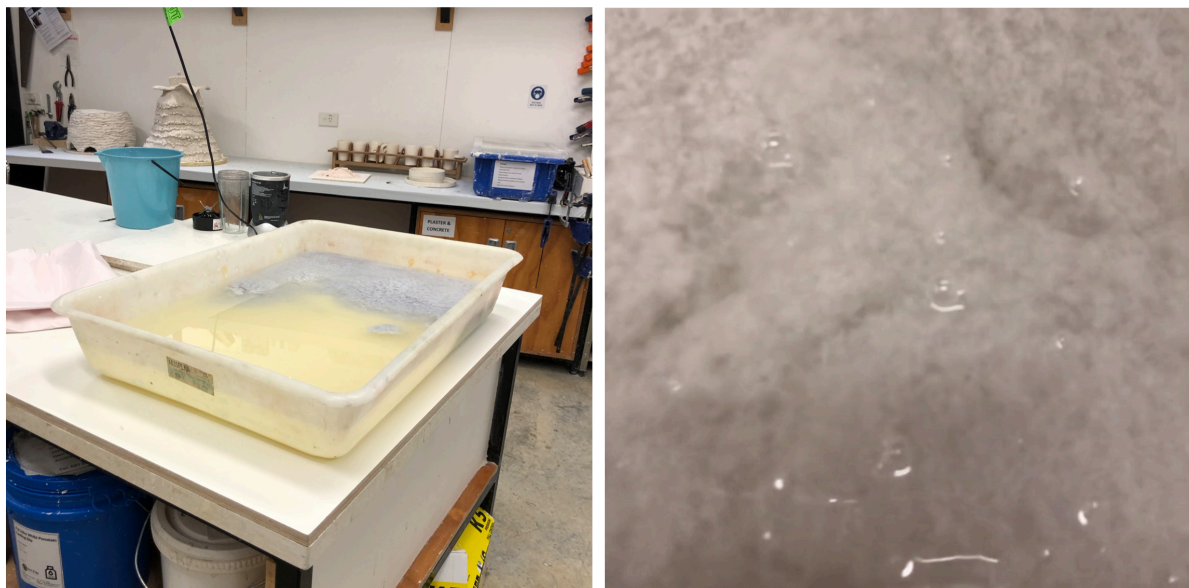


Figure 16 Paper process photographs (mixing), May 2020.

Between two screens – There is a collaboration that occurs, as the formation of the paper always happens between a pair of screens. During the pulling process, the mulch is pulled by one screen and then pressed by another. The water slowly drips, and the paper is no longer actively moving.



Figure 17 Paper process photographs (forming), May 2020.

The towel holds the scent – The towels used to dry the paper have never been washed (not once). That's because they do the cleaning, and each page is dried by the memory of the pages that have come before.



Figure 18 Another black Square, Racial Gazes, July 2020, Tricolour Photograph on Ilford HP5 Medium Format film (of the towels used to dry the recycled paper).

Drying on concrete – This is the last step of the papermaking process and it best conveys how the institution dries us out. As my last step, I use the institutions habitual nature of drying itself out to create something that will hopefully bring about metaphorical wetness. Our Art and Design buildings are covered in concrete profiles and have large industrial air-conditioning that is spread very visibly throughout the building. For the most part it is not the best environment to work in as it is often cold, however these are great conditions for drying out paper. When the paper is placed on the concrete floor, the concrete soaks up its moisture while the air conditioning aerates the top surface.



Figure 21, Paper tiles, January 2021, 16 x 4 rows of paper drying on concrete floor



Figure 21 Paper tiles, November 2020, 9 x 2 rows of paper drying on concrete floor



Figure 21 Paper tiles close up, January 2021, 15 x 5 rows of paper drying on concrete floor

A Labour of Love

The last theme is A Labour of Love, and it is about finding pleasure and rest in labour. This theme binds the first and second themes of The Evidence Document and Playing in our Mess together. This is an act of personal reconciliation with the institution because I'm still creating within it.

So far, I have made over 200 pulls of paper (500 x 400 mm screen size). It has become a routine in which my mind simply wanders, and my body takes control. I only make paper to rest, and when it becomes a chore, I stop. I don't want my body to correlate any kind of stress with making paper. Is it tiring? Of course, it's a very laborious process. However, it's a labour of play, and of love. I make paper in spit/e of the evidence document. Patching and building the paper has been my personal journey to de-institutionalise my art practice so that I can connect with my love for artmaking again. When I think about the papermaking process, I get excited about the possibilities, a bit like a child playing in mud.

I have almost finished making all the pages of paper that came out of the four Rip n' Bitch workshops, and I hope to give paper back to everyone who participated. I see everyone who was involved in the workshops as collaborators and I'd like them to each have an equal piece of what comes out of it. Like a map, the paper hold fragments and memories of what once was, which I hope can operate as a gentle reminder of all that we have gone through together in our study. I also hope that the paper is used in whatever way the collaborators want to and without having to evidence themselves to anyone else.

The Rip n' Bitch workshops have become a continuous aspect in my practice and represent the values of the overarching project. Since the Rip n' Bitch, my engagement with the research has been very instinctual and I make for pleasure. This new beginning of de-colonising my practice became vital when I started to engage with the freedom-of-language. However, this completion of the decolonisation of my practice and the values also meant that I had to let go of seeking the validation of career success. This project has become completely detached from idealised forms of making within arts academia. I don't know how it could further my career and I morally don't think it should. Instead, this project has become a journey of learning and I'm happy with it. However, in the context of being a guide for providing resolutions to the racial inequities within this institution it is very unhelpful.

There is a dilemma in curriculum deliberations

I recently came across a lecture by Jonathan Jansen called *The Problem With Decolonisation*⁴⁵, where he vocalises very valid concerns on our relationship with decolonising education.

