

A WILD PATIENCE HAS TAKEN ME THIS FAR: WRITING-IN-PROCESS ABOUT PROCESSES OF CREATING LESBIANITIES THROUGH WRITING, READING AND CIRCULATION OF TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This work was initially conceived as a term paper for a graduate course on ethnography and textuality, proposing an experimental approach to writing in order to discuss, from a post-structuralist perspective, gender and genre in the ethnographic practice. It is based on the author's Masters' dissertation on periodical lesbian publications in Brazil in the 1980s and 1990s and their creation and circulation through correspondence networks, creating spaces for identity elaboration, writing experimentation and political construction. Taking such circulation of personal messages as a starting point and inspiration for an experimental aesthetic proposal for emulating the epistolary genre, this text was built using e-mails and a handwritten letter, with digression as a textual strategy and the impossibility of editing as a

1. Article developed during a scholarship granted by Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES).

KEYWORDS
Lesbianities; Brazilian lesbian
press; textual anthropology;
literacies; genre; gender.

motor for an incremental, fragmentary creation of this work's arguments. References to reflections, conversations and discussions held in class, alternating between registers (formal/colloquial), and other textual marks remain as evidences of dialogic processes with the professors which were this text's original addressees and with the author herself. During writing, the *digression* process leads to a change in the very concerns and focuses of the proposed work, allowing considerations about shifts, discoveries and frustrations within ethnographic research and ethnographical writing.

PREAMBLE

From: me
To: Revista GIS

Wed, Mar 13th, 2019, 7:39 p.m.

Subject: Re: A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far: Writing-in-Process About Processes of Creating Lesbianities through Writing, Reading and Circulation of Texts

Dear Editors,

First, I'd like to congratulate you for organizing this special issue and to thank you for understanding the experimental aesthetical and political approach that has guided the execution of this work. I have made some (few) orthographical corrections, as recommended by the reviewers (accepting also some minor changes made by them in the submitted draft), considering they would not significantly harm the original non-editing proposal.

Some footnotes were included to provide translations to quotes originally in other languages or to add some information. I agree with the recommendation, as stated by one the reviewers, that several theoretical concepts were less discussed than just referred to. Such characteristic is partially due to the original aim of this work: the initial intended readers of this text, professors Adriana Facina, Adriana Carvalho Lopes and Carolina Rocha, responsible for the "Ethnography as a Textual Practice" course, held in 2017 at Brazil's National Museum, had already discussed

in class most of the works cited here and had allowed me to use them this way. I also deem relevant the same reviewer's criticism to my verbosity (and would have erased some information that should perhaps only be present in personal communications). By preserving such shortcomings in the final draft, I keep the aesthetical commitment adopted by the non-editing proposal: what happens when a text (for instance, a letter), conceived for a specific public, ends up being read (and analyzed) by an unexpected audience?

The names of the author and of the original addressees of this work, that I had previously removed to avoid any biases in the double-blinded review, were reinserted in the text. I have also included the complete references to my previous works.

Sincerely,
Carolina Maia

[Show trimmed content]

Thu, Nov 15th, 2018, 10:39 p.m.

Dear Editors,

Here attached are two documents: the first is a series of e-mails I have written to myself and then sent to the professors who taught Name of The Graduate Course in 2017; the second is a letter I have handwritten *on the road*, in an interstate bus, to complement the first messages. The purpose, as you will see, was to write a text in which *a posteriori* edition would not be possible: that's the reason of this message, and why an e-mail chain to myself: so, I would be prevented from withdrawing any previous remarks. The two aforementioned documents are condensed in this one, keeping, nevertheless, its characteristics and formatting (including its lack of consistence), with the premise that the design of the e-mails is an integral part of the experience of reading them, causing effects on its possible readers. Only two sections were not present in the original documents: this little preamble and the references, that I have added now, when submitting this text.

I have taken the liberty to submit a work whose total number of words exceeds by a little what was recommended in the journal's instructions to authors. Therefore, I humbly ask for the admission of this format because, as indicated above, not editing the material was a key principle of its elaboration. I am open to negotiating this, as you see fit and necessary.

Best regards,
Carolina Maia

Subject: A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far: Writing-in-Process About Processes of Creating Lesbianities through Writing, Reading and Circulation of Texts

From: me

Fri, Jun 23rd, 2017, 11:40 p.m.

To: me

“All new learning looks at first / like chaos”, says *Adrienne Rich in her poem Powers of Recuperation*. I have inscribed these lines in the wall of my room as soon as I moved to Rio de Janeiro, in the beginning of my Masters’ and of the new stage it opened in my life.

Adrienne Rich, a US-American, Jewish, white lesbian poet is a personal reference for many reasons (starting with her classic *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* – a text with a sound reverberation in the field I’ve studied in my Masters’ research) and someone I believe will show up often along this work. In the same poem, published in her last anthology,

Tonight no poetry will serve: poems 2007-2010 (published in the year before her death, when she was over 80 years old), the lines “She’s old, old, the incendiary / woman // endless beginner” really impressed me – the idea that such an established author could create such a vivid image of being elderly, of a trajectory in constant actualization, and of new experiments: “to scribble testimony by fingernail and echo / her documentary alphabet still evolving”. I bring here those lines because I believe that the experiment I intend to do here also requires learning how to write a term paper in a new fashion, something that’s still a bit untidy and loose and yet reinvigorating, that will require endless new beginnings.

First, I’d like to thank you for the possibility of experimenting a less orthodox narrative style in this work. I was glad to hear from Adriana Facina the recommendation that we could feel free to “be daring” in our term papers – that instruction me a new encouragement to my writing. Today’s class, especially the commentaries to Jan Blommaert’s works, was really fruitful and offered new ways to think the fieldwork I have already conducted and that resulted in the dissertation produced here in PPGAS/MN² (in which I have studied publications produced by the Brazilian lesbian movement – more on that later). I’d like to use this author to start defining the purpose of the present work. Blommaert offers an interesting reflection from his notion of *repertoire*:

2. Post-Graduate Program in Social Anthropology – National Museum, under the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

repertoire is the totality of the communicative resources, knowledge about their function and their conditions of use, and all of this is a very concrete matter. It is not enough to say that 'literacy' is part of someone's repertoire: it matters which particular literacy resources are there. [...] Thinking about repertoires forces us to abandon totalising notions in the field of language and communication, and to replace them with terms that identify actual, specific practices. The range of factors we need to consider in analysing literacy, consequently, is expanded and now includes social, cultural, historical and political factors (Blommaert 2007, 7-8).

By inscribing *literacies* in global power relations, without taking into account specific local factors that concern textual production, the author goes on by distinguishing possible different literacies regarding the very way of writing – one thing is knowing how to handwrite, using a pen and a piece of paper; another one is to show agility when typing (bearing in mind, as he does, that typing configured a specific profession back in a recent past); even the skill of writing texts within a “computer literacy” opens different doors, for instance, in the labor market for middle-class people with some degree of formal education. That “*computer literacy*”, says Blommaert, “quickly occupies a status position in the repertoires of its users as a ‘higher’ and more sophisticated form of literacy; it starts dominating certain writing genres and transforms them – think of e-mail as the new form of ‘correspondence’” (2007, p. 8). Throughout our course, we have talked a lot about hegemonic (as well as counter-hegemonic) ways of writing, and it should be no wonder that I chose to highlight this specific quote on more “sophisticated” forms of literacy and written expressions. More than that, I identify there (now, as I write) what could have been, without my awareness at the time of conceiving it, the germ of my current proposal: e-mail as a specific correspondence form, the transformation of genres... Without further delay, I can finally outline the proposal for my term paper:

[pause. think. breath in: it is there, and you know it. write it. endless beginnings³. how many pauses, how many new starts, how much gasping and gapping and grasping, are rendered invisible in the long-winded form of the “treatise”, to use Raja’s formulation on Austin (or else, about what Austin didn’t do) in our class at Fundão⁴? the idea here is precisely to play with it. isn’t it?]

