

Chapter 39. (Dis)Association - Writing and Reclaiming Agency Through Feminist Solidarity

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Act I

Imagine if I wasn't me for a minute or maybe two. Nothingness is part of my being—time dripping in the surrounds of my emptiness. I stand in front of a mirror just to stare at the hole I made in this world built to massacre every fiber of my existence. History wasn't meant for me. So, I drip away with time surrounding my emptiness.

The sensation that carries my life in its shoulder is of heaviness followed by the tingling sensation of fatigue. It comes from the left side of my body. From the little joint on my tinny toes to the top of my eyes. It hurts constantly, a non-stop pulsation with a mix of fever followed by stabbing pain. I carry it with me since I understand myself as an adult in this world. But now it makes my left side numb. I can't feel much anymore. I'm done. The brain is next, I guess.

Isn't that beautiful? A ghost as a writer instructor. Not tenured, still a candidate.

Act II

It's my first time teaching junior writing. No previous instruction was given on how I should tackle this teaching assignment. Did I panic? No. I did what I always do when life is about to kick my ass: I (Dis)Associate. My disability always comes in waves and dyslexia is performed as my second language.

Born and raised in Brazil in a high middle-class private educational system where I could only belong by passing as so. Was my family financially stable at any point in life? No. But God we passed as. Three jobs as a rule and mimicking others even when we couldn't understand much of their day-to-day dynamic. We were successful with the help of Dad's resilience and Mom's charisma.

I always knew from the beginning that we were others pretending to be them. It hurt not being enough from birth. But what one could do? Survive—In the name of love for the humans who surround you with love and care.

Then, life strikes again. I'm built to be a smart kiddo, but I lack the ability to act on it. I need to keep the scholarship my dad's job provided for me. But what can I do when I can't write properly even when the knowledge passed on to me

stays trapped inside? I can't mimic ability. *Could I?* Be able in my disability? Hard to say. But remember—survival is a must. I love them too much to see them lose.

Instead of facing facts as they were and feeling as enabled as I should feel, I start a side narrative of my existence—one that becomes the law in my internal world. I'm magic! That's it. Born to be magic I was. And act on magic. As charming as any powerful witch, I was there to show the world how rich I am in kindness, thoughtfulness, and internal creative life that can spill from my skin to touch others' sensibilities. That's my power and mission in life. I was born with a purpose, and nothing could stop me.

Poetry becomes a gate to show it with no parameters to be followed. I'm not a formalist. I'm tropical modernity born from Caetano's and Bethania's hip bones. I'm the personification of cultural chaos as a response to imperial/colonial/hegemonic metrics. You name it—you name it.

Act III

But now breathe! Breathe. In this suffocating atmosphere, I made it to a PhD program where I was accepted despite writing in my second language. How? There's no simple answer to this hurtful question. Skepticism and imposter syndrome are the shadow monsters that follow me wherever I go. The fact is I'm a ghostly human being and in shadow, I also walk. I know the path where my fears were born, and I'm not afraid to touch them to the point that I can access our wounds. I'm here to be pain personified in womanhood.

In this context of (a) life—I became, desire. And I desired to be more than human. I dreamed of power and the flame it encapsulates. In Foucault's narrative, I live in the shadow of bio-power. But the desire to not only be part of—but to break with any social norm that ever existed, I became a flame that burns in (dis)associative power towards freedom. I claimed my womanhood and, as a shadow worker in a world of catastrophes, the intent was to not only survive but co-exist in peace among nature.

As a writing instructor who has a limited education in composition theory and no idea of how alphabetization happens for an undiagnosed dyslexic kid, I stand staring at the syllabus while reflecting on its content. The despise for grammarology or the idea that what culturally was defined as good writing or academic writing should be taught grew in my chest. How can I be responsible for that? The violence that hurt me to the point of (Dis)Association is here asking me to perpetrate its principles. And what do I do in response? Yeah, I (Dis)Associate.

For a minute or two I become Victor Frankenstein—I cut and reassemble the syllabus provided. Writing without literacy gets thrown out of those pages. No mercy. No shame. And then, the fun starts. Remember—I'm magic, and those pages were about to get filled with my flames. No one is looking. I'm a ghostly human walking in the shadows—no one even cares where I stand. They only see what I allow them to. I'm the master of reflecting to others what they want to see.

The reality is that the image is just power dust put into place by a strategic act of a survivalist.

Cut. Cut. Cut. Take. Give. Fake. Add. Add. Add.

Add. Add. Add. Fake. Give. Take. Cut. Cut. Cut.

Survive.

Act IV

Monster. I'm other. A monster. And the syllabus that is an extension of my magical being is also perceived as one. The difference is that I deeply care for it. I didn't abandon it to be in darkness by itself. In its companionship, we help each other to be visible, and touchable in a classroom filled with young souls—young blood—young humans. It's sad to see how scared they are to be perceived as illiterate, incapable, or disabled. As puppies, pleading for attention and care, they demand to be taught to write as a professional.

And I sit there. I stare at them. I'm disabled and I write. Is it professional writing? Is it good writing? What are the standards? I don't know. But I do write and now I'm expected to teach it. But what are the standards? Ableism. Simply. Stone cold. Let me repeat it to you: ableism. Write as white. Write as rich. Write as elite. Write as cis. Write as a man. Just f* write a PR note to make the social media see us as an equal. Make me cool. Make me be seen. Teach a recipe.

