

I Write What I Like and How I Like: Defiance Scholarship in HCI

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ABSTRACT

During the “Beyond Academia” panel at the Participatory Design Conference 2022 – which has strong foundations in Nordic traditions - colleagues considered a range of questions regarding the practice of the Design community, and the academy more broadly. One point that stayed with me from the panel was this: to be in academia or not to be. This is perhaps the fundamental question of philosophy, a question that might be considered as forcing one to take sides, for or against a proposition. As an exhibition and performance of defiance, this critique presents a forceful case for revolting against the absurdities of zero-point epistemologies of Western sciences that happened to be a central tenant of HCI knowledge production and dissemination practices. In doing so, I reflect on the ‘perceived’ challenges and opportunities in the academy as an early career African HCI researcher protesting for and against the instrument of epistemic power. As we grapple with the crisis of solidaristic imagination across disciplines, I write what I like and how I like to survive (as in within the veil of the academy), with the hope that problematizing some dimension of HCI’s regime of power and knowledge will inspire you to imagine and converse otherwise.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → Human computer interaction (HCI); HCI theory, concepts, and models.

KEYWORDS

African HCI, Knowledge, Power, Deconstructive Writing, Decolonial Defiance, Slow Scholarship

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1 TO LIVE OR TO LABOUR?

To be in academia or not to be, this is the question that this critique seeks to problematize. This is perhaps the fundamental question of philosophy, a question that might be considered as forcing one

to take a side, for or against a proposition¹. Such a question has led critical thinkers to embrace the Hegelian dialectic where the familiarity of words (or family of resemblance, as Wittgenstein calls them) blind our picturing of things as represented by the linguistic connotations implied to them in the real world.

If one decides to be in the academy to effect subtle changes, one has to grapple with the politics of knowledge and power, for example, authorship and ownership, language games and prose competition, exploitation and exploration, labouring and rewarding and so on [15]. Along those lines of questioning, we could ask: when we write a paper or a book chapter, who takes ownership of the knowledge produced and shared? Even when academic publications have been conceived as mirrors to see ourselves closely and windows to see the world around us clearly, questions about the utilities of poetic and intermediate knowledge from imagination and experiences become pronounced. Consequently, it is evident that knowledge is situated, with intermediate-level knowledge as knowledge arising from experiences of places and spaces. How then can critical documentation practices be adopted as an established method of producing and communicating publishable pieces of work in HCI? [14].

If one decides otherwise, as the feminist scholar Sara Ahmed has attempted, new means of generating/and communicating knowledge beyond archival publications must be devised. Creative methods such as blogs, tweets, sketches, pictorials, demos, zines, art installations, sculptures etc. have been adopted as free-form modes of exchanges that support the interpretation of perspectives as composites layered and dismantled to give rise to specific expressions [16]. In HCI, we’ve also witnessed how diverse forms of knowledge have fallen under the category of supplementary material as the requirements for dismantling the boundaries between supplementary materials and archival publication become more amplified [24]. How then does the wider HCI community of peer’s accept

¹For one to escape the absurdities of the modern world created by Man, noted Albert Camus, one has to embrace philosophical suicide – i.e., the attempt to ‘revolt’ against the absurdity of the logics of rationality and objectivity via critical reflection on what it is to be or not to be. In his words, “there is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest – whether the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories – comes afterwards”. And it is by doing so that one could become conscious of the fundamental absurdity that “man is always prey to his truths. Once he has admitted them, he cannot free himself from them. ... A man who has become conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it” [7, p.5-17]. This is also related to Jacques Derridean’s conception of intellectual prostitution/masturbation as a sort of ‘absurd’ act of self-adulterating (as in giving into the desires for recognition, reproduction and so on) via deconstructive writing. The difference between the two bodily acts is that prostitution can be perceived as a transactional exchange with the sole aim of satisfying man’s inner desires in natural ways, whereas masturbation is a deceptive means of satisfying man’s inner fantasies in self-altering ways. For Derrida, deconstructive writing is a transitional exercise of tracing/trailing emerging ideas about the self (and/or for the other); a conjure towards un-veiling what is absent in the in-dividual selves as dangerous writing “inaugurates life”..then..” to write is indeed the only way of keeping or recapturing speech because speech denies itself as it gives itself” [12, p.162].

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the subjugation of experience-led knowledge? And what can be done to promote poetic and intermediate knowledge?

Building on the questions above, this focused reflection draws inspiration from Feminist Scholar Sara Ahmed and Data Scientist Timnit Gebru’s exposé, the ‘écriture féminine’² and ‘AI ethicist’ dilemma³, in dramatically documenting the subtleties of attempting to make sense of the madness of zero-point epistemologies informing knowledge production and dissemination in HCI. As an exhibition and performance of defiance, this critique presents a forceful case for revolting against the absurdities of the pervasive Western and scientific epistemological framing in HCI. In doing so, I reflect on the perceived challenges and opportunities in the academy as an early career African HCI researcher protesting for and against the instrument of epistemic power. The theme of the conference, “Live”, encourages making practical efforts towards “uniting HCI for a spectrum of global perspectives and hyperlocal experiences” by relying on lived experience-led knowledge for example. As an exhibit of experience-led reflection, this piece of writing (and extended footnotes) is intended to highlight how any attempt to detach from the logics, vocabularies, and dialectics of the scientific community entails, metaphorically, a purposeful act of embracing and committing intellectual suicide.

