

Chapter 11: Intr/Activism:¹ Scholar/Activist - Abilities, Simultaneously Cutting Together/Apart

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Introduction

As a scholar and activist, will anything I say or write have an influence on the brutality and violence we see in the Palestine-Israel crisis? No. How can I possibly contribute to end the senseless weaponisation of children, of basic needs provision (water, medical care, safety, electricity, etcetera), and of social media, etcetera ... ? I don't know. Must I remain silent about injustices and continue sanitising my research and branding it 'scholar-activist attempts to respond to social injustices', as I have done? No.

Being someone for whom writing comes quite naturally, and who has sought various artistic forms of expression over time to make sense of the world, I find myself in a state of writing paralysis ... a highly frustrating space of inexpressibility My heart, mind and soul feel like erupting; its empty contents dissipating into thin air to experience only a moment of relief ... I have a desire to give expression ... the ink of my pen is boiling over, but my paper unwilling to receive it, and my hand protesting in a language I don't understand

Being a 43-year-old South African professor in such a situation is not only unsettling, but threateningly and violently shakes my existential comfort zone/s as a writer, scholar and activist. Surrounded by the deafening silence of my scholar-activist colleagues in most

¹ The neologism, intr/activism, is developed in this chapter as a verb that joins the ideas of scholar/*activism*, in *intra-action*, and is useful to describe the process of scholar/activists "turning inward" through enacting various -abilities (radical self-styling). Intr/activism celebrates 'thinking global, and acting local' as Braidotti (2013) states, and requires that the 'arrogant I be turned into a humble, relational I' (Le Grange 2019). In this sense, the transformative potential of intr/activism is always already there, just like possibilities for intra-action always already exist (Barad 2007).

education and human rights networks, I ask: why the lack of engagement on the Palestine-Israel crisis? Why react so quickly to other events (threats of ChatGPT, for example), but say nothing about the humanitarian crisis playing out in Gaza?
{to be continued}

I wrote this as a popular piece on the 19th of October 2023 after a webinar hosted by the Curriculum Studies Special Interest Group of the South African Education Research Association (South African Education Research Association n.d.). Prominent South African scholar-activists—Na’eem Jeena, Steven Friedman and Mohamed Shahid Mathee—were invited to provide critical perspectives on what we then referred to as the Palestine-Israel crisis.

In the days that followed, horrifying television footage of (what turned into) genocide in Gaza, and the international community’s neutrality on this highly politically charged and intensifying war, began haunting me as disbelief, frustration and helplessness crept in. The images and brutal re(hell)ity of it, left me numb. With nothing other to hold onto, and my pen too heavy to lift, I picked up a spatula and paint, and a small oil expression was born (15 x 30 cm, oil on canvas). I dedicated this expressionist painting in memory of all the children, women, ill and innocent civilians who have lost their lives in the ongoing violence and genocide in Gaza. I wrote (late in October 2023) ‘May those left behind be privileged enough to see a more colourful skyline! And, may the Innocent Souls, Rest In Peace!’

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Fig. 11.1 Expressionist painting in memory of all the children, women, ill and innocent civilians who have lost their lives in the ongoing violence and genocide in Gaza

So much blood has flowed, trauma induced, and lives irrevocably shattered since October 2023 (and long before that) when I picked up that tiny spatula. This experience, and the ongoing, senseless murder and wiping out of precious life across the globe, have not left anyone untouched or unaffected, and continues to de/form becoming/s of all sorts. It turned my inquisitive, outgoing tendency as researcher, inward; and I began to question what it means to be/come a scholar/activist. This realisation sparked an un/learning process, one marked by frank, rigorous and ongoing criticism of myself and others; and a re/configuration of what scholar/activists' sensing, responding to, and expressing could be/come. For me, this meant queering the scholar/activist binary I uncritically endorsed for a long time and that is clearly visible in the way I wrote this popular piece.

My becoming a scholar/activist was re/configured through my ongoing intra-actions with posthumanism.² My understanding of activism, was also re/configured in line with Braidotti (2011: 268) who explains: 'In defining activism as the process of becoming-political, Deleuze speaks of the European left of the 1960s and 1970s in terms of a specific sensibility, which he connects to a creative imaginary about possible futures.' Activism understood as the process of becoming-political is creative and critical, and in the light of this I try to illustrate in this chapter a part of my becoming-political through various creative and critical engagements. In this sense, this chapter could be seen as introducing another way of understanding activism as radical self-styling that requires critique and creativity, which is different from dominant understandings of activism as outwardly mobilising social movements and campaigns.