“The first is the concern with knowledge of the past which is corrective knowledge, at the cost of a concern with knowledge of the future. Now as an amateur historian I am concerned about the knowledge of the past and its legacies in the present. However, if all that you do is talk about how evil the knowledge of the past is then I think we are really screwing our kids, that is because in addition to having that knowledge you have the knowledge of the future. What I call perspective knowledge, that is, what are we going to do to prepare our children for the next generation?”⁴⁶

This is where I ultimately hit a brick wall. If we fully decolonise our institutions, then they are not fulfilling their preconceived duty to provide students with the skills to function in their chosen industry. At the end of the day, most art students want to be artists whose work sells, and accumulates wealth and a reputation. My ideas of an art world or a safe way of existing within institutions don't align with that goal.

Quite honestly, I don't think this research journey is setting me up to survive monetarily in the art world. I have many ideas that are not going to find a place in the current industry that I exist within. I cannot condemn everything that I've learned so far because it has gotten me to where I am now – specifically, to a position where I am critically thinking about the spaces I exist in. My project is not an answers-based research project. Like I said earlier, it's an unhelpful guide. Unfortunately, at the cost of clarity and comfort, I'm going to have to sit within the realm of the abstract. This is a very complicated grey zone where my abstract thoughts and ideas also need to provide, in some capacity, transparency and understanding for those engaging with my work. I also mentioned earlier that I am not interested in performing these concerns, therefore the position that I have to take is that I still don't know how to exist safely within the art industry. But in saying that, I don't think most artists know and we are all trying our best to survive.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Jansen, “The Problem with Decolonisation,” University Seminar, Stellenbosch University International, November 24, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFZdQAb80Ww&ab_channel=UCTSummerSchool.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

What my research does not provide and can't answer for in any capacity is how to exist safely in a white world. At the end of the day, when we leave our homes or our places of rest, a white world is what we will step into. I say this with bittersweet hope, because this project, if anything, hopes to offer emotional safety, as it appears these institutions currently and foreseeably are going to respond to an ever-changing world that still prioritises white capitalist standards and industries.

THE FREEDOM-OF-LANGAUGE

The freedom-of-language is the first and last freedom I engaged with. I knew that this one would take lots of time, because I am attempting to undo 17 years of study. The freedom-of-language is about more than how we talk. It is our ability to express ourselves freely, without having to condition the way we language ourselves within art spaces.⁴⁷ For this freedom, I continually engaged with the concept of *liberation literacies*,⁴⁸ which explores how institutions uphold colonial academic ideas of correct language. It dives into the linguistic tools that corporations use to capitalise on African American Vernacular English (AAVE), for example McDonald's use of the slogan "I'm lovin' it". This notion highlights the hypocrisy of educating students about ideas of "correct" language that are not upheld in all aspects of our society. I've been exploring how language in academia denies the realities of multilingual and creolised individuals. This way of interacting with language works towards de-stereotyping and dismantling linguistic hierarchies, which the visual arts industry has a notorious reputation of upholding.

Some thoughts and feelings on International Art English (IAE)

Often when I bring up the idea of talking about art that does not use art speak terminology, I get an overwhelmingly negative response. The argument is that we are at art school, via the institution, and where else does academic language exist if not in a University? I can't help but feel that this was an extreme response to a very small aspect of an arts ecosystem. When I talk about finding other ways of talking about art, it does not mean that I'm going to completely undo thousands of years of academic art speak. That's always going to be there, we're going to learn about it, we're going to talk about it, it's not going to disappear. To me this also shows how vulnerable the patriotism to this language is. I think the most accessible art form is music and there is most definitely academic language used in the theory of music. Its terminology is important to discuss and to unpack in order to understand music on a deeper level. However, we can all still talk about music regardless of whether we know this knowledge or not; whether we know how to speak this language. If we really do think about the music that we love, we are all equipped with articulating ourselves. However, that same energy does not seem to exist within the art world. That is what I found to be the first step in exploring the freedom-

⁴⁷ Butler, Andy, "Safe White Spaces".

⁴⁸ Lyiscott, Jamila. "Racial Identity and Liberation Literacies in the Classroom." *The English Journal* 106, no. 4 (2017): 47-53. Accessed May 10, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26359462>.

of-language; to be able to articulate ourselves around art without using overly conceptual and metaphorical terms. Don't get me wrong, I do think the language around concept and form is important, however I am targeting the particular language that we use as currency for intellectual capital.

When I think about IAE, I recall the article "There's Something Wrong with Art Writing"⁴⁹ by Vanessa Mei Crofskey. When it came out there was a lot of quiet chatter about how radical this article was, and it is. Crofskey and I have the same issues with art speak: it's elitist and exclusionary, and she articulates really well how this language negatively affects the psyche of an arts student. Which begs the question: "Why is it still being used?" I remember asking a lecturer the same question and the response was that it has to be exclusionary, everyone shouldn't know how to do it. At the time I found this very confusing, it went against my whole thinking about how art should be accessible to everyone, but it was also a very rude awakening that was honest. Nothing about the arts courses, about art spaces, and quite obviously about art language is made to be accessible. And it hit me like a brick, that I'm learning how to participate in the arts industry, and at the end of the day it is an industry. This isn't a big or radical realisation, however, if this is an underlying arts value then it completely explains the performativity of what it means to be an artist.

When you enter art school, correct IAE is one of the first and most confronting aspects. Crofskey explains well what it feels like:

"It's shameful to admit that I don't understand or enjoy the majority of art writing. So much of it makes me feel disheartened, like a 9am lecture I'm blearily awake for. It makes me feel like I'm an impostor in the creative and academic community. Like if I cared more about this stuff, I would get it. But I do care, and I still don't get it."⁵⁰

I think that this language is most evident when you are in a critique. This is a space where everyone has to provide feedback on someone's work. However, when you start at art school you don't know how to do this, and the most common thing that happens is that a lecturer provides feedback. I remember what it was like trying my best to understand what they had to say, and for the first year I couldn't understand it, let alone speak it. But I do remember listening and looking at students who could talk the talk. Not until the last year of my undergraduate

⁴⁹ Vanessa Mei Crofskey, "There's Something Wrong with Art Writing," *Pantograph Punch*, December 6, 2019, <https://www.pantograph-punch.com/posts/jargon-art-writing>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

degree did I realise that none of us really knew how to talk the talk. When we talk about our work we don't actually know how to talk about our work, instead we are performing ideas of how we think an artist talks about work. And those who choose to not use this language do not get any form of validation from their peers or lecturers when they decide to share. This contributes to a well-celebrated façade of what it means to be an artist; that if you keep practising it enough, you'll eventually build enough intellectual capital in these art spaces to be respected and not get talked over.