In the book “Imagination: A Manifesto” [43], Ruha Benjamin argues that modern societies are facing a crisis of imagination. The central point of her thesis is that there are no collective social imaginaries - as set of ideas, connotations, norms, and beliefs that frame what is knowable and thinkable for a subject - on how to improve the human condition of sociability. With imagination and knowledge as situated within/and across histories in the making, one could posit: who decides the stake of the intermediate knowledge produced and shared in HCI domestication in other discourses? Even when academic publications have been conceived as mirrors to see ourselves closely and windows to see the world around us clearly, poetic knowledge from experiences of the world are somewhat recognized but also dismissed as lazy scholarship premises on identity politics.

Although the critique track encourages creative endeavour that could “dissect, provoke, inspire”, pragmatic criticism of the kind presented in this paper open possibilities where diverse perspectives could be reconciled. It is the conviction that the arguments presented -mixing distant imaginaries and narratives and engaging in dialogue and performance - denote the vitalities of ‘revolting’ against the absurdities of zero-point epistemologies. To effect subtle changes to the protocols and practices of HCI knowledge production and dissemination, the performance therein could be approached as a rhetorical compositions and not merely normative opinions to which one ought to respond as engaging in such an endeavor

²French literary theorist Hélène Cixous developed this genre of writing as a playful style of using mundane logic and language to understand the self and others. As a deviation from the more authoritarian mode of writing, Cixous argues that a more “feminine/diffusive” tone of expressing prior thoughts denotes how complex human social relations couldn’t be relegated to structuralist syntax. In a sense, “écriture féminine” is enacting a politics of difference where authors attempt to write the self and others out of the image constructed for the divided selves. I thank Charlie Gere for directing me to this.

³Specific to the AI ethicist for example, “this dilemma occurs in situations in which the means to achieve one’s goals are seemingly best achieved by supporting that which one wishes to correct and/or practising the opposite of that which one preaches” [33, p.39].

doesn’t exemplify “testimonial authority” [13] but encourages “testimonial smothering” [52]. Arguably, the attitude we attribute to or the level of persuasiveness we attach to our argument shape the perception of its value. Science and technology scholar Bruno Latour’s proposition that critique has run out of steam is relevant to the dilemma we afford ourselves as we attempt to dramatically express the subtleties of making sense of the madneses of zero-point epistemologies informing knowledge production and dissemination in HCI. As some have argued, intellectual critique across the academy is a “creative endeavor” [49] but more so a “pointless farce” [44]: the values of critique are in its performativity as a stylized circulation of existing ideas and opinions. From such an outlook, one might argue that the NordiCHI critique track perpetuates a measurement of emerging perspectives against the status quo of design and computing. With the academy as a free marketplace for extraction and exchange, historical baggage can be linguistically dressed and traded for capital. As an emerging scholar, why should we play this truth-telling game, as Foucault calls it? Regardless of such positionality, in the remainder of the paper, we indulge the readership to experience with affect the piece of text (and extended footnotes)⁴. But before doing so, we situate our arguments within the literature in HCI and the Nordic community.

2 POWER, KNOWLEDGE, AND POLITICS IN HCI

The field of HCI has continuously encouraged the adoption of complementary subjective approaches to understanding and designing interactive systems where the self is positioned as an instrument for inquiring into the dynamic of human-computer interactivity [47]. With the proliferation of first-person research in HCI, the community has demonstrated how inquiring and presenting truth is linked to the vocabularies and syntax of lived and storied realities as knowledge representation. Of specific relevance to our case are the concept of epistemic and citational justice, intermediate knowledge contribution, and positionality of authors as epistemic peers within a community of practices and field of studies such as HCI and interaction design.

First, epistemic justice and equality are not metaphors to be overtly resolved within the machinery of Eurocentric traditions. Both are continual political processes and not tokenistic intellectual events or exercises. Scholarly citation is a political and relational practice [52] as what we cite, how we cite, and why we cite have an

⁴It is important to note here that the quest for achieving something is perceived as an affirmative social force for experimentation with the logic of scientific thought: a dialectic movement towards the multiples of truth and knowledge. A recent experience from the UKRI Empirical Epistemology Network led to ideas about knowledge as an “epistemic achievement”. The workshop discussion got me thinking about different forms of knowledge contribution in HCI - general, contextual, common-sense, intermediate, situated, subjugated, lived-experience-led, craft-based etc [63] - and how granular discoveries from the processes of writing, reviewing and revising are dismissed from the construct of knowledge as an extendable vehicle for discovery and conformation. Some participants from the workshop point to how Western scientific rationality and objectivity, epistemologically, are not primarily concerned with the regime of truth. With knowledge as a mental state, the type of knowledge rendered in the strong science of HCI is that of coherence in epistemic situations where propositions of truth are registered within existing categories of sociability. The claim of epistemic achievement (or knowledge) emanated from the extent to which peers could clean up, condense, and select discoveries to confirm or conform to widely held doctrines. When such practices are left unattended, HCI might be relegated to the realm of epistemic scaparyard.

impact on the knowledge schemas in HCI. Within the fourth-wave HCI, one might argue that epistemologies (or theories of knowledge in HCI) are not merely free-hanging abstract ideals or concepts for understanding social relations, but rather powerful imaginaries that could inform (and reform) socio-technical and geo-political interactivity in specific ways.