Well, then. My idea, here, is to play, articulating (and citing, by which I mean both proper scientific citation and wider citation/iteration processes, how that performative effects happen precisely because the cited meaning is recognized in some way, as proposed by Butler in her use

3. This sentence was already in English in the original draft, quoting Rich.

4. “Fundão” is the name of a UFRJ campus, where professor Kanavillil Rajagopalan (Unicamp), or Raja, ministered a lecture on John Austin within the course from which this text is a result.

of Derrida*) different writing genres. The most obvious one, as the quote by Blommaert above may indicate, is the epistolary genre, transformed and brought up to date in the e-mail form. Another inspiration is the fragmented writing described by Gloria Anzaldúa (2000) in her *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers*, an epistolary exhortation addressed to racialized women, whose access to writing has been hindered by a white, male literary hegemony, so they don't stop writing (the dialogue with Blommaert's ideas seems quite evident to me, but maybe I should get back to it later). It's an inspiration because reading this text (although I, a white woman, I'm not the reader Anzaldúa may have envisioned) always sets into motion ways of overcoming my obstacles to writing. "I write because I'm scared of writing but I'm more scared of not writing" (Anzaldúa 2009, 30)⁵ was another sentence inscribed in my room's walls, during the process of elaborating my Masters' dissertation... It could have been yet another, in the following page (31) of the same essay: "The problem is to focus, to concentrate. The body distracts, sabotages with a hundred ruses, a cup of coffee, pencils to sharpen", and she goes on:

Distractions all – that I spring on myself when I'm so deep into the writing, when I'm almost at that place, that dark cellar where some 'thing' is liable to jump up and pounce on me. The ways I subvert the writing are many. The way I don't tap the well nor learn how to make the windmill turn.

Eating is my main distraction. Getting up to eat an apple danish. That I've been off sugar for three years is not a deterrent nor that I have to put on a coat, find the keys, and go out into the San Francisco fog to get it. Getting up to light incense, to put a record on, to go for a walk-anything just to put off the writing.

Returning after I've stuffed myself. Writing paragraphs on pieces of paper, adding to the puzzle on the floor, to the confusion on my desk, making completion far away and perfection impossible. (Anzaldúa 2000, 233).

I want to dismantle once and for all the pretension, as pretentious (and narcissistic, neurotic) as it is unrealistic, of aiming at perfection. I am adopting the epistolary genre to impose some temporality to my writing, to shatter some possible cohesions, to deviate arguments and, paradoxically, turn feasible their construction. In this tone I'm discovering now – ideally less formal, set into motion by a tone loosely committed (or less committed) to the canon that we developed during our classes –, I hope to find a more light-minded writing. In it, there is also some playing with dialogic: I write to you, Adriana Facina, Adriana Lopes, Carolina Rocha; at the same time, at least for now, you'll be absent from

5. The original draft cited Anzaldúa 2000, p. 232.

this dialogue: for now, I'll write with and to myself [*literally, I mean: in the process, I am going to write to my own e-mail address, replying again to myself, and in the end I will compile all messages and send them to you – well, I think it should be obvious by now: you are reading this, aren't you?*]. And another literary genre enters the scene now: the diary, so fundamental to the practice of ethnography (and so possibly revealing, as we discussed about Malinowski's personal diaries). Diaries and letters (and even more inexorably, e-mails) are also dated – and, once noted down or sent, are somehow definitive⁶. Mirroring what happens to speech, in which nothing said can be “un-said”, I'd like to try here a way of writing that could enable us to see its process (and its time), allowing re-elaboration but not “unsaying” anything – in other words, a way of minimizing editing possibilities that will also lead to further advancing the discussion message by message. In this mixture of academic writing, correspondence and diary, I hope I find the right tone to reflect on three main axes:

- how my reading of the texts in the syllabus was marked by my research theme (writing and circulation of texts among lesbian women in periodical publications focused on discussing and elaborating meanings about ‘lesbianity’);
- how my research theme marks me / is marked by experiences as a white, middle-class, lesbian woman that reads and writes about ‘lesbianity’;
- how I have been thinking the construction and elaboration of lesbian experiences through writing, circulation of texts and their reading – and, if the tone adopted in this writing allow me to accomplish this goal, my own experiences with constructing lesbianity through those processes.

Well, that will do for today. In the next e-mail, I'll talk a bit more about the research I have developed during my Masters' about the publications of the “Brazilian lesbian press”, about the documents that constituted the field in which I have developed this ethnography (by the way, I wish I had read Blommaert before that!) from which my recently finished dissertation was a result, and how letters (and the theme of correspondence) became increasingly relevant to me along this process.

Love, and see you soon,
Carol

6. One of the reviewers has emphasized the distance adopted, in the moment of writing an ethnographical monograph, in relation to the first “impressions” recorded in fieldwork diaries. In the course that resulted in this work, we have read Malinowski's works to observe differences between the *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and Malinowski's personal diaries. In this sense, establishing some kind of comparison to diary as a genre refers more to the idea of writing “to myself”, without editing, than to using diaries in ethnographical research.

* PS. I was happy to hear Adriana Lopes mentioning, in today's class, Guacira Lopes Louro and Tomaz Tadeu da Silva. When I mentioned iteration, citation and performativity right above, I remembered that was reading a text by Tomaz (*A produção social da identidade e da diferença*, in *Identidade e diferença: a perspectiva dos estudos culturais*, organized by him and published by Vozes in 2000) that I first knew about Derrida, when I was concluding my major in Journalism, in 2011. By that time, at the top of my enthusiasm for working within this perspective, I thought I understood his propositions – a conviction that was definitely destabilized along the years that have passed since then. Anyway, this was a timely remembrance: by skimming through it (or the PDF equivalent to “skimming”), I find new ways of thinking about this author – and perhaps of facing the task of using him again, here.

[Send. Undo. Send]

From: me

Fri, Jun 23rd, 2017, 11:45 p.m.

To: me

[I opened again that message that was already, definitely sent, to see how its formatting would look like. first thing: in one sitting, I already wrote two pages! I must bear in mind that, although I'm going to write bit by bit, you'll receive all texts at once – and, as you've said today, you won't have much time for reading them. second thing: after briefly running my eyes over it, I saw that I've written “pretention... pretentious”. well, I've committed myself to those risks...]

From: me

Fri, Jun 23rd, 2017, 11:45 p.m.

To: me

good evening!

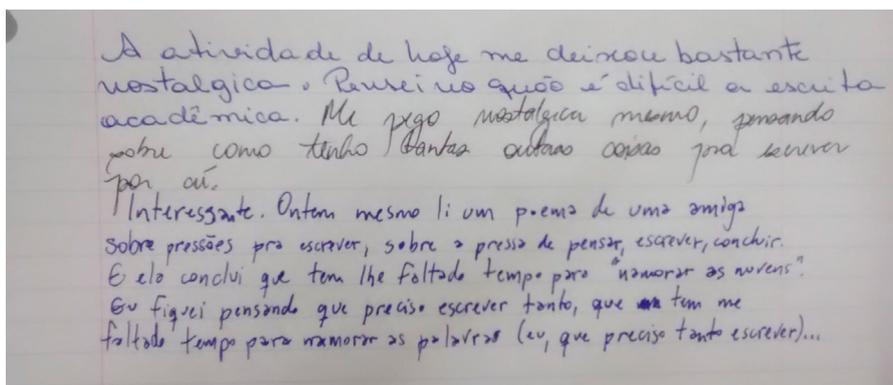
first of all, I'd like to apologize for taking this long to write you again – ok, you'll read it all at once, we already know that, but the very idea of e-mailing makes me feel as if I'm failing something, as if in a dialogue from which I had made myself suddenly absent. as in WhatsApp, it was read, but not replied (something I have done indeed by not answering your e-mail encouraging me to go on with this proposal – but, in a way, I think it was better, since shared-in-the-moment, to have talked to you about it in person today).

