david koloane is arguably one of south africa's foremost cultural practitioners. a founding member of the fordsburg artists studios (commonly known as ‘the bag factory’) in johannesburg, he is an internationally renowned artist, curator and critic. currently koloane is involved with the german south african symposium, a body whose main aim is the furthering of cultural cooperation and exchange between the federal republic of germany and the republic of south africa. recently koloane and various representatives from the south african national gallery, the northern flagship institution, the pretoria art museum, the german foreign office and the bochum museum in germany, met in stellenbosch in order to select two promising, young south africans to co-curate with german counterparts, a travelling international exhibition. in brief, the city of bochum is the cultural capital of europe in 2010 and wish to celebrate through a series of events including a travelling german/south african art exhibition beginning at the bochum museum, and later moving to various venues in south africa. quite fortuitously this coincides with the hosting of the soccer world cup in south africa in 2010. after much debate it was decided that nontombeko ntombela and rachel montshiwa will represent south africa in this venture. in what follows david koloane answers some questions regarding the selection process, its criteria and the projects’ outcomes.
jt: firstly, for those of us who are not familiar with it, could you elaborate a little on the origins and the goals of the german south african symposium?

dk: the german south african symposium was conceived in 2005 by dr ralph seippel and bodo schaff (the then german cultural attaché who has since unfortunately been deployed in latin america). dr ralph seippel is the german gallerist who initiated the daimler chrysler awards and recently opened up a branch of the seippel gallery in johannesburg. the connection with the bochum museum in germany was inspired by the ‘new identities’ exhibition, a major survey of south african art and culture that was hosted there in 2004 and later that same year at the pretoria art museum. broadly speaking the the german south african symposium seeks to develop and expand upon cultural co-operation between south africa and germany.

jt: i think the selection of south african representatives nontombeko ntombela and rachel montshiwa quite interesting. both individuals hail from so-called ‘marginalised’ areas in terms of the dynamics of the contemporary south african art world (durban and pretoria respectively). does this reflect anything particular to the goals of the symposium or the projects’ selection criteria?

dk: it was for me an interesting choice as nobody on the panel had the faintest idea as to what the selection process would yield. you will also notice that the various representatives came from different geographical areas in the country and provided names from which a consensus was eventually reached. so no, it does not reflect anything particular to the project, except where it concerns our focus on finding the best possible candidates.
jt: what specific traits were the selection panel looking for in selecting possible candidates?

dk: the criteria, which was unanimously accepted by all the delegation members, was that potential candidates had to display passion, self-initiative, hunger for curatorial experience and a fair amount of self-acquired knowledge of the contemporary art scene both locally and abroad. the candidates’ aspirations and vitality had to be sustainable, not short-lived or opportunistic. writing skills were also essential to enable candidates to elucidate exhibition concepts and artists profiles with ease.

jt: it is always a mammoth task to curate a travelling international exhibition. is part of the plan to throw these young curators into the ‘deep-end’ or is the project geared towards developing skills within a professional, practical environment? if so, what support structures are in place in order to help facilitate the process?

dk: the exhibition will not be a large-scale event in the order of a biennale for example, but rather of manageable scale – maximising the possibility for curatorial exploration and growth. there will be proficient support structures in place in both germany and south africa. however, it is important to caution against the support structures not ultimately compromising the candidates’ potential and innovative ability at any level of the process.

throwing candidates unto the ‘deep-end’ might work in certain instances or
emergencies but its not always an appropriate method of nurturing potential. with
instructive and constructive guidance from the national gallery in cape town, the bag
factory in johannesburg with its variety of artists from different countries, the luthuli
museum in kwazulu natal and finally the pretoria art museum and the national
cultural history museum in pretoria at a local level, the candidates will not be at a
loss for support.

jt: how will the project develop from here? for example, when is the german south
african symposium due to meet again?

dk: as you mentioned earlier, the city of bochum is the cultural capital of europe in
2010. the launch of this exhibition will coincide with this event before travelling to
south africa. the exhibition preparations should therefore be finalized by 2009
(before which candidates will travel to all the host venues, participate in a variety of
activities such as studio & museum visits and ultimately select participating artists)

the next symposium workshop will be convened in south africa in march 2008. at
this point there will be progress reports form the south african and german
components as well as additional institutions that have pledged support for the
project.

jt: on a more personal note, you are often called upon to select young curators,
writers and artists for inclusion in a variety of art-related projects. apart from being
a full time practicing artist, how do you view your role in the contemporary south
african art world?

dk: i feel honoured to have been bestowed with various forms of responsibility
within the visual arts over the years. looking back at my few years of teaching i would
like to reiterate how dire the situation was during the fuba era for black south african
artists. so it comes naturally for me to extend a helping hand to younger, emerging
artists today. i was assisted by a variety of people in the creative sphere (including bill
ainslee, louis maqhubele & fikile magodlela), so i have to do likewise.
jt: is there perhaps something like a ‘personal dream’ you still harbour for the south african art world?

yes. i would like to witness the development of an institution that has an open teaching policy based on the rijksakademie in amsterdam but with a contemporary african emphasis in terms of subject matter and imagery. it should have a rotating panel of practicing artists who teach by example.

comments off on the german south african symposium: interview with david koloane by johan thom.

june 27, 2018

johnny mbizo dyani – you don’t have to love me, i love you

filed under: music — abraxas @ 10:22 am

i love you. you don’t have to love me, i love you.
(johnny dyani, introduction to willisau concert, 1978)

the contrabass is a heart. resonant and wood-warm, it beats at the centre of the ensemble, its dark atrium throbbing with the cyclical rhythm of the ground-bass. systole and diastole – cut the bass, wait for the drop. basslines like blood in the veins of time: the bass carries and sends messages across continents, seas and centuries. beneath the drums and the melody, beneath the song and the solo, it is the bass that holds steady at the tiller: it is the vessel of memory, the bearer of secrets, and its full cup is drawn up from the deepest roots. before and beneath the bassline lies only the expectant silence of unmarked time, a negative sound space, waiting to be moulded by ostinato or traversed by a walking line. this silence beneath the bassline is the abyss of the past, heavy with distance and dislocation, diaspora and exile. it is the bass that sounds the depth of this abyss, reaching down to articulate deep spaces of loss and suffering, suffusing them with knowledge and healing, laying foundations and providing a direction of travel.

it’s like they say at home, if you want to seek knowledge you go to those guys, they sit in the kraal or whatever and then they be talking and then you ask all these questions, they look at you and say, ‘are you prepared for this knowledge?’ and you be saying, ‘ah yes, yeah!’ they say, ‘are you really prepared, because if you ask you might go crazy, it might not all fit here [points to head] and you go phissh!’ and it’s true because with all that knowledge you gotta be prepared. your mind, the strength of your mind, your sight, your hearing, your heartbeat, your energy. you have to be prepared to carry all that.
(johnny dyani, interview with aryan kaganof, 1986)

johnny mbizo dyani sang and played piano before he took up the bass, but it was his bass that brought him from south africa to europe. he left his homeland in 1964 with the famous blue notes – dudu pukwana, chris mcgregor, mongezi feza, louis moholo and nikele moyake – whom he had joined only a few months previously. he was still only a teenager, but he was already carrying all that.
in the decade and a half separating their departure and this 1978 recording, he and his fellow blue notes had travelled many roads, both separately and together. after their initial arrival in france, they had spent the second half of the 1960s in london, where they had become incendiary fixtures on the jazz and nascent improvised scene. but by 1969 internal disagreements between them had become insurmountable, and dyani was prompted to take his leave of britain. while the rest of the group stayed on in london to found the brotherhood of breath, dyani travelled to the continent, where he settled in sweden.

from 1969 through to around 1972 he worked extensively with trumpeter don cherry and drummer okay temiz. he also played regularly with his fellow south african exile, the pianist abdullah ibrahim, whose influence encouraged dyani to convert to islam. in 1972, he and okay would be joined in sweden by mongezi feza, with whom they formed a group called music for xaba; together the three musicians developed an incredibly close-knit improvising trio that was sundered only by the tragic and premature death of feza in late 1975. this phase of intense work with cherry and temiz seems to have been the catalyst for a step change in dyani's practice.

since the early 1960s, cherry had been immersing himself in the traditional sound cultures of the world. a nomad and a visionary, his aim was the creation of a global music beyond boundary and genre, and he had used his fluid organic music society formation to open the corridors of musical time and space; for his part, temiz had brought to this work a fierce virtuosity, and the temporal and rhythmic complexities of the turkish tradition. the importance of dyani to cherry’s search during these years should not be underestimated, for the bassist brought with him an approach to music that was founded in an extraordinarily sophisticated and philosophically complex african reconfiguration of jazz. the same was true of abdullah ibrahim; ‘a very important person’, cherry told arthur taylor in 1971, ‘as are his music and melodies’. jazz in south african had already long understood itself as a critical moment of transnational black becoming, one in which an imported african american musical form had become adopted and transformed into the principal musical vehicle for the expression of specifically south african problems. and jazz musicians and audiences in south africa were well aware that their music was a proud, vital moment in the continuum of universal sonic kinship and dialogue which dyani himself later called ‘skanga…the family of black music’. like all the jazz exiles, dyani and ibrahim carried this history with them. cherry understood this, and valued their vision accordingly.

conversely, the ability to rethink this heritage within the fresh musical, philosophical and spiritual context provided temiz and cherry, seems to have allowed dyani’s own music to come into sharper focus. the three musicians sought to become the cataract for a universal improvising folk music, and here dyani had a space in which his own tradition could join with the broader river of universal human song. some film from mid-1971, shot for french television, shows this trio in session, running through material that includes dollar brand compositions, turkish folk tunes, and jazz repertoire. it is intense, joyous music, made by players in vital and profound musical communion.

with the subsequent arrival of feza and the foundation of music for xaba, the project achieved even clearer direction. the two blue notes worked with temiz to open musical capillaries through which the sap of their own folk and social music could rise anew, travelling through and beyond so-called jazz and free music, past the post-war mbaqanga jazz of the township dancehalls, towards marabi – the unrecorded and unwritten urban african piano music of interwar south africa’s shebeens and slumyards. here they stood in the very headwaters of modern south african music, where it was closest to its folk and rural sources. ‘they were fine jazz musicians who knew their own folklore very well,’ temiz recalls. ‘not all jazz musicians know their own folklore. they knew also the dances, the lyrics and the living styles of their culture. we worked together and built our music around african music.’ ‘i don’t like to call myself a jazz musician,’ dyani would explain. ‘i rather say folk musician. it’s folk music and we improvise on it.’ introducing the concert on this disc, we hear the bassist inform his audience that the music he will be playing is
oh, i always have to keep tradition. there’s no art or music, paintings or human beings without a tradition... i have to keep a tradition, you know, in order to recognize myself, because when i was born i was born in a tradition, i was taught tradition, how to behave, how to move, how to eat, how to survive, that’s part of the tradition, so the music i’ve heard, i have to keep it with me wherever i’m going, the tradition, it has to be with me whenever i’m going. so that’s what’s giving me my life. (johnny dyani, interview with ib skovgaard, august 21, 1978)

the session documented here was recorded live at willisau jazz festival in 1978, at a solo concert given on 2nd september; the following day, dyani played in trio with david murray and andrew Cyrille, a set released by hat hut as 3d family. xaba had been destroyed by the death of mongezi feza in late 1975, but dyani and temiz were still working together in various formations that typically went under the title witchdoctor’s son, a moniker that dyani had started to give his groups, his albums, and also himself. there had been rapprochement too with the other blue notes; after the incantatory mourning for feza documented on blue notes for mongezi (ogun, 1975), they had once more started to record and tour together, and in 1977 they released a quartet album, blue notes in concert volume 1, also on harry and hazel miller’s ogun records. 1978 especially was a flurry of recording activity which saw the bass player appear on several recordings with david murray, as well as with the louis moholo octet on spirits rejoice and, for the first time, with the brotherhood of breath on procession (both titles were released on ogun). there was also a spiky free set with philip wilson and leo smith (fruits, circle records), and the first of many outings for nils winther’s steeplechase records on a session featuring dudu pukwana and john tchicai (witchdoctor’s son, steeplechase). this pace of recording and release would be maintained. dyani was moving fast, and speeding up.

this record is a previously unreleased live set, recorded through the soundboard by niklaus troxler, organiser of the willisau festival. it is a crucial document of dyani’s mature work. though he performed solo concerts such as this one, and often presented long solo stretches on record, no true solo album has ever been issued; only the 1979 recording session released under the title african bass contains a similar session, with some of the same tunes, though that is a duo with drummer clifford Jarvis (red records, 1980). this solo willisau set is a demonstration of the total musical vision that dyani had achieved during the 1970s. it catches him at his most protean and impassioned, shifting from voice to bass and to the rolling piano patterns which are the most direct link to marabi. it is an act of healing, an expression of pain, and a moment of teaching.

i wish you all sunshine
all of the time...
i wish you all some day will understand
the pain my people have to suffer
johnny dyani, ‘wish you sunshine’

there is no unpolitical music, and there is certainly no unpolitical south african music. though the music of the exiles was never limited to being a function or vehicle of politics in the overt sense, it could take a directly political role, and often did. like the music of his fellow exiles, dyani’s music making was always expressive of the political and personal realities that black south africans lived and suffered under apartheid and in exile. but of all the blue notes, dyani’s music was the most anguished, the most suffused with pain and transported by joy; it is music of healing and second sight, and it is strong medicine. through bass, voice and piano, dyani sought to conduct the memorial sound-power of his tradition and his people, channelling a furious but warm avant-marabi that would give voice to the enormity of the historic crime black south africa had suffered, and the totality of the african response to this wound – a response that was psychic, sonic, cultural and political. his music is a radiant flood of bitterness and anger, love and magic: all of the man, in his numerous contradictions and idiosyncrasies, tumbling forth as a natural music that had never been heard on earth. within it sounds the voice of the elders that sit in
the kraal, amplified and booming from the black interior chamber of dyani’s instrument. the unique tone he drew from his bass – loud, resonant, humming with dry warmth and depth of feeling – is instantly recognisable, and electrifies any session on which he appears. it was dyani’s alone: the prophetic sound of an african bass.

the contrabass is a heart, and it emanates love. bass is balm for spiritual wounds. it reassures, and holds the song steady; it moulds silence and time like clay, creating anchors and foundations, dispensing generous wisdom. it envelops and enfolds, cushions and comforts. it is maternal – the bassline speaks of the filtered sounds heard before birth, the muffled voices of those who have come into the world before us, and the double kick drum thump of the mother’s life-pulse. dyani was beyond needing confirmation from an audience. he was there to give, and his message was drawn from greater sources, whose energies he amplified and focussed. not just maternal bass wisdom, but grand-maternal: a grandmother’s teaching, and an unconditional love. you don’t have to love me, i love you.

francis gooding, june 2017

references
quotations from johnny dyani taken from the following sources:
aryan kaganof, the forest and the zoo: an interview with johnny ‘mbizo’ dyani (chimurenga magazine, 2010)
okay temiz quotation taken from interview with the author, may 2017
don cherry quotation taken from arthur taylor, notes and tones: musician to musician interviews (da capo, 1993)
with thanks to karl-jonas winqvist, okay temiz and noah angell.

comments (0)

april 8, 2018

metalepsis in black

my camera has captured for you a few glimpses of an ephemeral microsociety.

academics are not fully conscious of their real lives. groping in the dark, overwhelmed by the consequences of their acts, at every moment groups and individual academics find themselves faced with outcomes they had not intended.
just as we do not judge
an individual academic by
what she thinks about herself,
we cannot judge such a period of
transformation by its own consciousness.

the universities were designed for the wretched
dignity of the academics, for respectable occupations
and intellectual tourism. the sedentary population of the
upper floors is sheltered from the influences of the street.
the university itself has remained the same.

it is a trompe-l’oeil reality when
freedom is practiced in a closed circle, it fades into a dream,
becomes a mere image of itself.

what makes most documentaries so easy to understand is the
arbitrary limitation of their subject matter. they confine them
selves to depicting fragmented social functions and their iso-
lated products. in contrast, imagine the full complexity of
a moment that is not resolved into a work, a moment
whose development contains interrelated facts and
values and whose meaning is not yet apparent.
this confused totality could be the subject
matter of such a documentary.
academics unthinkingly follow the paths learned once, to their work and their home, to their predictable future. for them duty has already become a habit, and habit a duty. they do not see the deficiency of their university. i wanted to break out of this conditioning, in search of different uses of the university landscape.