Such views have led Kumar and Karusala [52] to argue that design knowledge production and dissemination is a designerly inquiry as we use our experiential first-order knowledge to decide on how to present such an understanding as a second-order knowledge that has the material and aesthetic utility of knowing. When such views are extended to the politics and ethics of design in HCI, then rhetorical citation could increase epistemic justice as diverse forms of knowledge are brought to the fore of the fourth-wave diversification efforts. Partly due to the extractive dimensions of academic knowledge creation and dissemination, there is the possibility of the exercise of elegant power through the discursive formation of HCI as a site of power, either by brute coercion or gentle persuasion [13]. Even when the HCI community has recognised the prevalence of epistemic and testimonial injustice in ITS knowledge practices, citational equality is not a cursory tool to be purchased. With the domestication of the formalised syntax of Western science in HCI, as authors, we are subjugated to testimonial smothering via the limited spaces for doubts and tell-tale cues, pre-defined interactivity with the readership etc. [52]. Such a practice is not new to HCI as Helen Oliver shared: "I added some more detail. It was still not enough detail. More reviewers demanded more detail and even more reviewers demanded even more detail, and a world of reviewers demanded a world of detail, and a universe of reviewers demanded a universe of detail" [31, p.3]. From the above, peer review appears to be peer sanction.

Second, the field of HCI has placed central to its diversification effort the need for accommodating diverse modalities of knowledge production and dissemination. This requirement has been exemplified across other disciplines that have demonstrated how powerful knowledge as a concept, or knowledge of the powerful as a concept in motion are differentiated, specialized, and situated. It is also commonplace that those who control the instrument of social communication and interaction have dispositional power, just as the West has used its epistemic and linguistic discoveries as an enlightenment tool for domination. Across science and technology studies, it is evident that technology and design are historically linked to power and knowledge relations; how knowledge is generated and presented will determine its acceptability and validity. The procedure of presentation is largely determined by the order of things in the social context in which knowledge is constructed and applied, which implies that the validity would depend on certain discursive patterns that are practised and domesticated in everyday relations.

Specific to modern knowledge systems, critical scholarship has shown how the polemics of power and knowledge relations are operationalized through the prohibition of certain claims and the rarefaction of others. For example, postcolonial scholar Edward Said [57] has sought to highlight how the discontinuity of the entire scientific discursive landscape denotes the bewitchment of human logic and language as a syllogistic mode of representing global knowledge systems, thus foregrounding the need for recognizing

the relevance of the other language, culture and value in knowledge creation. Subaltern scholar Gayatri Spivak [59] has also highlighted how the wider pool of contemporary knowledge is formed and domesticated by other discourses, particularly the dialectics between Western scientific protocols and indigenous knowledge practices. To demonstrate the limits of knowledge and power in the academy, both Spivak [59] and Said [57], for example, have engaged in the exercise of cracking the epistemic walls of modernity not only to encourage eliminating the architectural and structural systems of its compositions, but to facilitate debilitating the walls to be patched as it is through widening of modernities cracks that the institutional walls in HCI as an interdisciplinary can be dismantled (or diversified).

Third, HCI researchers and practitioners have placed a strong emphasis on more accessible and digestible knowledge practices where diverse knowledge systems are embodied within the culture of design and context of design e.g. annotated portfolio, manifesto, and strong bridging concepts [51, 61]. For example, researchers have examined the future of HCI knowledge practices where emphasis was placed on the "multisensory nature of human" values e.g. via painting, poetry, sculpture, games, audio, performance and so on, as a step towards reporting human perspectives in more accessible ways [60]. Winschiers-Theophilus et al. [62] have also adopted knowledge fairs as an embodied performance for evoking perspectives of knowledge that might be considered subjugated and differentiated. Recent knowledge studio session experimented with non-textual and more creative and artistic formats of academic documentation and expressions, which foregrounded the need for "more visual, auditory, or interactive forms of communication that allow for knowledge to flow more freely across linguistic boundaries" [60, p.2].

Specific to the Nordic community for example, Rutten and colleagues [56] argues that the first-person perspective offers a rich account of the processes and practices of designing a device for bodily awareness where activities, iterations and decisions are presented as layered annotation. The workbook allowed for identifying the taxonomy of collaborative and iterative design enterprise even when design documentations – in their reflective and communicate dimensions- are tedious. The authors highlighted the relevance of the workbook and annotation as creative methods that respond to the pervasive nature of open-ended design processes. The workbooks and annotations offered are not merely a narrative of distributed design activities and processes, but rather a traceable lineage of insights gained from design engagement, and the implicated of the iterations and explorations undertaken. From the effective practice of using the workbook and annotation as creative methods for documentation, we are to appreciate the layering and situating of knowledge as taxonomies to be reflected upon. Even with the premise of documentation as an evocative tool for first-person design and research, its adoption in their case study presents documentation as a collaborative mediator that allows for design to be generative, localised and situated.