I shall begin with a discussion on the posthuman condition, posthuman theorising and make an argument for methodological renewal in scholar/activism within this condition. Second, agential realism is explained as a posthumanist approach. This includes unpacking what is meant by an "agential cut" and "agency" to queer scholar/activism, as simultaneously cutting together/apart (as the title suggest). Third, I trace³ scholar/activist entanglements through further engaging with the popular piece, the oil painting, and other snippets of my becoming scholar/activist. This tracing experiment enabled me to cut together/apart scholar/activist—abilities as it relates to response-abilities, sense-abilities, and in/ex/press-ability. Lastly, I introduce and explain a neologism, "intr/activism", which I suggest scholar/activist might want to think along with and through in their becoming. I end with some final remarks.

2 Posthumanism refers to an ontological re/turn, as a response to the posthuman condition, that draws on an assemblage of thought experiments in the form of new realism/s, new vitalism/s, new feminist materialism/s, matter realism/s, speculative realism/s, object-oriented ontologies, and non-representational theories (Du Preez et al. 2022).

3 'Tracing', which will be discussed in detail later, is a type of agential realist analysis that enables the opening of some of the traces in an entanglement to make sense of a phenomenon, and relations between phenomena (Barad and Gandorfer 2021).

The posthuman condition, posthuman theorising and methodological renewal

As we find ourselves in the ruins of global capitalism and at the dawn of a new world order, Tsing's (2015) calls for alternative ways of thinking, doing and becoming are increasingly important. Creative, alternative ways, methods or approaches are pivotal for the current moment, the Thick Now,⁴ as we find ourselves ever more entangled with advanced technologies to an extent that it is difficult to know what human now is, and what it means to be human. These technologies are growing at a rapid rate and is coupled with environmental problems reaching unprecedented levels, to the extent that planet Earth is on the brink of ecological catastrophe. We are indeed, as Braidotti (2019) reminds us, situated between the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the Sixth Extinction; a (spacetime) matter that some refer to as the 'posthuman condition' (Le Grange and Du Preez 2023). In the posthuman condition, theorising in its radical openness is very different from humanist, conceptual definitions of theory because it is used as a verb that enables us to theorise from the inside (Barad and Gandorfer 2021). Theorising is our ethical responsibility, never final and always a work in progress, or a 'working hypothesis about the kind of subjects that we are becoming' (Braidotti 2019: 2).

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Posthumanism is theory (verb) that responds to the posthuman condition, as outlined above. Posthumanism is not anti/against humanism, nor does it imply something post/after humanism. Posthumanism suggest a decentering of human/ism, a disidentification with metanarratives of all kinds, and sensitisation toward the multiple realities of our times (which includes the dominance of humanist thinking that has led to unprecedented ecological disasters) and seeks critical and creative alternatives. In pursuing alternatives, activists and critical theorists, according to Braidotti (2011: 267), have all been confronted with the problem of 'how to balance the creative potential of critical thought with the dose of negative criticism and oppositional consciousness that such a stance necessarily entails'. She continues stating: 'Central to this debate is the question of how to resist the present, more specifically the injustice, violence, and vulgarity of the times, while being worthy of our times, so as to engage with them in a productive, albeit it oppositional and affirmative manner.' (Braidotti 2011: 268). This paradox is part of what I grapple with in this chapter that provides a glimpse into my becoming-political.

4 The concept, 'Thick Now', derives from a combination of Barad (2007) and Haraway's (2016) ideas and denotes the present time and space we inhabit, and that inhabits us; and that consists of multiple connections, entanglements of past, present, and future that are threatening, but at the same time hosts seeds of life, potential and newness (Le Grange and Du Preez 2023: 3).

Becoming-political relies on an understanding of political subjectivity⁵ in terms of 'the political' (Braidotti 2011: 269). 'The political' (in contrast to "politics"),⁶ Braidotti (2011: 269) says, is 'empowering and productive (potential)'; focuses 'on the transformative experimentation with new arts of existence and ethical relations' and 'is the radical self-styling that requires the circular time of critical praxis'. The political breaks with politics in a Marxist tradition for example (Braidotti 2011), which enables a reconfiguration of activism as a frame of mind. Activism as 'becoming-political ultimately aims at transformations in the very structures of subjectivity' (Braidotti 2011: 269).