To understand my relationship better with this language and the politics of using it when discussing ideas of identity, I sat in as a silent observer during critiques. I noted memories that came back to me, and the feelings about what critics are insinuating but not saying. It became very clear how this language was being used to gaslight and corner the students who are being critiqued, while generating as much intellectual credit as the critic could during their few minutes of talking. It's a destructive engagement with art, adopted from the minute we enter art school and it's not that we're taught to do this exactly, but the lack of discussion around delivering constructive criticism is what causes this behaviour to be celebrated.

Each year a "*Talk Week*" event is held, where external critics come into the institution and provide feedback on students' work. Talk Week has built quite a reputation for itself. It can be a major boost for a student or cause them to break down. There's a lot of stress leading up to this week, so that when your critique happens it is very difficult to listen. In light of the critique dynamics, I decided to opt-out of this year's Talk Week, and instead make work while it was happening.

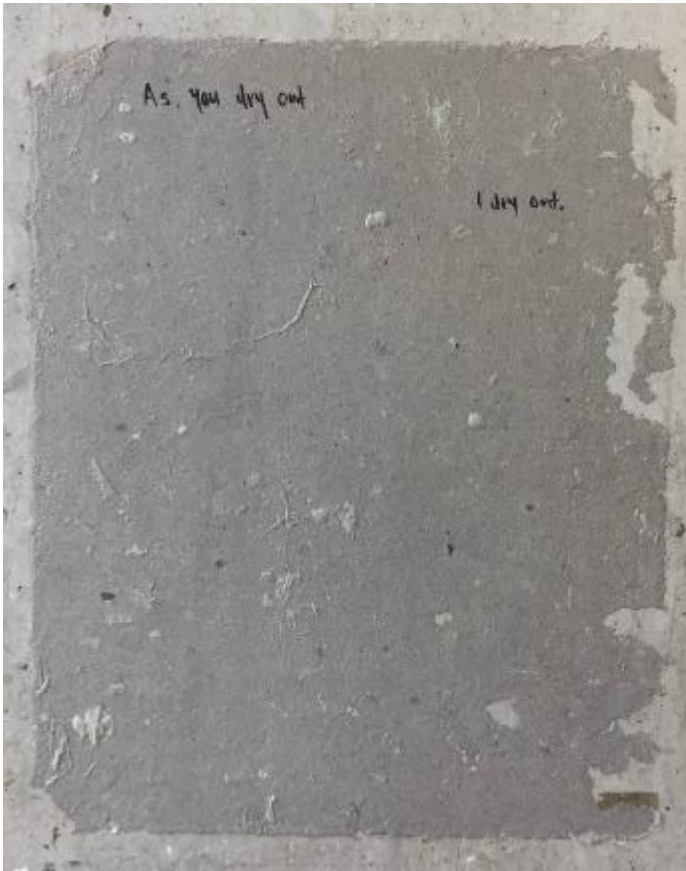


Figure 22 As you dry out I dry out, February 2021, before and after photographs.

As you dry you, I dry out is a single page work that consists of phrases and memories that Talk Week brings up for me, with a focus on critical analysis and conversation as ideas. Throughout the day I would sit in on critiques and when I felt ready, I would return to the paper as it was drying and write what I thought. If someone were to come up to this page it would seem incoherent and would look like a few scribbled words or multiple shopping lists on an over-sized page. However, the more critiques I sat in on, the more my interest shifted from the performativity of critique to the production of language.

Very suddenly these critiques would shift from wet to *dry* spaces; the tension from the students could be felt by the critics as they scrambled for feedback to give, and eventually a critic would find an angle to approach a student's work. As a student, it does not matter if your work does not concern this "angle", it has already been set. This dryness often comes from the cold reading approach; there is a layer of mysticism that we like to engage in as students which also feeds this artist façade. And I completely understand it, I engage in it too. There is a lot of satisfaction that comes if you have a

critique, and the critics can somehow piece together the ideas that describe or back up your work. It's perceived by students that you have somehow accomplished successful work as an artist.

This approach to art making is internalised very early, when we start writing contextual statements. We are taught to not tell the ideas within the work, but to let people in. I feel as though this is another great example of a performative engagement with language. In no other context would we describe our work in this way, and my concern is that often these statements are the first time we are trying to language the work that we're making. I question what this does, when you apply an industry-given skill to work that is personal.

In retrospect, *as you dry out, I dry out* was greatly informed not only by the *spit/e* collective,⁵¹ but also the on-going project "*arriving_in____stages*" by artist and PhD candidate, Antonia Nisbet.⁵² This project has, over the past few years, left prompts, questions, or statements on a sandwich board throughout the Art and Design buildings at the Auckland University of Technology. I really enjoy this very public and yet subtle engagement with language and the personal inquiry that it proposes. Most of the time I only get to see Instagram updates of the sandwich board and I really appreciate the lack of context it provides, just a question that I can answer if I choose.