the university environment proclaims the orders and tastes of the ruling society just as violently.
the appearance of events that we have not created, now obliges us to
be aware of the passage of time and its results, to assess the lack
of transformation of societal desires into disastrous events.
what should be abolished continues, and we continue
to wear away with it. we are engulfed.

sepa-
rated from each other.
of course one might
make a film about it. but
even if such a film succeeded
in being as fundamentally incoherent
and unsatisfying as the reality it dealt with,
it could never be more than a re-creation — as
impoverished and false as this botched sequence of words.
to really describe this era it would no doubt be necessary to show
many other things. but what would be the point? the point is not to add

more ruins to the old world of dead memories.

aryan kaganof
(after guy debord)
mphutlane wa bofelo – engaging the discourse on radical economic transformation (ret) in south africa and southern africa

filed under: mphutlane wa bofelo,politics,race — abraxas @ 11:26 am
abstract
this paper seeks to examine ret in the context of southern africa, with a particular emphasis of the current discourse on ret in south africa, and to raise questions about the systemic, structural and institutional arrangements within which the ret discourse takes place in south africa and therefore theoretical and practical issues and questions that the dominant ret trajectory has for the working-class agenda. to sketch the south african context, the paper provides a summary of the ruling party’s framing and or location of the ret discourse and its outline of the objectives of ret. this is followed with critical questions for debate in relation the framework and objectives mentioned above. the paper then locates the discourse on ret in sa in the context of the historical roots of racial, class, gender and related oppression in south africa, the continuities thereof in the current dispensation and the implications thereof for the transformation. it traces such roots to a dynamic intersection between capitalist accumulation, colonialism and racism and therefore posits the anti-thesis and synthesis as a radical project that simultaneously advance socialization, de-colonialization, democratization and put redistribution, redress, restitution, reparation and reconstruction at the centre of the political economy and social policy trajectory. thus, the paper reframes the debate from talking about ret to talking about radical social, political and economic transformation in order to emphasize that the democratization of the polity and democratization of the economy are inseparable and intertwined and should be pursued simultaneously instead of being viewed as discrete processes to be pursued and achieved in a linear fashion or in stages.

introduction
“to be radical is to go to the root of the matter. for man, however, the root is man himself.”
karl marx

this education conference of ditsela takes place on the occasion of the anniversary of two key moments in history from which we can glean critical lessons related to the theme of the conference and the topic of radical economic transformation. this year marks 150 since karl marx wrote the seminal piece, das kapital: kritek der polischen oekonomie (the capital: critique of political economy) and hundred years since the great proletariat revolution of 1919. marx’s capital and the october revolution are of particular relevance to today’s topic in so far as their provision of historical and dialectic materialism as scientific tools of analysis that exposed how the problems of unemployment, poverty and inequality, the cycles of booms and busts associated with capitalism and the series of financial crises the world has experience originate and are rooted in the intrinsic contradictions within the capitalist system and therefore that sustainable solutions to these has to be sought outside of the logic, values and structure of the capitalist system. marxists and post-marxists theorists have identified some of the factors intrinsic to the logic and structure of capitalism that account for the crisis as (1) the myth of the self-regulating market,(2) neoliberalism unbridled greed of accumulation, (3) crisis of over-accumulation and the crisis of over production and (4) the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. the myth of the self-regulating market is dealt with extensively by karl polanyi in his book, the great transformation. polanyi adequately explains how the economy is
connected and subordinated to politics, religion and social relations and that the institutions and mechanisms of markets self-regulation cannot exist without annihilating human and natural substance of society and turning labor, human beings into pure commodities. The notion of a self-regulating market is based on the idea of capitalism as a system in which the market is allowed to own and control the use of property in accord with their own interests, and where the invisible hand of the pricing mechanism coordinates supply and demand in markets in a way that is automatically in the best interests of society. (Scott, 2006).

The doctrine of the invisible hand of the market is contradicted by the view of capitalism as a socio-political system as well as economic system constituting of three levels, namely:

(a) Markets which involves issues of patterns of ownership and control of the production, distribution and consumption of wealth and resources; and constitutes of an interaction between market factors (labor, land, capital, and technology), product markets- goods and services, firms and consumers.

(b) Institutional foundations – policy regime, regulators, social infrastructure and physical infrastructure, which is the domain of government.

(c) The political authority – that administers the system in the form of direct and indirect participation in the economy through administrative and entrepreneurial role such as operating SOEs, appropriation, or buying, selling and growing of SOEs, and enforcing laws & regulations & regulations, maintaining infrastructure, passing new laws, issuing new regulation and building new infrastructure. (Scott, 2006: 3-13).

Expounding on the idea of capitalism as a three-level system, Bruce R. Scott asserts that ideology, culture and the political structure including civil society have a major influences upon how a democratic society works (Scott, 2006:16), and stresses that:

…market frameworks are created through political processes and regulated through administrative agencies, neither of which is directly controlled by the economic actors themselves. In short, the point is that economics is intimately connected to political and administrative processes.

When we take economics out of this broader context we gain something in the clarity with which we can study how markets operate according to the laws of supply and demand, but we inevitably lose the perspective that market frameworks are societal constructs created and legitimated by legislatures and not by the economic actors themselves. (Scott, 2006: 17-18). This understanding of capitalism as a sociopolitical and economic system is important in the light of the dominant tendency to frame the radical economic transformation on the assumption that South Africa has achieved political transformation and now require to transit to economic transformation. This framing not only holds the dangers of presenting the democratization of the polity and democratization of the economy as discrete projects that can be achieved separately and/or in a linear fashion, one leading to the other, it also holds the dangers of equating radical economic transformation with merely de-racialising the ownership and control of the economy. The reality, however, is that the South African politics and polity has not been fully democratised into a participatory democratic state that provide people active participation in the design, implementation, monitoring and review of development programmes, social policy agenda and political economy trajectory of the country nor is it characterised by popular control of public institutions and worker-control of workplaces and other social institutions.

The democratic deficit created by the inadequacy of bourgeois liberal representative democracy is in your face in South Africa, and so is the growing political, social, economic and ideological distance between broader society and the social, economic and political elite. The undemocratic attributes, injustices and inequities of the economy and the undemocratic attributes, injustices and inequities of the political system are complementary and inseparable. The opulence, greed and insatiable accumulation proclivities of monopoly capital is prescribed, protected, abetted and entrenched by the constitutional, legal and policy framework laid down by the governing black comprador bourgeois class. The social lifestyles and political and economic conduct of the black social, political and corporate elite is prescribed by the standards of big capital. The democratic deficit in the politics is the function and creation of the democratic deficit in the economy and the democratic deficit in the economy is reflective of the democratic deficit in the politics. This perspective is
useful in interrogating how working-class organizations position themselves in relating to the complex and tricky relationship between the state and the various fractions of capital. this question is important in southern africa where there seem to be a direct link between internal contradictions within the state and the territorial battles between the various segments of local, trans-national and global capital. in southern africa there is an emerging pattern of the emergent black capitalists and sections of the ruling black comprador bourgeoisie enlisting nationalist and anti-imperialist language and the transformation discourse to recruit the working-class on its side in its territorial war with other fractions of capital over who must turn nation’s wealth and state institutions and public resources into their private property the most. the paternalistic attitude of the regimes and regiments of capitalist globalization towards africa and the domination of capitalist monopolies by white capitalists -courtesy of the legacies and continuities of apartheid-capitalism – create an enabling environment for the black political and social elites to couch its ambitions to be the new capitalist bosses behind the transformation agenda. this often takes the form of framing the transformation agenda as the african agenda to veil class interests and class contradictions behind the curtain of nationalism. to what extent does this create possibilities for the transformation agenda to be residualizes into a de-racialisation agenda, thereby contributing to giving capital a new breath of life in the form of a non-racial face that allows it to thrive without racial fetters? to what extent is the transformation agenda constructed within the logic of the market? how vigilant and how much capacity, insight, power and influence does labour has to take the transformation discourse outside the logic and dictates of the regimes and regiments of capital?

in her book, the accumulation of capital, rosa luxemburg expounds on marx’s ideas on expanded reproduction to explain how the capitalist system is locked the inescapable contradictions and inherent crises. luxemburg argues: “capital cannot accumulate without the aid of non-capitalist organizations, nor on the other hand, can it tolerate their continued existence side by side. only the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organizations makes accumulation of capital possible.” (luxembourg 2003, 397)

one can’t agree more with rosa luxemburg on this observation. capitalism needs labour to turn raw material into goods and services. capitalism needs political and social institutional foundations to survive. but capitalism does not only deplete and degrades the environment in its quest for super profits. it depends on the suppression of labour interests, social demands and state power for unbridled accumulation of profits and private wealth. therefore capitalist greed for accumulation results in the destruction of the very non-capital actors that are critical for its survival. in this sense, capitalism digs its own grave. but capitalism cannot avoid the grave. it cannot free itself from its entrapment to crisis and to the generation of poverty, unemployment and inequalities without eroding its very logic and structure. updating luxembourg thesis on the crisis of over accumulation in the context of the 1980, walden bello describes the financial crisis of that period as ‘the intensification of one of the central crisis or contradictions of global capitalism: the crises of over-production, also known as over-accumulation or over-capacity. this is the tendency for capitalism to build up in the context of heightened inter-capitalist competition, tremendous productive capacity that outruns the population’s capacity to consume owing to income inequalities that limit popular purchasing power. the result is an erosion of profitability, leading to economic downspin’” (bello 2009)

bello observes that capitalism mooted out neoliberal restructuring, structural adjustments – extensive accumulation, rapid integration of semi-capitalist, non-capitalist and pre-capitalist areas in the global market economy, and financialization as gateways out of the crisis.

the problem with investing in financial sector operations is that it is tantamount to squeezing value out of already created value. it may create profit, yes, but it does not create new value — only industry, agricultural, trade, and services create new value. because profit is not based on value that is created, investment operations become very volatile and prices of stocks, bonds, and other forms of investment can depart very radically from their real value — for instance, the stock of internet startups may keep rising to heights unknown, driven mainly by upwardly spiraling financial
valuations. Profits then depend on taking advantage of upward price departures from the value of commodities, then selling before reality enforces a “correction,” that is a crash back to real values. The radical rise of prices of an asset far beyond real values is what is called the formation of a bubble. Profitability being dependent on speculative coups, it is not surprising that the finance sector lurches from one bubble to another, or from one speculative mania to another, because it is driven by speculative mania, finance driven (Bello. 2009).

In their book, The Crisis in South Africa: Neoliberalism, Financialization and Uneven and Combined Development, Sam Ashman, Ben Fine, Susan Newman explain the devastating result of the financialization route in South Africa:

...in the context of South African production, financialization has produced a particular combination of short-term capital inflows (accompanied by rising consumer debt largely spent on luxury items) and a massive long-term outflow of capital as major ‘domestic’ corporations have chosen offshore listing and to internationalize their operations while concentrating within South Africa on core profitable MEC sectors. The result, even before the impact of the current crisis, was a jobless form of growth and the persistence of mass poverty for the majority alongside rising living standards for a small minority, including new black elites. (Ashman et al. 2011).

The fact that the internal contradiction within the logic and structure of capitalism are at the centre of the crisis of poverty, unemployment and inequality is further amplified in the account of combined and uneven development in South Africa provided by Ashman et al (2011).

South Africa is now, ‘officially’, the most unequal society in the world – though there seems to be a macabre rivalry with Brazil for this status. The poorest 20 per cent of South Africans receive 1.6 per cent of total income while the richest 20 per cent benefit from 70 per cent according to the South African government’s Development Indicators 2009. In the most recent United Nation’s Human Development Index of ‘wellbeing’, South Africa fell one place to 129th out of 182. Before the global economic crisis, South Africa had one of the highest unemployment rates in the world. It now officially stands at 35.4 per cent or one-third of the workforce. The continuing relevance of Marx’s notion that capital generates and draws upon a reserve army of labour is surely demonstrated by South Africa, though Marx could not have foreseen its members would struggle to survive in the context of the highest levels of HIV infection in the world. This helps explain why, according to the UN, average life expectancy for South Africans is just 51.5 years, even though South Africa is classified as a middle-income economy. (Ashman et al 2011)

This description of the impact of neoliberalism and capitalist globalization in South Africa underscores Bello’s assertion that the recent financial crisis is not a crisis of the neoliberal capitalism but the crisis of capitalism itself. (Bello. 2009). One can go further to suggest that the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality are not the products of neoliberal capitalism but are an integral part of the logic and structure of capitalism; and in South Africa reflects how the apartheid economy and its continuities in the current juncture could in many ways be described by the notion of uneven development in the sense of fast growth in one segment of the population or economy does not support development in the same society as a whole. This then is the context in which we have to engage with the radical economic transformation discourse in Southern Africa.

ANC’s outline of the context and objectives of radical economic transformation the African National Congress’s discussion document on economic transformation locates the discourse on RET in South Africa in its resolve at its 53rd National Conference at Mangaung in 2012 to pursue what it refers to as the second phase of the transition from apartheid colonialism to a national democratic society. According to the Mangaung resolution the focus the second phase of transition is effecting economic transformation and democratic consolidation in order to improve the quality of life of all South Africans and to promote nation-building and social cohesion and the means to attain this are promoting growth and development, increasing state-led infrastructure, focusing on using local content...
and local companies, and giving effect to the national development plan, the new
growth path and the industrial policy action plan to stimulate growth,
reindustrialization, transforming the mining sector, promoting youth employment,
developmental state, maintain supportive macroeconomic policy framework –
reconstruction, growth and development. it also locates ret within the minimum
demands of the freedom charter. the discussion document presents the objectives
of ret policy interventions as:

- reducing unemployment and youth unemployment
- returning land to our people and supporting land reform
- increasing black ownership and control of the economy
- activating small business and cooperatives
- strengthening social justice and conditions for the poor and working class
- improving the employment impact on infrastructure projects
- reducing inequality and poverty
- dismantling monopoly practices and structures
- asserting south africa’s interests in the global economy
- improving integration into african economy
- stimulating inclusive growth

questions for the trade union movement and the working-class:
some of the critical questions that need serious engagement with insofar as the
framework of ret as articulated by the ruling party are:

1. to what extent will the achievement of the objectives of ret be impacted upon by
the current disarticulation between the social policy pronouncements that require
significant social spending on housing, healthcare, education, social grants (etc) and
an economic policy path that is locked in the washington consensus logic of reduced
tariff rates, tax incentives to big capital, bail out to big capital in different disguises,
trade liberalization, flexible labor, de-regulation and down-sizing of the public
sector?

2. many of the objectives of the ret outlined above were\' are the pronounced
objectives of growth and redistribution (gear), accelerated and shared growth
initiative for south africa (asgisa) national growth path (ngp), industrial policy action
plan (ipap), and national development plan (ndp). thus far these policy programs
that the discussion document use as a frame of reference for ret, have produced
little in terms of significantly altering racial, class and gender based power and social
relations accrued from the legacies and continuities of racial-capitalism. what is it in
theoretic and practical terms will or need to be done differently for ret to lead in the
direction of practical overhaul of the apartheid geography and the apartheid
economy?

3. is it possible for ret located within the framework of pursuit of the objectives of
the ndp to lead to overhaul of the apartheid geography and the apartheid economy
without paying serious attention to the problems and issues that organized labor
and civil society have raised about the ndp? for instance, the congress of south african
trade unions (cosatu has accused the ndp of selectively drawing from certain
government policies and programmes and ignoring others, ignoring or contradicting
critical elements of the ngp/ipap, which are supposed to be governments lead
strategies over the medium term. this, cosatu asserts creates confusion as to which
policy prevails, and undermined the greater degree of co-ordination which was
emerging through e.g. the infrastructure plan, and the presidential infrastructure
coordinating commission (picc). to what extent does locating ret within the rubric of
ndp without addressing the concerns workers and the poor have raised about ndp
holds the possibility of raising the policy confusion alluded to by cosatu? in its critic
of the ndp, national union of metal workers of south africa (numsa) has argued that
the ndp:

a) leaves intact the power relations of colonialism of a special type
b) it is therefore a major rightwing deviation from the freedom charter and thus, it
paves a path that derails a socialist-oriented ndr

c) ideologically, it is firmly anchored in neo-liberalism and does not even represent a
shadow of the revolutionary tradition of the national liberation movement

d) gear is indeed a living and growing document, it had 66 pages in 1996. it has now
grown to 430 pages in the form of the ndp!

e) we have consistently argued that there are very strong parallels between the ndp
f) specifically we have argued that the NDP:
   i) does not have a plan on how to restructure the economy
   ii) does not have a plan on how to fundamentally transform ownership and control patterns of the economy
   iii) plans to roll-out infrastructure to further reinforce raw mineral export dependence and not broad-based industrial development
   iv) minimizes the role of the state in the economy
   v) seeks to de-regulate the labour market further and to further weaken working class power, and is thus thoroughly anti-working class in its outlook
   vi) operates within the neo-liberal macroeconomic framework and broadly, and thus offers no hope for fundamental social and economic transformation
   
the question that remains in this regard is: to what extent is there a match or mismatch between the goals of RET and the goals of NDP? What are workers and communities going to do to ensure that the conceptualization and implementation of RET addresses the issues and problems they have with elements of NDP and other macrocosmic policies of the current government? Related to this is the big question of the extent to which radical economic transformation can be achieved without rolling back some of the critical aspects of the CODESA agreements.