Relatedly, Gislén succinct account of the values of using diaries as a means of reflective journaling highlighted how "engaging people in a reflection on and interpretation of their individual patterns of communication and movement in relation to their physical and

mental well-being. . . . the ongoing process of remembrance, of tying together current perceptions with previous events, the choosing of what matters, is a process we're all constantly involved in" [50, p.567]. Salazar and Borrero [58] reflective exchange as peers offered insights into the pervasive nature of design, politics and power. The conversational approach adopted to engagement demonstrated how any attempt to express our prior thoughts via writing entails continuously pulling and pushing the recollection of historical events, and often, internalizing specific cultural episodes at the expense of a greater truth. de Valk [46] adopted a montage writing style as an experimental method for mapping and invoking a narrative of the effect of technology domestication. By archiving live performances as a paper, the author demonstrated how features and expressions of the socio-technical are a starting point for more expanded exploration of technology, capitalism, patriarchy and domination in the pervasive Western scientific conception of design and innovation.

Furthermore, Lysbakken [54] visual essay questioned conventional ways in which scholarly research is presented and accepted across the design community. By reporting on the process of decoding and deconstructing gendered expressions in media platforms, the author was grappling with and pressing for a more grounded approach to writing, reporting, story-telling, and engaging positionality. Buenafe et al.'s [45] Yarn application is a platform for writing with effect where participants experimented with dramatizing the ineffable involved in creative writing. Consequently, the above narratives led to the question: when does a piece of academic research or design work become a reasonable and publishable contribution to HCI? [63]. When is a research paper an academic paper (or not) in HCI? [17, 24, 28]. For Wobbrock and Kientz [63], HCI and Interaction Design have witnessed the expansion of knowledge contributions across specific discursive and institutional sites. From empirical and artefact inventions to surveys and theoretical and methodological contributions, these communities have developed new ways of knowing, expressing, and experiencing the social world.

With the archival model of publications and the new hybrid conference culture, dear readership, are we not co-opted into a social contract where the pseudo-scientific model of "publish or perish" defines our work? [39]. Or should we consider Terry's proposal, "publish now, judge later" [38] – which, perhaps, denotes the lack of 'critical response sections' in HCI journals and conferences, and the limited space for 'pre-print criticism' or 'post-publication peer review' (See. [35]). Amplifying Marshal and colleagues' argument that "once a piece of HCI is in publication, it is unlikely to attract any critical discussion" [25, p.854], this reflection encourages a mix of exchange and performance between the fictitious author, the anonymous reviewers, and the potential readership.

Fourth, the evocative writing therein (and extended note) is an ongoing unveiling of my thought process as I attempt to make sense of the madness of the zero-point epistemologies of Western scientific framing of HCI. It also signifies a receptive defiance to obligatory thoughts, but more so, a reconciliation of the epistemological breakage of the personal and the political. As Gislén rightly pointed out, the "on-going documentation of one's own life" . . . can also "be regarded as a matter of personals style and choice in making our lives comprehensible" [50, p.567]. This is particularly attempting to highlight how social patterns of organization, for

example capitalist model of articulating and communicating the mundane, have become internalised as acceptable modes of being. Often, opinion essays debate, provoke, and persuade specific ideals using supporting perspectives or evidence to warrant acceptability within a community.

As far back as 1996, "experience papers" were considered as contributing to knowledge in HCI where practitioners are encouraged to reflect on the experiences of the socio-technical world as a form of historical briefing or making [63]. Such tradition could be extended here as we alternate between abstract ideas and political praxis in writing about the self as a subjugated body of work. As Adamu rightly pointed out, reflecting on the effect of experiencing (as in living and labouring) the academy ought not to be relegated as a complaint, a rant [37, 41]: "The activity of complaining is not merely embracing a common language of argumentation, but one of explicitly inserting one's intentionality, positionality, and subjectivity into a discourse which is otherwise theoretical" [2, p.159]. Overtly, the culture of the academy has internalized the values of "panopticon" as we continuously regulate our collection and recollection of storied realities and histories (via the soft techniques of powers such as ethics committee, writing style, peer review, acceptance rate, impact factors etc) to present a disenchanting account of the social world⁵. As a community of peers, how can we become otherwise to enact epistemic justice and equality in our analysis and reporting?

3 TO BECOME OR TO BE?

As much as Howard Becker has demonstrated in the sociological study of marijuana users, becoming a user requires a progression through various stages – learning to get the effects, learning to recognize the effects and learning to appreciate the effects of the instrument [42]. As an epistemic exercise, I first wanted to tell a story (or perhaps not). In my modest upbringing, we hardly call out someone who is not telling the truth as a liar, we usually say they are telling stories, and perhaps, as an African, one would not want to be attributed too strongly to telling stories. I wanted to confess instead. Confession! Are you a sinner? Often associated with Catholicism, confession is considered a technique of truth-telling, governmentality, and technologies of the self. As a Muslim, the first line of confession involves the verbalisation of *أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ*, which means "I seek forgiveness from Allah". So, if I were to confess, would it be directed first to the reviewer and then the readers, or would it be an internal dialogue with the self? It is evident that 'self-revelation' can be 'self-destruction' as one might be exposed to unnecessary criticism and sympathy. How then can we embrace confession as a method of truth-telling in HCI scholarship where reviewing is approached as "a mix of critique, exchange and performance"? [24, p.8]. And perhaps the reviews and rebuttal (as in corroboration and not controversion) of this salvaged paper will speak for themselves, even when strongly objected by the reviewer 2 [17]. We gave in! Publish or Perish in action.