In her book, *The Posthuman*, Braidotti (2013) states that theory as ethical responsibility asks of us to think global and act local. She writes: 'I would rather start from the empirical imperative to think global, but act local, to develop an institutional frame that actualized a posthuman practice that is "worthy of our times" ... while resisting the violence, the injustice and the vulgarity of the times' (Braidotti 2013: 177-178). 'To think global, but act local' (a kind of activist slogan and/or aspiration for the posthuman condition) is an immanent ethical call for us to re/kindle our (posthuman) sensibilities (the ability to sense and make sense of the current condition) and, taking shared responsibility (enacting our relational ability to respond to the condition) in experimenting with the potential of becoming in the "Thick Now".

Experimentation with the "Thick Now" calls for methodological renewal and new, different and creative modes of inquiry and expression (Thompson and Adams 2020). We learn from Ruth First's activist life and becoming (see Chapter 1) too how important it is to adjust one's approach to be relevant for the condition and changing times one finds oneself in. It, thus, makes sense to ask questions about scholar/activism in the posthuman condition as scholar/activism might benefit from alternative methodologies that necessitate experimenting with different ways of expressing, knowing, becoming and doing. Such methodologies might be qualitatively different from other methodologies that are more geared toward outward social mobilisation. Agential realism, as proposed by Karen Barad (2007), is one alternative approach for theorising the posthuman condition, as I shall show below.

5 Here she takes the lead from Foucault and Deleuze and explains: 'As eyewitnesses to the immediate events of the cold war in Europe and more specifically the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and the Czech and the Paris Spring revolt of 1968, Foucault and Deleuze (1972) distance themselves from the nefarious illusion of revolutionary purity, which engenders armed violence and repression. They are therefore critical of the universalist utopian element of Marxism, which inflated intellectuals to the role of representatives of the masses. They were equally suspicious, however, of the universalist humanistic assumptions and the claim to human rights or the self-correcting validity of human reason. They stress instead the need for a change of scale to unveil power relations where they are most effective and invisible: in the specific locations of one's own intellectual and social practice.' (Braidotti, 2011: 268).

6 'The political' is different from 'politics'. Politics is a negative power that is restrictive and coercive (potestas) and 'focuses on the management of civil society and its institutions' and 'is a reactive and majority-bound enterprise that is often made of flat repetitions and predictable reversals that may alter the balance but leave the structure of power basically untouched' (Braidotti, 2011: 269).

Agential realism and agential cuts in scholar/activism

In agential realism, agency is 'cut loose from its traditional human orbit' as it is no longer aligned with human intentionality (as was the case with phenomenology) or with subjectivity (as was the case with poststructuralism) (Barad 2007: 178). For Barad (2007: 178) agency is not something someone or something has, like a possession: 'Agency is "doing" and "being" in its intra-activity'. This is so because agential realism holds that it is impossible to separate ontology, epistemology, ethics, and politics as they are deeply intertwined or entangled. It is a relational ontology that starts from the premise that entities arise through relationships and 'that entities, or relata within phenomena, do not precede their relationships' (Bozalek and Fullagar 2021: 30). In other words, nothing pre-exists or is predetermined, but comes into being through intra-action. The neologism "intra-action" was first used by Donna Haraway and further theorised by Karen Barad (2007), as a key component to agential realism. "Intra", derives from Latin, and means "within", "interior", and "during". Intra-action '*signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*' (sic) or phenomena (Barad 2007: 33), and expresses 'an ontological shift from individual to relational existence' (Murriss and Bozalek 2021: 70). 'Intra-action' is radically different from 'interaction' because the latter assumes that there are separate entities that precede their interaction. Interaction is thus about acting 'between, towards and among each other as separate entities' (Murriss and Bozalek 2021: 70). Intra-action, on the other hand, assumes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through intra-action (Barad 2007).