Herbert Jauch provides this insightful account of the Namibian experience:

In its 1976 political programme, the South West African People’s (SWAPO) envisaged radical economic transformation but did not implement it upon assuming power. In the run-up to independence in the late 1980s, negotiations with the Western Contact Group resulted in certain constitutional principles which included the protection of private property. Thus neither the land that was stolen through genocide nor the control of multinationals over mineral and fishing resources was even touched. As a result, colonial economic structures remained in place after independence and there was not even talk of the need for radical economic transformation amongst the political leadership. An arrangement (although sometimes uneasy) between the old and the new elite was reached and economic changes were limited to some modest reforms such as affirmative action measures and more bargaining rights for unions. Working class organisations failed to mount a systematic challenge to push for radical economic transformation. Critical left voices were either co-opted into government structures or remained in NGOs that were mostly donor-dependent. Trade unions’ militancy declined steadily over the years and despite some occasional radical positions on land and privatization, unions overall did not manage to push for radical economic transformation. This left working class interests stranded. A few years ago, Namibia’s second trade union federation, the Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA) developed its own policy proposals. This at least signaled an intention to tackle broader socio-economic issues and not be confined to a narrow collective bargaining agenda. (Jauch 2017)

In Zimbabwe a similar situation prevailed. Despite the socialist orientation of ZANU (PF) at the time it ascended to power, it became constrained by the Lancaster House arrangement like South Africa and Namibia, Zimbabwe had the advantage and opportunity to learn from African countries that received independence and received advice from statesmen from these countries. Based on Mozambique’s experience after it had chased the Portuguese out of the country and embarked on an intensive nationalization program, Samora Machel cautioned Zimbabwe against post-independence revolutionary zeal, and Julius Nyerere implored with President Robert Gabriel Mugabe to preserve the jewel of Africa – referring to Zimbabwe’s relatively developed and diversified economy. (Chitambara et al 2011). The Mozambican experience that Machel implored Zimbabwe to learn from indicates the barriers that the economy dominated by beneficiaries of settler-colonialism and racial-capitalism hold for post-independent Southern African countries. It underscores the fact that Nyerere should have qualified his plea to Zimbabwe to keep the jewel of Africa with a caution about the hollowness of hoping to leverage whatever positive elements of the inherited economy without addressing the realities of a disarticulated economy, characterised by a disharmony between its various parts and the existence of tiny enclaves of opulence and filthy riches alongside oceans of poverty and wretchedness. In this regard, it is instructive to examine the observation of Chitambara et al (2011) that:
...if Zimbabwe was a “jewel” at independence; it was certainly a flawed one. The inherited economy was based on the philosophy of white supremacy that resulted in the evolution of a relatively well-developed and modern formal sector, employing about one million people (a fifth of the labor force), that existed alongside an undeveloped and backward rural economy, the home of 70 percent of the population. The ‘jewel’ was the ‘enclave’ part of the economy, which had been developed on the ruthless dispossession of the source of livelihood of the majority of the people, in particular their access to land, which forced them into wage employment. Movement across these structures was strictly controlled such that the prevailing relationship between them was an exploitative one. (Chitambara et al 2011).

The late Zambian economist, Guy Mhone has written extensively about enclavity, primitive accumulation, migration and rural marginalization and labor absorptive capacity in Southern Africa and how the economy characterised by enclavity thwarted and arrested possibilities of pro-poor development, and inclusive and shared growth Zambian.

In South Africa, many theorists have employed Trotsky’s thesis of combined and uneven development to highlight the systemic and structural barriers created by the continuities of an enclave economy accruing from settler-colonial racial-capitalism. This highlights the importance of strategic policies simultaneously aimed, building the capacity of state owned enterprises, enhancing the efficacy private public partnerships, facilitating active participation of indigenous people in the economy through skill development, business support and affirmative action programmes and transforming patterns of ownership and control of the economy through redistribution and redress programs and reconstruction and social policy programs aimed towards the overhaul of the socioeconomic and physical or geographic structures of racial segregation apartheid geography. Zimbabwe’s transitional national development plan indicated some sense of learning from other African countries. It declared that in some countries in Africa growth and development was impeded by external and internal constraints that include inappropriate policies and strategies, misallocation of human and material resources building costly, unproductive and often unnecessary capacity. The transitional national development plan went further to mention the results of such skewed policies as uneven development, stagnation, and decline, leading to no significant and sustained improvement in the living standards of a people as a whole. (Chitambara et al 2011). However, the constraints of Lancaster House Agreement, the impositions of the IMF and the World Bank and lack of political will and courage to carve an alternative developmental path saw the Zimbabwe National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) government religiously implementing the structural adjustment programmes, much to the disadvantage of the working-class and the poor. The rigorous adoption and implementation of effective structural adjustment programs (ESAP) in Zimbabwe once again proved that liberalization and financialization is not a panacea to underdevelopment.

The Zimbabwean government inherited the most developed financial sector in Southern Africa, with four commercial banks, two discount houses, three merchant banks, three building societies, three finance companies, the Post Office Savings Bank, the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange, a large number of pension and provident funds, three development finance institutions, including agricultural finance corporations established in 1924 to fund agricultural projects and two stockbroking firms. (Chitambara et al 2011). These highly segmented financial institutions were not changed in any fundamental way by the new government in the first decade of independence, making the financial services to remain exclusive of the majority of the population, available only to urbanites that constitute less than thirty percent of the population. (Chitambara et al 2011). Under the rubric of ESAP, Zimbabwe embarked on a rapid financialization project, based on the logic that a well-developed financial sector plays a central and central role in promoting socioeconomic development and that financial development reduces income inequality and absolute poverty.

Based on the argument that excessive regulations and controls interfere with competition and make banks less efficient, more fragile and reduce industry’s access
to finance, the Zimbabwean government adopted the liberalization of the interest regime and its transformation into a market-based framework as its strategy to mobilize savings. This strategy is in line with the theoretical underpinning of the financial sector reforms that emphasizes the link between interest rates and savings and postulates that liberalization will, amongst others, increase financial savings and improve the quality and quantity of investments and that increase in domestic interest rates relative to foreign rates will encourage capital flow thereby augmenting domestic savings, resulting in a large pool of loanable funds. (Chitambara et al, 2011).

The reforms introduced by Zimbabwe in this regard were:

- Relaxation of regulations pertaining entry of new financial institutions
- The government committed itself an exchange-rate policy that allowed Zimbabwean dollar to depreciate over time by the inflation differential between Zimbabwe and its major trading countries
- Zimbabwean residents and companies were allowed to open foreign-currency denominated accounts with authorized dealers in Zimbabwe
- Foreigners were allowed to purchase shares in the Zimbabwean stock exchange subject to 25 per cent limit on a counter, with a single investor limited to 5 percent
- Restrictions on access to domestic borrowings by foreigners was abolished
- In February 1995, Zimbabwe agreed to commit to Article 8 of the IMF (Chitambara et al, 2011).

Chitambara et al, (2011) observes that financial liberalization not only deregulated interest rates but also facilitated the onset of the first stage of financial deepening – the emergence of new financial intermediaries and banks, with a number of banking institutions increasing by more than three folds by 1990, constituting fourteen commercial banks, four merchant banks, three finance houses, six discount houses and five building society. The fact that most of the new entrants in the financial sector were owned by indigenous Zimbabweans makes the banking sector one of the sectors in which economic empowerment of the indigenous was achieved smoothly. (Chitambara et al, 2011). However, the most important question, which is critical, especially for South Africans – is did the well-developed and diversified, and relatively indigenized financial sector result in socioeconomic development? Did financial development contribute to the reduction of income inequality and absolute poverty? Did the economic empowerment of indigenous Zimbabweans translate into the broader empowerment of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe as a collective or to their social development and economic development?

An answer to this question is a big no or as South Africans would say, for the underclasses and the majority of the population, it offered ‘dololo’. This comes out very clear in this account by Chitambara et al, (2011)

“The influx of new entrants into the financial sector resulted in intense competition for customers between the new indigenous Zimbabwean banks and the old, orthodox banks, mainly foreign owned. However, the community did not benefit much from this competition, as the pricing of banking products did not improve. Average lending rates increased from 12 percent in 1990 to 34.7 percent in 1997, while interest on three-month deposits rose from 10.3 percent to 32.5 percent over the same period. In addition, when measured in terms of depth of products and services offered, the new banking institutions did not offer any innovative services, choosing to fight for space in the market for generic banking products, mainly deposit mobilization and lending to well established companies and individuals with high net worth. A lack of risk management skills and weak corporate governance structures limited the capacity of new institutions to develop new structures. As a result the banking sector continued to serve its prime clients, leaving the SMES and other marginalized sections of the community without access to financial services. (Chitambara et al, 2011).

This example of how the poor benefitted fokkol from financial reforms that took place within the framework of ESAP in the name of inclusive growth indicates how the roots of the financial doldrums in which Zimbabwe found itself can be found in the imposition of the neoliberal trajectory on Zimbabwe and the failure of its government to boldly the colonial, neo-colonial, racial and uneven nature of the economic structure head on right from the beginning. Instead of bold action the government resorted to using paying lip service to the land issue each election time. When it became clear that the workers and the poor are tired of slogans and flag
independence, the government was forced to go the route of land redistribution, and indigenization, appropriated popular sentiments to project itself as an anti-colonial force in order to prop up its power. This happened at the time trade union movement was divided between a section that uncritically endorsed government agenda and a section that aligns itself with a liberal bourgeoisie opposition that tremendously failed to align itself on the side of the masses, refused to support land repossession project. The MDC actually expelled –international socialist organization (ISO) member – Gwisai Munyaradzi – who was then MP on the MDC ticket – for pushing for MDC to support land redistribution agenda.

The absence of a strong, united and radical trade union movement and of a strong socialist movement left the radical transformation agenda in the hands of the ruling ZANU PF who mostly used it as a vote-catching mechanism and as a means of patronage and self-enrichment of the political and social elite associated with ZANU PF rather than as a break with capitalism or practical search for a socialist alternative. The questions in this regard are: will the trade union movement and broad working-class organizations in South Africa, choose the path of entrusting the government to take an dismissive and absenteeist posture or that of a critical support of the government’s RET trajectory, exploiting positive aspects thereof to articulate a socialist alternative, exposing and combatting attempts by the social, political elites to eat in the name of transformation, and developing its own policy proposals and creating its own platforms and strategies to pursue this goal rather than relying solely on government efforts and platforms? What can we learn from Zimbabwe in terms of transforming the white-dominated financial sector in South Africa in a manner that benefits all South Africans rather than create a few elite who operates with the same profiteering logic of the white and/or foreign owned financial cartels? Related to this question is the question of the meaning of national liberation and class struggle in the South African context, specifically the extent to which formulating these as discrete questions that can be addressed in stages creates an ideological and political, philosophical and practical dilemmas, and to what extent locating the RET within this paradigm raise questions.

In this regard there is a need to for the working class to critically on the extent to which there is a need for critical review the notions such as national liberation, colonialism of special types, the national democratic revolution and the native republic thesis which have always featured heavily in the dominant traditions within the liberation movement insofar as characterization of the South African struggle is concerned. In his article, National liberation: what significance, if any, for South Africa today? Leonard Gentle makes the point that though the land that is today still officially known as South Africa was a British colony up to the establishment of the South African state through the Act of the Union of 1910, the parties that negotiated settlement of 1994 were all South Africans unlike in Zimbabwe where the Lancaster Agreement was between Britain and the liberation movements.

He therefore concludes that in South Africa ‘national liberation’ could not have meant the achievement of national independence from or secession from a colonial oppressor state in the strict sense of the word. In response to this problematique of how to characterise apartheid state the SAPC coined the term colonialism of a special type in the 1950s to describe the oppression of white minority rule as akin to colonialism, albeit with the colonizer not being a foreigner but an occupant. Such characterization amounted to regarding white South as settlers; a term later associated more with the pan Africanist congress that split from the ANC in 1955. From the 1960, partially because of the discomfort with the settler-colonial connotations and partly because of the influence of the two stage theory and the black republic thesis as propounded by the USRR, the SAPC and ANC used the concept of national democratic revolution (NDR) to explain the character of the South African struggle. The gist of NDR was that the struggle is national in form but democratic in content. This meant that the struggle should be conducted in two stages, respectively aimed at the goals of the attainment of liberation from colonial racial oppression and the attainment of socialism. Flowing from this logic was the idea that the first stage that should lead to a black capitalist republic shall be led by the patriotic front in the form of the African National Congress and the second that should lead to
socialism shall be led by the south african communist party as the vanguard party. (gentle.2012). as late at 2010, the general secretary of the sacp, comrade blade nzimande asserted that the objective of the ndr has always been understood as the defeat of repressive and colonial regimes to build people’s democracies under the leadership of the motive forces, mainly the oppressed and exploited. he also stressed that such revolution may not be able to proceed to socialism immediately in circumstances where the motive forces are not strong or conscious enough to drive socialist revolution or where other objective factors pose a limitation to transition to socialism.

this view is in harmony with the assertion of the anc national working committee in 2009 that the ndr is called as such because its national and democratic tasks are aimed at dealing with the political and socio-economic manifestations of apartheid colonialism and that while the motive forces strive to change the elements of the capitalist system in the interests of the ndr, they have to manage the capitalist system in line with the main elements of its own logic.

in its second transition document of 1912, the anc further amplified its strategic mechanism of managing the capitalist system in the interest of the ndr by arguing that the ndr requires a black bourgeoisie and should even appeal to sections of the white capital that are ‘patriotic”. given the points raised in this paper about the need to locate a revolutionary transformative agenda outside the logic, structures and regimes and regiments of capitalism, what are the possibilities of the ndr located within the framework of creatively harnessing capitalism in the interest of democratization of the polity and economy transitioning into radical socio-economic transformation, let alone socialism?

what are the implications of pinning the hopes of the attainment of the objectives of the ndr and the possibilities of a second transition on liberal constitutionalism and creative management of capitalism? as ari sitas has observed, the dominant discourse within south africa, particularly within the tripartite alliance is not only that the post-apartheid dispensation is an unfinished national democratic revolution or a national democracy in the making, but also that an electoral or insurrectionary alternative is premature. (sitas. 2012). the second transition concept mooted by the anc at its 2012 policy conference and subsequent policy positions as minor version of transition from the ndr social revolution is thin in details such as how it offers any substantial break with the political economy trajectory based on neoliberal macroeconomic and the residualisation of social policy to safety-net aimed? what implication does the idea that since the anc can directly access, reach and influence the working-class, urban and rural poor through local councilors and local branches, it does not need the mediation of the civics, has on the strategy of communists and progressive trade unions building socialism now through the politics of encroachment and constructive criticism within the ruling party? (sitas 2012). gentle (2012) pose the following questions in relation to the ndr: “what does ‘national in form’ means? “who is the south african nation? “what did the liberation movement mean “national liberation? gentle (2012) correctly probes the notion of national liberation by a reminding us that in terms of the notion of ‘nation’, only white people were considered as the south african nation in the 1910 and that only white people made the decision in 1961 that south africa should become a republic outside the british commonwealth. one can add that black people were not included in the ja\nee vote that was intend to gauge whether the sa government of that time had the citizen’s nod to pursue the negotiated settlements. this is precisely because in terms of the apartheid lexicon and its systemic and institutional framework only white people as a collective were perceived to constitute the south african nation, with black people as a collective perceived and portrayed as a collection of tribes. this the logic that informed the establishment of the bantustan, urban townships sometimes segmented into sotho section; nguni section etc and what was then called radio bantu; with tribal segmented radio stations, e.g radio sesotho, radio zulu, etc. it is in response to this apartheid notion of south africa as constituting of the white nation and a collection of tribal groups and the balkanization of the country along racial and tribal lines that the idea of a unitary democratic south africa in which there is no whites or blacks, minorities or majorities but a single south african nation permeated the broader liberation movement. but to what extent can we say we have attained the nation-building part of the liberation project? are there significant and
noticeable steps toward dismantling and reconstructing the apartheid geography and antecedent structural and institutional arrangements beyond surface modification of the old society and renaming apartheid constructed institutions without doing away with their racial and tribal constructions?

