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Dreads and open mouths: On writing/teaching

Meena Alexander: In our writing, we need to evoke a chaos coequal to the injustices that surround us. (1996: 128)

1.

rupture (v)

- 1 A. break
- B. burst
- C. crack
- D. split

rupture (n)

- 2 E. breakage
- F. fracture
- G. rip

rupture (ant)

- 3 H. mend

Trinh T Minh-ha: To use the language well, says the voice of literacy, cherish its classic form. Do not choose the offbeat at the cost of clarity. Obscurity is an imposition on the reader. True, but beware when you cross the railroad tracks for one train may hide another train. Clarity is a means of subjection, a quality both of official, taught language and of course writing, two old mates of power: together they flow, together they flower, vertically, to impose and order. Let us forget the writers who advocate the instrumentality of language are often those who cannot or choose not to see the suchness of such things - a language as language - and therefore, continue to preach conformity to the norms of well-behaved writing: principles of composition, style, genre, correction, and improvement. To write 'clearly,' one must, incessantly prune, eliminate, forbid, purge, purify; in other words, practice what may be called an 'ablution of language' (Roland Barthes). (1989: 16-17)

2.

Write, his lover says. Why don't you sit down and just start writing?

He sits to write but the words won't emerge. He wants to write. Every time, he begins to write, he chokes. He wants to write but he feels paralyzed by words lodged in his throat.

His heaving tongue cannot dislodge the burden of history, of memory, desire, of language.

She writes, schedule yourself for a few hours every day without distraction.

He is easily and quickly distracted. Memories and daily happenings intrude constantly, incessantly on his concentration.

She writes, I think you need to take a deep breath and try and shed the old stuff - renew yourself and start as if from a different tack.

He starts again. He tries to make sense of his need to write and of his resistance to writing.

What silences you, she asks. What are you afraid of?

He is afraid that he will lose himself in language, afraid that he doesn't have language that is adequate at his disposal, afraid that the language he has disposes him. He is afraid that in writing he will become absorbed in the manipulations of language, afraid that language will begin to speak him.

He is anxious about resisting the pressures to speak/think/write correctly, anxious that his fears of how he will be read will police his desires to write in forms that do not conform to hegemony-making ways. But he is also anxious about how his resistances and his writing will be read.

He wonders if all language is simultaneously a rupturing and a silencing.

Ana Castillo: Many of us, too many of us, do suffer the anxiety induced by the pressure to speak 'correctly', and therefore we come to doubt our writing skills. And, whatever our relationship to language, all mestizas are products of the hegemony that has instilled in us contempt for our cultural identity. (1991: 168)

3.

He begins to write in fits and starts.

The room he writes in is small and cluttered with his belongings. A bed, a desk and chair, a dresser, two bookcases, another chair, a mirror. Piles of books and papers cover the tops of things. There is a window that looks out onto the alley but the building across blocks the light. It is always dark in this room.

He likes the darkness. He finds it comforting and compelling but he imagines writing in an uncluttered room.

He writes against the landscape of dis-ease. A story in the *Los Angeles Times*. One in four children born in Los Angeles county will not have health insurance. Another story in the *Los Angeles Times*. Area hospitals have made it a habitual practice to dump patients on skid row. Frequently these are mentally ill patients, who have nowhere else to go. They are dropped off on the streets, without even prescription medication. This is the state of the richest nation in the world, the land of wealth and opportunity.

He begins to think of clutter as symptomatic of these times.

The Ku Klux Klan are allowed to march in cities across the US - they are sanctioned the right to proclaim their hatred often even from the steps of State Capitols. But the

homeless are routinely evicted from public spaces. Queers are beaten up for being in the wrong place at the right time. So-called 'illegal aliens' are hounded and deported.

Elvira Arellano, a single undocumented working mother, characterized by one US Immigration and Customs Enforcement official as 'a criminal fugitive alien', forced into sanctuary in a Chicago church after an immigration judge orders her to appear for deportation, is arrested by federal immigration officials at an immigrants' rights rally outside Our Lady of Angels Church in Los Angeles, watched by her eight-year-old son, a US citizen. She is deported the following day.

Memories and daily occurrences trespass.

An (im)migrant from the third world, an 'international' academic living/writing/teaching in the US, the heart of empire, he collects and recollects memories, desires, trespasses, engages his circumstances.

As he attempts to make sense of what is around him, bombs explode in Fallujah, Basra, Beirut, Gaza.

Contemplating the politics of writing, language, desire, he recognizes what a privilege it is to not be living at the frontlines of exploding bombs.

He recognizes the privilege, his privilege, of being able to contemplate the politics of writing, language, desire away from the frontlines of exploding bombs.

In the in-between of diasporic displacement, he wonders if his engagements with the local make him parochial, insular, US-centric. He wonders if his deliberations, his struggles, are self-indulgent.

With such wonderings, he begins to write, tentatively, hesitantly. How can he write but in fits and starts? How can any writer write without the encroachment of memories, desires, incessant upheavals?

Stuart Hall: In a permanently Transitional Age we must expect unevenness, contradictory outcomes, disjunctures, delays, contingencies, uncompleted projects, overlapping emergent ones. (1996: 232)

4.

