

The Snake – Writing Workshop with Yvette Bathgate

Engaging in a dialogue with some of the works in Delaine Le Bas' exhibition [The Snake](#), the workshop allowed participants to produce pieces of collective writing and making, exploring the dream-like space of possibility, fantasy and being-together. Taking inspiration from one of the works in the show, we recreated its imaginary, dream-like land through pieces of collaborative writing. Through a tacit agreement between everyone in the room, the workshop space becomes a place where individual authorship could be shed, and stories could be made together.

We first generated a collection of collectively authored stories through an exercise of automatic writing, similar to a game of exquisite corpse, where we were invited to contribute to a story in turn by each adding a word or a short sentence. Belonging to everyone and no-one, these stories—playful, funny, unruly—were everyone's responsibility, as we all took part in the process of their making, yet no one could be held individually accountable for them, as no one could claim control over the final direction that each story took. While it took place orally, each of the participants in turn acted as a recorder for a story they were not contributing to: this meant exploring another layer of responsibility related to the weight of bias, point of view and the limitations of the transmission of a message or a memory that does not belong to you. What does it mean to record—what does the recording leave out, what's the recorder's bias, what sticks to them and reveals their individuality.

From this, we moved onto the landscape where these stories may take shape. Drawing directly from one of the pieces in the exhibition, a mixed-media watercolour with screenprint depicting an imaginary snake-shaped island, which we recalled being Medusa's Island, we set upon reproducing it onto the sheets of newsprint that covered the table around which we were seated. Perhaps as a result of the tacit agreement we had entered into by first showing up for the workshop, then taking part in the first exercise, we all worked together, moving around the table to attend to different parts of the drawing, rather than focusing on discrete sections. We explored different ways of mark-making, both direct, with pencils, crayons, water, and indirect, through stencils and carbon paper transfers.

Almost seamlessly, we went on to place some of what we had previously recorded on this landscape. Both because the terrain we were working on had been drawn collectively, and because the words and images we were copying into it were not ours alone, we found ourselves intertwined to one another. This prompted conversations around legitimacy—have you got the right to tell a story that's not yours? Is any story yours, or are we borrowing from a shared pool?—authorship, and the care and attention needed to handle someone else's words—and perhaps all images and words.

We then considered the table, covered in our tangled marks, deeply dependent and contingent upon their surroundings, even when they could be recognised as having been made by a specific person. The 'Island' we had come to realise was in itself a kind of recording, an echo chamber that received and held our tangled words, while already a memory—or a dream—of something else, the original work in Delaine Le Bas' exhibition.

We took some time for more reflective writing individually, with the invitation to use the texts already generated in the first part of the workshop, as well as the Island itself. The texts such

generated were widely different, yielding to found poetry, streams of consciousness or works with a more visual element.

We had handled, channelled and echoed each other's words and stories paying attention to the care and responsibility that was required. In a space that, populated by Delaine's works but separate from the original exhibition space, was an alternate, dream-like space, we had come to make a body of entangled, shared and collective stories. When it came to the end of the workshop, knowing they belonged to the group as a whole but did not have a place to exist outside of the workshop space, ours and not any of our own, we let go of them. The table returned to being just a table as we discarded the papers that covered it, shedding away our writing and drawing and mark-making—it had taken us where we were, shaped us in the space of an afternoon, and that was enough.

—*Enxhi Mandija*