In a post-humanist sense, one might say that becoming a scholar/activist, or scholar/activism, happens in intra-action and is a relational, profoundly entangled affair (ontologically, epistemologically, ethically and politically). Because one's scholarly becoming, and activist becoming, do not pre-exist their relationships in this intra-action, but arise only through the agential cut, one is not first a scholar and then an activist, or the other way around, but both scholar/activist in an indeterminate, relational becoming. They are co/constituted in entangled relations. Agential realism also queers Cartesian binaries such as nature-culture, subject-object, material-discursive, human-nonhuman, etcetera and asks 'the prior question of what differentially constitutes the human – and for whom' (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 18). It is about questioning, theorising and analysing cuts, such as human/non-human, itself (Barad and Gandorfer 2021). In this sense, this chapter is an attempt at queering the cut scholar/activist. Note, that the use of the slash is neither a sign of absolute separation between entities (as the dash might signal), nor indicative of an either-or dichotomous relationship. The slash as used here, reveals the cut; simultaneously cutting-together-apart (Barad and Gandorfer 2021).

Bozalek and Fullagar (2021: 30) explain that '[t]he agential cut enacts a temporary resolution between

subject and object' (in this chapter, scholar and activist) and 'creates a temporary determinacy within a phenomenon that is inherently indeterminate ontologically and semantically'. An agential cut is therefore different from a Cartesian cut, which assumes that distinct boundaries are in place, with entities pre-existing relationships. Because subject and object, or scholar and activist, remain entangled, and because there is no actual cut with distinct boundaries in place, an agential cut, cuts together/apart, simultaneously. Also, agential cuts are not enacted from the outside and is never once and for all. When we, therefore, say there is no ontological or agential separability between us becoming scholars and activists, we also say that being scholars and activists is one move, together and apart simultaneously. However, the scholar/activist agential cut is not merely semiotic or discursive (as it might seem until here), but has material affects. One might say that the agential cut, cuts together/apart scholar/activists' materialdiscursive⁷ realities as it relates to the abilities to respond, sense and express (differently).

Through, with and alongside my ongoing experimentations with posthumanism, scholar/activism "became something other" or "different" for me. It transformed my becoming by making me attentive of the ability to respond (scholar/activism as enacting my ability to respond, that is, responsibility) and the ability to sense (scholar/activism as a sensibility, honed when in tune with one's intuition and by looking inward); and bringing these in closer proximity, 'simultaneously cutting together/apart', as Barad's (2007) agential realism holds. In addition to tracing how scholar/activism "became something different" for me, I trouble our tendency (as scholars) to increasingly refrain from enacting our (activist) -abilities to sense, to respond and to express (and deal with inexpressibility) where ecological injustices occur and violence prevails. I speculate that this tracing experiment might also add methodological value to scholar/activists seeking renewal in their thinking, doing and becoming.

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Scholar/activist -abilities cut together/apart: A tracing experiment

Tracing is a type of agential realist analysis that enables the opening of some of the traces in an entanglement (Barad and Gandorfer 2021). Entanglements are related and contingent phenomena that are deeply intertwined; ontologically, epistemologically, ethically and politically. The aim is not to trace the endless lines/relata between phenomena, but to trace 'from and with the middle' of entanglements (Barad and Gandorfer 2021). For Barad and Gandorfer (2021), tracing is never complete because of the

⁷ For Barad (2007), discursive practices are not mere utterances of the originating consciousness of a unified subject; rather, statements and subjects emerge from a field of possibilities which is not static or singular, but rather is a dynamic and contingent multiplicity. She highlights the need for reconceptualising discursive practices to take account of their intrinsically material nature. She refers to this as material-discursive practice.

complex nature of entanglements and its endless re/configurings. Moreover, tracing has material affects and is, therefore, not merely a discursive activity.

To queer the cut scholar/activist that, simultaneously, cuts together/apart; I trace lines of scholar/activist entanglements from the popular piece, the expressionist oil painting and other aspects of my scholar/activist becoming. This popular piece was never published, nor anything of its kind at the time in local South African papers. Week after week I experienced immense disappointment whilst having to read trivial rugby commentary made by a top scholar in opinion sections, but nothing being published or debated as regards the genocide in Gaza ...?

{continuing from the question about the lack of scholarly engagement on the Palestine-Israel crisis...}

Some respond by saying it is too traumatic to talk about, while others seem to want to see how the politics play out before commenting. Then there are those who are just too busy with academic work to turn their attention briefly to the thousands of children and innocent civilians who died and continue to die because of violence and brutality beyond my limited capacity to understand.