⁵The Foucauldian concept of 'panopticon' has been widely adopted as a metaphor for analysing how systems of regulation are internalised in the consciousness of subjects by the soft instruments of power and knowledge. The discipline culture of the 'panopticon' works not through constant surveillance but by the institution of self-regulating and harmonizing mechanisms that unconsciously inflict the necessity to conform to certain orders of society.

Initially, the piece was meant to be a dialogue between myself and one of my PhD advisors. The motivation behind the dialogue was this: white straight males are becoming a subjugated group of people in modernistic discourses, demonized as the problems of the world: poor white men, from white burden to white guilt. Frustrated by the experiences in the CHI review process⁶, as a reviewer and an author, I thought about experimenting with the idea of 'passing – as in writing as a straight white male, considering that personhood has been figuratively detached from authorship using pseudonyms⁷. I approached my main PhD supervisor with the idea of writing a paper together, where we alternate positions, and essentially becoming heteronyms of interconnected entities that are distinctively separate but paternally alike. The assumption was that in between those moments of playfulness a new baroque practice of self-writing the other might emerge.

The concept of passing warrant little attention here. As we come to understand, blackness and whiteness reflect an orientation, an attitude. Acting white or passing as white via writing are two different embodied experiences. Acting is a conscious choice of mating class and race, the practice of performing colourism and classism, whereas passing is the self-reification of a mindset by its symbiotic performance. On both fronts, a noticeable example is experience of a white woman named Norah Vincent who experimented with acting/passing as a straight white male. Norah wanted to understand what it means to be a white straight male in the USA⁸. Unfortunately, she was so horrified by what "it feels" to be a white straight man (and not what "it is" to be a white-Man as Feud could not answer what it is that women want, nor could one sensibly say what a woman is without being censored), that she committed suicide. Thus, attempting to act/pass as a white straight male is a reactionary pursuit as any attempt to fit into the image fabricated for the other does not equate to a conscious expression of being. The idea of confessing and passing were both discounted, instead, I wanted to use the gifts and pains of receiving a Western education in politicizing the vocabularies of archival knowledge production and presentation in HCI.

Building on Late Biko Steve's Frank talk 'I write what I like', I reflect on the vitalities of alternating between abstract ideas and political praxis. . . the Self, Gaze, Subjectivity, Deconstruction, Defiance, Protest, and Laziness. In essence, I write about writing the self

as a subjugated body of work⁹. Using the pseudonym 'Liberation Scripts', Steve Biko engaged in the politics of self-writing as an exposé of the underlying philosophy of the black consciousness movement in South Africa [5]. I wanted to deliberately defy and disobey the epistemic conditions of knowledge production and dissemination in HCI: Are we to be censored, dismissed, or accepted? Wait, who decides though? Reviewer 2 or the Associate Chair, or the entire community? Such questions have resurfaced across the wider research community, an issue that we'll not extensively indulge in this paper (see. [48, 53, 55])

To present our case, we drew on abstractions across disciplines such as protest literature and slow scholarship that have shown how the moral responsibility of the intellectual ought to be politics and the public [20, 30]. For Ndubele, the protest "literature works this way: the more the brutality of the system is dramatized, the better; the more exploitation is revealed and starkly dramatized, the better".... "literature that refuses to be enjoyed precisely because it challenges 'conventional' methods of literary representation, and that it painfully shows up the ogre to himself, implicitly indicting; it is demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority. It keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, obliterating the details. It provokes identification through recognition and feeling rather than through observation and analytical thought. It calls for emotion rather than conviction; it establishes a vast sense of presence without offering intimate knowledge; it confirms without necessarily offering a challenge. It is the literature of the powerless, identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness" [30, p.149-150].

Arguably, the paradox confronting the modern intellectual is that of historical ignorance and political censorship. As a post-colonialized subject seeking to redirect the disciplinary gaze, we adopt the vocabularies of speculative exposition to denote the artistic values of our argument. We argue that the crisis of the African intellectual, from earlier postcolonial studies to African literature centres around the crisis of Eurocentric education and Nationalist culture [29]. The idea of gazing back denotes the purposive embrace of the instruments of power in redefining the values directing the relations among knowledge producers and their subjects of inquiry. As such, we want the reader to appreciate the sensation of constantly being told to be an obedient subject, to know and think under the academy's gaze. By dramatizing situated and subjugated perspectives, the exercise henceforth is to "stay with the trouble" of layering and dismantling the composite of the ordinary, as it is through those purposive acts of "doing the doing" that we, as a community, might begin to foreground specific expressions of knowledge as intermediate and interpretive.

⁶Recent CHI reviews experiences suggest, to some degree, Euro-American colleagues see little importance in providing contextual details about their work. The common assumption is that the Euro-American perspective is universal, we don't need to know from the title or abstract that the project reported was conducted in Hamburg and Hawaii, we should know better as if novel work in HCI only emanates from those spaces.