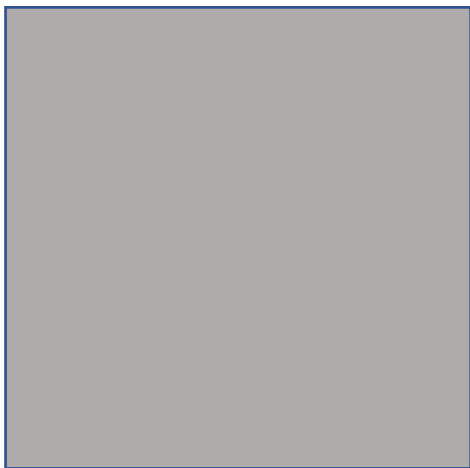


Figure 23 (*Asking what care can mean for the thinking of things*), *arriving in ____ stages*, Antonia Nisbet, January 2020. Text taped to a sandwich board, screenshot of Instagram



Figure 25 untitled, *arriving in ____ stages*, Antonia Nisbet, January 2020. Text taped to a sandwich board, screenshot of Instagram

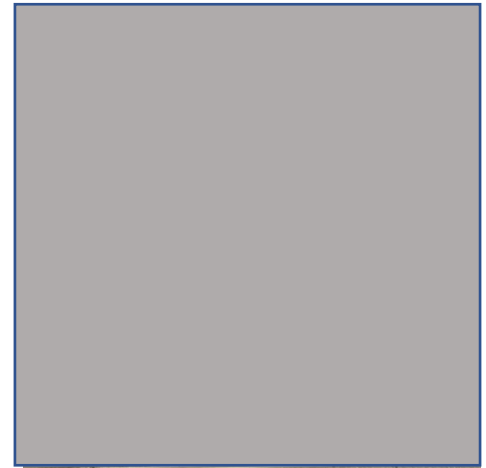


Figure 24 (*Care is not about fusion; it can be about the right distance*), *arriving in ____ stages*, Antonia Nisbet, January 2020. Text taped to a sandwich board, screenshot of Instagram

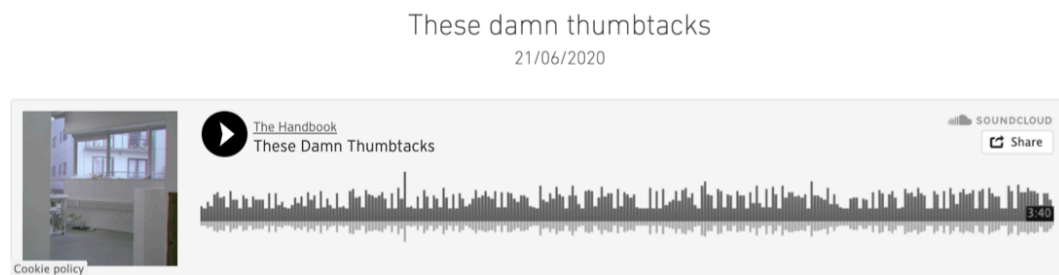
⁵¹ Spit/e Collective, "Archive Residency – RM" RM Gallery website. *Past Residencies* (blog), July 15, 2020. <https://rm.org.nz/current-resident/>.

⁵² @arriving_in____stages, Instagram Photos and Videos, Accessed May 3, 2021. https://www.instagram.com/arriving_in____stages/.

In my practice, *As you dry out, I dry out* and many other thought pieces, voice recorded rants, texts, and essays began to form what I envisioned as *The Handbook* publication. Like most of my making ideas, *The Handbook* publication was developed in a humorous conversation with a friend. I jokingly said “what if there was book that had all the answers to our problems”. What I didn’t take so seriously at the time became an ongoing parallel with my papermaking practice. Over this past 17 months I have been passively collecting thoughts, essays, voice messages and using anything to record my experiences as they came. As I developed the freedoms, I began to see a direct link to my relationship with language and expression. Like Nisbet, I have been building and recording some type of archive, which in my case will hopefully exist as some type of (unhelpful) guide to surviving arts academia.

The Handbook publication

The Handbook started out as a small rant about how racism in the studio is a lot like thumbtacks on the ground.



These damn thumbtacks

sit alongside I'm sorry but why are you coming for me and not my ideas.

This is not a spoken word event. I will not be conditioning myself to alternative ways of communicating so that I'm more palatable. All I'm doing is talking so let's talk about this.

Not too long ago I was talking to someone about catalyst events. They are moments in my life that remind me of my position in society. And I'm not going to claim that I'm a woman of colour or claim that I'm white, those terms have been so fluctuant and so sensitive to me for so long. My whiteness and my blackness comes through in moments that I decide and I dictate. However, the world has systems in which it provokes me. it provokes my whiteness and my blackness which are terms that the world and systems around me decided to designate my attitudes. But I digress in saying that this is how I described those catalysts events.

Every day I stand on a thumbtack, and by the time I see it it's too late and I've already stood in it. And I've had it for the day. I let the people around me know, shit I stood in a thumbtack and my foot is fucking sore. And the next day I wake up and I've forgotten the bruise of the thumbtack until I start walking again. And I carry on with my day, just remembering the thumbtack like an itch on the side of your leg. But I don't talk about it was yesterday's news. Until the next day, I stand in another thumbtack and this one was stuck in my shoe, someone put it there. And the cycle continues these thumbtacks arrive in different places in different days, in which I do not see them until it's too late. For me I know I'm lucky in the scope of thumbtacks, they're quite small thumbtacks and for the most part, I don't stand on knives and bear traps, they don't kill me. And say because overtime I don't really talk about them anymore yes my feet have gone numb but I still get to walk. My family also stands on thumbtacks occasionally they'll stand on bear traps. so yes we are shocked that people would put so many thumbtacks around and it's not a matter of us walking around them they location change every day. But also who the fuck is putting out thumbtacks, like why. What's going on here who said it's ok to do that

But I assume everybody has those thumbtacks that remind them of their position in society.

Am I frustrated by the idea that I've reduced repetitive disruptive racial behaviour down to a thumbtack, well yes. But yall don't seem to get the point otherwise.

Figure 26 These damn Thumbtacks, June 2020, Piece form The Handbook publication, Screenshot.

It was the first of many where I tried to undo the language I've learnt to associate with academia and to find my voice within my stories. Once I'd written a piece, I'd then record myself and try to talk without any of my assimilated language or accents. At first it was very performative, as until that point I had never tried to actively distance myself from academic language. During the project, I have also developed a well-tuned ear for academic speak; I guess I was constantly critically analysing my academic voice and making a judgement as to whether or not I was communicating or expressing myself better when using it. It would be a lie to say that I've completely destroyed my academic voice, and, in saying that, it was also not the aim of this project. The aim was to de-stabilise the hierarchies of language and expression, and for me that meant I needed to practise, and to practise expressing myself in a way that was nourishing and messy.