His dreams turn violent. He dreams his body is being hurled toward a bright blinding light. He has no control over his movements. He loses consciousness. When he comes to, his body is dismembered. All the body parts are labeled 'paragraph'. A voice instructs, 'you have five minutes to put the paragraphs together in logical order. Make sure to have an introduction and conclusion.' He scrambles to assemble the body parts but he is paralyzed. He is looking at his own dismembered body and he cannot move the parts. A clock appears. Time is slipping away. He keeps telling himself there is only one way to put a body together but the parts won't move. He cannot make the parts move. He wakes up to find his arms coagulated, stiff. He lies without moving for hours.

Cherrie Moraga: Fundamentally, I started writing to save my life. Yes, my own life first. I see the same impulse in my students - the dark, the queer, the mixed-blood, the violated - turning to the written page with a relentless passion, a drive to avenge their own silence, invisibility, erasure as living, innately expressive human beings. (1993: 58)

5.

He is afraid that if he doesn't write in the master tongue, he will not be taken seriously, will not be heard. But he is more afraid of losing himself in the master tongue even if it is only a socially constructed self (and what other kind of self is there?).

What silences you? What are you afraid of? It is language that he fears, the language of the fathers. He fears that in writing he will swallow the language of the fathers.

Why should he claim this language, write in the voice of the fathers?

This language of the fathers bestows credibility, authority, integrity, honour; but what does it make him lose? This language of the fathers offers privileges but what sacrifices must he make to speak in it? This language of the fathers grants respectability, morality, esteem, but what violences must he be complicit with to write it?

Why should he uphold the tradition of the fathers? Why should he pledge allegiance to the fatherland, to the language of men when that language dishonours him, shames him, lies to him?

A writer should disrupt language that excludes to oppress, rupture language that oppresses. A writer should attempt to interrogate language, question its limits, its screens. A writer should dare to imagine.

He wants his writing to echo, to repeat, to revisit, to reverberate. He wants to destabilize the speaking/writing subject and expose the fiction of rationalization and rationality.

He recalls often Rachel Blau DuPlessis's words, 'the struggle on the page is not decorative' (1990: 173).

Nicole Brossard: I exist in written language because it is there that I decide the thoughts that settle the questions and answers that I give to reality. It is there that I signal assent in approving ecstasies and their configurations in the universe. I do not want to repeat what I already know of language. (1991: 200)

6.

He is struggling to write.

His lover asks, why are you suspicious of language? Why do you distrust it so much?

Language does not come easily to him. He struggles with words. He loves words but his relationship to words is uneasy, troubled, tentative. He wants both to do and undo language at once.

Dreams of a common language, a universal language, confound him.

He notes that as South Africa moves towards embracing the eleven official languages in its new constitution, the US moves toward English-only legislation. Australia introduces a proposal to require a new citizenship test in English for all future immigrants.

What is at stake in the dream for a common language, a familiar tongue? What issues of power are embedded in this dream for a common language? What yearnings? What desires? What ambitions?

Writing leads into a web of struggles. He struggles with writing and with the language that he has. He feels both estranged from and united with the language he has.

The language that he has is the language of the law, of the colonizers, of the fatherland. Where is he in this language, the language of law, the language of the colonizers, the

language of the fatherland? Where are queers in the language? The sexually transgressive? Language is the enemy and yet he needs this language to speak. This is the old dilemma.

He struggles with language, trying to open language to accommodate disparate desires, tensions, but sometimes he feels strangled by language.

Anu Aneja: Ethnicized by the legacies of cultural and postcolonial histories, she is offered a variety of costumes that she can freely choose from, but donning any one of them implies speaking with a certain voice, speaking for many others, speaking to an audience that is already awaiting her particular difference. The enormity of choices in the supermarket culture of ethnicity, coupled with the expectant stance of the consumers of difference, leaves one feeling heady, overwhelmed, almost paralyzed by the possibilities. (2005: 146)

7.

He is looking for writing that doesn't merely (re)produce and reduce. He is looking for writing that doesn't merely render difference in familiar terms so that the difference is in terms of subject matter but not in terms of form. He is looking for writing that breathes, writing that is alive, writing that shifts as it sifts through tired forms to illuminate. He is looking for writing that surprises. But how often can writing surprise if it is expected to follow tired and tested formulas? Do this, don't do that. Do not experiment. Satisfy all your readers. Explain everything. Be clear. Don't use unexpected metaphors. Prepare your readers for your ideas. Start always with a thesis.

Overwhelmed by notions of right and wrong, of earning a passing grade, students learn not to experiment. They may not have learnt all or any of the rules but they have been trained to believe that if they want to do well in the US academy they must follow the rules. And the rules that they think they must follow are the usual ones. Start with a thesis. Be objective. Anticipate the objections that opponents of your position will make, and try and respond to their objections. Do not use personal experiences. Oh, okay, use personal experiences but try and make your experiences universal. Write for the general reader. Be universal. Appeal to everybody. Of course, students don't always follow these rules but most of them learn to recognize that these are the rules and that they will be punished if they don't follow the rules. But good writing rarely emerges from following all the rules. Good writing emerges when writers take risks and are encouraged to take risks. Good writing seldom emerges without risks.