⁷This was not new as Victorian women published work using pen-names that responded to the masculine culture of acceptable scholarship. See. <https://advait-sarkar.wordpress.com/2024/01/14/ai-can-be-an-author-without-being-a-person/>

⁸The use of the term wants (or wanting), as in human fundamental desire in life is problematic but also polemic from the seemingly controversial Freudian frame of "what do women want". Following Karl Marx, one might argue that Freud's question was merely to blur the pictured Man-as-human inadequacy as a being. Often, we embrace the simple idea that Man is by nature conditioned to engage in useful enterprises, those that fit the realm of necessity and freedom. For necessity, we satisfy our natural wants as reproductive beings by engaging in enterprises that make us "feel useful", whereas, for freedom, we embrace purposive/informative activities that make us "useful beings". However, when these dialectics are dissolved, Man's prime want is "to feel" and not "to be".

⁹The problematisation of the self can take two forms [3]. First, we attempt to inquire into self-imaginaries - as set of ideas, connotations, norms, and beliefs that frame what is knowable and thinkable for a subject - to gather anecdotes that could provide the basis for escaping the disciplinary enclave of our academic culture. This is primarily framing the self as a subjugated body of work that necessitates a continual process of concession, compromise, and negation of the assemblage of historical and futuristic perspectives. Second, we attempt to deconstruct self-imaginaries via deconstructive writing as a step towards affirmation of the subjectivities of the bifurcate self. For example, the activity of walking has been characterised as a second re-birth, an escape from the maternal relationship. As a decisive act of avoiding natural enclosure, walking denotes how we're in a continual state of rediscovering ourselves beyond bipolar categories, as Bidwell has reminded us [4]. Thus, deconstructive writing the self as an object of inquiry entails an exercise of tracing/trailing emerging ideas about the self (and/or for the other). To write is to be political as writing is not merely a matter of factuality, but more so, a matter of politicality.

3.1 The promise of Nationalist culture

As an early career researcher, there is the temptation to explore a wide range of issues in HCI or be embedded in the chaos of multiplicity that is inherent in its discourses. I often wonder, am I epistemologically pre-conditioned to be a postcolonial or decolonial HCI researcher? Although the projects I am actively involved in while writing this piece have little to do with the global south, identity politics and the geopolitics of design forcefully inform my thinking. I am often self-reminded, overtly, that the colour of my skin is sticky. I am African, and the African condition is my primary subject matter of inquiry. My perceived Western imaginary suggested that one could profit from the HCI prose game by engaging in epistemic competition. With the academy as a free marketplace for extraction and exchange, historical baggage can be linguistically dressed and traded for capital. As an emerging scholar, why should we play this truth-telling game, as Foucault calls it? What this might suggest is that there is a tendency for an asymmetrical relation between the needed accountability to our research subjects and our disciplinary flagship readership. What I am getting at is this: how can we mainstream a political process of epistemic protest in HCI that makes clear the power dimensions of knowledge production and dissemination? Put differently, how can we, as those labouring in the Western academy become more aware of the slippery practices of comprador intellectualism? [11]. And how can we go about “doing the doing” to effect changes from within, and not merely “doing the documentation” needed to solidify the imaginary constructed of those at the fringe of disciplines?

In the economic sphere, compradors were individuals who willingly aided Portuguese imperialism in China via their purposeful facilitation in the exploration of community commonwealth. As local agents, the compradors are characterized as negotiating and safeguarding the business interests of colonialist establishments. In postcolonial studies for example, Hamid Dabashi viewed comprador intellectuals as diasporic cultural brokers that engages in the practice of selling mental labour via their dual positionality as either compliance/defiance butlers of globalist ideals [10]. Often, these transnational scholars capitalize on the hegemony of Western discourses by attempting to “write back to empire” using ethnocentric discursive syntax, thus amplifying the marginality of non-Western cultures. In postcolonial studies, the initial emphasis on writing back to empire did not espouse transformative analysis of existing discourses, but rather engages in incremental analysis of the political character of mainstream narratives in that that overtly upheld the hegemonic practices of Western knowledge systems.

Furthermore, Edward Said emphasizes how the diasporic positionality of the exilic intellectual often subsumes them as “casual thinkers and reporters” operating within the fridge of disciplines [34]. By exporting ideas, data, and knowledge about locales, the comprador is commissioned to import class-based doctrines that further solidify the stereotyped image of the Orient/Occident. From the above, Said and Dabashi have sought to emphasize how those intellectuals are “re-actors” that prey on the whim of dominant discourses, and their “re-action” doesn’t equate to any substantial access to institutional power nor demonstrate personal conviction.

Building on the thesis above, one might speculate on the vocation of the African intellectual in HCI. Are we responsible members of

society that engage in exercises that form (and not merely inform) new regimes of indigenous knowledge or are we responsive entities that are embodied within dominant cultures of knowledge creation? Regardless of each position, there is the question of whether the African intellectual and by extension African HCI researcher might be entrapped in the bubble of brokering for power. How can we identify (or be identified) as/with one?