I won't.

Act VI

I'm a ghostly human creature (Dis)Associating at all times. Fleshly floating around. (Dis)Association carries two potentials for meaning-making: 1) the potential to become an act of association or a cooperative link through disability; 2) the potential to go beyond what is understood as concrete, an ontological reality imposed by ableist rhetoric as an act of dissociation, as an act of resistance against the imposed negative connotation of a humane condition. The term holds two different worlds that exist side by side and share rhetorical space in the lives of people who live on the margins of a normative, ableist, social reality.

Disability + Association = (Dis)Association

The art of dissociating in a creative way is a way to resist. And where did I learn that you might ask? In the kitchen of course. In solidarity. In womanhood. In sisterhood. As the women in my life taught me to exist on our terms, we might need to put our imagination to work. That means going against every representation that presents reductionism. That means diving into madness and emotional turmoil as a gate to create catharsis—Inside out. In madness and sadness, we recognize each other. In creativity and art, we create scope to question this reality that hurts so many beings.

In childhood memories, I reconcile pain and resistance in composition. I compose a life that I'm willing to live by writing and teaching writing as a gate to the abolition of colonial practices. In our kitchen, I remember our radio playing—Mom & Grandma singing *Tudo de Novo* interpreted by Maria Bethania alongside Caetano Veloso—who, by the way, also is the writer. I follow along chatting magic from our coven to the universe. Please, dear reader, stop what you are doing right now. Stop reading, and just listen to the song.

Feel the magic! (Dis)Associate.

Act VII

Transatlantic solidarity. Grandma in Italy. Mom & I in Brazil.

Trans-cosmic solidarity. Grandma in heaven. Mom in Brazil. I'm in the U.S.

Transnational solidarity. Brazil-U.S. It composed me to be (dis) association.

Green card. F1. Brazilian Citizenship.

Portuguese-English.

Disability comes in waves!

As Della Pollock once stated in *Performing Writing* (1998), performative method is writing as praxis. As a homo-performer, I act in writing, and writing acts on me. In the classroom, I challenge my students not to just write but to act on their writing. Find a purpose, find a voice. Allow themselves to be engaged with the world—to be curious and be in conversation with others. There's no writing without errors. Try to at least know more about how complicated, multiple, and engaging living can be. That's what I encourage.

As a disclaimer and a way to break with classroom expectations and hierarchies, I disclose my disability. I'm dyslexic. I live with a mental illness and an autoimmune disease. And I'm a colored woman. And I'm here as your writing instructor and as a person ready to find you in solidarity and care. If you want to learn about writing literacy and the power of communicating through cultural grounds and differences, please stay. You will always be welcomed among these walls.

I always wait for them to leave or words of challenge. But they never left, and the words never came. Together we decide to be publishers, editors, and colleagues. We don't do it for the grade. We do it for the sake of being able to resist. We write together, we peer-review and we develop our magazine—*uncomplicated*. The intent is to un-complicate our lives through communication. The intent is to (Dis)Associate. In vulnerability, we find ourselves stronger and we allow ourselves to try reaching for others recognition of a future that might go beyond inclusion.

Together we write. Together we stand.

Disability comes in waves. And care for difference became our second language.

In sum, a junior writing course isn't designed to encapsulate the possibilities writing can provide to one's soul. The act of resistance starts by acknowledging it. We, students in our own right, aren't here to bow to the walls and regiments of the university grounds. We are here to take the space while creating a sense of belonging that transcends its mercenary policies. And that starts with a simple statement a *la Magritte**:

*This is not a pipe. Is this an academic course?
That's for others to know.
You, as others. Others, like you.*

Final Act

Born in a covenant. We are all witches. The grandma is the matriarch. Mom is our north. Me as our south. Magic flows around composing and putting positionality into question. There's no me without them and no them without me. We survived in solidarity. We dreamed of better lives, and when it didn't come to our encounter, we together, (dis)associate.

Grandma was a writer, but her words were lost in time. Mom is a writer, but her words don't leave our home. I'm an academic writer, and my words were meant to travel the world. However, in its path, there is no composition without them. In every writing, I share their words; they're always with me. In solidarity and magic, we stand. For its genealogy, find in our DNA a source. I refuse to be understood under the rituals of scientific positivism.

And please remember, as a ghostly human I stand. As a monster. As the other. I'm not running from the narrative life imposed on me, but I'm open to reframing it in a manner that allows historically excluded communities to live peacefully among all beings. I'm not here to teach you about proper writing. I'm here to exist in disability and difference and claim my positionality as a north to be held dear in the hearts of the ones who resist everyday erasures.

Here I stand. Here I float.

Here I (Dis)Associate my positionality.²

2. Rene Magritte (1898-1967), Belgian artist and grand reference of the Surrealist Movement. The *Treachery of Images* (1929) represents a three-way paradox for exposing the conventional notion of objects that simply responds to words and images as a form, an illustration of description or definition. The painting proclaims 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe', 'This is not a pipe' as a description of an illustration of a pipe. Then, the painting is not a pipe but rather an image of a pipe.