Reasons differ and seem murky in most instances. I ask, how can this be? How can entire university entities dedicated to human rights (education) and social justice research, and universities in general, keep quiet about such atrocities, such massacres of children and innocent civilians? Masses of South Africans have taken to the streets to protest against war crimes committed in the conflict between Hamas and Israel. But when I look around me at human rights scholar-activists, I am reminded of Simon and Garfunkel who sing: 'People talking without speaking, people hearing without listening, people writing songs that voices never share. And no one dared disturb the sound of silence.'

There seems to be a perception, or constructed neoliberal reality, amongst some that one's activism can "be held against you in the future" (when you apply for positions or promotions, etcetera). I believe this argument is used as a smoke screen to justify (violent) silence/s. What matters in all spaces and times is good scholarship. And good scholarship cannot transpire in individualist spaces of unproductive silences. It happens when the artificial boundary between abstract theory (or the discursive) and lived experience of activists (or the material) crumbles.

When one theorises on an abstract level and fails to bring it in conversation with the material realities of the “thick now” (the present; with and without its evils), one ends up standing outside of a discourse. In fact, one could think of it as a form of epistemic violence. The discursive points to how theories, words, mental constructs, meaning, etcetera, is being made, unmade and remade. This is what many scholars devote most of their time to. It also happens to be the kind of work that neoliberal universities (which are for the most part performance driven) value because they can more easily measure impact.

However, when discursive privilege comes into play, matter—nature or the material—often gets ignored or neglected. This makes us lose touch with the material (which in the Palestine-Israel crisis means large-scale death). The potential for change, that the present moment holds, evaporates into thin air when we privilege the discursive. The point is that the material and discursive do not stand outside one another. Theory and practice are one. They co-constitute one another and are mutually co-constituted.

As scholars who also call themselves activists, we cannot be silent and stand at a comfortable distance from what is being observed in the Palestine-Israel crisis because we are part of the world in its continuous unfolding—with or without its evils. Or as Nathan Snaza and John Weaver put it in *Posthumanism and Educational Research* (2014: 3): ‘It is impossible to think, criticise, and write about a system except from inside it. One must always inhabit the discourse one wishes to throw into question’.

If I (as a privileged professor with freedom of speech and ample networks to rely on) remain silent on these atrocities, who is going to say something? Being able to respond as scholars and activists (enacting our responsibility) is not (always) a matter of taking sides; it is a matter of determining what it is you know that can help everyone to, together, make sense of the collective traumas we experience and the senseless violence we continue to witness. Activism does not mean taking sides blindly or rashly; it is a relational activity where scholars and/or activists can come together to vigorously campaign and set intents towards reconfiguring social and political change.

One’s ability to respond as scholars and activists is a loving, affirmative enterprise and a

“worldly activity” with seismic potential to create, demolish and regenerate new ways of thinking and doing. It is, therefore, strange that we keep on theorising as if the world stands somewhere away from our theories, outside of our lived experience and materiality. The world is theory and if we make any claims to theory, then we cannot keep quiet. Then we should sharpen our scholarship and break the silence (Du Preez 2023)
{to be continued}

Although much of what I wrote and experienced in October 2023 still holds, a lot is also no longer relevant as different intra-actions and entanglements are at play. However, there was value in writing this, and there is value in being open to experience the emotion of in/ex/press-ability and to turn inward, as will become evident below. Turning inward enabled me to begin theorising (differently) and appealed to my desire to express (differently); while I was simultaneously confronted with thinking through scholar/activists’ abilities to respond and sense. In what follows, I shall continue tracing my scholar/activist becoming and in so doing, explain what I mean by response-abilities, sense-abilities and in/ex/press-abilities in scholar/activist intra-actions.

Scholar/activist response-abilities

Response-ability is about making-sense and being in touch with practices in the world as they unfold in its immanent materiality by ‘attending to, tracing, and taking account of entanglements’ of all sorts (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 31). For Barad (Barad and Gandorfer 2021: 24), response-ability ‘is about being ethically in touch with the other as opposed to pretending to theorize from the outside ... – which is a form of violence – and realizing that observers and theorizers are an integral part of it’. Our ability to respond (response-ability) always happens in intra-action (nothing predetermined precedes our ability to respond). This challenges the traditional view of responsibility that is usually associated with the rational individual and makes of response-ability a collective or shared ability.