[maybe that apology was addressed to me, for making myself absent. this space here is still a mixture of diary and correspondence. and I still follow Anzaldúa: my fear of not writing still surpasses the fear of writing.] agora que já escritos, os parágrafos acima parecem um preâmbulo quase desnecessário. compartilho, na imagem abaixo, um dos resultados da nossa prática de escrita de hoje: foi o que me fez abrir o Gmail agora. como

disse a Carolina, escrever à mão tem seus efeitos próprios; no conciso de minha grafia confusa, a menção à poesia de minha amiga parece dizer muito mais do que consegui digitar aqui.

and I have been absent because of other writings – I’m finishing a paper at the eleventh hour, for a presentation at “Fazendo Gênero”⁷ (I wish to write you more about my motivations and inspirations for that, too). and now the table has turned: I left our class feeling moved, with my head full of ideas, wanting to stir everything we discussed today, to keep on playing with Carolina’s writing stimulation technique. *[as she wrote in her autograph for me: may magic illuminate my writing!]* and the truth is I have this other work that is more urgent than anything else – not only because of its deadline, that have already been postponed, and I have already failed to meet it, but because its theme can create its own urgency within me. *[if I had already written what I mean to write you, the motives behind it would be more obvious – it will become clear, I promise.]*

after written, the paragraphs above seem like an almost unnecessary preamble. I share, in the image below, one of the results of today’s writing practice: that was what made me open my emailing app now. as Carolina said, handwriting has its own effects; in the concision of my confuse lettering, the reference to my friend’s poem seem to say a lot more than everything I was able to type here⁸.



7. Fazendo Gênero is a biannual international gender congress held in Florianópolis, Brazil.

8. The image says: “Today’s activity made me feel nostalgic. I thought about how hard academic writing is.

I find myself truly nostalgic, thinking about how many other things I could be writing somewhere.

Interesting. Yesterday I read a friend’s poem about the pressures to write, about the rush to think, write, draw conclusions. And she concludes that she’s missing the time to “pursue the clouds”. It made me think I need to write so much, that I’m missing the time to get enamored by words (I need, so much, to write)...

From: me
To: me

Fri, Jun 23rd, 2017, 11:45 p.m.

You know, when I had the idea behind this work, I thought it would be a lot easier. In a way, it is: I just said to a friend that while I'm writing to you, I'm driven more by pleasure than by deadlines, and this is just amazing. It's like reconnecting to a feeling of writing with ease, something I wish I had discussed into further detail when I mentioned the exercise we made in our final class, but unfortunately it won't be possible, at least not now. Today I start writing, moved by the necessity of bringing another subject, that is actually being stimulated by yet another one. And if I start again by talking once more about my surprise about it not being as easy as I thought it would be (something I had already mentioned in class and that I should just leave aside), it's cause it has something to do with how groundbreaking it is for me to write in this fashion: although this approach can open some new paths for unforeseen themes and more spontaneous ways of writing [*I just had an insight a moment ago: in a way, this is an experiment of using digression as a way of writing*], on the other hand the immutable order of text blocks makes it more difficult to bring themes that I see as the unfolding of arguments that I already know, but you don't. [*it is getting too long already, and you haven't even started talking about what is left out, which is so cool. but well, let's take this digression thing seriously...*] And before I start entering those topics, I intend to think here with you three, I feel I still have to explain a bit more about my Masters' research and the topics that leave their marks on it (on me).

Well, as I have mentioned in the first e-mail (which, not even by far, seem to summarize well enough my research topics), my Masters' research was about publications within the "Brazilian lesbian press" – an expression I always put within quotation marks because I haven't found no other authors taking all those materials as something constituting a field (or, in Social Communications, a "segment"), I think, or at least calling them this way. I don't recall if in my dissertation I say that this theme has been on my research agenda for several years now: I wished to study Brazilian print publications for lesbians in my college grad monograph, but the lack of information on the topic (and the difficulty of accessing the sources) discouraged me. Well, if I can't remember if I mentioned that old interest in this topic, at least I have included another story that seems even more relevant to establishing my connection to that "field". Even though this may be a bit long, I take the liberty to quote it in full. These are the first paragraphs of my dissertation:

Mid 2002. With no access to the Internet in her own home, a teenager tries to pay some attention to her informatics teacher while seizing the opportunity to use the school's

computer laboratory to check her e-mails. She finds a message by M., a recent acquaintance from a chatroom she accessed some night spent at her father's. Her friend seems nervous and asks for her home address, so she can send her a letter. She's got a limited access to the web as well, she explains, and she would need some time and space to write a difficult narrative – to relieve from a dark secret, something she could only tell someone who didn't participate in her immediate daily life. Concerned and a bit curious, the girl asks her if she's ok and types her address. Some days later, she receives a letter sent from São Paulo State. In it, M tells that she spent a night with a female friend and, faltering a bit – “please don't throw up in this letter after reading this” –, she reveals what was so difficult to put into words using other means: she and her friend had kissed. The reader loses her breath, not with disgust, as her pen-pal had feared, but with curiosity: so, is this possible? A previously confused and amorphous feeling becomes distinguishable and colorful – so this is it. A woman can become attracted to another woman – she keeps on reading – and they can end up having sex! After organizing her ideas as well as she can, the teenager writes to her new, instantaneous friend, asking for more details than would be really necessary for listening to and understanding someone else's experience, maybe because she was trying to elaborate her own – the ones she would still have and those amorphous, uncomfortable feelings she tried to pretend she didn't notice she had. The two girls exchanged letters for many months after that, until the increase in broadband Internet supply and demand made this service a little more affordable and, for members of the middle-classes in great urban centers, even mandatory in their residencies. With that, this teenager – that from now on we can call Carolina Maia – was able to access written reflections, narratives and other textual productions that different women published online about their sexual and affective experiences with other women.

I hope this account doesn't sound as mere self-exposure: it is my alternative to the preambles in classical anthropological narratives. In these, be it in canoes sailing seas and rivers until reaching distant islands, be it in the search for setting up camp as close as possible to the village to be studied or even within it, the ethnographer narrates their progressive distancing from their own house, their own culture, and their getting closer to the spaces and subjects they are trying to understand. Here, I seek to demonstrate how questions that would someday become my concerns within a scientific research – lesbianity (and how it was discussed in written productions), isolation, correspondence – found me inside my own home. More than ten years before even imagining the present work, the topics that now constitute my field had started to constitute me. By 2002, the titles I discuss here in more detail had either gone off the market or were in decay. Maybe it is because I have witnessed some of the first steps of Brazilian lesbian contents available online, in blogs and sites focusing on homosexuality (aimed at women or in sites for both men and women), that I now take interest in trying

to understand how it was before. Before the Internet, how could women who were affectively and sexually attracted to women access reflections on such experiences? How did they find each other, how did they seek each other, how did they keep in touch? (Maia 2017a, 15-16)⁹.

[pause. one of the difficulties of this e-mail approach: I don't like to work while connected to the internet. I get lost too easily. but I think this pause may present a good opportunity for a little affective note, still regarding the internet, so I can pretend I am maintaining here a thematic consistence: it is just a little interruption because I am talking to my girlfriend as I write, and if it wasn't for the internet, our relationship would be almost unfeasible: she lives in Brasília. the reason behind this pause? she's reading Naven and asked what was Bateson's sun sign – Taurus, too much of a Taurus, as we discovered: sun, mars, mercury, venus. the internet gives us access to all sorts of essential information and to some others which are... well, satisfying this kind of curiosity is important too, isn't it?]