telling cases in this regard is how the housing and social infrastructure development programme of the post-1994 government has failed to challenge and reconstruct apartheid spatial arrangements and the how the ghost of the 1951 bantu authorities act is being resurrected in the form of a traditional leadership and governance framework act where the chiefs enjoy more powers than they did in the bantustan regimes of the nationalist party, (giyosi 2012) often at the expense of the rural poor, especially in places located in the former transkei and former ciskei area. another case in point is how we have simply renamed radio sesotho, radio zulu, and radio xhosa etc to lesedi f.m, ukhosi fm, umhlobo wenene without transforming them into instruments of integration instead of tribally based institutions they essentially remain. the issues flagged raise the following questions: how far we are as country with the nation-building project? what are there contrarieties within this nation-building project? to what extent has south africa learnt from other countries in africa about the pitfalls of national consciousness that fanon referred to? the questions about the meaning and relevance of national liberation and ndr in the current context are related to overall geographic consciousness about the class structure of south africa: what does the revolutionary agenda entail? who are the motive forces? what kind of alliances and solidarities need to be built and what are the challenges and threats contained in such alliances? in this regard, it may be useful for the broader left to grapple with the following questions posed by gentle (2012):

....when did south africa shift from being a british colony and become something else….what is that something else….and what was that “something else” before 1994? and more importantly, what is that something else today? what is the character of the bourgeoisie? and what is the character of the working-class in south africa? is it simply a unified working class for which race does not matter? what about the middle class? does south africa today still replicate the old divisions for access to the social surplus generated by the working-class? what strategies and tactics should the underclasses employ to win their goals …and who is on the side of the under-classes and who is against them?

how should the trade union movement and the working-class frame ret? perhaps the best way for labour and working-class to answer the pertinent questions raised above is to locate ret within the historical-material roots and systemic and structural base of racial, class and gender oppression in southern africa and south africa in particular. a critical examination of the roots of racial and class oppression in the global south and southern africa in particular reveals an intersection between capitalism (classism), colonialism (imperialism) and racism and racial segregation. in order to deal with the crisis of the exhaustion of natural resources and the conflict between capital interests and labor and social demands, capitalism in the northern hemisphere had to launch beyond geographic borders in search of raw resources and cheap labour.

capitalist colonial expansionism then had to enlist racism as moral justification expansionism of the plunder of the lands and wealth of other people and the super exploitation of their labor through subjugation to subhuman working and living condition. the fact that colonialism and or imperialism conscripted racism as its moralizing doctrine logically resulted in colonial societies being based on structures of racial segregation. emergent capitalism in southern africa enlisted the pre-existing structures of racial segregation established by racism to fend cheap labor for itself through the proletarianization of the african people, using the mechanisms of the forced labor, in south africa, the apartheid policies established by the national party regime served to institutionalize the structures of racial segregation established by colonialism and expanded by racially-based capitalism. in his article on the south african political economy, martin legassick eloquently explains inextricable link between colonialism, capitalism and racism in the context of south africa.

south africa was formed through colonial conquest, by first the mercantile dutch east india company from the mid-seventeenth century followed by the british from the early nineteenth century. from that time on colonialism resulted in racism, slavery, attempted genocide, the expropriation of the land of indigenous people and
the exploitation of their labour as forced labour. Here lie the roots of national oppression. Full-blooded capitalism developed late in South Africa in comparison with Europe and the United States. The real impact of capitalism came only with the discovery of gold and diamonds, in the mineral revolution at the end of the nineteenth century, as the world economy was undergoing the transition to imperialism. Diamond and gold mines required large amounts of cheap labour. They used the pre-existing structures of colonialism and racism and transformed them into structures of segregation to generate this supply as cheap black migrant labour, supervised by racially privileged white workers. The ideology and structures of segregation prepared the way for the ideology and structures of apartheid. Segregation and apartheid, therefore, served the interests of capitalism rather than merely the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism. (Legassick. Undated)

This account of the roots of national and class oppression indicates that the program of transformation in South Africa must effectively be that of de-colonialization, socialisation and the de-racialization and democratization of both the polity and the economy. While this implies that redistribution, redress, restitution, reconstruction should be at the centre of social policy and economic policy, it also means that South Africa must honestly address the difficult question posed by the fallism movement: how possible is it to achieve redistribution, redress, restitution, reconstruction without brutally confronting the legacies, continuities and symbols of the structures of colonialism, white supremacism and patriarchy? The argument that de-coloniality and intersectionality discourse presents before us is that de-racializing capital within the precincts of colonial and neo-colonial structures is as cosmetic as de-colonization without a break with capitalism, patriarchy and related forms of social division, social exclusion and social disenfranchisement ultimately amount to the ruling, corporate and social elites seating at the capitalist table eating on behalf of everybody, while the underclasses as a whole, black people in particular, women and other marginalized sectors of society remain on the periphery, condemned to feasting on crumbs. It points to the fact that the task of the trade union movement and the working-class has to be pushing the ret discourse beyond pursuing shared growth to dislocating the edifices of colonialism, capitalism, racism and patriarchy. Patrick Bond (cited in Legassick. Undated) pointed to the need for the transformation agenda to highlight this historic task of the working-class and their organization in his response Blade Nzimande’s passionate call for South Africa to go back to the RDP, to wealth redistribution, greater social spending, and heavy investment in infrastructure, together with policies that created long-term jobs and sustainable livelihoods for the majority. In a passionate plea made in to the Black Management Forum, Nzimande correctly asserted that growth alone, even if it reached 6%, wouldn’t necessarily translate into jobs. Where there was such a “huge wealth gap”, even growth of 10% a year wouldn’t help people without structural change.

Bond responded that Nzimande is right, but he needs to spell out clearly that this involves a struggle to nationalize the commanding heights of the economy under workers’ control and management and that the strategy for inward-industrialisation to provide for the basic needs outlined in the RDP should lead inexorably to a strategy for workers’ power, workers’ control of the economy, and workers’ democracy. The argument raised by Patrick Bond points to the fact that for the working-class radical economic transformation, or revolutionary social, political and economic transformation will be superficial if it does not amount to development of a strategy for workers’ power, workers’ control of the economy. In this regard, it may be useful to quote at length, Simon Clarke, whose book, Keynesianism, Monetarism, and the Crisis of the State, influenced Bond’s views expressed above: “the necessity of socialism has never been more urgent. The objective conditions for a democratic socialist society have never been more fully developed. The concentration and centralization of capital has socialized production to an unprecedented degree. The computer, through which monetarism has been able to perfect the subordination of society to the alienated rule of money, provides the instrument that makes it possible to bring the complex apparatus of social production under democratic control. “There is no reason why socialism should not put itself back on the historical agenda, if only it can learn the lessons of its defeats. The fundamental lessons are three. First, the basis of socialism can only be the socialization of production. Only by bringing social production under social control can the contradictory tendencies of capitalist accumulation, that lead to the
pauperization of growing masses of the world population, to the intensification of class struggle, to wars and to recurrent crises, be overcome. Second, socialism has to be internationalist. This is not dictated simply by the internationalization of capital, for the crisis is unleashing nationalist political and ideological forces that counter such internationalization. It is more fundamentally a political imperative. Nationalism is the supreme expression of the alienated form of the capitalist state, fetishising the ‘illusory community’ of the nation against the emerging unity of the ‘real community’ embodied in the collective organization of the working class. Third, socialism has to be democratic. This does not mean that socialism should confine itself within the limits of the formal democracy of the capitalist state. The experience of state socialism and social democracy alike shows that the attempt to build socialism from above, on the basis of the illusory community of the capitalist state and the formalism of its democratic processes, soon leads the state to confront the real community of the democratic organizations of the working class as a barrier to socialism. The socialization of production cannot be divorced from the question of the political forms of such socialization.” (Clarke 1988)

Conclusions

The conclusions that can be drawn from the question raised in this paper with regard to (1) the conceptual and practical framework of RET, (2) an analysis of the roots of national and class oppression in South Africa and (3) the historic task of the working-class is that genuine radical economic transformation has to result in an overarching change in patterns of ownership of the land, the major means of production and the commanding heights of the economy. It has to entail a move from private ownership to public ownership and state control of the land, the major means of production and the commanding heights of the economy and the socialisation of essential services such as water, energy, health, education, and transport. It also has to entail doing away with a dis-embedded economy that is centred on the activities of private corporations and the state only without taking consideration of and capacitating other economic actors such as the family, home-based economic and business activities, economic and business activities that take place at the community level, in organizations, within the informal economy and in broader society. It has to take the form of re-embedding the economy in society and reinforcing the intersection between political democracy and economic democracy. It should be intertwined with the creation of democratic worker control of production and workplace democracy and community control of public institutions like schools, hospitals and clinics. True radical transformation of the economy has to facilitate cooperative, collaborative and communal processes and structures of production, distribution and consumption.

Radical economic transformation should go beyond economic reforms aimed at creating a black capitalist industrialist class. It should go beyond simply de-racialising the upper layer of the capitalist structure but leaving the bottom structures the same, characterised by black working-class suffering and white privilege. The way forward for labor and working-class organization with in relation to the RET discourse can be summarized with one slogan: resist, mobilize, transform! Resist both the ploys of capital to arrest the moves towards economic transformation and the machinations of the black capitalist and comprador bourgeoisie to turn RET into an elitist project in which the rich and connected eat the nation’s wealth in the name of and on behalf of the masses. Mobilize to build the strength, power and capacity of the forces of socialist forces to fight and win battles at the shopfloor, at the boardrooms, on the street, in the parliament, etc. Unleash the force and power of the forces in all these platforms to push for systemic, structural and institutional transformation.

Notes

1. Mphutlane wa Bofelo teaches political and social development at Workers’ College in Durban, Kwazulu – South Africa / Azania. The views expressed in the paper are not necessarily subscribed to by the Workers’ College.

2. Ditsela is the development institute for training, support and education for labour. It was established in 1996 by the main trade union federations in South Africa, to help build a strong trade union movement.
3. Karl Paul Polanyi (October 25, 1886 – April 23, 1964) was an Austro-Hungarian economic historian, economic anthropologist, economic sociologist, political economist, historical sociologist and social philosopher. He is known for his opposition to traditional economic thought and for his book, The Great Transformation, which argued that the emergence of market-based societies in modern Europe was not inevitable but historically contingent. Polanyi is remembered today as the originator of substantivism, a cultural approach to economics, which emphasized the way economies are embedded in society and culture. This view ran counter to mainstream economics but is popular in anthropology, economic history, economic sociology and political science.

4. Rosa Luxemburg (5 March 1871 – 15 January 1919) was a German-Polish-Jewish Marxist theorist, philosopher, economist, anti-war activist, and revolutionary socialist who became a naturalized German citizen. She was, successively, a member of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL), the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). She articulated a pointed criticism of both the Leninist and the more moderate Social Democratic schools of socialism, Luxemburg.

5. Walden Flores Bello (born November 11, 1945) is a Filipino academic who served as a member of the House of Representatives of the Philippines. He is a professor of sociology and public administration at the University of the Philippines Diliman, as well as executive director of Focus on the Global South. Socialist Worker described Bello as “one of the most articulate and prolific voices on the international left” and that “he has devoted most of his life to fighting imperialism and corporate globalization.” Bello was also a supporter of Hugo Chávez and was impressed by his opposition to the United States, stating after Chávez’s death that he was “a class act, one impossible to follow. Wherever you are right now, give ‘em hell.”


7. The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa) agreed on the principles of power-sharing, protection of minority rights and guarantee of property rights as the corner-stones of the government of national unity. The National Party had entered the negotiation process saying these are the non-negotiable conditions upon which any future constitution of South Africa should be based. The property clause remains in the current constitution of South Africa.

8. Herbert Jauch has been with the labour movement in Southern Africa for over 20 years. He served as executive member of the Namibian National Teachers Union (NANTU) as well as on various committees of the Namibian Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW). Since 1995, Herbert worked as labour researcher, carrying out research projects for the Southern African Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUC) as well as Namibian and South African trade unions. Herbert was instrumental in developing a labour diploma course for Namibian trade unions and served as director of the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LARRI) in Katutura, Windhoek from 1998 until 2007. He was LARRI’s Senior Researcher until January 2010 and now works as freelance labour researcher and educator with various organisations in Southern Africa.

9. The Lancaster House Agreement, signed on 21 December 1979, allowed for the creation and recognition of the Republic of Zimbabwe, replacing the unrecognized state of Rhodesia created by Ian Smith’s unilateral declaration of independence in 1965. The terms of the agreement provided for Zimbabwe Rhodesia to temporarily revert to its former status as the colony of Southern Rhodesia, thereby ending the rebellion caused by Rhodesia’s unilateral declaration of independence. In addition to the terms, Robert Mugabe and his supporters were pressured into agreeing to wait ten years before instituting land reform. Both the British and American governments offered to compensate white citizens for any land sold so as to aid reconciliation (the “willing buyer, willing seller” principle), and a fund was established to operate from...
1980 to 1990.

10. south african slang for ‘nothing’

11. afrikaans word essentially meaning having nothing, being nothing, nothing left, literally “fuck all”

12. the international socialist organization (iso) is a revolutionary socialist organization in that identifies with trotskyism, leninism, and the marxist political tradition of “socialism from below.”

13. leonard gentle is the former director of the international labour and research information group (ilrig), an ngo that produces educational materials for activists in social movements and trade unions. he has been an anti-apartheid activist for many years and has worked as an organizer for the south african commercial, catering and allied workers’ union (saccawu), the national union of metalworkers of sa (numsa) and as an educator for the international federation of workers’ educational associations (ifwea).

14. ari sitas is a south african sociologist, writer, dramatist and civic activist. his publications include voices that reason, black mamba rising: south african worker poets in struggle, william zungu: a xmas story, slave trades, and towards a postcolonial sociology?

15. ari sitas is a south african sociologist, writer, dramatist and civic activist. his publications include voices that reason, black mamba rising: south african worker poets in struggle, william zungu: a xmas story, slave trades, and towards a postcolonial sociology?

16. patrick bond (born 1961, belfast, northern ireland) is professor of political economy at the university of the witwatersrand wits school of governance. he was formerly associated with the university of kwazulu-natal, where he directed the centre for civil society from 2004-2016. his research interests include political economy, environment, social policy, and geopolitics

17. simon clarke (born 26 march 1946) is a british sociologist specialising in social theory, political economy, labour relations, and the history of sociology. he has a particular interest in employment relations in china, vietnam, and the former-soviet nations. he is professor emeritus of sociology at the university of warwick.

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confessions of a fanatic

when i met grandmaster aryan kaganof at tete mbambisa’s performance in khayelitsha he looked so pale and tired someone overworked, worn out and bit ill health. it was during an interval and as i went over to greet him and doc jonathan eato in my slanging ‘mother tongue’ isixhosa he greeted back in his tsotsi slang and immediately said “hey man we are getting old” then we teased each other and there was this item i was wearing which he admired of which i failed to grab the opportunity of souvenirs exchange moment of which up to this moment i beat
myself up with not grabbing that golden opportunity. we went on chatting and i was telling him what tete was saying to me when i went to greet him that he was getting old and there was no escaping that. then grandmaster told me of tete’s performance at the rainbow in pinetown how jovial and fun it was he said the audience was even dancing to some of tete’s tunes. then he came back to tete’s comments about getting old. he mentioned the untimely passing of ray phiri and, notably, the passing of legendary jazz icon dr. johnny mekoa. what disturbed me was the fact that these incidents happened during the tour to promote tete mbambisa’s latest jazz offering ‘one for asa’. he said tete was dancing and saying he is next in the line. it’s like he was welcoming and embracing death. then kaganof, witnessing all these events unfolding, said it feels like they are ‘hosting the ghosts’.

the autopsy

attending tete mbambisa’s concert is one of the highlights of this year’s calendar in my life. tete mbambisa’s sound is timeless.