He wants to teach in ways that will let his students take risks. He wants to encourage them to take risks. He knows this is risky for them and for him. Risks excite him and he wants to dispel the myth often invoked into enforcing conformity-that it is only those with privilege who can afford to take risks.

Jasbir Puar: The academy as a policing mechanism maintains investments in certain ways of reading theory, of establishing and retaining credibility and validity. When we become merely academic by-products and not academic producers - that is, when we simply reflect The Academy as opposed to projecting it and challenging it, we reproduce the policing mechanism for our peers, for our students, and for the institution itself. (1994: 79)

8.

It is the middle of a hot humid night and he cannot sleep. He is replaying an argument

with a friend. The friend had said, I want queer theory to gain respectability. He had said that he fears respectability even though he sometimes desires it. He had said that he fears that in our quest for respectability, our desires for transgression, for trespass, get domesticated. He had said that what he desires most is a theory that is wildly transgressive, that exceeds respectability and deference, that refuses to be tamed. The friend had said, desire consumes you. It is sometimes important to think with your head.

Desire consumes him. It marks him. He is often accused of not wanting to give up desire. Desire brings him pleasure. Pleasure is not spurious. He understands why it is seen as dangerous to the social and moral order but he does not want to, cannot, imagine a theory without desire and pleasure. He does not want to imagine a theory that does not interrogate the social and moral order. He wants to think with both his head and his heart, at once.

Malea Powell: My writing has always been an attempt to live in the shadows of presence. To insist upon an existence, a voice. To write myself and my body into comprehensible space. But human existence is haunted by leavings, by disappearance. In disappearing, the writing moved from paper to flesh. (2002: 12)

9.

He is in his grandmother's room, a small room in which she carefully arranged her possessions. He is here to dismantle her arrangements.

Her will is simple. The pieces of furniture given her by friends should be returned to them. Anything else my grandson wants should go to him.

He sits in the room immobilized. He wants the room to be imprinted on his memory. This is the room in which she spent the last five years of her life, the first room that she ever had that she could call her own.

He remembers asking her, after all those years of living with others, don't you get lonely staying by yourself? She tells him she loves the comfort of seclusion. She tells him it is a relief, a joy. She likes the reliability of her own companionship.

A year before she died, she visited him. They are drinking tea. He tells her she should write about her life, about moving from Lahore to Delhi to Toronto. She says, my life is not important. She asks about his writing. He tells her he is struggling to write. She tells him, you do not have to destroy your *bhoots*; respect the demons that haunt you.

Among her things are several notebooks. In them, detailed budgets and inventories of things to do and buy.

Gloria Anzaldúa: Who gave us permission to perform the act of writing? Why does writing seem so unnatural for me? ... The voice recurs in me: Who am I, a poor Chicanita from the sticks, to think I could write? How dared I even consider becoming a writer as I stooped over the tomato fields bending, bending under the hot sun ... How hard it is for us to think we can choose to become writers, much less feel and believe we can. (1990: xvii)

10.

In class, the teacher asks all the students to list the one thing they are most afraid of. The list includes death, the loss of parents, fear of drowning, fear of being killed in car crashes, in aeroplane accidents. He offers language. Some students laugh. The teacher

asks, language? Yes, he says, he is afraid of language. The teacher says, well, if you learn the language well enough, there will be no need to fear it. He doesn't tell the teacher that is what he fears the most, that he will learn the language of the state, the language of the oppressor, the language of the patriarch, the powerful, too well. He doesn't tell the teacher that he fears he will forget how to hear and read and write the hesitations in his mother's speech, the vacillations in his grandmother's speech, the furtive doubts in his lover's speech. This, too, is language.

Susan Heald: If students and professors completely identify themselves with the subject positions available within dominant educational discourses, they have all the reason to hang onto them. (1991: 139)

11.

A missive from the Dean. The Dean wants to see him. The Dean asks, is it your responsibility as director of composition to make our writers take risks? Isn't it our responsibility to prepare our students for the classes in which they will in fact be punished for taking risks? Isn't it our responsibility to prepare them for classes where they are expected to conform to the rules and churn out dull but flawless essays in Standard English?

What is our responsibility? What is our responsibility? The question resounds.

Is he being irresponsible in suggesting that it is impossible to prepare students in one writing class to write across the curriculum? What does it mean for teachers of composition to take on the task of preparing students to write across disciplines? Can we in fact prepare students for all disciplines? And what if the ways in which we are expected to prepare them for different disciplines go against our convictions of liberal education, of critical thinking? Should we, as teachers of composition, be expected to teach our students to unabashedly delight in capitalism and global corporatism because the mandate of business is to exult in capitalism and corporate greed? Should we, as teachers of composition, be expected to teach our students writing without pointing out sexist, racist, homophobic, classist, ageist practices that many disciplines (including our own) are built upon?

Isn't it our responsibility as teachers of writing many of whom are also cultural theorists and critical thinkers to make our students critical of the writing that expects them to become agents for the hegemony, to become nothing but good, compliant, middle-class consumers? Is that not our responsibility?