Well, let's get back to what matters. The Internet provides us with access to essential information! That's what I was talking about. Good, then. I should also mention that, when I decided not to study the lesbian press, back in 2011, when I was finishing my major, I ended up analyzing the news section of *MixBrasil*, a São Paulo-based GLA website that emerged in the mid-90s, Choosing *Mix* was also a decision marked by affection: the column signed by Nina Lopes, a DJ that would run a lesbian magazine in 2008, and especially the one by Vange Leonel, a lesbian singer known by *Noite Preta* and self-described "protowriter" (in spite of her prolific writing in different genres, including prose, poetry, dramaturgy and translations), were very important to me around 2005, 2006... a time in which I was beginning to understand myself as a lesbian, with the loving help of my girlfriend at that time *[I met her, you see, using Orkut! This writing and networking thing is really strong, you know?]* and a lot of reading, questioning and reflection.

[another pause: searching for the link to Vange's song took me to another one, by USA-based queercore band Team Dresch – another reference in my teenage identity construction stage. I probable heard Remember Who You Are for the first time around 2003 or 2004, and I still listen to it when I get writer's block: "can't get sick of thinking about meaning, and language, and anything that gets me hot". this song fills me with strength! And it talks about being able to desire other women, to be desired by women: "sometimes that's what it takes to know you're alive / is to feel yourself burning just from some girl's stare". I've got this song tattooed on my chest so I never forget it: "make up who you are, it makes up who you are". Maybe I'm pushing this a bit too far, but I see here something of Butler's performativity, iteration and citationality: there's no maker behind the making, gender is made as we make ourselves within gender, etc. And since

9. Originally in Portuguese.

we're departing from Blommaert's discussions, and thinking about which writings count as such, this song is an example of a lesbian writing that has constituted me – more than that, it is a call for writing, speaking out, whatever that may communicate something: “put up signs / make up who you are / send out signals / about who you are / transmit messages / telling who you are / no matter who you are”...]

Reading, writing and reflecting about lesbianity, about desiring women, about what it means to be a lesbian and the right to being one ended up being a central theme in my dissertation – something I wasn't expecting, since my initial idea was to map what the “lesbian press” looked like, what was it about – I wished to understand the dynamics of this field, the relations between those titles, the motivations of their “editors” of such bulletins, which were mostly homespun, fanzine-like productions: type, cut, paste, bring it all together and then go out to make some copies... Well, I started my fieldwork by trying to know everything I could about it: from a first bibliographic and documental research, I was able to identify the titles of 19 periodical (or that at least intended to keep a constant periodicity) publications made by and for lesbian women in Brazil. That list ranged from *ChanaComChana*, a newspaper edited in January 1981, to current-day *Alternativa L*, a magazine funded by São Paulo municipal administration¹⁰.

[A much, much bigger pause¹¹: my girlfriend called me to say good night, we got caught up in the conversation and it lasted two hours. Yes, that time over there in the heading is right: it's almost 6 am. She called me just to say good night, but I was so excited talking about this work; about this and about a book I'm reading for another course's term paper – actually, that book was what made me open my e-mail today. It brought me here. But to tell Laura what in that book made me write you all this, I had to explain the book's central arguments first. And to write about that here... first I'd need to have had written this e-mail here, got it? About my research and all that. And it ain't complete yet. And then I lost my track and I've talked about all kinds of stuff and I'm still not there: verbosity, graphorrhea, those are the risks of digressing. Maybe I should take digression a little less seriously? In short, we hang up the phone and I realized this was getting too long for a single e-mail. I thought of deleting it all. Or maybe getting back at it tomorrow, removing some parts, sending it and moving on – but that would go against what I've committed myself to do in the beginning. The only way out is to go on and just send it to you. And after I hit send, there's no turning back.]

That's it. I'll continue this later. Tomorrow? Maybe. I still have a lot to share with you, and when I write I see how much. That's actually an

10. Currently, there are more two lesbian magazines in circulation: *Brejeiras*, from Rio de Janeiro, and *Tia Concha*, from São Paulo.

11. This phrase was originally in English in the Portuguese version of this article, including the “bigger”, that should read “longer”.

interesting exercise: I want to summarize what I've already written about making oneself through writing, about narrating and elaborating and trajectories – something the women in the field I've studied have done in the materials I've analyzed. And today I've discovered that I seem to want to do the same. I told you this was an experiment, didn't I?

[what is left out: there is always something that's left out]

From: me
To: me

Tue, Jul 25, 2017, 5:37 AM

Girls,

Let me tell you: the day after the previous e-mail hit me like a hangover. If this feeling was physical, it would be that sour taste in the mouth, like a reminder of its previous lack of control *[oh, sure. as if the mouth could drink and talk by itself alone, right]*. “What soberness conceals, drunkenness reveals”, isn't it what people say? But I wrote sober, it was like being high on writing, substituting immoderate words for drinks. I took some days to focus on writing other things and to think. Well, first I need to say that I've learnt something about this process (and because I already know my verbosity): if I let my words loose, they'll go on and on, but term papers require some concision, right. Right, then: the basic instruction I've learnt about running this experiment is: I can't go on just writing without a plan! Well, maybe I can, because it seems that by doing it, I could write a lot of things that needed to be written – but I must remember what I plan to say before I say it. *[that was the reason for starting the last e-mail, right? I need to lay a sound foundation, so I can dance on it]*. But let's move on – cause the further I go here, the closer I am to fine...

And since we're talking about repertoires and genres, maybe what's not working here is trying to use the “e-mail genre” and its language to explain my research. After rereading what I've written last time, it seems that I've fallen again into an “academic-ish” language, and that's not my intention here. Well, here's what happened: after all that, I ended up with this list of 19 “periodical” publications. I wanted to focus on periodical publications because I believed that the continuous circulation of these materials, the idea that a next issue would come, would be important in network-making among lesbian women. Indeed, the enterprises that lasted longer, the ones focusing on creating and disseminating written contents (news stories, short fictional stories, poetry and what I have called “personal reflections” – texts sent by the readers, telling part of their lives), where those funded by membership/

subscription and which sought to maintain a steady periodicity, in general aiming at producing quarterly issues. And if I've put "periodical" between commas above, it is due both to this difficulty in keeping this periodicity and the fact that at least one of those titles (*Iamuricumá*, a 1981 bulletin) announces this intention in its first issue, but apparently dies there¹².

Wait a little. Step back. Why all that? I mean, why is it – publications, periodicity, etc., all that – important? Obviously, this concern has something to do with my background (I hold a Journalism major). But for these women – why all that? *[it seems I'm repeating here a conversation I've had a zillion times while working on my dissertation – it seems I haven't yet learnt its pathways...]*

One of the things I like the most in my dissertation is having written that the Brazilian lesbian movement – or the political organization of lesbians, whatever – emerged interwoven with writing. I can explain: there's this landmark of Brazilian alternative press and a major name within the "Brazilian homosexual press" (this one, yes, is an established category in academic works – that often leave aside lesbian publications, but that's another story), a gay newspaper called *Lampião da Esquina*, whose editorial board didn't include any lesbians (by the way, *Lampião's* history is very interesting, they made a sort of letter-driven crowdfunding! See MacRae, *A construção da Igualdade*, 1990). Then, in the beginning of 1979, they called some women that were participating in meetings of a group that would later become Somos/São Paulo (another Brazilian LGBT landmark! See MacRae, again) to write something about lesbians. The 12th issue of *Lampião* has a green cover with a big white heart in its center, and inside it the words "Love between Women". *[a while ago, hanging out with some friends, I stumble upon a yellowish copy of that issue, exposed in an art gallery downtown. It made me so happy I had to publish a selfie with it on my Instagram and Facebook.]* One of the texts celebrate the first time women got together to write collectively about their homosexuality in Brazil. After that, they kept organizing together; Somos, a mostly masculine group, became more institutionalized, and those women created Somos' "lesbian-feminist subgroup" or just "LF". LF was responsible for running the self-proclaimed first lesbian newspaper in the country, *ChanaComChana*¹³, with an interview with singer Angela RoRo in the cover of its first issue, really cool. First and last: after this issue, *ChanaComChana* would no longer run as a newspaper.