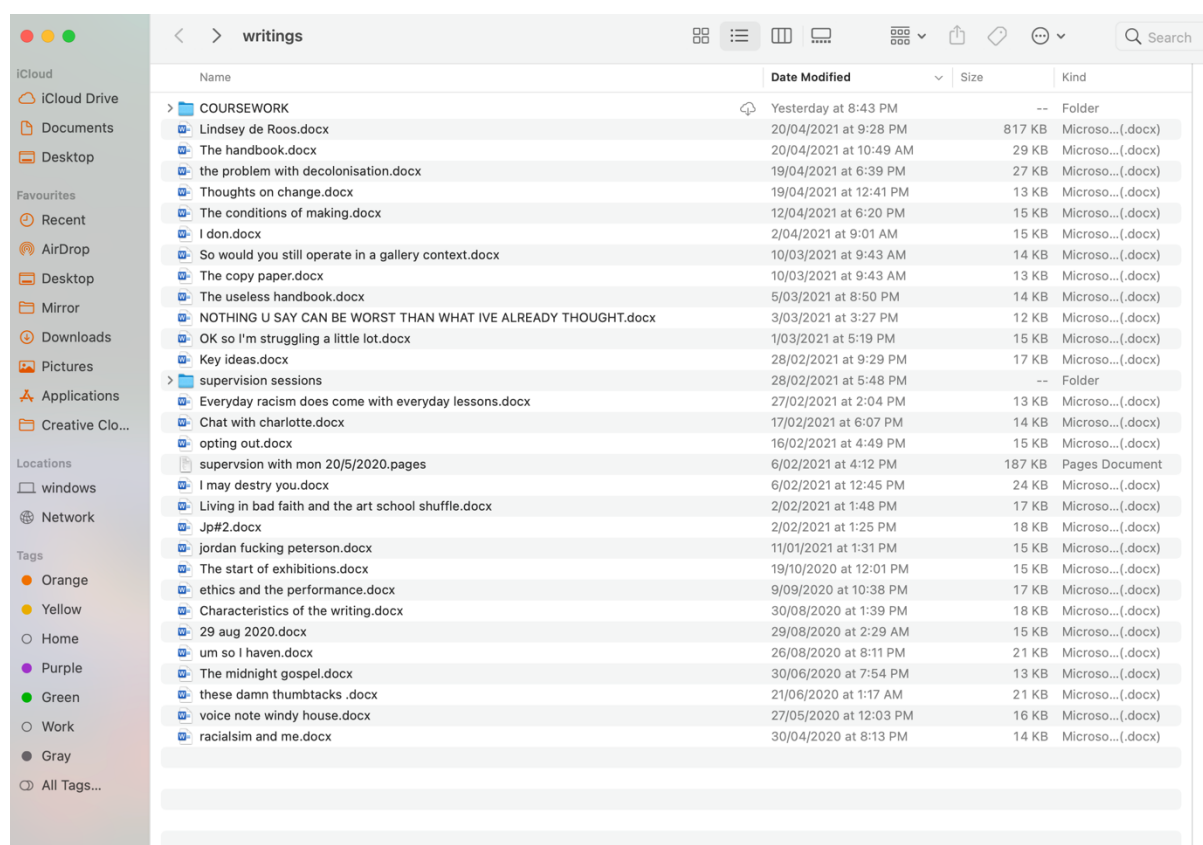


Figure 27 Screenshot of my personal writings folder, May 2021.

This practising involved writing in all forms: it included voice messages from and to friends, audio recordings, the dictate option in Microsoft Word, notes on my iPhone, diary entries, essays on movies, TV shows, and experiences. Just like the papermaking, I was only writing for pleasure, as I was trying to distance myself from the writing anxiety that comes with assignments. If I felt a strong need to talk about something I would first write what my thoughts are, and then talk to someone about it if I needed to. It became really important for me to develop a writing practice that did not overlap with my current student practice of assignment writing. Now writing was no longer a chore.

To give context of how my writing has shifted across the duration of the project here are *Some thoughts*:

The freedom-of-language ending notes

This one has got to be in a funk for a while. I have had a gut feeling that I was researching and making work for it but I didn't exactly know what it was that I am doing. Or even if I am exploring how to be free with my words. It's so complicated. My words change with every person I speak to. The language and the accent, the tone. It changes I am a third culture kid and it's a life I've become very accustomed to.

So if I were to be fully free with my words what would that even be when it's not one thing. It's expression, its performance, it's about being.

Now on the 7th of April 2021; x amount of days away from my deadline I've figured it out. That I've been doing it all along. Right now I'm typing. Typing as fast as I can so that my overdrained, exhausted brain won't lose my thoughts. I'm rushing. Changing my tone and style of writing with every sentence. It's honestly chaos. I am mistyping words, I don't have any structure to what I'm saying and I'm repeating myself and I'm not writing with a palatable three point sentence structure. I'm just writing.

And I can only be able to do this so comfortably and hesitantly because I have spent a year talking to the mic, recording my thoughts as they come. Letting my voice actually dictate my words. I am writing without judgement. Only because I know what it's like to talk into a word for hours and hours on end without stopping. Just being.

The ultimate form of a free language for me is to just speak. Unfortunately I thought there would be more depth for me to deliver to you. But I can't give you any. For me to find freedom in language meant that I had to let go, to opt out.

There's nothing that captures the freedom better than just speaking.

As a part of my concluding exhibition, I will be presenting these writings in chronological order in publication form in a small book made from the leftover paper that I've created in the project so far and printed freely using my staff account. This unhelpful handbook will be present alongside an enclosed space where I will continue to make paper. Throughout the exhibition, I will be making paper, where I'll be privately concluding each of the four Rip n' Bitch workshops by sending the paper bound in books back to the contributors. I will be making paper at varying times and days, depending on my need to make.