A scholar/activist being responsible, became something different to me when I saw it as a shared ability to respond and not a responsibility that weighs down an individual. However, scholar/activism as a shared, ethical response-ability depends on scholarship that does not claim theoretical neutrality or objectivity, as this perpetuates (epistemic) violence. Here I am in full agreement with Edward Said when he writes:

Nothing in my view is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in the intellectual

that induce avoidance, that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position, which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take. You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so to remain within the responsible mainstream; someday you hope to get an honorary degree, a big prize, perhaps even an ambassadorship. For an intellectual these habits of mind are corrupting *par excellence*. If anything can denature, neutralize, and finally kill a passionate intellectual life it is the internalization of such habits. Personally, I have encountered them in one of the toughest of all contemporary issues, Palestine, where fear of speaking out about one of the greatest injustices in modern history has hobbled, blinkered, muzzled many who know the truth and are in a position to serve it. For despite the abuse and vilification that any outspoken supporter of Palestinian rights and self-determination earns for him or herself, the truth deserves to be spoken, represented by an unafraid and compassionate intellectual. (Said 1996: 100–101)

Deeply etched in many modern-day academics' genetics seem to be the desire to maintain a reputation for being and doing research that is 'balanced, objective, moderate and neutral'. Such claims, or intellectual habits of mind, align well with neoliberal ideals that thrive on rational individuals, acting on their own self-interest. Claims to neutrality and objectivity have increasingly colonised our desires to think, express and become, differently. This is evident in a lot of shallow research that mushrooms everywhere, but that hardly seem to make a difference. Enacting our abilities to respond without further inducing epistemic violence through neutrality requires of us to "theorise from the inside" (a verb). This means being ethically in touch with the "Thick Now" that we inhabit in this space and time, and that inhabits us; and the multiple connections, entanglements of past, present and future that are threatening, but simultaneously hosts seeds of life, potential and newness (Le Grange and Du Preez 2023).

What I am writing here might at first seem like a further abstract theorisation, however, when understood in line with my own story, the material affects and manifestation of this theorisation (as verb) of scholar/activist response-abilities, could become something different. As a young scholar I was trained in Critical Theory and Poststructuralism. These traditions shaped much of the way that I saw and re-acted to the world around me. However, for more than a decade I was employed at an institution that did not seem to value my "different-ness", nor welcomed or appreciated my critical disposition. Early on I decided to keep on "speaking out" and raise critical questions where needed, despite the warnings

I received from (mostly senior) colleagues to rather keep quiet to prevent that my different-ness and criticality is “held against me when applying for promotion”. I chose not to pay heed to that advice and kept on challenging the colonising effects and affects that the institution had on my (and others’) desire/s to think, express and become, differently.

Despite the institutional turmoil, I chose to continue deepening my scholarship, but could not help notice how my colleagues (especially the younger ones) increasingly succumbed to silence in critical spaces during meetings and academic discussions in fear of their own promotion options. The silences around me became so loud (and worrying) that I devoted my professorial inaugural address in 2019 to the topic of: *‘Nostalgia, dialogue and silence: On the ethics of curriculum studies’* (Du Preez 2019). I spoke about different ways in which silence is performed and how it shapes our ability to respond ethically in curriculum work, or dis/ables us from doing anything at times. However, the situation did not change, and my intellectual passion began to quickly wane as corrupting, neoliberal habits of mind were promoted and celebrated around me.

I took a major risk three years later when I resigned from that unproductive, uncritical space without having another job to turn to immediately, nor anything to fall back onto for financial support. Taking this step has profoundly transformed me, because I realised what really mattered was not whether I conform to the hegemonic mode of thinking, but whether my scholarship was good enough to carry me through. I had to also think about what constitutes “good scholarship” and through this came to realise that my scholarship was helpful, but that it could benefit even more if I were to bring the material and the discursive dimensions thereof into closer proximity. This also led me to question what it meant when I claimed that I am a scholar/activist. I no longer see being a scholar/activist as an individual responsibility, one that requires my immediate, outward reaction, but as a relational intra-action. This tracing experiment, although only partial, sensitised me to turn inward and become more in touch with how (the relational) I inhabit space and time, and how space and time inhabits (the relational) me. This inward turn (self-styling) is, therefore, not an individualistic, selfish doing; but always happens in relation to, or in intra-actions.