In the sections that follows, I provide some directions on how protesting, as a sort of attitudinal exercise, explicates different facets of self-inflicted powerlessness by the insistence on being or becoming an African scholar. This mode of reflection, alternating between abstract ideas and political praxis dramatically and comically, denotes a progression of becoming a political subject that encounters (and could counter) the culture of the academy [19].

3.2 The effect of Eurocentric education

The crisis of the twenty-first century is the problem of the power line, the colour line has been accumulated. Growing up in a large extended family, it is obvious that I was born into a power structure that is cultural, political, and maternal. As the last child of parents who were both first children, I was inducted into a system of recognition that can either privilege or disadvantage me as a child and an adult. The cultural expectation placed on my parent is that of labouring for other’s sake – my father, to solidify the family status in close society, and my mother, to ensure the attitudinal alignment of those that would lead in the future. The tasks were taxing for both. The pedagogical expectations placed on their offsprings are that of ‘learning’ and ‘labouring’. But how?

For African American philosopher Cornel West [40], under the Bourgeois model, the intellectual is perceived as a cultural artist who is the bearer of universal unraced truth. In the Marxist tradition, however, the intellectual takes up the role of a political activist who embraces social organization as worthy intellectual exercises. Often, these individuals act as community-wide organizers and spokespersons e.g. black preaches, and artistic performances in the US context. In the Foucauldian model, intellectuals are attributed with a strong anti-bourgeois sentiment and post-Marxist conviction where one is to problematize the political economy of the regime of truth, power, and knowledge. Finally, the insurgency model of the organic catalyst sought to develop a critical consciousness of the individual self and others via the continual politicizing of social life e.g., DuBois and Fanon’s autobiographic projects. For both DuBois and Fanon, however, the organic intellectual must grapple with the “myth of representation” in black literature as the authenticity thesis often slips into a self-imposed marginal via the commodification of personal and political life to gain recognition¹⁰. How is this

¹⁰My PhD research was funded by proceeds of the Nigeria national oil company, and Nic Bidwell suggested I reflect on my intersectional positionality considering issues associated with the inequality/injustice in the oil sector. This is calling into question my decolonial orientation as it intersects with the politics of privilege and marginalisation, and the issue raised here pertains to the volatile relationship between industry funding and traditional Research enterprises [18]. Such question necessitate critical aware of how funders’ standing could inform Research agenda and findings [1], and how funding configuration, as in the flow of capital and expertise, can direct knowledge production/concentration of the diasporic intellectual [32]. Therefore, I acknowledge my subtle privileges as an ECR experimenting with conflicting norms of the academy – where often I am deliberating being sloppy and witty to make a case. This is important to the NordiCHI critique and alt.CHI track as some have argued that the research practices of HCI might have inadvertently encouraged limited critical

labouring and learning an effect of Eurocentric education? Let me explain further.

In the popular culture of the West, Emily Bootle’s exposé: “This Is Not Who I Am: Our Authenticity Obsession” has shown how the authenticity culture has oversimplified what it means to be a Human being, beyond Man. Specific to the conception of Being, German philosopher Martin Heidegger posed the fundamental question as to why there is always an emphasis on something and not nothing in the social - in essence, Me! You! Us Human! Them Aliens¹¹. From Plato’s framing of being as an idea or a logos, to Kant’s proposition of Being as a transcendental character of a position, and to Aristotle’s invention of being as logical truth or as an instrumental ladder to truth propositions, Being in the metaphorical sense is not identical to reality. Being is neither an actuality of existence nor a necessity of an existential appearance [9]¹². As Heidegger noted in his seminal work ‘Being and Time’, the polity of Being across history denotes an act of escaping the phenomenological grounding of existence as given, of avoiding the structural framework of things, for example, Me by my alias/name as such. On a meta-level, the Heideggerian understanding Being with/ and through Time outlines how the specific thinghood of things, such as the alias that was allocated to me by my maternal grandfather become a common identifier of this bodily thing as [my given names].

From this thinging as [my Names, African, HCI researcher etc], I am forcefully co-opted to live and labour on the edge of disciplines as a protester against or hustler for specific ideals [my anatomical, nationalist, or ethnic identity]. Also, the thinging, as in the cognitive fitting into the societal image of who I am (or might be), arguably, suppresses genuine creativity as one operates through fixated syntax of problematization. By problematizing the structuring of subject/and subjectivity as given, one is attempting to defy the abstraction of social relations as objective truth. Below are two attempts at reflecting on the storied experiences of living and working within the veil of the academy, with a silenced voice performance to the first readership and an iconographic comic as an engaging offering in exchange.

4 HOW TO BECOME DISGRUNTLED AND DISOBEDIENT

As noted by Erete and colleagues, an intersectional analysis of power in HCI’s knowledge structures entails largely using methods

engagement of imported arguments, thereby, presenting ‘mainstream HCI’ as ‘not integrating criticism’ in its analysis and discussions [25, p. 854].

¹¹When even I attribute Martin Heidegger to the conception of Being in the modern world, I am reminded of his associated with the Nazi Party of Germany as the rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933. As a philosopher, Heidegger has been tagged a ‘philotyranical intellectual’ that is hunted by his political choices or nihilism.