Brooke Jacobson: What is the responsibility of the artist if not to make meaning out of the material they find?

Jill Godmillow: I think that it's to reformulate language - not just verbal language but visual language as well. To poke holes in the existing language, to make spaces, so that there is a possibility for imagination and action to work through it. (1990: 181)

12.

He is afraid of the language that he has but he is also aware that it is only in and through language that he comes into being.

He is moving in language.

What are you most afraid of, a former lover asks him? He tells the lover that he is afraid of language. The lover says language can kill.

'Official language kills, resist standardization' - words on a poster in a used bookstore in London.

He is in Britain visiting his relatives.

His aunt teaches his cousin to speak English only. His aunt is scared his sister and he may corrupt their cousin's speech. His sister and he are only allowed to visit their cousin in the presence of their aunt. In England now, no need to speak Hindi.

Enunciate your vowels carefully or what will people think?

His cousin changes her name, from Sunita to Sandi, but despite her elegant enunciations her brown skin disqualifies. No, not really British, no, not British enough, no, not British at all.

She becomes silent.

'Official language kills, resist standardization.'

June Jordan: White power uses white English as a calculated, political display of power to control and eliminate the powerless. (1981: 61)

13.

He spends several hours in the university bookstore looking at readers and handbooks that are currently available on the market for teaching writing in college composition courses in the US. He is not surprised to find that even a progressive reader like *Negotiating Difference* falls in the trap of liberal pluralism.

He notes that in their 'Introduction for Students', Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg write:

writers must, for example, consider what order of ideas will be clearest for readers, even if it's not the order that immediately presents itself. Writers ought also to think about what kinds of cultural allusions will be most persuasive, even if they are not the ones most familiar to readers. What kind of person does the person wish to be: Cool and analytical? Warm and caring? Which self-presentation will be most credible with readers? Effective writers attempt to anticipate readers' needs and expectations in these ways in order to attempt to inform readers, to influence them, to change their minds. (1996: 2)

Few, if any, articles in our academic journals follow these guidelines, and yet notions of good writing in most handbooks and readers are predicated on considering carefully what those who oppose your positions will think and on pleasing those who oppose your positions.

He wonders, if we have always to think of our opposition, would anyone be able to write?

Ian Barnard: While those of us who teach writing routinely remind our students of the cliché that they must have an audience in mind when they write their papers, in practice we often make the impossible liberal pluralist demand that their work be amenable to all and that every reader should be potentially persuaded by it. (1996: 90)

14.

MANIFESTO # 1

You must teach as if your life depended on it.
 You must teach as if some of your students' lives may depend on it.
 You must teach to empower, yourself and some of your students.
 You must teach so that your students take risks, feel like they may experiment.
 You must teach yourself to take risks, to experiment.
 You must teach yourself to admit confusion.
 You must teach yourself to admit failure.
 You must teach to make connections.
 You must teach that if this discussion is taking place in a clean, well-lit place it is dependent upon others getting their education in poor, dimly-lit with naked bulb places.
 You must teach that those of us who live in comfort are able to live the way we do in this North American world because somewhere, elsewhere, within and outside the USA people must live in struggle to survive.
 You must teach so that lives will not be destroyed, female lives, poor lives, disabled lives, old lives, queer lives, brown lives, black lives, yellow lives, even white lives.
 You must teach that not everyone is heterosexual.
 You must teach that sexual choices and practices are varied and diverse.
 You must teach assuming that not everyone you are teaching is heterosexual.
 You must teach that more people in the world are coloured than white.
 You must teach that more people in the world are female than male.
 You must teach that everything is possible.
 You must teach that everything is not possible.
 You must teach that not everyone has the same access to privilege.
 You must teach to transform.
 You must teach to ask questions.
 You yourself must ask questions.
 You must teach so that the lies will no longer be told, be passed on.
 You must teach the responsibility of listening to those who are disenfranchised and disempowered.
 You must take the responsibility to listen to those who are disenfranchised and disempowered.
 You must teach that English is not the world's most widely spoken native language.
 You must teach that instead of waiting for, relying on translations into English, we must learn to speak and to write other languages.
 You must teach that language is not neutral, not unbiased.
 You must teach students to recognize the uneven power relations within and among languages.
 You must teach students and yourself to question language.
 You must teach yourself and students to question the uses of writing.
 You must teach that writing may have the power to widen our imaginations.
 You must teach that therefore our lives may be changed.
 You must teach that writing should lead to action.
 You must teach that writing could be action.
 You must teach that writing should be a place of, a site for resistance to the hegemony.
 You must teach that writing may save lives.
 But writing can also kill. That, too, you must teach.
 You must teach that writing can be collaborative, need not be a solitary, suicidal act.
 You must teach that writing can help build coalitions, alliances, national and transnational.
 You must teach so that fear and anger, rage and love may emerge.
 You must take seriously the expression of anger and fear, love and rage.
 You must teach in a way that doesn't make you the only authority in the classroom.
 You must teach so that your students feel that they, too, can be authorities.
 You must not give up, undermine, your power; but you must learn to give power to others as well.
 You must learn to value what your students can teach you and each other.
 You must believe that writing can transform ourselves and others.