TETE MBAMBISA BLACK HEROES

i think the first time i heard of tete mbambisa’s sound long before i know the man i was in my mother’s womb. i think it was about few hours after zygote (conception) and that was the sound of umsenge and that’s how powerful the sound of tete is and then in primary school and in those days it was called sub standard a came this soothing haunting sound ‘zukile’ and when that song is playing on the radio you were rest assured that your parents are coming home from work. it (zukile) had that healing effect. then there were 1976 uprising which i can confess that that though i was still young and in primary school the impact of the riots was too severe to ignore judging from the reaction of our parents towards the unrest. in the midst of all that with abdullah ibrahim ‘s
manenberg being the hit song then mbambisa kept us sober with his offering which was a tribute to late piano guru chris mcgregor and that is the song stay cool. in the song you find all generations of south african jazz in one song, past present and even future. funny enough you also find all music genres in one song.

then as time was progressing you kind of being enticed by other sounds. during the late 80's and early 90's there was an emergence of choral music coupled with african pop culture which was nicknamed bubblegum music. the likes of the late brenda fassie and choral music composer mzilikazi khumalo were household names. they kept us mesmerised during those days – it was a phenomenon then. but still then south african jazz music refused to die thanks thanks to the likes of the late duke ngcukana (christopher columbus ngcukana's son) for fusing three elements of music: choral music, jazz music and marimba – to introduce chorimba. i should confess though that at some instances jazz music was treated like a 'cheap whore' which forced those who revere jazz music to move away from the spotlight in protest of this illicit act. however artists like
hotep idris galeta were vocal about this abuse. at the jazzathon which was a four day festival held at the v & a waterfront hotep will always after his performance make people aware of the value of jazz music and have a stern warning to those artists who use the name jazz in vain.

but the fact that jazz music was dying was evident especially with the rumours of the death of tete mbambisa and also horrible things that were happening to the families of jazz musicians. the mccoy mrubatas, the ngcukanas, and, of course, tete mbambisa, just to name few. the years 1996 to 2007 were the years of plenty in the life of south african jazz. as much as kwaito and hip hop were taking over, the sounds of sibongile khumalo, moses molelekwa, the resurrection of legendary saxophonist, maestro mankunku ngozi, just to mention a few were too powerful to ignore. coupled with that was the government’s choice in appointment of mr pallo jordan as the minister of arts and culture and indeed he did deliver. he made it possible for jazz music to shine by giving artists space to freely express themselves.

provincial things were happening. nomaindiya mfeketho brought us north sea jazz which is now known as cape town international jazz festival which is now approaching its coming of age. we’ve seen art meets sound meets poetry through the sterling work of
kgafela oa magogodi, ernest mothle and msa xokelelo. we’ve seen a retrospective of the late dumile feni. late cups ‘n saucers nkanuka through the brainchild of fitzroy ngcukana was regrouping and these were artists who were long forgotten now re emerging to the jazz scene. through all this then followed the passing of jazz artists in droves ezra, robbie, duke and others. but the one that hit me hardest was the passing of winston mankunku ngozi. i mean he was a giant, one of the most noticeable figures in the sa jazz scene. guys like ezra ngcukana were even quoted saying they don’t see the reason to live anymore. to them it was like jazz has died. and of course for jazz lovers it was indeed the end of the world.

however the case of the passing of ezra ngcukana was admittedly the unearthing of new talents on the jazz scene.

lefifi tladi was there to render a poem dedicated to ezra, hence they were the part of the notorious dashiki. my friend sakhiwo noboza, a sterling trumpeter now turned guitarist, was there but it was a rendition of tete mbambisa’s dembese which was led by renowned trumpeter feya faku that stole the show. tete was of course was on piano while lefifi by his side kept nodding, it was a spellbinding performance. bra’ barney rachabane tapping on mankunku’s yakhalinkomo – i mean ezra’s send off was quite hilarious. in fact it gave us jazz lovers that hope that jazz is still alive. bra’ roy’s little giants, his son with his friends mesmerised us – it’s like mongezi feza was brought back to life – full circle.
born too late, gone too soon is the lamentable case of zimasile ngqawana. zim was not just a musician but a philosopher and a cultural activist. he was the voice of conscience. a voice of the voiceless. as we are all aware of the state of jazz neglect by the powers that be. to the system, theoretically, jazz is the most revered genre that needs to be nurtured, but practically that is not the case. we often heard of the cases of jazz musicians dying as paupers due to lack of support from the government. i even read an article headlined ‘the art of dying poor’ and mankunku being a household name was on that list. and that was what made zim angry. in the meantime you will have government sponsored hip hop concerts advertised as “jazz concerts” and you won’t see even a single jazz artist in the line up. this was a masochistic abuse of jazz.
when zim’s institute for jazz was vandalised there was no government assistance to rebuild the institution. to zim ngqawana in confession has succumbed to the fact that for him it’s no longer about entertainment but inner attainment. to him it was not about pleasing the audience but for his personal spiritual healing. he even said “the audience is free to do whatever they want to do” – which in jazz that is not the norm. the passing of zim ngqawana was a wake up call for the authorities, they even pledged a trust in honour of zim. that was too little too late judging from the fact that when his institute was vandalised no assistance came from government. it was one of those hypocritical stunts the system is famous for. perhaps we should say zim’s passing was a sacrificial offering to cleanse the ‘sound’.

the state of jazz neglect is in fact a world-wide case. the case in mind is of wynton marsalis with his traditional new orleans jazz function. his lament on the death of jazz, his trademark paints a picture of the ongoing persecution of jazz, the tireless journey of duke ellington, the lonely life of albert ayler and many more of those jazz martyrs. abdullah ibrahim once said it’s like the sword is lifted above your head and you are summoned to go through anyway.

confessions

the first time i was introduced to aryan kaganof was by a postal brochure that i received from him. to be quite precise it was by leseglo rampolokeng through his book black heart.
Lesego Rampolokeng is a subversive artist (dissident poet), a literary bomber. He also caught my attention through a television programme called ‘not quite a friday night show’ that was aired in the early 90’s. The host of that show was a comical guy even the show itself was kind of a comedy show. It was satirical. Lesego in turn after meeting him in person at the concert held at Cape Town Gardens introduced me to the sound guru Warrick Sonny in his house in Camp Street. At that time I was still trapped between rock’n roll and choral music, classical literature and bit of poetry. Was also fascinated by alternative spiritual practices, though my Christian faith took centre stage. Taking music classes accidentally introduced me to the experimental jazz sound. Then I was majoring in bamboo flute. I can recall one moment during break my colleague and I, he was a guitarist, we were just chilling playing this tune and boy did we get carried away. It was then that I spontaneously improvised in sound. It was a full 45 min of non stop experiment. Our teachers were so baffled asking us where we learned to play like that. That resulted in us passing exams without even writing them. It was then that I started to embark on a quest to find and understand this sound. I went from Joan Jett in rock’n roll to Boy George, from
sibongile khumalo to mike ngxokolo in choral music, from gf handel to wa mozart in classical music, from sandile diken to

lesego rampolokeng and ingoapele molingoane in poetry. from christian indigenous worship to being fascinated by intlombe nemiguyo . and all this was in search of that sound that unique sound.

it wasn’t until i was captivated by the voice and sound of mbizo johnny dyani that i finally realised that i have arrived.
mbizo was a point of departure in my quest. from him (mbizo) i began to understand the artistry of professor ct msimang and pitika ntuji. mbizo led me to the sound of the blue notes, of chris mcgregor, dudu pukwana, mongezi and tebogo moholo.

that was the beginning

fanatic (ghosts and figures)

elements of hope and honour

in the beginning was jazz and jazz was with the sound and the sound was jazz.

having witnessed the erosion of jazz sound it was slowly becoming evident that this sound needs to be rescued from the shackles of sound sinning genres. first was mbaqanga and maskandi that disguised themselves as “jazz”, then as slowly as that genre was dying came african pop, popularly known as bubblegum, that’s the mahlathinis and brenda fassies. then there was kwaiito and house music – the makendlas and revolution. throughout this process the ray phiris and the tabanes
were still soldiering on, attempting to keep the sound (jazz) alive. It was this genre – the hip hop – the one that is often referred to as the genre of the lost generation, that actually resulted in the re-emergence of jazz. To recall a few artists from this genre: tumi of tumi and the volume, tuks senganga, prokid, proverb and others who were time and again paying tributes to jazz artists through their work. This genre also has an underground element where prima facie avant garde artists are showcasing their craft. That's where names like simphiwe dana, mthwakazi, tlokwe sehume and others emerge. In the sound of these artists you can clearly capture true jazz in its most spiritual form.

dreaming of bugs gongco and gideon nxumalo is what is happening when I listen to the work of nduduzo makhathini and kyle shepherd. These guys it seems are the rescuers of South African jazz music. Guys like herbie tsoaeli, ayanda sikade, shane cooper, kesivan naidoo, jonathan crossley are like warriors of this sound. Listening to Thandiswa Mazwai’s Belede has further put my soul at ease saying finally the sound of jazz is indeed rescued. Black coffee is also following suit in acknowledgement of the power of jazz.

Selfless and tireless work of the dedicated saint (Dr. Jonathan Eato) has finally yielded results. The martyrdom of the grandmaster is indeed not in vain. Amongst other places I know that host this sound the one that truly stands is jazz in the native yards project popularly known as Kwa Sec. It has over the years serve as jazz sanctuary of highest degree right at the most humblest of all places. In the township. Having witnessing all this unfolding and at play.

And after the 12/07/2017 Tete Mbambisa concert held at Bertha House Cinema in Khayelitsha I can confidently say

Finally the future of South African jazz looks even brighter.
for more information about jisa’s south african jazz archiving project contact dr. jonathan eato at jonathan.eato@york.ac.uk

comments off on hosting the ghosts – the autopsy of south african jazz by luzuko elvis bekwa

july 24, 2017

mphutlane wa bofelo – reclaim the humanism of socialism to extinguish the flames engulfing the country

filed under: mphutlane wa bofelo, politics — abraxas @ 10:34 am

strini moodley memorial lecture presented on 19 july 2017, howard college theatre, university of kwa-zulu natal (ukzn)

respected leaders and members of the ukzn community, umtapo centre, the steve biko transformative educational project and broader kzn civil society, i greet you in the name of the oneness, unity and fellowship of humanity: sanibonani, shalom, namaste, assalaam alaykum, kgotso ebe le lona. as frightened as i am by the word ‘memorial lecture’ and equally surprised when i saw the official invite to this event falsely accusing me of being a “lecturer”, i am greatly honored to be part of the speakers at this memorial lecture of comrade strinivasraji moodley – the man fondly known as connection.
the connection nickname symbolized comrade strini's inclination to interact with and bring people together beyond social, political, cultural and geographic borders. A memorial is indeed a fitting tribute to a man whose political and cultural work was by and large against de-historicizing the many social, political and economic problems facing humanity. The symbolic and political significance of the concept of memorial in this context is also due to the fact that comrade strini subscribed to the black consciousness philosophy, a philosophy that has articulated the relationship between memory and being very well. Indeed black consciousness – like other philosophical branches africana philosophy such as pan africanism, black existentialism, black existential feminism and critical race theory, stresses the importance of remembering, particularly critical interrogation of the past and its link to the present and the future as a political act, that has either liberating or oppressive consequences depending on the meaning that one attach to their place in history and their role in the making of history.

Black consciousness has properly identified the impact of the colonialis project of denigration, disfiguring and mutilating of the histories and traditions of an oppressed people as denying people a sense of being and belonging and therefore denying them their humanity. The black consciousness movement (BCM) – of which strini was a co-founder in azania – identifies the re-humanization of the oppressed people and their mental and physical liberation as the central aim of national and class struggles the world over and as the central focus of our struggle in azania. The BCM articulates black self-realization, as the key mover of the agency of black people as the most downtrodden of the exploited under-classes of azania. It proposes black solidarity and black power as the most potent instruments to confront and challenge the structures of racial-capitalism that deny black people their humanity, and advocates egalitarian socialist values and practices as the medium through which the humanity of all people – irrespective of the colour of their skin, their gender, their sexuality etc can be reclaimed.
this takes us to today’s theme. i must admit that the first challenge i had in deciding how to approach my talk was deciding on which of the two proposed topics to speak on:

1. how can the flames engulfing the country be extinguished?
2. socialism and humanism are they two sides of the same coin?

my struggle with the topics was precisely because i found the two topics so intertwined that it would be difficult to talk about one without speaking to the other. i found the implied framing of socialism and humanism as discrete and separate ideals and goals problematic. i also struggled with the notion of extinguishing the flames.

what flames are we referring to? are we referring to the flames of spontaneous, organic and organised resistance engulfing the country as exemplified by rhodes must fall, fees must fall, popular land repossessions actions and nationwide protests against the squeeze of the continuities of apartheid-capitalism and neoliberal policies on poor and working-class people’s lives? or which flames are referring to? there are so many flames engulfing the country. the country is engulfed by the fires and flames of industrial pollution that endangers the lives of thousands of people particularly poor working-class communities such as the people of durban south basin who for decades have endured the assault of air pollution, oil pollution, water, noise pollution and land degradation on their lives and wellbeing caused by the activities of sapref, engen refinery and several polluting industries ranging from waste water treatment works, numerous toxic waste landfill sites, a paper manufacturing plant and a multitude of chemical process industries, the people of zamdela
in Sasolburg who for fifty years have been subjected to poor air quality as a result of high concentration of sulphur dioxide emissions and fine particulate matter courtesy of the Sasol chemical industry, and several communities in the country who almost three decades after democracy are still literally breathing raw sewerage? Azania is engulfed by socioeconomic violence unleashed on poor communities by neoliberal capitalist policies that churn unemployment, poverty and inequality. It is engulfed by rampant maladministration and corruption in the private and public sector. Azania is engulfed by the continuities of apartheid-capitalism and racial, class and gender disparities. Azania is engulfed by what for a lack of words I refer to as internecine wars between various fractions, appendages and outlets of capital in the scramble over who must turn the state into its private property and cash-cow the most. The various kinds of flames engulfing Azania are related to the flames engulfing other countries and other people all over the world. What I know, however, is that the Strinivasas Moodley we know, would be more interested in igniting and kindling to high voltage the flames of popular resistance and revolutionary war against social, political, economic, gender and environmental injustice. And to my understanding, Strini perceived socialism as a scientific expression of humanist ideals.

This understanding influences me to use my poetic license and abuse the position of being the speaker to reformulate the my topic today as reclaim the humanism of socialism to extinguish the flames engulfing the country.
herbert marcuse poignantly expresses the point that we make that socialism is humanism when he states:

“in the marxian conception, socialism is humanism in as much as it organizes the social division of labor, the “realm of necessity” so as to enable human beings to satisfy their social and individual needs without exploitation and with a minimum of toil and sacrifice. social production, controlled by the “immediate producers,” would be deliberately directed toward this goal. with this rational organization of the realm of necessity, human beings would be free to develop themselves as “all-round individuals” beyond the realm of necessity, which would remain a world of want, of labor. but the qualitatively new organization of the realm of necessity, upon which the emergence of truly human relationships depends, in turn depends on the existence of a class for which the revolution of human relationships is a vital need. socialism is humanism in the extent to which this need and goal pre-exist, i.e., socialism as humanism has its historical a priori within capitalist society. those who constitute the human base of this society have no share in its exploitative interests and satisfactions; their vital needs transcend the inhuman existence of the whole toward the universal human needs which are still to be fulfilled. because their very existence is the denial of freedom and humanity, they are free for their own liberation and for that of humanity. in this dialectic, the humanist content of socialism emerges, not as value but as need, not as moral goal and justification but as economic and political practice—as part of the basis itself of the material culture.” i would like to agree with marcuse that socialism and humanism in its radical sense are inseparable.

my view is that the political, social and economic crisis facing the world today has its roots in (1) the barbarism and injustices of market supremacism, racial
supremacism and patriarchy, (2) the inadequacy of representative liberal democracy and social democracy, (3) the excesses of commandist communism and vanguardist marxism, and (4) the failure of the dominant discourse to locate racism and patriarchy as much central to problems we face as capitalism. Therefore, this crisis cannot be appropriately dealt with without appealing to the radical humanism of socialism. It equally cannot be adequately addressed without locating socialist and radical humanist thought in the quest for forms, expressions and organs of power beyond the state, the market and formal political parties. Most importantly, the rediscovery and resurgence of the humanist goal of socialism or what Biko and the BCM refers to as the vision of an egalitarian socialist society that bestows a human face to the world will be just a matter of chasing shadows if socialist and leftist thought in general is not located to the specificities and peculiarities of the conditions and problems faced by black people, women, the gay-lesbian-transgender–intersex and queer communities, refugees and immigrants, disabled people and other disempowered, powerless, silenced and marginalised people. It is clear that to rediscover and articulate the mission of the quest for a humanity, socialism has to disabuse and redeem itself from the myth that socialist ideals and practices must begin with Karl Marx and Frederick Engels and end with Vladimir Lenin (with Leon Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg said in hushed tones, Mao somehow tolerated, Antonio Gramsci somewhere in the background – Frantz Omar Fanon and CRL James as the bastard kids; IB Tabata, Archie Mafeje and Neville Alexandre too black to be in the canons and black socialist women completely left out.) Most importantly, socialism has to rid itself of the twin devils of statism and economism to explore participatory democratic politics and collaborative, cooperative, communal, social and sustainable modes of production and distribution of wealth and knowledge.