The publication will be present throughout the exhibition, including 35 writings, images and QR codes to an online version of the publication and recordings that I've made throughout this project. It's important to me that the publication is accessible in as many ways that I can control. I think about all the great learning and rethinking that has come from listening to podcasts and the struggle of finding material that is vital to my practice. Therefore, the publication has to be accessible to anyone's safe space.

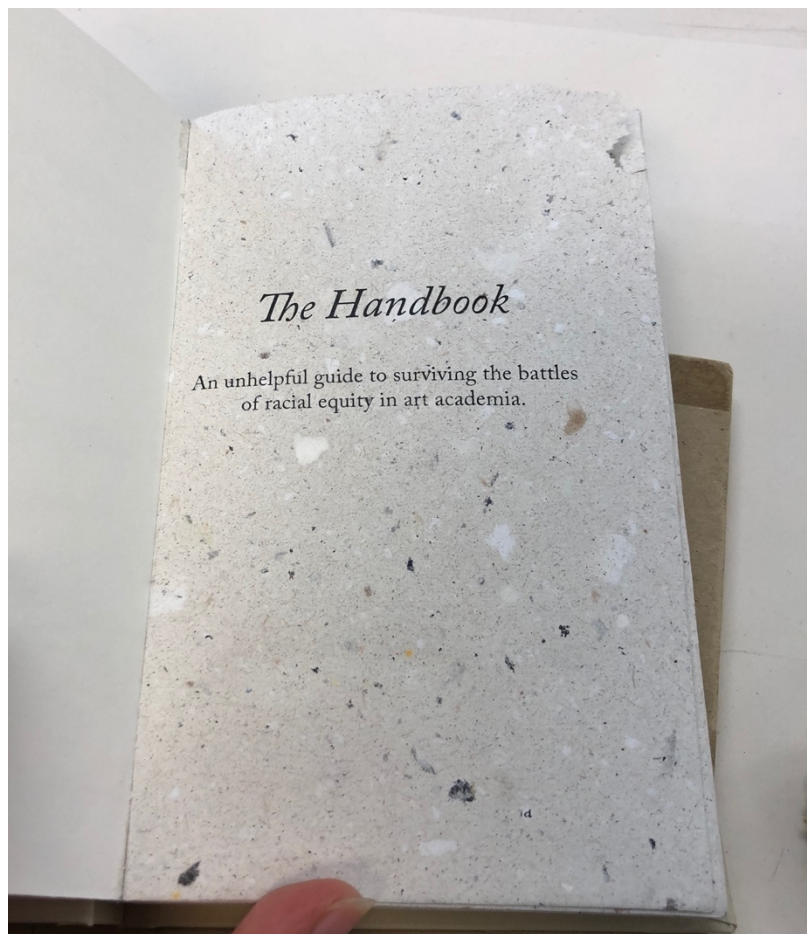


Figure 28 *The Handbook* Publication, June 2021, Printed on handmade paper and bound (perfect binding).

CONCLUSION

PAPERMAKING – THE THIRD ERA

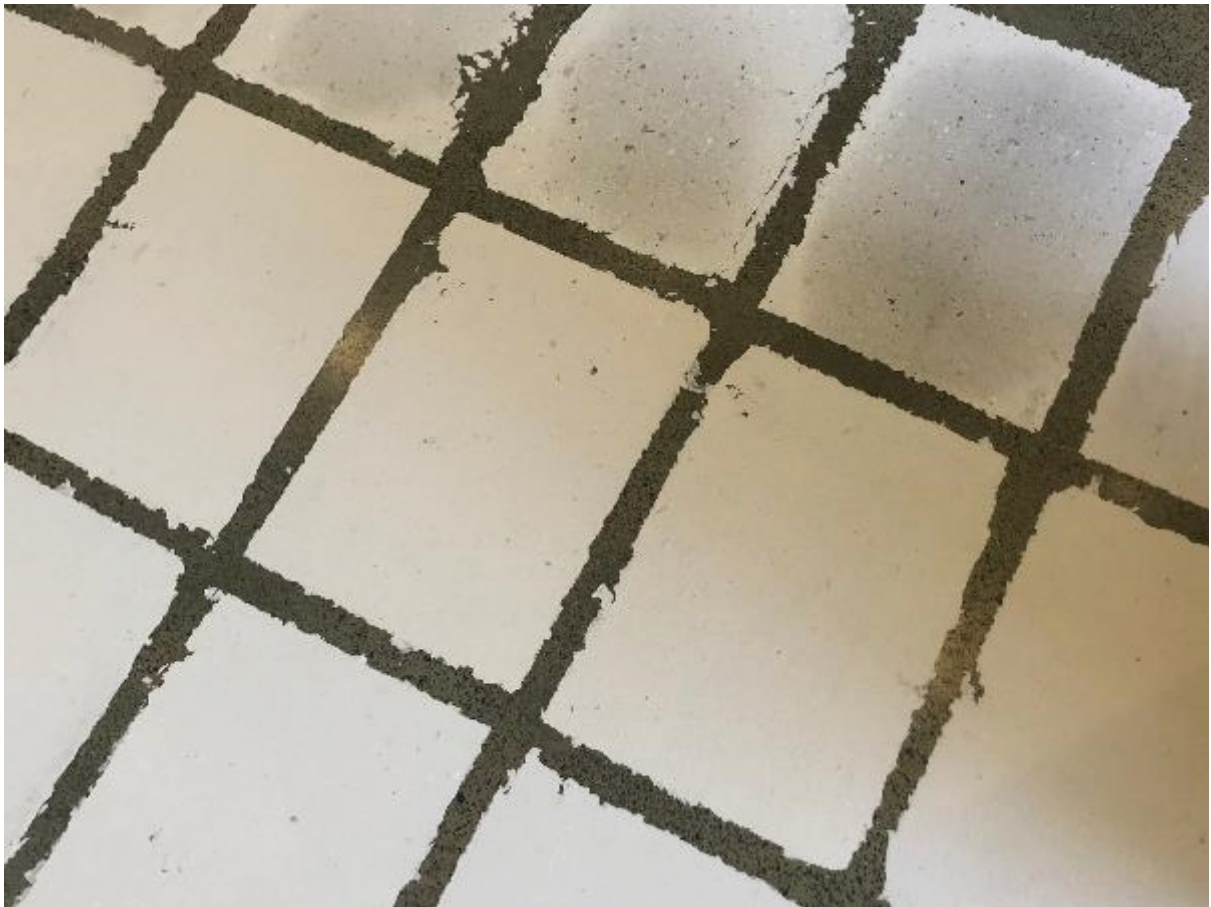


Figure 29 Paper tiles, January 2021, 15 x 5 rows of paper drying on concrete floor