Min-Zhan Lu: As postcolonial theory reminds us, to proclaim oneself a radical worker inside US English Studies is to confront its official function in global and internal domination - that is, to wrestle with our complicity with the compulsion of English to 'help' the so-called third world, minority, student, or basic writers by creating and legislating their 'needs'. (2004: 10)

15.

A dream at dusk in an old almost forgotten white-washed courtyard a fountain spouting deep blue water a tree bearing tamarind a long table clothed in yards of crisp pale purple fabric arranged beautifully with food and yellow flowers. The sky is a flamboyant orange with streaks of black and grey. He is sitting at the center with a queer activist. They are flanked by several queers. They are having a wonderful time, being transgressive, being merry. Suddenly, big, burly men dressed in suits appear and surround them on all sides. There is nothing gay or queer about them. They begin to come closer and closer. He wakes up in fright.

Keith Fort: To insist on the standard form of the essay is to condition students to think in terms of authority and hierarchy. Form reflects an attitude and the formal patterning of the mind carries over from discipline to discipline and among elements in society. In our society forms are interlocked and complementary. In the form of the critical essay is found the same manifestation of the 'proper' attitude towards authority that would be found in almost any of the institutions of our society. (1975: 178)

16.

His acts of writing are pieces, fragments that are written against the violences of global corporatism, of colonialism, of wars. He wants his acts of writing to rupture, to break the logic of dominance. But he is frightened that his acts of writing might be colluding with dominance.

What does it mean to write as rupture?

The ruptured tongue is coherent, incoherent, rational, irrational, consistent, inconsistent.

The ruptured tongue is wild. It is unsightly, ungainly, repulsive, bent.

But the ruptured tongue is not broken. It doesn't need to be fixed. It cannot be claimed by the State, or in the name of the fathers or the oppressors.

The ruptured tongue cannot be contained or recuperated in the name of the nation.

The ruptured tongue seeks the edge and crosses over.

Keith Gilyard: Writing is not an activity that features social responsibility as an option. Writing is social responsibility. When you write, you are being responsible to some social entity even if that entity is yourself. You can be irresponsible as a writer but you cannot be non-responsible. (1996: 21)

17.

Returning to his writing class after the break during which the deadly tsunami strikes

Asia, he finds it impossible to go ahead with the scheduled plan for the day - a discussion of 'standard American word usage'. Absorbed and traumatized by the still unfolding tragedy, he suggests to his students that they turn their attention instead to representations of the disaster. After all, he explains, news of the disaster comes to us not only in images but also in words and sentences.

He mentions how in turning to the media for news of the tragedy, he finds the BBC repeatedly referring to Sri Lanka as the 'holiday island'. Whose/what interests does such a construction serve, he asks. Holiday island for whom? What biases are reflected in such a choice of words? Is Sri Lanka a holiday island for the people who live and work there, many of whom struggle merely to survive? Is Sri Lanka a holiday island for those who have been engaged in and living with the effects of a twenty-year civil war?

He discusses reports and images in the media that showed some tourists in Phuket resuming their holidays immediately. He finds it indeed commendable that some tourists did not return 'home', but wonders what it means to resume holiday-making so quickly and be determined to have a holiday at sites that overnight became sources of grief for so many people. A tourist from Australia is quoted by BBC as saying, 'We came back to Phuket the next morning and it was a shock to see everything. But we're not too worried about staying - we've got a holiday to have' (BBC 2004). What does it mean when having a holiday gets seen as a right, as something tourists who have traveled from elsewhere are entitled to, even in the face of enormous loss and destruction?

And, what does it mean when leading media outlets in North America focus undue attention on the fact that some Westerners have died, along with tens of thousands of Asians?

And, doesn't this have everything to do with sentences and words?

And, as critical thinkers and writers, isn't it our responsibility and work to interrogate the ideological biases that words and sentences carry?

And, isn't this a particularly appropriate time to break out of the insularity of North American tunnel vision?

After class, the students rush to the Chair to complain that they are not being taught how to write.

Judith McDaniel: I became a serious writer when the risks I was taking in my life began to have 'real' consequences in both my life and art, and when the risks I was taking in my art began to have 'real' consequences in my life ... I am convinced we need [to remind] ourselves now and then that the original meaning of risk was 'danger and loss'. The risks that I refer to are risks that lead to a profound change in our landscape, both the personal emotional landscape of our lives and the physical present landscape. (1989: 102)

18.

What are you looking for, his colleague asks. I am looking for writing that is daring, he says.

He wants his students to confront the easy formulas, to think outside the structuring logic of heteropatriarchy. Surely we can agree that all good writing is clear, another colleague states. He asks what is meant by clarity. His colleague tells him writing that is generally intelligible. But intelligible to whom? And why should good writing only be writing that is intelligible to most people? What if the goal of the writer is not to be intelligible to most people? He tells his colleague that he is not sure that he would agree that all good writing is clear and that clarity should be the only criteria for good writing. He tells his colleague that clarity in any case is not an objective criterion. His colleague tells him that

students need to be taught to write clearly and that it is our obligation to teach them to write clearly. If we don't teach them the basic skills of writing clearly, then we fail them.