12. Correction: researcher Paula Barbosa, currently doing her Masters' in Journalism at State University of Ponta Grossa, has found in 2019 two more issues of *Iamuricumá* (the second, from February, and the third, from May 1981) at CIM – Centro Informação Mulher's archive (personal communication, 2019).

13. Meaning "pussy with pussy".

But the story unfolds: after some quarrel, LF turns into GALF, *Grupo de Ação Lésbica-Feminista* (Lesbian-Feminist Action Group), now an independent group, and in 1982 they release a bulletin also called *ChanaComChana*, with this sick fanzine-like aesthetics: made from cutting & pasting, huge blocks of machine-typed text, sometimes reunited in a somewhat confusing design. This do-it-yourself approach, relying less on graphical professionals, made the whole process less expensive, and they managed to keep the bulletin running until 1986, distributing it to feminist, lesbian and gay groups across Brazil and around the world (and receiving in turn a whole lot of similar materials, which they used to create their own), creating a subscription network, very cool, creating a dialogue... really awesome. [and here's an anthropologist – really? can I already call myself that? – shamelessly admitting her love toward her “object”.] In addition to subscriptions, part of the income they used to fund the operation of running the bulletin came from their own pockets and from selling the material in bars in the homosexual “ghetto” in São Paulo, around Roosevelt, Bixiga... actually, selling the bulletin in a bar with massive attendance of lesbians at that time has ignited another event, the “Brazilian Stonewall” or the “Ferro’s Bar occupation”, by those activists (in 2009, a [news story about this 1983 event](#) led me to [interview Miriam Martinho](#), one of GALF’s coordinators, for a blog I wrote to at that time – a blog that 1. was of a tremendous importance to my own elaborations on sexuality and political activism; 2. I can’t believe I’m showing you!).

In 1986, one of the group’s most active members, Rosely Roth, was invited to Hebe Camargo’s show (yes! Bomb ass tea!) in a special discussion about lesbians, leading her to be proclaimed “the first out lesbian on Brazilian TV”. She took advantage of that visibility to show an issue of *Chana* to a wide national audience, also informing the group’s P.O. box address. Marisa Fernandes, another GALF member then, later commented the impact of that TV appearance in an interview to Norma Mogrovejo: “Millions of lesbians were watching [the show] and we received thousands of letters saying ‘I’m not going to kill myself anymore, now that I know I’m not alone’, very emotional letters. All of them were answered”. You see – can you imagine how hard it was to find information about that? Well, after the boom that followed that mass communication experience, maybe because of it, GALF decided to refashion their bulletin, now with a less “raunchy” title. That’s how emerged the bulletin *Um Outro Olhar* (“a new perspective” or, more literally, “a new view”), really similar to its predecessor in some aspects. From 1987 to 1994, *Um Outro Olhar* had 21 issues (some of them really large! Around 40 A4-sized pages); in 1995, the group responsible for its operation (that had already been formally registered as an NGO, *Rede de Informações*

*Lésbicas*¹⁴ *Um Outro Olhar*) released a magazine called... wait for it... *Um Outro Olhar!*, whose first number was actually the 22nd, which means: a new design, a more “cultural” emphasis, focusing less on the political agenda of lesbian social movements, a magazine print in color and all that... and, at the same time, some kind of continuity. Well, *Um Outro Olhar* (the fanzine-like bulletin, not the magazine) was precisely the title I’ve discussed in my dissertation.

And here I am, talking a blue streak again, right? Took a deep breath and there I went. I actually wrote the three paragraphs right above as a single, huge block of text! The thing is, this story seems to be telling itself almost automatically. All I’ve written in this e-mail is actually some sort of preamble, an introduction, to something that’s yet to be told, but when I’m telling this little story, that has been told so many times in other stories... I don’t know, it’s like this story wants to be retold once and again, can you believe that? I don’t know, I feel like it has possessed me to be fruitful and keep on multiplying. For real, I’ve told all that already in my dissertation, I wish I could tell something else (that’s also in the dissertation, can’t help it), widen my range.

[I digress: Eliane Brum (no need to introduce her, right? that journalist, my personal idol) says she always wanted to be a fiction writer, but that she felt she needed to “fill herself” with other people’s stories first, before writing her own. I heard her saying that when I was almost finishing college, but I could see myself in that idea: I choose studying Journalism instead of Portuguese and Literature for the same reason: I was too young and felt empty of stories. I think I’ve only realized now what it means to be fulfilled by one.]

*[a digression caused by the previous one: you know the book I’ve mentioned before, a bit mysteriously, in the other e-mail? I was thinking of bringing it back later, but it fits so well here. Genres of Recollection: Archive Poetics and Modern Greece, by Greek-American anthropologist Penelope Papailias, became – along with Blommaert – another inspiration and relief for me as a scholar who took this weird path of documental ethnography. I want to share a lot of things about her with you, but here I’d like to mention how she discusses Derrida, yes, him, Derrida! she brings a really moving reflection on citational acts and document transcription practices, questioning if a message, even if reproduced *ipsis literis*, can remain the same after traversing the body of the person who’s doing the transcription. yeah, that’s right: traversing the body – with the document on one side, the person reads it, processes it, copies it on the other side; the brain (and who knows what happens inside it!) receives stimuli from the eyes and send new stimuli to the hands, which try to imitate what the eyes saw using pencil, pen, computer, whatever the tool may be. even if the words are equal, imagining that a perfect fidelity in reproduction is something humanely possible, what’s the result? well, Adriana Lopes is the Derrida specialist here – I*

14. “Lesbian Information Network”.

leave that to you. to me, it feels enough to just think about the way those words traveled in me; to reinsert the body in all that movement of thinking and writing and then trying to make some sense about what was thought of and written about; to think about the possible transformation brought to life by such traversing, not only how the words changed by crossing me, but how their crossing changed me; to marvel at the wonder of having been a pathway for traveling signs, references and their mutable referents...]

[sigh: oofff. I really sighed, ok? materiality of air coming through the carnal channel of my mouth. it must be the wind the words blow when they pass.]

And boy, how many word pathways have those publications opened! I'm not even talking about those I felt opening in me, but about the words *in the publications*, the ones which took uncountable roads by traveling in envelopes, crossing Brazil & other countries. Words by women who were able to find each other, who found themselves through writing, creating new things for and within themselves. Forget all about I've told in the previous paragraphs, this is the real deal¹⁵. That's what I'd like to talk about:

And here's the thing, when I started all this, I wanted to write that story, you know? Not just only that, all of them. That one I've told and the other 19 stories, of all titles I told you I had reunited on a list – so ambitious, this girl here, who wanted to narrate 30 years, hundreds of pages, in a year of research! Not knowing it was impossible, I tried to do it and didn't make it. I'll spare you the details, but it involved a whole deal of intensive use of Google, Facebook, e-mail, WhatsApp, old newspapers, all that (my girlfriend named my efforts as “stalking as a research methodology”), and I could find and contact many names that were present in the “editors” in my publications list. I interviewed thirteen women, who narrated the histories of ten out of those 19 titles. More than that, they narrated – and narratively elaborated, as Ernesto Meccia (*El Tiempo No Para*, 2016) would say – the trajectories of 13 women, I mean themselves, and of many others that were present in their lives. Lives! That's where the rubber met the road and my thoughts did a one-eighty. I wanted to describe the constitution of a field, and what is a field made of? P-e-o-p-l-e. Subjects made in and through experience, experience lived within language (hooray, Joan Scott!). And I can't tell anymore where this turn started (not even if it's necessary to know that), if it was during interviews, if I saw that on the documents... because the documents also told me stories and showed me people. Now that I'm studying narrative with you and historical-anthropological narrative in another course, I think that maybe I was trying to devise something in the lines of an officious historiography – The Great History of the Lesbian Movement in Brazil and its Periodical Publications. Or: Brazilian Lesbian

15. “This is the real deal” was originally in English in the first draft.