Scholar/activist sense-abilities

Re/configuring my understanding and ability to respond (posthuman responsibility) alerted me to the importance of turning inward and tapping into my senses. For example, I had to ask myself what I sense lurking beneath silence/s that causes violence, and how I can enact my ability to respond when all, including myself, goes quiet. It also cautioned me as to my reactive tendencies. St. Pierre (2021: 6) avers

that when enacting our abilities in line with our senses, it becomes possible to create new posthuman sensibilities and 'structures of intelligibility'. For me, this meant stepping back and slowly sensing my way through what I was thinking, doing and becoming (as scholar/activist) to deepen my work. I had to follow my own earlier advice, that is, to go slow and work deep:⁸

Engaging in deep scholarly work and imagining a university space free from the shackles of neoliberalism require that we slow down. Slowing down is not a "slow strike", it requires careful planning to set aside time for deep work. Slowing down is an ethical choice to take time for oneself and for the other (Du Preez and Du Toit 2022: 118).

Prolonged exposure to neoliberal accelerationism in higher education contexts has had a devastating and numbing effect on many academics, including myself (Du Preez and Du Toit 2022). It is as if neoliberalism has blocked out peripheral vision for many which has led to some resorting to silence, blocking out violence (through, for example, ignoring certain research topics that necessitates our critical attention and in so doing, committing epistemic violence) and producing nicely packaged research products (articles, book chapters and the like) that can be measured to determine performativity. Some have argued that in this moment in time, we are standing in the ruins of capitalism where we are just as much victims as perpetrators of neoliberalism (Maistry et al. 2021). Constant pressure from universities on academics to perform has led many to adopt a reactionary response to their environment and the demands that come with it (Du Preez and Le Grange 2024). In this reactionary climate, a lot of research is fast-produced, replica and small-scale type of studies. Engaging in such research is for Braidotti (2013: 5) like entering 'a zombified landscape of repetition without difference and lingering melancholy'. To change the direction of such "zombified research" might require slowing down and re/aligning with our senses (Du Preez and Du Toit 2022). A scholar/activist who taps into their ability to sense (posthuman sensibility) might be more easily alerted to injustices through their peripheral vision and reading of the condition, which could put them in a better position to respond to it without "zombifying" it with their research.

My posthuman sensibilities 'kicked in' at a time when I felt the most helpless, as if my scholar/activism would never be enough, because it (literally) opened my senses and allowed me to navigate emotions of in/ex/pressibility (differently). It assisted me in "un/zombifying" my thinking about matters

8 Deep work refers to '[p]rofessional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate' (Newport 2016: 3). Furthermore, the Deep Work Hypothesis asserts that '[t]he ability to perform deep work is becoming increasingly rare at exactly the same time it is becoming increasingly valuable in our economy. As a consequence, the few who cultivate this skill, and then make it the core of their working life, will thrive' (Newport 2016: 14).

research. Me paying attention to my posthuman sensibilities was, therefore, yet another intra-action that required turning inward. Again, this was not a selfish inward turn to attend to my own interests, but an acute realisation of my relatedness in intra-actions.

Scholar/activist in/ex/press-ability

The popular piece I wrote, the small oil painting, and the snippets of my becoming, so far bears testimony of the increasing feeling of helplessness I experienced as scholar/activist witnessing a genocide. It also pointed to my relentless desire to express; something I have also recently published about (Du Preez 2023). Barad and Gandorfer (2021: 18) refer to this as 'desiring for expressibility', and for them, desiring to express is an iterative process of sense-making. I struggled to make sense of the helplessness and inability to at least express in writing what I experienced as scholar/activist witnessing the genocide on Gaza. My ability to sense and the desire to express guided the rational, critical me onto quite a different journey, inward. What I experienced made an in/pression on my becoming and my relational, slow becoming alerted my senses to various forms of ex/pression, in this case through an oil painting. The emotions tied to in/ex/press-ability (enacting the ability to in/press and ex/press) was simultaneously cut together/apart (like my understanding of scholar/activism) through this realisation.