He is tired of this argument. He tries to explain how writing clearly becomes an excuse to squash students' linguistic peculiarities, to mold their distinctive voices into the voice of standard discourse. Writing clearly becomes a way of reducing, simplifying, and is often an excuse for anti-intellectualism. He tells his colleagues this but they are not convinced.

He wants to scream there is strength in undisciplined thinking, in emotional thinking, that it is possible and necessary to imagine new ways of thinking. He feels hysterical.

Judith Butler: The demand for lucidity forgets the ruses that motor the ostensibly 'clear' view. Avital Ronell recalls the moment in which Nixon looked into the eyes of the nation and said, 'let me make one thing perfectly clear' and then proceeded to lie. What travels under the sign of 'clarity', and what would be the price of failing to deploy a certain critical suspicion when the arrival of lucidity is announced? Who devises the protocols of 'clarity' and whose interests do they serve? What is foreclosed by the insistence on parochial standards of transparency as requisite for all communication? What does 'transparency' keep obscure? (1999: xix)

19.

He is back in the city that he grew up in and loves and once feared leaving. The city has changed its name. And in that naming is a violence which betrays him, marks him as intruder, as foreigner. When people ask him where he is from, he sometimes says that city which is no more. Of course, this is not entirely true for the city that is no more in fact exists but at the same time it doesn't exist. The city seems to have left him forever in his absence. When he left he expected to be able to return to it but the city was transformed.

Long before he returned, he had been thinking of departure and rupture, of betrayal and loss. Return is sometimes accompanied by gain but always by loss. Having lived away for ten years, each time he returns, the city he grew up in and loves is less like the city in which as a person of some privilege he came of age, in which he explored his desires, lost his innocence.

So much has changed.

Not only has he had to rethink his faith, undoubtedly a false faith afforded only to some by the luxury of privilege, that no matter what happens elsewhere in India, in Bombay it is always business as usual - the atrocities of 1992 and 1993 have made certain of that - but more significantly, the secular India in which he grew up seems to be quickly eroding.

The city has been taken over by a Hindu nationalist party whose goal is to claim Maharashtra, the great land, for Maharastrians only.

The many inhabitants of the city (the mongrel, hybridized city that is the capital of Maharashtra) who have lived here for decades, who were born here, are suddenly marked as intruders, as outsiders.

In the daily newspaper he reads an interview with Salman Rushdie who says that 'the country that came into being in 1947 is being transformed into something else' - what it is being transformed into seems intolerant, insular, and frightening.

Perhaps it is nostalgia and the privileges afforded by class that make him think of the city's history as more secular than it ever was.

He doesn't want to idealize the city. It is built on terrible inequalities that have always divided its inhabitants. More people still sleep on the streets and in the slums than in secure houses and apartments.

A sign above one of the three elevators in the building his mother lives in reads: 'For Domestic Only'.

Homi Bhabha: There are other logics of signification to which we should be open, and the sentence can sometimes sentence us, in the imprisoning sense, to the kind of prison house of a particular language form. (1999: 8)

20.

Picking through his grandmother's belongings, he finds a photograph of himself as he was at fifteen.

An effeminate boy, he was constantly teased and harassed by his peers.

But he learnt to suppress his effeminate tendencies. He learnt to adapt. He learnt to belong but who did he learn to belong to?

They are sitting on the parapet overlooking the sea. The boy says, you know, you have beautiful legs. He is embarrassed at the pleasure these words bring. The boy says, you know, I am gay. He says he does not know. The boy asks, are you gay? He lies. He says, no, I am not gay.

He shuts himself off from the boy. He has learnt to kill part of his self. He does not want to claim what he has come to see as connected with his effeminacy, his weakness.

He is struggling to remember.

He wishes he could tell a different narrative of his life at fifteen but it is this memory that returns to stalk him. He knows how his life would have been different then had he been able to say the words, yes, I am gay.

A fantasy.

Effeminates of the world unite.

Roland Barthes: I know what the present, that difficult tense, is: a pure portion of anxiety. Absence persists - I must endure it. Hence I will manipulate it: transform the distortion of time into oscillation, produce rhythm, make an entrance onto the stage of the language. (1977: 16)

21.

His memories are tangled with wide expanses of water. Did he, in crossing the water, in coming to North America, relinquish his right to claim an identity he never felt comfortable claiming anyway?

Who are we? What are we doing in this alien landscape, you ask. He says nothing. You say you long to belong. You ask, don't you feel a sense of loss? Don't you feel you gave up all claims to belonging when you left, when you decided to come to these shores? He says he gave up all illusions of belonging long before then. He says he never felt like he belonged, that he doesn't understand what it means to belong, that he is not sure he wants

to belong because belonging always seems to involve compromising, that not everyone can compromise even if they want to.

Long ago, he gave up the need and desire to belong. He knew that as a queer and as a half-breed he certainly didn't belong in dominant articulations of India and Indian. He doesn't want to belong and he doesn't want to be accepted but he does want to have rights. For him the question of rights is distinct from a sense of belonging.