Press (and its Ties to Lesbian Movements)!!! Imagine that, that'd be cool. Well, it was actually cool just the way it was, can we agree on that? But I must admit that in the end I ended up using very little information from the interviews. And actually, through those women I could have access to copies of materials that are not available anywhere: *Visibilidade* (COLERJ – Coletivo de Lésbicas do Rio de Janeiro¹⁶, 1998-2004?), that I got from Neusa Pereira; *Ponto G* (GLB – Grupo Lésbico da Bahia¹⁷, 1998- 2002?), the few issues that Zora Yonara still kept with her; *Alternativa L*¹⁸ (São Paulo, 2013 – today), from Sheila Costa; *Femme* magazine (Grupo Afins¹⁹ – Santos, 1993-1995), that I found at Brazil's National Library (!!! No one mentions that in the literature I've studied!!!) and at Austin University's library (how fancy, isn't it? Thanks for your help, Carla Ramos). The issue that was missing from my *Femme* collection²⁰ was digitalized by Laura Bacellar after an interview. Actually, it wasn't for the information Laura gave me that day, I would never have found Monica and Theresa, *Femme* editors, that gave me a really lovely interview. I am trying to write a bit about them elsewhere. That other paper I have mentioned before, about a presentation at Fazenda Gênero²¹, is about *Femme* – and to be honest I didn't really like it in the end, I feel it's badly written. They deserve something better.

[I am getting lost again – hi, I'm Carolina Maia and I'm here to try to make amends publicly with the shortcomings of my last work. its silences and all that is left out of it. I told you have something to say about what is left out, right?]

Anyway, the thing is that I had to make some choices, and I ended up choosing a less-studied material produced by the most well-known group in the history of the Brazilian lesbian movement. *ChanaComChana*, I believe, it's the lesbian periodical that's the most discussed in the literature about the "Brazilian homosexual press" (if not the only one in some works); I tried not to do the same by choosing *Um Outro Olhar*. I told you that all titles in my list, with maybe one or two exceptions, were run by activist groups, right? Just see the names that appeared right above: Lesbian Collective, Lesbian Group... before I started my research, I actually resented that a bit: why were gay men able to produce magazines that are "successful" in editorial terms, and lesbian women couldn't do it? ²² After fieldwork, I understood that "being successful" could mean something different than I thought at first.

16. Meaning "Visibility" – Rio de Janeiro Lesbian Collective.

17. Meaning "G Spot" – Bahia Lesbian Group.

18. "L Alternative".

19. "Afins Group" – "afins" has a double meaning here. "Afim" (plural "afins") means "similar", but the group's name came from personal ads from women saying they were "a fim de" ("wishing to") meet other women with similar interests (Maia, 2017b).

20. Paula Barbosa found another issue, the 9th, of *Femme* magazine in a visit to CIM's archive in 2019 (personal communication, 2019).

21. Maia 2017b.

22. That idea was reconsidered during the research (See Maia 2017a, 18).

The following thoughts refer mostly to *Um Outro Olhar* but can also be applied to *Femme* in some aspects. What if that “homespun” quality, instead of signaling a problem or difficulty (for creating a commercial niche, lack of funding and/or access to it, etc.), was actually what made those titles even the more interesting? I mean, there *were* problems and difficulties: the “lack of commitment” of lesbians as “consumers” was a criticism I heard frequently from the women I’ve interviewed, and they meant lack of financial reward (enough to keep those bulletins running) and of collaboration, too. They were amateurs, meaning they did it for love²³. Those who became “editors” were not and never became journalists (although journalists have participated sometimes in their publications). They wrote from their contacts with other activists. *Um Outro Olhar*, for instance, participated in networks with activists from Brazil, Europe, Latin America, Canada, USA, and without consulting my archive I can recall translations from Italian, French, English and Spanish into Portuguese in its pages, all made by readers/collaborators/associated members of the group. *Femme* magazine reproduced contents from Portuguese magazine *Organa*, that played a meaningful role in inspiring its creation. Those two very informative publications also used their national and international relationships to gather information about lesbian, gay and feminist activisms, publicizing upcoming events and other groups’ postal addresses, reproducing calls for submissions for poetry, fictional short stories and other kinds of anthologies on “lesbianism”. A true incentive to writing, and I will still discuss another one. You know, I think this whole thing was about encountering other lesbians... In the other two titles I mentioned before, that unfortunately I won’t discuss in further details here because my memory fails me now, although such type of political articulation couldn’t be seen in those two (maybe that wasn’t the idea behind them), you could see some kind of invitation in their pages: both *Visibilidade* and *Ponto G* published texts, poems... and a list of places to visit. Bars and pubs, date and time of the group’s next meeting, that kinda stuff. That’s it: my interlocutors explained to me that “before the Internet” (as I was wondering before) a woman who wished to find another for an *affair*, *sex* or *dating*, or even friendship, for that matter, could meet other women in pubs, meetings of lesbian groups or... through writing.

My dissertation, in brief, discussed how the circulation of *Um Outro Olhar* has promoted the constitution of networks between women: be it from consolidating activist networks, be it in the creation of correspondence networks between the bulletin’s collaborators, the member associates of GALF/Rede Um Outro Olhar. Those networks were made in the bulletin itself, which was made out of many letters and other kinds of

23. In Portuguese, “amador(a)” means amateur, but also refers to love (“amar”).

texts (essays, articles, “personal reflections”) that, by being thus made available, helped building ideals of love and politics between women, providing examples of relationships that, as we can read in some letters, some of those readers couldn’t find anywhere else – not that there weren’t other people living such experiences, but it was all very *concealed*, a description I’ve heard several times during this research... [Drica, Dri, Carol, we can go back to this later – it’s just that I’ve talked too much about this part recently, it’s over 5 am now and I have committed myself to something here today. but just ask me and I’ll tell you more, ok?] Well, those links were also created and interwoven away from the pages of the periodicals, thanks to what I understood as a sort of connection between doors of the “closets”: personal ads sections.

My next work, I hope, will be about that: today (or yesterday? Monday the 24th, working late nights confuses me) I submitted a proposal for PPGAS Student Seminar, in which I propose to study personal ads published in *Femme* magazine and their role (or maybe the centrality attributed to them – let’s see how things go while I write it) in establishing new links and relationships between women. Why *Femme*? Well, not only because I feel that I owe something to that story or because I feel I’ve written a lot already about *Um Outro Olhar* (although both reasons hold part of the truth): it is because if it wasn’t for a personal ad, *Femme* would not exist. And it wouldn’t exist because, had Theresa not started to exchange letters with some women thanks to some personal ads published in nude magazines (yes, some magazines “for men” published that kind of stuff too) during the 1980s, she wouldn’t have met Monica and they would never be a couple. I mean – they say “what is meant to be [just is]”, but who knows, right? But that’s how it happened, they met because of an ad like that, they kept publishing a similar ad, they created a correspondence network with the women who wrote them, and that letter chain allowed them to get to know the “girls from *Organa*”. They worked on their idea and released their magazine, made out of the collaboration from friends who participated in that network and which was also responsible for creating new links within that network – there’s no doubt it was going to include an ad section too, right?

You see... I started this e-mail series thinking I was going to talk about those women’s writing, about the texts I found in those titles, about texts I’ve read and about how one makes oneself a “lesbian” through reading and writing. Maybe because I have written a lot about such topics in my dissertation, that was precisely what I did not write about here. Or maybe that’s how I work, actually: as I told you, my dissertation took an unexpected turn (isn’t it what many of them do?). Maybe my proposal was successful precisely there, in the idea of rendering visible the very process of writing – you know how, after finishing

writing a monograph, we “polish” its introduction as if we knew what we were going to do since the beginning? As if most of us didn’t discover it along the way. I told you in class that my interest in letters stemmed from conversations with friends, didn’t I? And that many friends think I study “letters” because of that. *[Maybe that’s gonna be the subject of the next e-mail, we’ll see, this is an open-ended process.]* Just one more “maybe”, so I can call this over for today: maybe I was interested in the letters since the beginning, but the process of discovering it (and in my field, “to discover oneself” [as a lesbian] is both insight and elaboration) took me way more time than expected.