¹²With Heidegger’s conception of Being as *das Ding*, Critchley noted how Emmanuel Levinas’s phenomenology of writing about the ethics of encountering the other in the self entails “an aesthetic presentation that breaches” supposedly objective “aesthetics and breaks with the order of presentation and presence. . . . Levinas’s strangely hyperbolic rhetoric is to intimate or testify to a dimension of the unthematizable Saying within the thematic of the Said that, for him, characterises philosophical discourse. . . . Levinas writing might be seen as an anti-aesthetic aesthetic as it shows the necessity for the passage from the Saying to the Said, the Said that is justified through being derived from a prior Saying. . . . In this sense, Levinasian ethics would not simply be a one-way street from the Same to the Other, but would also, in a second move, consist in a return to the Same, but a Same that had been altered in itself” [9, p.79].

that explicate the disciplines colonializing dimensions [14]. This could take the form of critical self-reflection where situated experiences and subjugated perspectives are rendered as by-products of the operationalization of power. Embracing one’s epistemic agency and testimonial authority [14], the politics of dramatic documentation requires more creative and illustrative methods of responding to/ or reporting on the madresses of zero-point epistemologies. And as an exhibit of “Frank Talk”, defiance entails working against the logic, vocabularies, and dialectic of the scientific community, whereas, disobedience, either epistemic or pedagogical, calls for delinking/detaching from the zero-point epistemological orders [27]. Both purposive activities involve thinking in the exteriority of the logic of Western epistemes and then dwelling in the borders of geo-bodily politics of knowledge. More recently, Gamboa, Ljungblad, and Sturdee, presented “Conversational Composites: a flexible method grounded in the material and tangible qualities of sketching in different forms and media, creating physical and digital layers” [16, p.1]. As an illustrative method of knowledge production and dissemination, composites enable scaffolding the textures, layers and fragments of diverse experiences and perspectives as knowledge. Thus, the logic of the composites encourages engaging in a sort of self-care espoused by Michel Foucault in the institutional studies of schools, prison, and sexuality as foundational features of contemporary discourses.

4.1 The disgruntled, “angry” black man!

The popular media in Northern America presents the image of a black man as profoundly angry. Often, the black man is told to calm down, be cool, don’t Vex! From boyhood to manhood, one might argue that black males are not loved and respected but rather openly “named and stereotyped” and then overtly “feared and desired”. This is not an understatement of the lived realities of being a male as a quantifier that Norah Vincent experimented with as with limited avenues to express manly temperaments in real life, there is the tendencies to relegate to compulsive acting out of inner fantasies and frustrations. Often, the black man is painted as: “brawn over brain, muscle over mind” [43], thus assigned an imagery with no intellectual, cultural, or moral faculty afforded to the Man-as-Human. The assigned imagery is also sexualized as an agential being that does not have non-sexualize potency, and perhaps, the effect of such a mode of reasoning is that images have the potential to control human behaviours and actions in specific ways.

In this part, I present an AUDIO NOTE (anonymized as-in omitted to minimize any unconscious reviewer and reader bias) where I reflect on how women’s writings have informed my becoming by learning from the institutional protest of women as often their labour is rendered as immaterial. By engaging in some sort of dialogue as a reflective practitioner with the selection of authors (from PhD students [26, 41], to black women in computing and HCI [6, 8, 13, 36], and scholars/activists [21–23]), one is in a transitional stage of continual learning (and re-learning). As reflective practitioners in HCI, we are encouraged to problematize the regime of knowledge, however, any attempt to change the terms of the conversation (and not merely the content) can be perceived as an exercise of power over and with the self. To Benedetta [41], Leslia



Figure 1: Affective iconography of an engagement with earlier draft of the paper

[8], and Débora [21]: care of the self is the basis of social life, keep doing what you are doing, the power is in doing the doing. The Iron Lady, Margaret Thatcher, once noted “If you want anything said, ask a man. If you want anything done, ask a woman.” To mansplain, parasitism can be productive [33].

4.2 The disobedient, “wild” black boy!

As a concluding remark, my first readership, Mirian Calvo, presents an AFFECTIVE ICONOGRAPHY in Figure 1 of frank engagement with the text as an exercise of being a part of the exercise of attempting to write the self and others out of the image constructed for the divided selves. The exchange is not meant to be supplementary material in the traditional sense of archival publication, but rather a demonstration of the affective wandering that deconstructive writing espouses. The visual mapping of our interactivity, as in tracing/trailing the mating of ideas about the self (and others), inaugurates a reflective practice for provoking more intimate conversation about the difficulties of becoming and being an early career researcher in HCI. With both becoming and being as a progression through discursive spaces - of learning to get the effects, learning to recognize the effects and learning to appreciate the effects of defying the norms of HCI knowledge production and dissemination [42] - one ought to decide on whether taking side is a worthy intellectual pursuit, for or against a proposition, to be or

not to be in the academy. As an emerging researcher who aspires for epistemic justice and equality, I choose to problematize the self as a discursive entity worthy of scholarly consideration. Perhaps soon, as a collective, we could transcend the abstract boundaries imposed on artistic expressions in our community. It is common knowledge that the structures of society are given form and value by saying and acting upon a set of imaginaries, and any attempt to defy them puts one in a state of ontological anarchy. As Audre Lorde reminded us: “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”. For now, I write what I like and how I like.

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