To belong. To fit, to conform, to suit. This desire to belong always predicated on the desire to conform. But can everyone even conform if they want to? What about the poor, the queer, the undesirable? Will they be allowed to conform? Can they conform? Why is there such a premium on belonging? What about the pleasures of not belonging? The pleasures of being different? The pleasures of not conforming? Of resisting?

At a talk, a well-known composition theorist says in response to a question about the margins that, of course, all people at the margins want ultimately to be a part of the centre because the centre is the locus of power.

Implicit in this need to belong is the need for approval. We want our students to seek our approval and we want to be in a position to give them our approval. Teaching and learning are often about approval. But what kind of teaching and learning can take place when teaching/learning is only about approval? Approval suggests that someone is in a position to approve and someone needs to be approved. He wants to rethink this model that seems to be inherently flawed. He wants to overturn it.

He wants to resist being swallowed by the centre. He wants to resist being shaped entirely by the form of the centre. The power of the centre to consume and to subsume is enormous.

He suggests that there can be strength in being at the margins. There can be power. There can be pleasure. For those with privilege, the margins may also be a place to unlearn privilege.

Winston Weathers: I write for many reasons, to communicate many things. And yet, much of what I wish to communicate does not seem to be expressible within the ordinary conventions of composition as I have learned them and mastered them in the long years of my education. As I grow older, more experienced, perhaps even more mature, I sense that many of the things I want to say do not always 'fit' into the communication vehicles I have been taught to construct. (1980: 1)

22.

His language is bloodied. It carries with it the interventions of colonialism, of imperialism.

Whose blood is on his language? Can he rid his tongue of imperialism, his language of its bloodied history, its bloodied past?

Whose blood does his language carry, contain? How can he write in it and respect the blood of the dead?

What would the dead say to him if he said to them that it is language, this language that carries with it the stains of the dead, that frees him as much as it contains and constrains me? The dead are on his tongue.

The history of his bloodied language, the imperialism on his tongue, is riddled with torture and destruction. In using this language, he must remember this. He cannot use the language of the oppressors, of the interventionists without negotiating with this burden that language brings.

Toni Morrison: The systematic looting of language can be recognized by the tendency of its users to forgo its nuanced, complex, mid-wifery properties, replacing them with menace and subjugation. Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. (1995/96: 82-83)

23.

He attends a panel discussion on multicultural education organized by the Dean's office at the institution at which he teaches. All the speakers are very enthusiastic about embracing multiculturalism.

Such unfettered enthusiasm worries him. He mentions that he is fearful of a multiculturalism that seeks only to increase racial and ethnic diversity without interrogating methods of knowledge production and overturning eurocentric frameworks. He fears multiculturalism becoming an instrument for reinvigorating and reinscribing unquestioned whiteness and white-centred methodologies and frameworks.

One panellist who responds to his comment says that certain conventions and standards have to be upheld, that students need to master standard forms and methodologies before they learn about other forms/methodologies.

He is tired and screams that if multicultural education doesn't involve questioning hegemonic forms and changing dominant frameworks then that's the point at which we should say fuck multiculturalism to avoid domesticating and co-opting difference. The mere presence of racial and ethnic 'other' bodies is not enough. Before the other panellists can respond, the moderator intervenes and calls the discussion to a close. His outburst is seen as a disruption of the proceedings that are expected to conform to genteel conventions of behaviour, of civility. Emotion is disallowed.

Later, a well-meaning well-known colleague approaches him and asks why he, as a person of colour, seems intent on sabotaging efforts to bring difference and ethnic diversity into the academy. The well-meaning well-known colleague tells him that he should be delighted that the Dean's office is taking an interest, any interest, in multiculturalism.

C Mark Hurlbert and Michael Blitz: It is a struggle to open the discourse of the academy. It is a struggle to resist assimilation into a machinery of subordination to Knowledge brokers and managers. It is a struggle to resist conforming to the Knowledge machinery's systemic requirements/desires for newly-skilled bearers of the instruments of cultural knowledge - workers who will disseminate, if not the Knowledge, at least the idea that the Knowledge is available - but only at our universities and only in the forms of academic discourse. (1992: 73)

24.

He dwells on what it means to take risks in writing.

Instead of writing to a disagreeable opponent who must be persuaded by one's argument/s in accordance with the political, social, and related pedagogical dictates of liberal pluralism, he imagines writing in tones contemptuous of polite give-and-take, and of writing with rage and with contempt.

He imagines the productive liberation that comes with writing for a blatant disregard for - or, even a scathing mockery of - those who disagree with him.

Taking risks in writing is not a cliché.

He imagines contesting the fundamental assumptions of many contemporary composition theories and pedagogical practices that privilege moderation, rationality, unity, consistency, and decorum over pleasure and excess.

Risky writing enacts its own rhetoric. The risk shapes the rhetoric.

He imagines taking risks and confronting the consequences.

Lauren Berlant: Only one plot counts as 'life' (first comes love, then ...). Those who don't or can't find their way in that story - the queers, the single, the something else - can become so easily unimaginable, even often to themselves. Yet it is hard not to see lying about everywhere the detritus and the amputations that come from attempts to fit into the fold. (1998: 286)

25.

He wonders how it happened that the writing we have come to value is writing as closure, writing that comes to an easy close, an uncomplicated conclusion.