That’s it for today. See you soon!

xoxo,
Carol

From: me
To: me

Tue, Jul 25, 2017, 5:38 AM

[this time I’ve waited for long seconds until the “undo” button disappeared. no turning back]

* * *

A letter on the road

Rio de Janeiro – Florianópolis, Aug 1st 2017

Drica, Dri and Carol,

So, how are you? Everything’s ok? I confess I was a bit apprehensive when I didn’t receive no answer to my last e-mail, in which I forwarded to you the first part of my term paper. I should also say that if it wasn’t for having already sent that first part, I’d be a lot more embarrassed to be late in finishing it – I hope that this late delivery doesn’t pose a problem to your reading. In addition, I’m making a strenuous effort to be able to handwrite in a minimally legible manner, my hand lettering was never good and being in a moving bus certainly doesn’t help it. Yes, I’m in a bus: I’ve been through a few mishaps (that can partially explain why I’m late here), ended up losing the flight that would get me to Florianópolis for Fazenda Gênero and I had no choice (\$\$\$) but to travel by land those I don’t know how many kilometers that separate my house from the “Island of Magic”. Worried with the idea of not being able to connect to the internet while on the road, plus the fear of running out of battery for any unexpected need, I had this idea to write on paper

– a solution that, with the exception of my bad calligraphy and not knowing how it is going to look like after I digitalize it to send you this, seemed way more practical. Besides that, it makes a lot of sense: I want to talk about letters... this whole proposal came from the idea of flirting with the epistolary genre. Why not going full old school, with a pen and paper? Even the fact that I'm traveling by bus helps me think some things, a dimension of sensitivity that could remain occult if I wrote this paper in a different fashion – just arguments, without the feelings and “clicks” that were the beginning of each insight. I really like to travel by land because this way, on the road, I can get a firmer grasp of the distances and paths I'm crossing. Traveling by plane gives me the same feeling I get from taking the subway in cities I don't know well enough: a misunderstanding of the map, magic channels that take me mysteriously from one point to the other, without seeing how I could get there. And if my work talks about materials (and persons) circulating across the territory, distances and pathways matter. Besides that, traveling by bus is slower, and connecting to slowness matters too: after all, I study other times, and by “other times” I mean not only the recent past (the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s), but the times things took then. The time between a bulletin issue and another: the time of producing it, gathering information, contacting other groups, receiving collaborations from the readers, typing them, putting it all together; the time of sending it, the time of postal services, the time of going to the postal office to check if there is something in the P.O. box (so nothing suspicious is delivered at home or at work); the time of receiving it, time for reading it, piece by piece, from the most tedious (there are some that just talk about politics, you know...) to the most compelling ones, including the *letters* sections (those published in the bulletin, bringing opinions or telling stories, and also the personal ads), and the ever-present poems. (a letter published by *Um Outro Olhar*, accompanied by a little poem, brought a sentence that became a subtitle in my dissertation: “every lesbian worth of that name likes to write poetry, right?” In an interview, one of my interlocutors, an ex-editor of a lesbian publication, shared with me her opinion that “love poems are only good to those who write them” & their muses, because she received “really bad” poems. Yes, Blommaert... which writings do count as such?) [Text inserted over the rest of the text, preceded by an arrow:] The time for writing a letter to the bulletin's organizers, commenting it, making questions: the time for answering to it. [End of the inserted text.] The time of correspondence.

I told you about Penelope Papailias' book *Genres of Recollection*, right? How I wish I had read it before/during my dissertation... she brings some discussions on linguistics and literary criticism that are, in fact, important contributions to those who do documental ethnography or “textual anthropology”, as she says. Besides discussing Derrida (defining

the historiographical production as profoundly performative and historical narratives as being constituted by long and complex chains of citational acts – *reporting/reported speech*, the “he said, she said” of history), as I mentioned before in an e-mail, she also uses Bakhtin to think about textual genres and the construction of legitimacy and scientific authority. So close to our discussions, right?²⁴ I think about how Landes was discredited²⁵ and Anzaldúa too (*Borderlands/La Frontera* was her thesis that got rejected, isn’t there a story like that? I’m on the road, in the middle of a field I have no idea where it is – I can’t google it)²⁶, like Mead²⁷ and others. Benedict hid from Boas her poetic works²⁸. Literature is a girl thing, please don’t forget this: it has always been, you only need to remember gender segmentation in press, the first segmentation to appear in press, as commented by Maria Alceste Mira, Dulcília Buitoni, Constância Lima Duarte: 19th-century women’s newspapers featured fashion, etiquette and literature, other newspapers (an occult masculine universal, standard) brought literature as well, but also politics, news pieces, economy, those subjects the weak female mind wasn’t prepared to face... but hey, where was I? Within the text, I mean – geographically, I only know I’m somewhere in SP State and that the sun is setting – I started writing 3:40pm, right after the first stop, for lunch. I hope there’s a second stop soon, I’m crazy craving a cigarette. The horizon here is wide and it’s a beautiful nightfall, although it requires me to turn on the little lamp over my chair to shed a light on the notebook that’s open over my thighs, crossing my right leg over my left. I just remembered what I was talking about: Papailias, Bakhtin, textual genres. Writing by hand is slow and it’s so much easier to lose myself in my thoughts. Genre, gender. Reading is way faster, it’s gonna mask the time behind my digressions. I remembered what I was talking about because I described the scenery in which I’m writing, and it made me remember I wanted to talk about Melpo Merlier.

[*FINALLY, there’s a pause for my cigarette!*]

24. In the classroom, we have repeatedly discussed the discredit of some female anthropologists whose ethnographical writing differed from the masculine canon of the discipline, as shown in the following examples.

25. See Cole (1995).

26. As I could check during the preparation of this article for publication, that information is incorrect. *Borderlands/La Frontera* was highly acclaimed by the critics; Anzaldúa really did not publish her thesis, but not because it was “rejected”. The author left and went back to her PhD studies on Literature at Santa Cruz University some times between the 1970s and her death in 2004. Her thesis/book *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, that Anzaldúa believed she was months from finishing when she passed, was edited by AnaLouise Keating and posthumously published by Duke University Press (Anzaldúa & Keating 2015). See Keating (2015).

27. See Lutkehaus (1995).

28. See Lutkehaus (1995).

Melpo Merlier, tells Papailias, was a Greek upper-class intellectual, founder and coordinator of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies, whose activities included creating and collecting documents through interviews with refugees who were forcefully removed in the population exchange between Greece and Turkey during the Asia Minor War (1919-1922). By doing so, the institute helped in consolidating the “testimony” genre as historical narrative, the victim as authority and also the idea of “memory worker”, the researchers who conducted those interviews and transcribed the accounts. For Papailias, Merlier’s intellectual background – she was a philologist, interested in *folk* cultural manifestations – was both the drive behind the innovations in her conception of the documents created by the Centre and the motive for criticism to their legitimacy (along with her gender, of course). Therefore, I find it interesting to think about gender and narrative innovation, even more thinking about Clifford’s introduction to *Writing Culture* and the fact that Shostak’s work was interesting as something to be analyzed but not interesting enough to invite her to participate in the [Santa Fe] seminar and thus expose her theory behind such experiment. I’m citing Merlier’s history also because one of my favorite parts of *Genres of Recollection* is when Papailias quotes one of Merlier’s “work letters” (in opposition to “personal” ones), written in a hotel outside of Greece, in which she describes the place in which she was writing, with files and folders on her side turning that place into her working space. Even more interesting is the fact that she wrote, along with instructions and commentaries to the Centre’s workers, a reflection about including in this “work letter” such personal digressions – and even more, that she typed them! *Literacies*, Blommaert would say, and I’d bring Anzaldúa along again: writing is not separated from life. Papailias’ commentary on that letter is also beautiful: Merlier was a person without roots, that moved from city to city many times, married a French man, traveled often to different countries; therefore, creating – even that for a few hours – an “office” at a hotel’s table and describing it in her letter was a way of creating, in writing, the feeling of a home. Really beautiful, isn’t it? (It gets even more beautiful with a notebook on the lap, rocking inside a semi sleeper bus).