In my first session with my supervisors, I tried to explain how I was thinking about racism. That if racism were a person or an object who would they be, what would their personality be like? At the time I thought that this imagining would help me contextualise the systemic racism that exists within the University. After pondering this idea for a while it immediately hit me, that race could be a four-sided tile. They are individual units that operate as a whole, creating ley lines of connection with one another. Together, tiles create a platform, a space, grounds. Which then begged the question, if racism were tiles on the floor how would I unpick them?

Ironically, I ended up making tiles of my own. When I first saw the masses of recycled paper drying, after weeks of labour, I kept thinking about this metaphor. However, I saw the recycled paper very differently from the tiles. The recycled paper consistently goes through a process of being united and then removed from one another. They start off as individual documents being ripped up and put into

a large plastic bag, to then being re-formed into recycled paper that is again connected through its grid-like structure, to then be removed from the grid and each other again. The paper undergoes a continual shapeshifting, and I don't know what its life will be after I've sent it back to the contributors.

Despite the scale of the tiled paper on the floor and their ability to claim space in the Level 3 foyer, every day I would return to footmarks over the paper, which I would then spend an hour brushing and cleaning. I wouldn't clean them to maintain their pristine-ness (the paper itself isn't really that clean). But I couldn't help but feel like someone had just walked over another person's experiences, and somehow that my lack of protection created an opportunity for that to happen. I know that I can't protect the paper for eternity, and like I said earlier, the intent is that the paper will be given back to the Rip n' Bitch contributors. So now there's this tension of the paper being the weight of someone's experiences and an accumulation of weeks of labour – or perhaps, just some tiles that are walked over. In those moments, I honestly felt defeated, because I ended up creating something that in the walking over represented what it's like to be racialised.

Throughout my process of tiling the paper in situ, I constantly got questioned about what I would do with the paper, which at most times this question seemed to be a burden rather than an opportunity for critical thought. To this day I think about the future life of the paper once I've made it, and I can't seem to think of what this might be. Instead, I ponder the fact that there was an overwhelming external need for there to be an end product for this Masters project. That I needed to be working towards an exhibition; my final form of evidencing the work that I've undertaken throughout this last year of study. Still, it doesn't sit right with me. I made plans months ago to finish making paper, but it does seem to be a source of comfort that I can't let go off.

What I've realised now that I am close to presenting the work for exhibition is that this Master's project has simply scraped the surface of a lot of the issues that I've discussed in this exegesis. To provide an end to something that has just started seems unjust. Unfortunately for those who sit comfortably within the institution's requirements of existing, this project will not have a satisfying end. Just as there is no solution that is being carried out for these issues of racial equity; there will not be a palatable conclusion to the project. It's on-going and will continue to do so as long as the institution is drying out students and staff.

What will be present in the final examination exhibition for my Master of Visual Arts, is what I have continued to do throughout the project, and that is to make paper.

INSTALLATION WEEK

Instead of conclusion to my creative practice, I wanted to see this exhibition as a "save point" (like in a video game). I had the opportunity to exist in a well-lit, sometimes warm space, and because this space is so rare, I used it for more than intended. Over the days, St Paul Street Gallery Two became less of a gallery into simply a room - for making, creating, breaking, connecting and celebrating. Within this space, I finished the handbook publication, Hosted the last Rip n' Bitch workshop, ate and shared lots of \$2 cup noodles, and made paper. I became more interested in the ways of geographing this space as opposed to presenting what had been accomplished.

Once the exhibition concluded, I pondered on what had occurred in the past week, specifically the last rip n' bitch workshop and my insecurities in this project. I always felt like I wasn't doing enough, but as I removed the final pieces of paper from the space, the reality of this projects entire timeline became a lot clearer. Before I could have made any further actions on the role of racial equity in academia, there had to be a space for reconciliation, a space to heal from what has happened, and a safe road to accomplish what needs to come.



Figure 30 Paper piles, Rip n' Bitch Workshops, June 2021,



Figure 31 Dinner break during installation week, June 2021.

List of events

June 2021

Friday 11th - Editing text in the handbook

Saturday 12th - Editing text in the handbook

Monday 13th - Printing photographs/text pages for handbook + Editing text in the handbook

Tuesday 14th - Printing the handbook

Wednesday 15th - Rip'n'Bitch workshop #5/Printing handbook

Thursday 16th - Assembling pages + Binding the handbook

Friday 18th - Papermaking (one tile)/Last of the binding process

Sunday 20th - Papermaking (21 tiles)

Monday 21st - Papermaking (28 tiles)

Tuesday 22nd - Papermaking (15 tiles)

Wednesday 23rd - examination/ exhibition begins

EXHIBITION

The Handbook project exhibition (23-26 June 2021) included three interconnected pieces, *The Handbook* (publication), *Tiles On The Floor* (paper making) , and *Six Black Squares* (drying towels and Gallery chairs). Each piece reflects a stage of the papermaking process and the reprocessing/reclaiming of the paper (that was used for academic validity) ripped in the *Rip n' Bitch workshops*. In total, there were 65 pieces of paper (tiles) produced in this space, including a papermaking station, a towel drying area, and a place of rest for the visitors and the publication. This demarcated territory alluded to the same space in Gallery 2 that had the *Rip n' bitch* workshop. This exhibition was a celebration of the acts of rest and reconciliation taken in an academic institution. Furthermore, it is an illustration of the work that needs to follow to heal from the legacies of race.