Who proclaimed that language/writing should be stripped of imagination and desire?

Who proclaimed that writing should only be used to record not to re-order?

Who proclaimed writing should be used devoid of emotion?

Who proclaimed writing should be used to persuade, to argue, but not to explore and to imagine?

Who proclaimed writing should be firm, sure, not tentative, uncertain, provisional?

Who proclaimed writing could be free of politics?

Who proclaimed writing could be free of ideological biases?

Who proclaimed language was not living and evolving and shifting?

He wonders who proclaimed writing/language should follow the dominant cultural script, should always obey the rules?

Nancy Gray: Assimilation operates to preserve boundaries between superior and inferior while seeming to transform them into something else. Whatever the norm cannot displace through assimilation, it destroys. (1992: 124)

26.

Writing is traumatic for him. He sometimes spends hours over a sentence.

Writing is traumatic but there is pleasure in the trauma of writing. Make the text tremble, make it speak. Mould it to your vision, hurl it across the seas, across time, space, across geographies.

The pleasures of writing, of (re)creating, (re)visioning.

He says to his lover, I want you to write words on my body. His lover asks, what should I write? He says write a secret. He turns over and offers his back, his shoulders, his buttocks, his thighs. Write, he urges, write me a secret. The lover writes. He writhes under his lover's words. The lover finishes. He lies still. Shall I, the lover asks, read my secret, reveal it to you? No, he says, it's your secret, and goes to take a shower.

Lynda Hart: I am a writer only when I surrender. For her, it is, I think, the other way around. She tops when she writes, she surrenders only for love. The writing does not heal, it merely smears balm on the savage wounds. (1998: 205)

27.

Some days, he feels incapacitated by rage, by his inability to intervene in crises. Some days he feels the inadequacy of words even more than on other days.

Another black man dragged to his death. A gay boy tortured and tied to a post and left to die. More women smeared and disfigured and tortured on a daily basis than he can even keep track of.

US and Allied bombs continue to pound Iraq and any other target in the Third World that they fancy, but life in the 'First World' generally goes on undisturbed, unperturbed, as usual.

In the face of such crises, how should a writer write? How should a writer be able to continue to believe in writing, in the power of writing to affect?

And how can any writer/teacher make the separation between the academic and the non-academic? How can any writer/teacher in the academy claim that the academic is not punctured by the non-academic?

How can a writer and teacher in the academy especially fail to recognize that we are imbricated intimately in the fabric of imperialist economies of power?

For an academic to pretend that those of us in the academy are outside the history and forces of global geopolitics and design of imperialism is a crime.

In the face of this reality, writing is particularly contentious. But in the face of such materiality, he knows now more than ever before that engaged writing is not a luxury, that writing, that art, that poetry are as intrinsic and necessary as the air we breathe.

Sometimes it is hard to be convinced because writing in fact changes little but it has potency. It can affect, inspire, move one to action. He needs to believe this in order to write and teach.

Toni Cade Bambara: One's got to see what the factory worker sees, what the prisoner sees, what the welfare children sees, what the scholar sees, got to see what the ruling-class mythmakers see as well, in order to tell the truth and not get trapped. Got to see more and dare more. (1983: 14)

28.

MANIFESTO # 2

In writing, we will dare.

In writing, we will be fearless and fierce.
 In writing, we will defy.
 In writing, we will be apprehensive and questioning.
 In writing, we will be contradictory.
 In writing, we will claim what the white fathers denied our ancestors.
 In writing, we will claim what the coloured fathers denied our mothers, our grandmothers, our sisters.
 In writing, we will claim what the white and coloured fathers denied men.
 In writing, we will be emotional.
 In writing, we will be chaotic.
 In writing, we will explore our desires.
 In writing, we will expose injustice.
 In writing, we will overthrow the tyranny of standard forms, if necessary.
 In writing, we will chart new courses.
 In writing, we will resist institutional authority and institutional modes of structuring, of logic.
 In writing, we will think outside of the structuring logic of periodicity.
 In writing, we will decentre and trouble accepted modes of structuring and thinking.
 In writing, we will create undisciplined thinking.
 In writing, we will see anew.
 In writing, we will resist the notion of expertise.
 In writing, we will seize pleasure and not be ashamed of our desires.
 In writing, we will attempt to change how we relate to one another.
 In writing, we will attempt to create upheavals in the dominant systems of language and thought.

M Jacqui Alexander: We can fill in the outlines of empire since its multiple contradictions are everywhere seen in the hydra-headed quality of violence that constitutes modernity's political itinerary as its ideological cognates, militarization and heterosexualization, are exposed. We can fill in the outlines of empire since we have seen the ways in which freedom has been turned into an evil experiment - that is, in George Lamming's words, 'the freedom to betray freedom through gratuitous exploitation.' We can fill in the outlines when we see how empire's ruthless triumph demystifies the corruptibility of the self, without respect for those who believed themselves incorruptible. Perhaps empire never ended, that psychic and material will to conquer and appropriate, twentieth-century movements for decolonization notwithstanding. What we can say for sure is that empire makes all innocence impossible. (2005: 3-4)

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