[I’d like to make another digression: I can’t discuss Papailias’ work any further, but she makes a really cool discussion about textual genre, relations between texts, the association of texts to “traditions” of similar ones and the effects produced by all that. In short, she discusses a book titled ORTHOKOSTA, by an author who specializes in “documental fiction”, whose form imitates an archive – it is a number of “testimonies” given to a “historian” whose intentions are not exactly clear. At the time this book was published, the testimonial genre was so well established that many critics refuted the book, repelling it as false. The citation became dangerously faithful to the original. It got me thinking: this thing I’m doing – is it really a letter? Or is it just an imitation of this particular genre? Bakhtin

comments how some genres, such as the romance (Papailias adds: and the ethnography), derive their characteristics from other genres. Maybe this scientific writing here borrows some marks from the epistolary, maybe my academicism contaminate even my most mundane writings, maybe this “personal communication” style freed my words here, maybe I have them planned a lot more than I would have done in a “real” letter. Maybe this letter holds more artifice than it appears, so these “personal communications” become more credible as such – don’t let yourselves be fooled by me, you have no way of knowing it. And, to some extent, me neither.]

This whole “building a home on the letters” thing is particularly appealing to my eyes because I like to think about the documents I’ve investigated both as things that circulated over long distances and as immaterial PLACES – places for discussing things, meeting people, relieving some feelings, elaborating identity, creating relationships. Some “personal” texts, published (and to what extent edited?) in *Um Outro Olhar* in the form of letters (sometimes addressed to the bulletin’s editor: “Dear Miriam”, “Dear friend, thank you for staying with me yesterday on the phone”, etc.), bring accounts that are so intimate as they are seemingly prosaic²⁹: for instance, Malu, a university professor in Rio de Janeiro State, tells she heard at work a “joke” associating to lesbians the sport she practiced; infuriated and courageously, she answered with something along the lines of “what if I was one?”, which is still different from “I am, any problem with that?”, more possible nowadays. This evasive confrontation, this letter telling this event and it being published (under a nickname), to me all that points both to how hard it was to talk about it and also how necessary. The bulletin offered and multiplied the possibilities of “whom to” talk about it – there is no possible narrative without a listener, right?³⁰ Another woman, Ana, who made a telephonic call to Miriam (from the USA! Try to figure how much this wouldn’t have costed in the 1990s. And her letter is really long – she needed to talk?), tells about her personal drama: getting involved with straight women. Cice tells her relationship to a married woman (who didn’t even like her that much, she says), a bonding that ended after that woman’s husband forbid the both of them to see each other. Mary writes to reformulate what she had previously said in one meeting of the group (something that ended up being published in the bulletin as a part of that meeting’s “report”): she had reflected upon it and concluded that no, having a girlfriend doesn’t make it easier to come out of the closet; she had nothing to prove to anyone. Besides that, in the same letter she tells that she was going to focus on loving herself first, on loving being a lesbian, and only after that she should pursue her dream of finding a loved one – reading the bulletin helped a lot, yes, thanks! Naná, a physician with a literary

29. The account mentioned here are discussed in more depth in the 3rd chapter of my dissertation (Maia 2017a, 134-178).

30. See Meccia (2016).

vein, writes a short story that depicts the same romantic love ideals present in her autobiographical accounts, in which she narrates the development of her relationship. Different women publish, in almost all issues of *Um Outro Olhar*, love poems for a loved one, bitter poems about rejection and loss, laudatory poems about missing someone who had passed away, inspiring poems about lesbian pride. This is, to me, a collective construction of ideals about love, shared and created through the circulation of writings, made by women who frequently complained about having no “models” for that. I have read Butler’s *Excitable Speech* thinking a lot about those texts – about two, in particular: Nani telling she used to feel anguish because of her unintelligible feelings toward other girls, until she was called a DYKE by a neighbor. After that, the “understood what she was”; the second is when Eliane, one of my favorite collaborators to *Um Outro Olhar*, wrote a letter saying she longed for the day in which “dyke will become a compliment”. That, my friends, is what “promoting pride” is all about.

It is funny how writing sometimes is more like a specific way of thinking, isn’t it? I mean, writing almost as a way of investigating, trying to look for insights on the dialogue [with oneself] laid out on the paper. (*nothing new under the sun, right, Carolina? Isn’t that the reason why you write a personal journal? What a genius.*) I just realized something. I’ve once heard from my friends variations on the theme “you study letters, right?”. At first, I thought they were referring to (and maybe they were) personal ads – I used to publish some [on my Facebook profile] (*is it ethical? I’m thinking about that now*). After losing the count of how many times I’ve answered “that’s not reeeally what my research is about”, I’ve started to pay more attention to them, in a kind of network-built non-directive approach to inspiration... But paying more attention to what I’m writing now, I realize that not only the documents I’ve analyzed were crucially defined by correspondences, but also that a very meaningful part of that content fall under the epistolary genre. Ok, that’s not new to me, I actually mention that in the dissertation (I have even a hypothesis for why letters, that I’ll summarize shortly after this, and after that I promise this text will come to its end), but I haven’t formulated it that way. My friends think I “study letters” (instead of I “study lesbian periodicals”) because, well, I talk about letters all the fucking time. You see... Since my dissertation has already been approved, I thought I had already understood what it is about...

Both Gloria Anzaldúa (in her *Letter to Third World Women Writers*) and Audre Lorde (in *Age, Race, Class, and Sex*) come down on the bourgeois ideal from *A Room of One’s Own*: paper is expensive, time is scarce; if you can’t afford to write a novel, write bit by bit, as much as you can. Lorde defends poetry as the most economical genre, the voice of poor

women and of women of color. In the case of the women whose writings I've analyzed, I think the deal wasn't exactly having "a room of one's own" (meaning time and financial autonomy), but more about creating authoritative, legitimate narrative voices for thinking their own lives. Lorde highlights how much investment (material, emotional, of time) and dedication writing a long narrative (such as a novel) requires. I think the same could be said about the more evidently "political" articles and essays present in *Um Outro Olhar*, as well as reports, political calendars, etc., that require a lot of time for preparing them, lots of reading, discussion, baggage. Letters appear, then, as an accessible genre for writing opinions and narratives of one's own experiences – and those letters were published in their entirety in the bulletins as a way of expanding the discussion. (What I wouldn't do to be able to re-write that part of my dissertation now!)

After rereading those topics listed on my first e-mail, it got me thinking if I could really be able to discuss all three access I promised I would bring here. Then I asked myself if, when I was writing those e-mails, I hadn't already dropped the commitment to fulfill that promise. Then I got angry at myself: I never wanted this last message to serve as a "conclusion" – it would give it an appearance of cohesion and totality that was exactly what I was trying to run away from. Well, now it's your turn to say if it worked.

(I hope it did.)

Love,
Carol

P.S. I've made a copy of my friend's poem about "pursuing the clouds" in the next page.

P.S.2: "A wild patience / has taken me this far" are lines from the poem *Integrity*, by Adrienne Rich.

P.S.3: Just so you have an idea of my traveling here, I've finished this letter close to Registro/SP.

[page break]

Faz tanto tempo que não paro:
tem que ler
tem que escrever
tem que lavar roupas
fazer comida, se houver.

Traduzir, ler, procurar
escrever. Concluir.

Faz tanto tempo que não
namoro com as nuvens.³¹

(Mariam Pessah)

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31. It's been a while since I don't stop
I have to read
I have to write
I have to do the laundry
and cook my food, if there is some.
To translate, to read, to try
to write. To conclude.
It's been a while since I don't
pursue the clouds.

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