Figure 32 *The Handbook project* exhibition, June 2021, including *The Handbook* publication, tiles on the floor and six black squares.



Figure 33 The Handbook project exhibition, June 2021, six black squares, six drying towels used to make paper – hung over scrap wood and two Gallery chairs.



Figure 34 The Handbook project exhibition, June 2021, six black squares, six drying towels used to make paper – hung over scrap wood and two Gallery chairs..

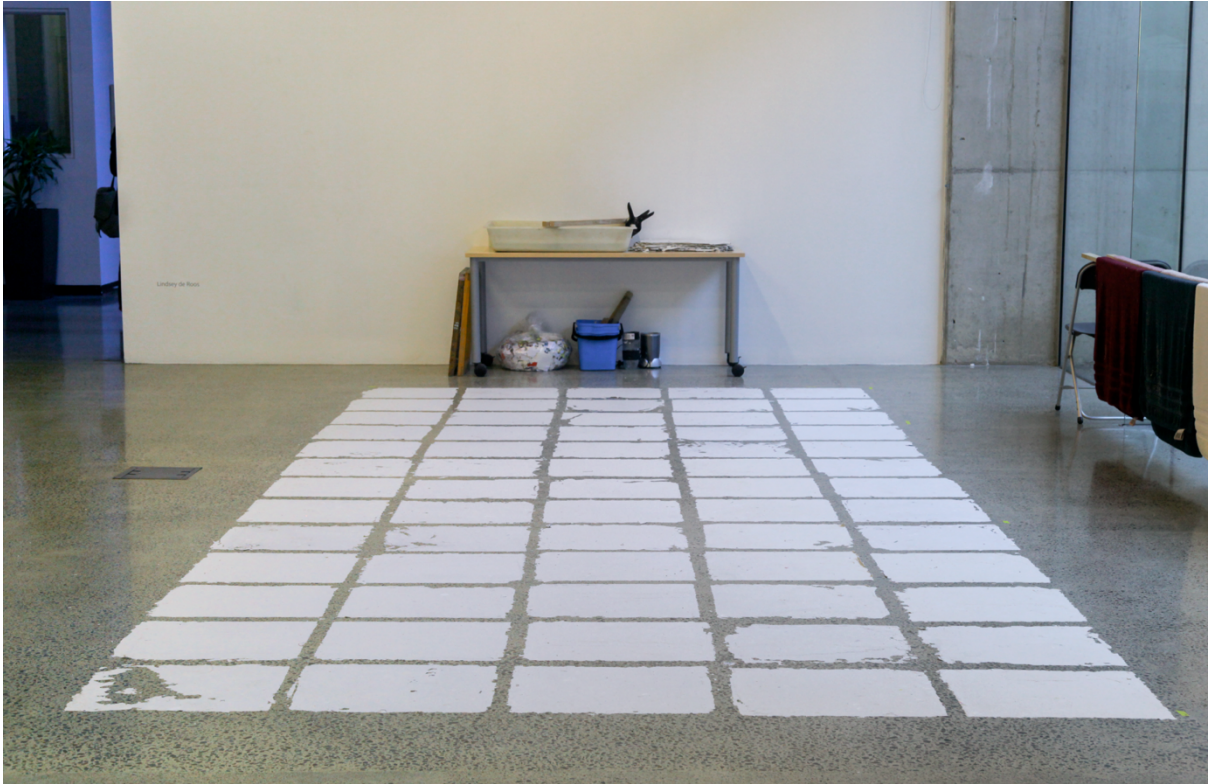


Figure 35 The Handbook project exhibition, June 2021, tiles in the floor, 65 pieces of paper drying on the concrete gallery floor



Figure 36 The Handbook project exhibition, June 2021, tiles in the floor, 65 pieces of paper drying on the concrete gallery floor



Figure 37 The Handbook project exhibition, June 2021, The Handbook publication, publication resting on gallery cushions.



Figure 38 The Handbook project exhibition, June 2021, The Handbook publication, publication resting on gallery cushions.

POST EXHIBITION

Following the exhibition, I gathered the paper created in the gallery space (exhibition) alongside what was produced throughout this project and began processing it into books. These books have been sent to all of the collaborators who attended the Rip n' Bitch workshops - to return the paper they contributed in kind. Each of the 30 books (120 x 160 mm) consists of 30 pages, bound using the perfect binding method. 30 was a poignant number in the making of these books as there were 30 collaborators in the *making* of this project. The dimensions of each book were calculated to ensure all of the paper produced was used. Once all of the books had been completed, the *book returns* were mailed out (alongside a letter of thanks) to each collaborator, bringing my Masters project to a close.



Figure 39 book returns to contributors, August 2021, Recycled paper bound (perfect binding), 120 x 160 mm.



Figure 42 book making for contributors, July 2021.

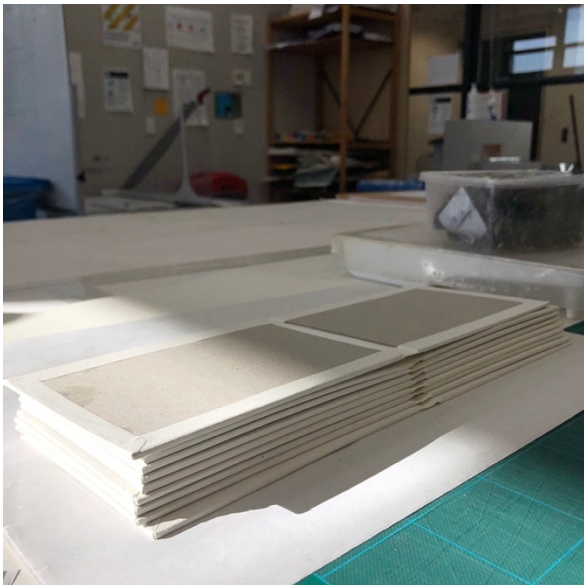


Figure 41 book making for contributors, July 2021.



Figure 40 book making for contributors, August 2021.

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