This means that we have to discard and bid goodbye to a predictive and commandist kind of socialism that not only claim to have all the answers but also claims that only a particular party and a particular inner-circle within this party possesses the spiritual powers to see the future, and therefore the rest of society must depend on the brains and eyes, guts and whims of this group of intellectual sangomas for its destiny and future. It is ludicrous to subscribe to the notion that one party can be the leader of society instead of its taking its cue from public demands, societal issues and the dynamics of time and place. It is absurd to portray one party as the vanguard of the working-class instead of the under-classes as the vanguard and a socialist party drawing from the daily experiences and struggles of the wretched of the earth. It is ridiculous for one political organization to impose itself as the sole authentic representative or torchbearer of a particular philosophy and to deny the plurality of voices and diversity of perspectives and slants within one philosophy, ideology or movement. As a matter of fact the very notion of which social force is the vehicle should be interrogated in a critical manner that avoids being essentialist about the questions of class, race and gender and also avoids being prescriptive and dogmatic on the agents and forms of struggle. As
Herbert Marcuse correctly asserts:

Socialist theory, no matter how true, can neither prescribe nor predict the future agents of a historical transformation which is more than ever before the specter that haunts the established societies. But socialist theory can show that this specter is the image of a vital need; it can develop and protect the consciousness of this need and thus lay the groundwork for the dissolution of the false unity in defense of the status quo.

Indeed Strini perceived socialism, radical humanism, and black consciousness as the way out of the mayhem in which we find ourselves where children and women are unsafe in the streets, at home, in schools and at every space and wherein everyday there is one or other form of protest in demand of very basic necessities that should be a given in a normal society.

Strini understood that in the context of Azania any project aimed at re-humanizing the people who are at the intersection of the ravages of racial, class and gender oppression that does not have the insight of black consciousness, black feminism and ecological perspectives and does not take into cognizance of all forms of social exclusion, marginalization and powerlessness is bound to fail. This comes out very clear in Strini’s input on the beginning of Umtapo where he clearly articulates a radical humanist and socialist perspective on the notion of peace activism in our context. Strini mentions that
umtapo was established in response to internecine violence in the community particularly internecine violence among political parties and that it was aimed towards an intervention programs that would make people to be in solidarity with one another to work together to address the root of the problem instead of fighting one another. (the beginnings of umtapo. youtube.com), explaining that in the context of all the wars and violence in Africa and the world peace has acquired a new meaning (ibid), strini indicates states that:

“…the whole notion of a peace activist is not different from the old days. in the old days we were freedom fighters. i think today every freedom fighter has to be peace activists. what is a peace activist? a peace activist is not a person who is only interested in the absence of war but is more concerned about the quality of life of every human being. a peace activist will be fighting for will be for development of the quality of life of every human being in the world. not just in your own community, not just in your own family, not just in your own neighborhood, but the world over. that is what umtapo sets out to do… to multiply themselves in the community. the way we want to go about with this is to establish a leadership institute that will be able to train young people to be leaders who are committed, accountable, incorruptible, who are able to have a keen awareness of their own self and their own history and are also able to mould and design new country, a new country that will have leaders who are gonna make it their role to eliminate violence, corruption and unemployment and all the things that have riddled the country, primarily the problem of poverty. (the beginnings of umtapo. youtube.com)

here strini clearly articulates the idea that genuine struggle and achievement of peace lies in the struggle for and realisation of social, political, economic, gender and environmental justice and in the creation of an egalitarian society wherein all human beings have at their disposal the human, social, political, economic, cultural and environmental conditions required for their overall wellbeing or for meaningful human existence. he stresses:

• the importance of solidarity, self-realization and focusing on the roots rather than the symptoms;
• the role of activists as facilitators of individual and collective agency to mobilize collective action for social change;
• the need for committed, accountable and incorruptible leadership
• the vision of a development agenda that radically deals with the intersection of problems that is injurious to the welfare and wellbeing of people and the environment.

strini’s emphasis of the importance of focusing on the roots rather than the symptoms of a problem is evocative of
jose marti’s assertion that to be radical means to go to the roots. it is no wonder that within the bcm strini was known as the irrepressible prophet of the revolution. at the personal level my most unforgettable memory of strinivasan moodley was of him workshopping us on freirian pedagogy. i remember specifically his statement that has lived with me for all my life and that shape my social, cultural and political activism:

“the role of a facilitator is to kill himself\herself”

what i understood strini to be saying was that the role of facilitators is not that of a gate-keepers of knowledge, power and resources nor is the task of facilitators to build an empire for themselves or to consolidate the establishment but rather to create a world in which their services is no longer required, a world in which knowledge production and education and active participation in social, economic, political and cultural life is not the preserve of the propertied and the elite.

that as activists, in any terrain – be it in academia, organised civil society, organised labor and in social and political movements etc – we should assume the role of facilitators rather than that of lecturers, teachers and leaders who know all the problems. what strini is telling us is that we should see ours as the struggle against establishments, hierarchies, orthodoxies, dogmas and canons and rather than the the enterprise propping up the system that is based on various forms of social stratification, social disenfranchisement and social exclusion.

that our task is to smash the gated pedagogy that entrenches inequalities and commoditize education and other social services in the name of standards and the bottom-line. there is therefore no doubt that if comrade strini was here he would be among those calling for expropriation of the expropriators, for socialisation of land and the major means of production, for equal redistribution of wealth, for the public control and social ownership of the commanding heights of the economy, for free and de-colonial education, for free, decent and habitable housing, free and quality public healthcare and quality and safe public transport, shouting at the top of his voice:

rhodes must fall!
fees must fall!
outsourcing must fall!
capital must fall!
racism must fall!
patriarchy must fall!
south africa must fall for azania to rise!

the point we would like to make here is that socialism and humanism, to be specific, radical humanism, are two cups of the same liter or rather socialism minus humanism is socialism minus its core. by humanism here we are not referring to many variants of utopian and liberal humanism. by now it should be common knowledge that western humanism or liberal humanism has been exposed and rendered false in its promise of human freedom without altering the capitalist relations of productions that fosters unequal, inequitable and unjust power relations. western humanism and liberal humanism has also been rendered a falsity by its failure to confront the structures of racism and patriarchy and has its indecisiveness in the face of the ecological disaster associated with unbridled accumulation.

the humanism of marxism has been undermined by a rigidly statist and economistic paradigm characterised by vanguardism and bureaucratic centralism. the falseness of the democratic and humanist postures of former stalinist, one-party and bureaucratic centralist communist regimes lies in the fact that they seek to become more humanistic by making arrangements with western imperialism or by using the socialist lexicon to implement the neoliberal capitalist agenda. we can see this playing itself in azania with the tendency by those in power to pay lip service to the concept of people’s power while propping up the power of capital and entrenching systemic, structural and institutional arrangements that create a form of democracy that is effectively an empire of the social, political and corporate elites. but for genuine socialists and communists there is not denying the fact that any liberatory project worth the salt has to be based on the humanist notion that enslaved human beings must accomplish their own liberation and therefore on a frontal attack on all structures serves as barriers to human agency for liberation. such an understanding implies that the task of socialists is to engage in a simultaneous process of cultivation of individual and collective agency and exposure and confrontation of the systemic, structural and institutional arrangements that constrict, suffocate and throttle human agency.

herein lies the humanism of socialism: the idea that human beings are makers of their own history and should be at the centre of all social, political, economic and cultural activities and processes that have an impact on their life and shape their destiny; and that all structures, systems and institution that deny human beings this should be fought and smashed by any means necessary. as herbert marcus observes, “the human reality is an “open” system: no theory, whether marxist or other, can impose the solution…’i find myself in agreement with herbert marcus that the tasks of all who are activists and intellectuals, all those who are still free and able to think (and bold to act), is to develop the conscience and consciousness of enslaved human beings who must accomplish their own liberation…. to make them aware of what is going on, to prepare the precarious ground for the future alternatives. this socialist humanist ideal fits like a hand-in-glove in the black consciousness idea that the oppressed people should be the agents, subjects and objects of their own liberation, it resonates with the motto of the disability movement in azania, nothing about us without us and with the maxim that has since been hijacked and commercialized as clothing label: for us by us. indeed a true liberatory project is one that is by the people for themselves and the role and work of a revolutionary activist in this regard is summed up in the advice of lao tzu:

go to the people. live with them. learn from them. love them. start with what they know. build with what they have. but with the best leaders, when the work is done, the task accomplished, the people will say ‘we have done this ourselves.’

some of the practical things we could do to deal with the flames engulfing the country and the globe are to:

1. revitalizing anti-sectarian radical popular-education, civic education, worker-education, worker-culture and theater for social transformation, centering these on the organic struggles and campaigns of the labor, student, youth, women and community organizations and using them to strengthen initiatives such as fees must
fall, outsourcing must fall, anti-eviction campaigns and popular protest for housing and land.

2. exploration and experimentation with or consolidation of existing grassroots-based community development programmes and solidarity economy initiatives that tap into the principles and practices of eco-socialism and sustainable living approaches

3. identifying spaces within and outside of existing formal and informal education platforms and broader labor, civic and social movement platforms to explore and experiment with the ideals of a cooperative higher education and the building of a broader movement for transformation of public higher education from what henry giroux refers to as a “bordered” or “limited” enterprise to a “borderless,” socially and politically conscious sphere directed towards the project of democratization and borderless pedagogy that moves across different sites – from schools to the alternative media – as part of a broader attempt to construct a critical formative culture that enables people to reclaim their voices, speak out, exhibit moral outrage and create the social movements, tactics and public spheres that will reverse the growing tide of authoritarianism.

4. explore the idea of bringing radical socialist and broader left groupings that are not beholden to the current neo-liberal state and capital around a national socialist forum that explores a common platform of action around issues of common agreement and common interests that could include, among others:

(a) a series of workshops, seminars and campaigns to advocate for human, political, social and economic development policies and programs that serve to radically democratize the society, the state and the economy and to move south africa towards the nationalisation and socialization of the primary means of wealth, the commanding heights of the economy and essential social services.

(b) a national summit on land redistribution, agrarian reform, sustainable industrial development and social and economic transformation aimed at consolidating and linking current struggles and campaigns on these issues and developing a cogent policy and political program on them.

(c) an ongoing campaign and advocacy against gender-based violence that will include a series of gender and sexuality workshops and seminars at schools, universities, communities and workplaces as an educational initiative aimed at tackling the attitudes, practices and systemic and structural factors that account for the explosion of various forms of violence and oppression against women and children and against the gbtqi community.

(d) campaign for a popular constituent assembly that will do away with the sellout constitution that came out of the fraudulent codesa process

the radical humanist socialist approach we propose to tackling the issues must attack and complete breakaway with the dominant narratives promoted by racism, capital and patriarchy that seeks to portrays black people, workers, women, the gbtqi community, refugees and immigrants, homeless and landless people as a problem instead of as people faced with particular economic, social and psychological challenges and problems caused by racism, capitalism and patriarchy. as biko correctly responded to the racist notion of the black problem, ‘there is no such thing as the ‘black problem’ but that the problem is quite simply white anti-black racism.’ we should offer the same answer to those who turn black students and black youth into a problem rather than as people faced by the problem. when black youths in particular are assailed with social rhetoric that asks them not to make any reference to the apartheid past or its impact on their social realities and are encouraged to restrict their focus on seizing the abundant opportunities and spaces for self-development opened up by post-apartheid legal and constitutional framework. when black youths are told that an enabling environment has been created for them through the bold of heroes and sheroes of the struggle, and theirs is the new struggle of pulling themselves up by their own bootstrings to occupy the spaces and seize the opportunities.
when black youth are bombarded with the rhetoric that overemphasize individual effort and individual agency above collective agency aimed at structural change and social transformation such as “phanda, pusha, play” (hustle, push and play), vukuzenzele” (wake up and do it for yourself), #uzoyitholakanjani uhlel’ekhoneni?” (how will you find it when you are sitting at the corner?” socialist humanism and bc will enable the poor black rural and township child bombarded with “uzoyitholakanjani uhlel’ekhoneni?” occupy your space” to respond:

i am not at the corner
out of my own volition
it’s the only space
left for me to occupy
the hospital has no space
for a bed for my tb
my numeracy is too wanting
for me to know the safe number
for me to raise at a specific
time and place to a particular
person in the prison space
my mind is an occupied space
campus culture declared me a dropout
the arts architecture history lectures landed me in venice
literature left me in london of bygone days
the curriculum spoke to me in a strange language
the fees kicked me out of the space
at home i wrestled with the rats in bed
fought with roaches for a place at the table
till the red ants evicted
my family from our shack-house
because we spoiled the value
of the house of mister mayor
i am not at the corner
out of my own volition
i put a table on the street corner
to sell potatoes and cigarettes
metro police came with guns and the law
to kick me out of the very corner
me and my buddies gathered
around the corner to wash
cars for some money for bread
the rich man came with fancy machines
produced papers the local government
& took away the corner and the clients
i relocated to another corner
only for municipality to ask
me to produce business license
i am not under the bridge
out of my own choice
i identified a good space
where i can stand guard
on people’s cars for r30 for the shelter
big business came up with elegant uniform
donkiepiel & superficial smiles

indeed socialist humanism will arm the youths and students, the poor and the unemployed with the political consciousness to boldly declare that as long as the systemic , structural and institutional arrangements not only push them to the corner but also allow for the rich and propertied to even colonize the very corner they are quarantined to : sizohlala sizinyova ne government ..until there is truly a government of the people by the people for the people!!!
without any apology: izwelethu i afrika. i afrika izwelethu! one azania: one people!
one nation: one azania!
“oh ravelli,” she whispered, “you have taken me to heaven – i shall never consider anything beautiful after this – how wonderful it is to be with you – one lives through so many lives.”

countess carmencita monteleon of spain

before he was being invented by others, or started imagining himself in autobiographical texts, he was creating new names for himself. born jan gysbert hugo bosman on 24 february 1882, the first of these names was the italianate vere di ravelli, a name made up for the concert stage. combining the name he had read in a book with a shortened form of the spanish for ‘gysbert’ – ‘gilvere’, he was using the stage name in 1902 during his second concert tour of the cities of berlin, magdeburg, paris, strasbourg and cologne.

a letter to johannes j. smith of 15 november 1912, includes two sapphic reconstructions by ‘gian bonzar’ for translation into afrikaans and possible publication. the letter, signed by bosman with his invented stage name, ‘vere di ravelli’, goes on to state:

i do not write under my own name, in fact i am distinctly averse to anyone knowing that i write at all. you will respect my nom de plume, i know, simply because i should like it to be so. i am not anxious that my name should even be mentioned in the matter. it may seem very silly to you – all this – but please forgive me – it is my little madness.

it is fair to assume, therefore, that by 1912 jannie (as he was called by his parents) bosman had become ‘vere di ravelli’, necessitating the adoption of yet another transformed appellation. the name ‘gian bonzar’ is clearly derived from jan boonzaaier (his mother’s maiden name), and this letter to smith is the only instance found by the present author where its use is suggested. however, on the cover of an undated manuscript of bosman’s translation from arabic into english of the travels of ibn jubayr (2 volumes) in the nasionale afrikaanse letterkundige museum en navorsingsentrum (naln) in bloemfontein, the author’s name appears as ‘the marquis louis de vere de ravelley’, with ‘the marquis’ subsequently scratched out. another undated typescript, this time a translation from arabic into english of the diwan of al-hansa is appellated ‘by louis de vere’. also in bloemfontein, a typed manuscript of eighty-eight poems, some of them also appearing in the collection in an italian mirror (and thus presumably predating them), is by the author ‘louis de vere’. nine years after his letter to smith, the name ‘vere di ravelli’ appears on the cover of in an italian mirror. the ‘little madness’ of hiding the stage name (standing in for the real name) behind various nom de plumes, had abated somewhat.

creating and then parading different names for oneself is one thing; providing these names with historical alibi’s and characterizations another, more fantastical pursuit. although the changing preference of names outlined above doesn’t suggest matching different autobiographical accounts, the ambiguity of identity created by this strangely fascinating frenchification and italianization of a boer name is somehow
carried over into Bosman's autobiographical narratives. Until recently, it was believed that these were restricted to a series of articles written by him and published in the journal Vita Musica in 1963 until 1964 (entitled 'Music's Exile – the autobiography of Vere Bosman di Ravelli') and the book Saint Theodore and the Crocodile, an autobiographical fantasy published in South Africa by Tafelberg in 1964. However, during many years of trawling in South African archives for mostly other material, and of speaking with colleagues, friends and students, the present author has discovered two unknown, or forgotten, unpublished and, in both cases, seemingly incomplete autobiographies. A forgotten facsimile of a holograph text containing a partly unknown autobiographical narrative was found in the Africana section of the Merensky Library at the University of Pretoria. This document of 343 pages, which will be called the Merensky manuscript, refers to the book Saint Theodore and the Crocodile, and it is therefore safe to assume that it postdates the completion of the Saint Theodore manuscript, and was written somewhere between 1962/63 and Bosman's death on 20 May 1967 in the Strand near Cape Town. There are striking resemblances between the content and structure of the Merensky manuscript and the four articles comprising the series 'Music's Exile'. However, the article series (and the journal Vita Musica) was discontinued after four installments, and the Merensky manuscript contains much that is unknown, and in some cases more detailed and personal descriptions of historical events and people mentioned in the article series.