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I also like to think of the technique used to create the oil painting as a form of artistically cutting together/apart layers of pigments with a metal spatula. Amidst the background noise of bombs, death cries and sirens on the television as anxious, traumatised journalists report on the horrors of the genocide (the material effects of it), I rhythmically started to cut and slice pigments (together/apart) in an explosion-like fashion on the canvas. Cutting and slicing colours from the inside out on a canvas drenched in black oil pigment, had a material effect on me too. Artistically cutting together and apart in this way did not only capture light, texture and emotion, it captured a moment in my becoming scholar/activist (differently). This was an expression of the entanglement I tried to make sense of and respond to. The mild, organic scent of the linseed oil stayed the same, however, the in/pression left by the temporary inability to express myself (dealing with the loss of words) was profoundly transformative. Whereas before I felt like a helpless writer, scholar and activist, burdened with the loss of words and overwhelmed by my in/ability to express; I now understood my scholar/activist becoming differently. This becoming could be explained using the neologism, "intr/activism", to be discussed next.

Intr/activism

In tracing the entangled nature of my understandings as scholar/activist and trying to make sense of the silences and wars around me, I was able to see how highly frustrating, emotion-filled moments of in/ex/pressibility can be turned into moments loaded with potential for transformation. More specifically, tracing response-abilities, sense-abilities, and express-abilities as it relates to scholar/activism turned me inward. Intr/activism is a verb that joins the ideas of scholar/activism (cut together/apart), in intra-action, and is useful to describe the process of scholar/activists 'turning inward' through enacting various abilities (that is, self-styling). Intr/activism celebrates 'thinking global and acting local' as Braidotti (2013: 177) states, and requires that the arrogant I be turned into a humble, relational I (Le Grange 2019). In this sense, the transformative potential of intr/activism is always already there, just like possibilities for intra-action always already exist (Barad 2007).

Turning inward is not a selfish act of individual resistance, nor is it an activity for people to pursue in their own self-interest. It is also not merely reactionary to the condition of the time, but a manifestation of the need for methodological renewal to enact ecological change. One can think of turning inward, intr/activism, as first putting on your own mask, and then assisting another person to put on theirs, like instructions given for airplane safety. Intr/activism implies a process of un/learning through frank, rigorous and ongoing criticism of the self and others (self-styling); and a re/configuration of what scholar/activists' sensing, responding to, and expressing could be/come. This means also queering binaries such as the scholar/activist one. Doing so shows that one's scholarly becoming, and activist becoming, do not pre-exist their relationships in this intra-action, but arise only through the agential cut, one is not first a scholar and then an activist, or the other way around, but both scholar/activist in an indeterminate, relational becoming. They are co/constituted in entangled relations. The transformative potential of intr/action opens the possibility for unafraid, compassionate intellectuals, to speak the truth about a situation, as Said (1996) encourage us to do.

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Final remarks

Again, looking at the questions I asked in the opening paragraph of the popular piece, I might ask and respond quite differently now that I think of my scholar/activism alongside intr/activism. Tuning into my intr/activist becoming, allowed me to sharpen my abilities to sense and respond in many ways. This process of radical self-styling has turned me inward and outward (simultaneously, cutting together/apart) and challenged what I conceived of as the limits of my ability to express. Activism, as outward

social mobilisation, turned into mobilisation from within, for me (a radical self-styling).

Although the silence amongst many scholars on the genocide on Gaza remains, I am proud to be a South African, because on 29 December 2023, South Africa filed an application instituting proceedings against the State of Israel for the violence it has unleashed on the people of the Gaza Strip, arguing that Israel was in breach of its obligations under the Convention. In a televised address by the President of the Republic of South Africa, H.E. Cyril Ramaphosa, on the ruling of the International Court of Justice, he reminded us that:

We are also a people who were the victims of the crime of apartheid. We know what apartheid looks like. We experienced and lived through it. Sadly, many of our people died and were exiled like our beloved leader Oliver Tambo and others, others were jailed like the father of our democracy and others were maimed.

We, as South Africans, will not be passive bystanders and watch the crimes that were visited upon us being perpetrated elsewhere. We stand on the side of freedom for all. We stand on the side of justice. (The Presidency Republic of South Africa 2024)

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I end this exploration into my becoming scholar/activism through intr/activism with the same words that I concluded the popular piece I began with:

South Africa has had many legendary scholar-activists who we can draw inspiration from and to whom we can turn to learn about becoming authentic scholar-activists. The next generation of scholar-activists (me included) may want to turn to our predecessors to learn about activism as a loving, affirmative enterprise that holds potential for change (Du Preez 2023).

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