The second 'unknown' autobiographical text became known to the present author through one of those mysterious 'coincidences' that sees material converging, as though attracted by a magnetic forcefield, on a researcher becoming immersed in a subject. A chain of unlikely conversations and personal connections led to the 'discovery' of yet another autobiography, of which the existence in a private collection in Pretoria has hitherto been unknown to scholars. The holograph marked 'Autobiografie B 1-19' [autobiography B 1-19] consists of nineteen exercise books totalling 560 unnumbered pages and will be called the Loots manuscript, after its owner Jozua Loots (see figure 1) who generously provided the present author with access to his materials. The Loots manuscript is for most of its narrative more detailed than the Merensky manuscript, but unlike the latter it stops short of Bosman's first public performances in 1902. It is impossible to put a date to the Loots manuscript, and it seems reasonable to deduce from the narrative and the way in which it ends, the existence of more exercise books, presumably now lost.

Figure 1: Jozua Loots and Bosman di Ravelli, early sixties

Saint Theodore and the Crocodile differs markedly from the Merensky and Loots manuscripts. Like 'Music's Exile', the latter two contain substantially more information about Bosman's childhood and youth, his journey to Leipzig at the age of sixteen (including an extended stay en route in London in the Loots manuscript), his audition at the Leipzig Conservatoire for Carl Reinecke and Alexander Winterberger and his subsequent concert career which was launched with a tour of the Chopin E minor Piano Concerto in 1902 under the baton of a young Nikisch pupil, only identified by the surname Hess. Some of this detail is documented in Saint Theodore and the Crocodile, but in a much-condensed form. Whereas the Merensky and Loots manuscripts are more or less conventional chronological accounts spanning respectively the time from Bosman's birth in 1882 until the early 1900s (Loots) and approximately his first return to South Africa in 1905 after the suicide of the mezzo-soprano Isabella Valliers (the object of his untouchable and unconsummated noble, knightly love) (Merensky), Saint Theodore and the Crocodile is a staged, synchronic account of highlights and significant people in Bosman's life as presented in conversations with his friends: primarily Juanito (Stowe) de Monteleon and his wife Carmencita, and his young guest, Charles.

Both the Merensky and Loots manuscripts also provide more information of Bosman's musical activities during his first extended stay in Leipzig between 1899 and 1905. Although the account is hardly systematic, one is able to reconstruct some sense of his musical background, his training in Leipzig and his early career. We read that his decision to study music was sparked by a dream vision that developed into a kind of mad obsession:
was it a dream? i don’t know. but i woke up and found myself at a grand piano on a platform playing to an audience as far as the eye could see. and from that moment i could see nothing else … i was already well advanced in next year’s work when my madness seized me – i use this word for it was just like a wild beast seizing its prey, and i had nothing more to do with it … i now imagined myself not only a great pianist, but a great man with a definite message to my country – almost like a call, a vocation. the voice was insistent, torturing me with reproaches for my cowardice …

doctor hears brahms for the first time on the union castle line ship the briton (on which he departs on 10 october 1899 from cape town), and when the ship docks at madeira he is informed of the outbreak of the anglo-boer war in south africa. when he hears the beethoven violin concerto played by lady hallé in the queen’s hall, he doesn’t know what a concerto or a symphony is, and during his visit to the national gallery in london he is confronted for the first time with art in this kind of setting. his meeting with professor carl reinecke in leipzig is described in vivid detail, as is the subsequent conversation with the ‘medium-sized dark man with graying hair … deep-set warm black eyes’ and the most ‘un-german’ person who is the liszt-pupil alexander winterberger. doctor tells us how he initially has lessons with winterberger’s assistant dufour (twice a week, mondays and thursdays, with fridays reserved for theory), who studied at the paris conservatoire. referring to doctor, the professor instructs dufour: ‘you must begin from bed-rock – nothing, absolutely nothing.’ the result is two hours of technical exercises every day. his first public performance in 1902, also recalled in saint theodore and the crocodile, is described with vivid immediacy in the merensky manuscript:

the orchestra began – something happened to me – my mind became a complete blank – what must, what can i do? run off? o, if only the end of the world would come, or the roof fall in, or there was a fire to stop it all. i heard the orchestra coming nearer, nearer, like a creeping wild beast – just before my cue. hess with his baton held the orchestra, looked me in the eyes, smiled, nodded – a light from heaven descended upon me – i dashed with great vigour into the first chords – in a hall your tone sounds much bigger than in a room – when i heard this beautiful sound drifting to the farthest corner, i was inspired – the whole first movement was played with a strongly accentuated rhythm – warm applause – imagine i was the first british student playing in a leipzig concert for a long time past – all the british and americans clapping loudly. … i was not completely myself, calm, without a trace of nervousness or excitement. the second movement, being perhaps on the sentimental side, i was nineteen, was a fine piece of musicianship, thanks to winterberger whom i had begged not to come – and the rondo i romped through with evident enjoyment and that of the public showed their appreciation.

doctor ends up doing various tours with hess, amongst others to poland, the rhinelands, paris, vienna and berlin. he plays both the chopin concertos, the beethoven third, fourth and fifth piano concertos, the grieg piano concerto, mozart a major piano concerto (probably number 23, k. 488) and, the last addition to his leipzig period repertoire, the tchaikovsky first piano concerto. in addition, he lives, works and socializes in a galaxy of aristocratic patrons and famous musicians, including louis persinger, albert coates, arthur nikisch, camille saint-saëns and vladimir de pachmann. the merensky manuscript in particular is a strange book that stops with a letter informing doctor of isabella vallier’s death. it is clearly no end to the book, and implies a continuation, which, if it existed, we are at present unaware of. but the void left by doctor’s reaction is somehow typical of the manuscript as a whole. for all its colourful anecdotes and intimate glimpses, these do not add up to a vivid picture of the autobiographical subject. the anecdotes remain fragmented. the promised revelations never come. on the one hand the manuscript is positively bursting with detail; yet not a single date or reference anchors the material in historical time. of the man behind the pseudonyms, the reader learns little. saint theodor and the crocodile is, if anything, an even stranger book. for one thing, it indulges in name-dropping on a truly epic scale. more than 100 personal names find their way into this 156-page book as acquaintances of doctor, including artists (like stefan zweig, lina cavaliere, emma calvé and rupert brooke), countless minor aristocrats, two popes and the kaiser. venice is the stage for this parade of
as we stepped ashore at the piazetta he took my arm. we walked up between the library and the doge’s palace. in front of st. mark’s we stood silent. i felt a slight trembling through his body as his eyes absorbed its breathtaking beauty. all of us were silent for a few minutes. the piazza is the great drawing room of europe. people go there from all over the world. soon we were surrounded by friends – those who knew me, those who had heard me play, others whose friends were my friends. charles opened his eyes wide and said to me, ‘but, uncle ravelli, one meets the world here.’ cipollato added, ‘a great world.’ and, turning to charles, ‘i don’t mean a material world, but a spiritual world. when you hear an artist play you will understand what i mean.’

the metaphorical significance of this passage is clear enough. in this book the reader is presented with a stage filled with bosman’s acquaintances over many years, traveling through time and space to appear telescoped within its pages against the backdrop of venice. the autograph copy of saint theodore and the crocodile survives in the documentation centre for music in stellenbosch, and so does a pre-edited typescript copy of the autograph in bloemfontein. this unedited version portrays interesting differences with the 1964-book, not least with regard to the passage quoted above. the unedited version ends as follows:

‘but uncle ravelli, it is not a person one meets in you, but a world.’ cipolato added, ‘a vast world.’ and turning to charles, ‘i don’t mean a material world, but a vast spiritual world. when you hear him play, you will understand what i mean.’ [italics by the current author]

in this version the world described to the reader in such detail is personalized and internalized. it inheres in the performing artist and makes itself present through his playing. the unedited version makes clear that which is only implied in the corresponding passage in the book: that bosman not only introduces the world to charles, but that he embodies it in his playing. it makes bosman into the medium facilitating access to the ‘vast spiritual world’ of western art and culture through music. if, as karl j. weintraub has written, ‘the concept of the self is derived from models supplied by the ambient culture’, the marked absence of bosman as living subject from his own autobiography (going back and starting with the absence of his own name) could be read as an alienation of the self from the ‘ambient culture’, or from the immediate cultural institutions among which he moves. ‘over and over again i came up against that blank wall – a lack of tradition’, bosman wrote in 1964. ‘what a german boy probably knew at ten or twelve, was still unknown territory to me. it was a great handicap.’ in the loots manuscript he refers to the place of his youth as ‘that medieval world’.

it is indeed the absence of the sense of self that stands central in bosman’s autobiographical narratives, and it is in this absence that music becomes central to facilitating identity transactions between belonging and alienation, limitations and aspirations. bosman’s early-romantic musical self (‘my romantic spirit’ as he refers to it) is related to the romantic sense of self typical of autobiography as a genre, but also to the understanding of music as a primary medium of expression of the self in the nineteenth century. if the sense of geographical and conceptual disjuncture characterizing settler identity inevitably gravitates towards a model of identity, the romantic self constitutes such a model. in this sense the romanticism of the post-colony is recognizable as a part of modernism, in that it recognizes the romantic self primarily as model (rather than as creative possibility). this allows it not to be seen as a regressive tendency, but one alive with the particular possibilities characterizing the post-colonial condition.

it is exactly this difference between appreciating bosman as historical figure and valuing his symbolic value that becomes important in the assessment of his
significance for afrikaner culture in south africa. in an obituary broadcast by sabc radio after his death, the programme was introduced by saying that 'with the death of the highly civilized and widely read jan bosman di ravelli, we have lost an irreplaceable link with the musical world of romanticism'. the poet w.e.g. louw's obituary in the afrikaans-language newspaper die burger (of which the influential louw was then the arts page editor) appeared under the following banner ‘this young boer conquered old europe spiritually’. the south african music teacher reprinted an obituary from handhaaf, which ended thus:

jan gysbert hugo bosman – ahead of his own time – was, when it comes down to it, a young boer, a man from our own soil, whose talents had to be developed and appreciated abroad, who out of necessity had to follow his career in foreign lands – but who never disowned his own soil, who did not become entirely estranged in strange countries, and made a contribution to his own people; a contribution that could be of lasting significance.

and yet, if jan bouws is to be believed, gustav preller wrote in 1936 how bosman had been ‘pushed away’ by fellow afrikaners. to what extent it was known that bosman, as an anglicized cape afrikaner, considered himself british rather than afrikaans for most of his life, is an intriguing question. in the loots manuscript bosman recounts a conversation between his father and elder brother on the eve of the outbreak of the anglo-boer war:

[my brother], a naturalised official of the free state, was … supporting oom paul kruger against the british government. my father, moderate, born a british subject for several generations saw matters in a different light. he assured my brother he was wrong to think that in the event of war, all the cape colony dutch would rise and join the boer republics. ‘we have our own parliament – and as for england, we know her, but you we don’t know.’

indeed the ‘britishness’ of this young ‘boer pioneer’ is a consistently present though mostly silent narrative strand of this story. ‘the transvaal and the free state held no interest for me’ bosman writes during the anglo-boer war, later remarking of his debut in leipzig in 1902 that he aroused considerable interest because he was the first british pianist to perform there in many years. its potential wider dissonance in an otherwise pure musico-genealogical line connecting newly established colonial afrikaner culture to beethoven (most clearly through liszt and czerny), remains largely unexplored today. of interest, at least to the present writer, is not so much inverting the claimed oppositions imagined between fixed and antagonistic white language-power complexes in south africa, but recuperating the britishness of early afrikaans patriotic identity and cultural aspirations. for patriotic bosman certainly was, as his presence at the founding meeting of the suid-afrikaanse akademie vir wetenskap en kuns [south african academy for science and art] in 1909 testifies.

if writers in the second half of the twentieth century were uncomfortable with this more ambiguous identity, it was because virulent anti-britishness had progressively become a fixed point of reference of afrikaner nationalist identity during the twentieth century, obliterating the very real british ingredient of this identity (and culture) so eminently recognizable not only in die life and career of bosman, but also in places and names touched by ‘englishness’ and later reclaimed by afrikaner nationalism. writing about the end of an old english tradition in the former boer republic of the orange free state and its capitol, bloemfontein, karel schoeman cites stephen vincent benet’s john brown’s body and calls the 1950s and 60s ‘the last bright august before the fall’. the way in which this english tradition was gradually erased from the identity of the city as the afrikaners retook possession of it, echoes the de-emphasis in south african music historiography of bosman’s cape (read ‘english’) afrikaans background. schoeman writes:

when, many years later, with the end of the paper [the friend], i was asked by the volksblad to write a commemorative article on it, i pertinently focused attention on this [english] tradition. that exactly this sentence was omitted in publication under the pretext that the article was too long was, for me, significant: in 1985 the afrikaans bloemfontein, as represented by its smug daily paper, wanted no reminder of an
in interviews and published writings after his return in 1957 to a South Africa politically controlled by the Afrikaner-dominated national party, Bosman also omitted earlier references to his 'Britishness'. In 'Music's Exile' he writes that the manager of the hotel sedan in Leipzig (named as one Müller in the Merensky manuscript) tells him: 'the whole of Germany [is] pro-Boer and that, on account of my name, I [will] find people everywhere inclined to be kind to me'. However, the comparable passage in the Merensky manuscript also contains a retort from Bosman, omitted from the published article: 'but I am not from the Transvaal'. Resuscitating this ambiguity in a historical figure like Bosman unshackles other fascinating, and often interlinking, dissonances. Behind the claim made of Bosman as a pioneer of Afrikaner cultural awareness in the early twentieth century and the link thus established to European spiritual values through music, looms the discomfort with art music as an unstable signifier for Afrikaner nationalism in the twentieth century. Music introduces a tension between the desire to identify emergent Afrikaner high culture with the predominant European art of the nineteenth century, and a palpable distrust of music as an open signifier. In doing so it amplifies the already-existing ambiguous identity of Bosman's Britishness. The musical world of Bosman is, ultimately, not the heroic world of Beethoven, but the women's world of the early-nineteenth-century salon inhabited by Chopin's music. It was as Chopin interpreter that Bosman excelled ('I had always an intimate feeling for Chopin, as if he belonged to me', writes Bosman in the Loots manuscript) and the later nineteenth-century stigma of effeminacy that attached itself to the space and genres of a man whose music was even in its own time considered less universal than exotically national, also ambivalently colours especially Afrikaans reception of Bosman. In an introduction to the poetry of early Afrikaans poet Eugène Nielen Marais, one-time benefactor of Bosman, Gustav S. Preller, contrasts what he calls the 'powerful emotion of a man' expressed in the Afrikaans poetry of Marais to the Chopin interpretations of the 'sensitive [Fynbesnaarde] technically masterful young piano virtuoso Bosman di Ravelli'.

An over-emphasis on Bosman's status as a composer rather than a performer could well be explained by this unease with the sensuality of sound in performance (contextualized by Chopin-reception), as opposed to the setting of Afrikaans language poetry to music. The fact that Bosman's entire known oeuvre consists of only three such songs and two small piano works (now lost) has not prevented Dutch music historian Jan Bouws from claiming especially the songs as 'an enormous cultural event and, together with the second Afrikaans language movement, proof of the resurgence of the Afrikaner Volk.' The importance of Afrikaner identity is also evident in F.Z. van der Merwe's description of the songs as striving to 'develop a new Afrikaans musical style based on the work songs of natives'. The hyperbole of especially the bouw citations makes sense only if the immense importance of art music culture in the formation of Afrikaner cultural identity is accepted, and if this importance is understood to be qualified by an often unarticulated imperative to contain musical expression within the desired narrative functions of Afrikaner national myth. Clearly, musical works (especially settings of Afrikaans verse) were more suited to this than sensitive Chopin interpretations.

There can be little doubt that Bosman's linguistic abilities, literary interests and activities comprise another strand of his symbolic value as an early Afrikaner cultural icon. 'Bosman de (sic) Ravelli had a vast knowledge of languages. He could understand and read 16 languages!', writes Handhaaf in 1967, before assuring its readers that 'it was significant how well he could still speak Afrikaans after his long absence [from the country].' But as with his Boer/British national identity and his composer/performer musical identity, the meaning for his countrymen of this remarkable polyglot talent was unclear. For one thing, Bosman preferred writing copious amounts of poetry in English (the language he also preferred for correspondence), for another, his was no modernist verse or even late nineteenth-century poetry as would change the Afrikaans language in the hands of writers like N.P. van Wyk Louw in the 1930s. It was early nineteenth-century English poetry: frequently sentimental and anachronistically romantic in content as well as in language and imagery. The 'otherness' of this language and form was, if anything, enhanced by an undeniable, though soft-pedalled homo-erotic current pulsating
through the verse no less than through bosman’s autobiographical writings. one sonnet entitled ‘norradino’, reads thus:

as in brancaleone’s arms i lay,
tasting the brutal strength of southern heat,
and the cool silences my trembling feet
had trod so often on shores of the bay,
carved in sapphire, tipped with silver spray,
by the erring moon on its bosom; sweet
unbidden memories of a joy complete
with you drew my warm lips from his away.

if brancaleone were only you,
if you were brancaleone we would
possess in splendid perfect brotherhood
love, friendship and passion without purlieu,
now each of these with heat i must pursue
to still the burning instincts of my mood.

the tone and emotional register is recognizable from passages in saint theodore and the crocodile: ‘his hand sought mine. “it has made me very happy to have talked to you like this. you are old enough to be my father, but in time there is no age – i feel and know that you understand all the immature longings of youth. no one has ever come so near to me as you have tonight.” ’ of the many differences between the two extant versions of saint theodore and the crocodile remarked on earlier, the most startling is perhaps the ending of the unedited version that appears in the publication as part of a ‘prologue’. the paragraph in question reads as follows:

love, then, is like this – ever trailing sorrow in its turbulent waters. love is as long as life, moving like a lingering dream, with episodes of splendour and promises so rarely fulfilled, and yet its glory remains undimmed. sometimes i have a hunger for you, not material, yet not easily appeased. it is more like a hunger for the love of god. a part of my soul seems torn away, left bleeding. your physical presence would stop the bleeding but would not heal the wound. it will be one of the great discoveries of our age to know how to heal the wounds of love.

placed at the end of the book (as it initially was), its ambiguity suggests the just departed charles as the object of bosman’s love. placed at the beginning in the edited version, it displaces this love to charles’s mother, with whom we read that it ‘never came to embraces or kisses between us – the social gulf was too deep’. yet the use of english and the sexual ambiguity of his texts are not the only potentially unruly signifiers of bosman’s linguistic prowess. although it was widely known in south africa that in his later years he had translated arabic texts into english, unlike for instance j.p.j van rensburg’s 1963 translation of the odyssey into afrikaans, or the translation of goethe’s faust into afrikaans three years later in 1966 by w.j. du p. erlank (eitemal), bosman’s translations remained unpublished. converting world literature into afrikaans was a priority during the booming decades of afrikaner self-confidence. the oriental fascinations and english-romantic sonnets of the europeanized bosman were clearly of less appeal to the society he had returned to in 1957 than the german, greek and latin that his oxford tutor had taught him as a child in the karoo town of murraysburg. europeanizing africa was not supposed to happen via an orientalized europe. it is the dutch music historian of south african music, jan bouws, who connects the ethnic, genderized and oriental otherness of bosman when he writes:

half a century ago, at the beginning of the second afrikaans language movement, it looked as though he was destined to take the lead in the early afrikaans musical life. it worked out entirely differently. in subject-specific technical knowledge he might have been far advanced in comparison to his fellow afrikaners, but a pioneer, a leader also has to possess other qualities. in the end bosman had no inner certainty about the future of south african music, and in his decadent desire to achieve excessive civilization [oorbeskawing] he became in essence a stranger to the young, emerging art of his own volk.
little is known about bosman’s life after 1912. the dictionary of south african biography tells us that he ‘maintained his success as a concert pianist until 1955’, the year in which he returned to south africa. however, in an sabc interview in 1958, the then seventy-six year old bosman stated that his last performing season, totalling sixty-two concerts, was in 1938. although he also had a full contract for the following year, the war intervened. a south african (and thus allied) national resident in italy, bosman spent three and a half years in a german concentration camp, and by his own admission was too ill to continue working after the war. sometime in 1948 he suffered full-thickness burns to his shoulder, making it impossible for him to resume playing the piano. bosman later said that the shock of the accident left him deaf. after having returned to south africa in 1956, bosman went to live with the then already elderly painter maggie laubser in her house in the strand near cape town. it is not known how he and laubser became acquainted, but it seems reasonable to deduce that this must have happened in europe (the painter studied in various european countries between 1913 and 1924), perhaps while laubser was working italy in 1920-1921. a laubser sketch of bosman is reproduced in vita musica of august 1964, and the present author has found a copy of another sketch which is reproduced under figure 2. in 1959 bosman was awarded honorary membership of the south african academy of arts and science ‘for his contribution to the development of afrikaans musical life’. of his playing, which was never recorded, we know nothing beyond his own vague and romanticized descriptions.

figure 2: sketch of bosman di ravelli by maggie laubser

jan gysbert hugo (the marquis) (loius de) (vere) bosman di ravelli, also known as gian bonzar, was a man of many lives, and times and places. in conclusion, however, we return to the image of saint theodore and the crocodile on the column in saint mark’s square. in the published version of his fantasy, ravelli tells his young guest, charles, that the story of inner transformation invented by him as the story of the crocodile and the saint, springs from personal experience. ‘i know this,’ he says ‘for i was too a crocodile once.’ not another name then, but a mythical persona linking venice and north africa, the twentieth and the fourteenth centuries, reality and myth. but the denouement of the elaborate story is strange, in syntax no less than in the striking absence of narrative support for its dramatic potential. the reader cannot accept that this is what the author and story is about. the guided tour of personages, architectural wonders and art works is no stage to effect transformation of an ‘i’. and sure enough, consulting the earlier typescript version of the book, this confession, this identification of the author with the book’s title, is missing. instead it is his young charge who is changed by his venetian vacation, and by implication, ravelli who has affected this transformation: ‘… you have created a new being in me …’, says the young charles. this, perhaps, was also the meaning intended to survive into our time; the colonizing vision of south africa as a space to be transformed by europe through the actuating power of culture. jan bosman emerges as an exemplar of the traveling virtuoso whose european success infuses the colony with european (musical) kudos from afar, becoming both message and medium to his country in the way he dreamt of so many years before as a young boy studying in stellenbosch. but transformation is an open-ended process of uncertain outcome and direction. thus it is the ‘transformed’ charles that informs his mentor jan gysbert hugo bosman: “i have seen the sacred light, i am no longer a crocodile” ‘we are left to ponder who changes whom when he concludes: “and i am going to call you just ravelli in future.”’

endnotes

document will be referenced as the naln manuscript.

Bosman di Ravelli, autobiography (sic), facsimile of holograph document, no date, Africana section, Merensky Library, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, p. 210. In the rest of the article this document will be referenced as the Merensky manuscript. In a review of the Cologne performance, Die Kölnische Zeitung refers to Bosman as ‘Ravelli’. It is fair to assume that the stage name was adopted earlier for Bosman’s first concert tour in (also in 1902), although evidence of this could not be found in the extant documents. Bosman explains the origins of the name in SABC archive recording 6514, catalogue number 17/37-38(60), SABC, Johannesburg.

Johannes Jacobus Smith (1883-1949), the first editor of the popular Afrikaans journal Die Huisgenoot and the Woordenboek van die Afrikaanse Taal (Dictionary of the Afrikaans Language).

Letter of Vere di Ravelli to J.J. Smith, 15 November 1912, J.S. Gericke Library, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, 333.K.B.35.

The typed ms of about 115 000 words bears the stamp of John Paradise (literary agent), 86 Strand W.C. 2. The book consists of a preface (pp. 1-15), the text (462 pages), notes (pp. 1-15) and an index (pp. 1-38). The NALN reference numbers are M240/89/476 en M240/89/477.

The typed ms bears the stamp of John Paradise (literary agent), 86 Strand W.C. 2. The book consists of an introduction (pp. 1-45) and the text. NALN reference number M240/89/478.

Collection of typed poems by Louis de Vere (NALN reference number M240/89/474) on loose leaves. At the back of many of the poems is the address: Louis de Vere Esq., c/o Miss Tyrwhitt-Drake, Palazzo Pauer (?), 41 Via Romana, Florence, Italy.

Merensky manuscript, p. 53.

The author should like to thank Santie de Jongh of the Documentation Centre for Music (DOMUS) at the University of Stellenbosch for procuring these and other sources relating to this article. The dates of the vita musica articles (June/July 1963; August/September 1963; December 1963; August 1964) suggest that the Merensky manuscript may have been the original draft of the clearly much edited article versions. The last article in the series of ‘Music’s Exile’ (August 1964) states at the end ‘to be continued’. However, as far as the present writer has been able to ascertain, no further installments ensued. Jacques Philip Malan’s entry on Bosman in Die Suid-Afrikaanse Musiekensiklopedie (South African Music Encyclopaedia) (Cape Town: 1980) vol. 1, pp. 217-219, lists just these four articles in the series, also suggesting that the series was discontinued after August 1964.

One of the present writer’s postgraduate students, Carina Venter, had a conversation with a friend in Pretoria shortly before the paper on which this article is based was given in Belgrade. The conversation touched on Bosman, upon which it came to light that Jozua Loots’s father, also Jozua Loots, happened to be in possession of nineteen small exercise books containing yet another version of the Bosman autobiography, as well as several other Bosman mementos including photographs. It turned out that Jozua Looij is the twin brother of the man who had donated the bulk of the Bosman material now in the possession of NALN in Bloemfontein, Izak Looij, and is the father-in-law of fellow undergraduate music student in Pretoria in the early nineties and a personal friend of many years’ standing, Hilton Anspach (who married another fellow undergraduate music student, and Jozua’s daughter, flautist Handri Looij). Jozua Looij was kind enough not only to allow the present author access to this material, but also to give permission for electronic and hard copies of this document and the photographs to be made. These are now held in Domus at the University of Stellenbosch, where it can be consulted by researchers.

See the whole of Book 6, Looij manuscript.

The omission of the love affair with Isabella Vallier is the most important difference between the Vita Musica articles and the Merensky manuscript. In most instances the Merensky manuscript contains more descriptive detail and sustains a more personal tone (frequently through direct speech) than the Vita Musica articles. Exceptions are the descriptions of famous musicians heard by Bosman in Leipzig, including reports on concerts by Emil Sauer, Leopold Godowsky, Ferruccio Busoni, Ignaz Padarewski and Vladimir de Pachman. See ‘Music’s Exile’, (August 1964), pp. 7-8.

In a SABC radio interview broadcast on 1 June 1960, Bosman states that he left South Africa in 1899 and returned in 1956 when he was seventy-four years old, excluding
only the ‘brief’ return to South Africa from 1905 until 1910 (SABC archive recording 6514, catalogue number 17/37-38(60), SABC, Johannesburg).

Merensky manuscript, pp. 49 and 55.


Merensky manuscript, p. 82. These events are also described in SABC archive recording 6514, catalogue number 17/37-38(60), SABC, Johannesburg. See also the Loots manuscript, Book 3, unnumbered p. 20.

Merensky manuscript, p. 92.

Ibid., pp. 105-108.


Loots manuscript, Book 11, unnumbered p. 21. A description of how Dufour and Winterberger worked together, is found in the Loots manuscript, Book 12, unnumbered p. 6. A certain character, Field, explains: ‘Dufour is an excellent trainer – thorough, conscientious, he never fails you however much you may fail him. I know his pupils the moment they begin to play – something precise, rather old-maidish, a little sour perhaps, but clean, correct, a shade mechanical. All that Winterberger corrects with the first lesson – they are a fine team together. When I heard Winterberger play the first time, I was then with von Bülow, I was in despair. What is the good of playing any more after that? All the technique in the world cannot make you interpret like that.’ An technical description by Bosman of Dufour’s teaching is found in the Loots manuscript, Book 14, unnumbered pp. 14-16.

Merensky manuscript, p. 123.

In the Merensky manuscript Bosman states that he was nineteen at the time of his first public performance (p. 194), which would imply that this performance happened sometime between 14 February 1901 and 24 February 1902. Elsewhere in the same manuscript, however, he says that he first started playing in public in 1902 (p. 177), a fact he confirms in a SABC radio interview broadcast after his death on 1 June 1967 (SABC archive recording 16024, catalogue number a 67/68, Johannesburg). Thus this first performance probably happened in January or early February 1902.

Di Ravelli, Saint Theodore and the Crocodile, pp. 90-91.

Merensky manuscript, pp. 194-195.


Loots manuscript, p. 9.

Cited in Eakin, p. 203.


Loots manuscript, Book 1, unnumbered p. 4.

See the Loots manuscript, Book 2, unnumbered p. 12.

Translated by the present author from the Afrikaans. All translations from Afrikaans in this article are by the present author. The original reads: ‘Met die afsterwe van die wynbeskaafde en wyd belese Jan Bosman di Ravelli, het ons ‘n onvervangbare skakel met die ryke, vergane musiekwêreld van die romantiek verloor.’ The producer of the programme ‘N Hoorbeeld Oor Suid-Afrikaanse Pianis Bosman di Ravelli’ was Johan Stemmet and the programme was broadcast on 1 June 1967 (SABC archive recording a 67/68: 16024).


Letters in the document collection of W.E.G. Louw in the J.S. Gericke Library at the University of Stellenbosch attest to the warm friendship that developed between Louw, his wife (the composer Rosa Nepgen) and Bosman in the decade spanning Bosman’s return to South Africa in 1957 and his death in 1967. See in this regard Letters 158.K.B.30.

No author. ‘Bosman di Ravelli (1882-1967)’, The South African Music Teacher, No. 73 (December 1967), pp. 13-14, esp. p. 14.; translated from the Afrikaans, which reads: ‘Jan Gysbert Hugo Bosman – sy eie tyd vooruit – was op stuk van sake ‘n boerseun, ‘n man uit ons eie bodem, wie se talente in die buiteland het uit die buiteland kom en gewaardeer sou word, wat noodgedwonge sy beroep in die vreemde moet beoefen – maar wat tog van sy eie bodem nie afgesterf het nie, wat in die vreemde nie geheel vervreem het nie, en ‘n bydrae gelewer het wat vir sy eie mense van blywende betekenis kan wees.’


Loots manuscript, Book 3, unnumbered p. 4.
see louis hendrik claassen, die onstaansgekiedenis van die suid-afrikaanse akademie vir taal, lettere en kuns [founding history of the south african academy of language, literature and art], ma dissertation, randse afrikaanse unisentiteit (1977), p. 232. the present author should like to thank prof. gerhard geldenhuys for alerting me to this reference. in an interview broadcast after his death in 1967, bosman also explained how his friend gustav preller presented his ideas for a state academy for music to generals smuts and louis botha during this time. see in this regard sabc archive recording 16024, catalogue number a67/68, sabc, johannesburg. this project was never to come to fruition.

writing in the book westerse kultuur in suid-afrika ['western culture in south africa'], apartheid ideologue geoffrey cronje states the case against the influence of british cultural identity as follows: ‘… a section of the afrikaners identified with the carriers of the british imperial idea and became lukewarm and indifferent and even condescending with regard to afrikaner cultural property ['kulturbesit'] while displaying a pro-englishness. this cultural schizophrenia ['gespletenheid'] – the usual fate of conquered peoples – dealt afrikaans cultural life a telling blow, because a section of the afrikaner volk started worshipping strange gods instead of their own culture and because inner volk division – an inevitable result of the pro-englishness of a part of the afrikaners – weakened the power of the volk and hindered the single-minded advancement of the afrikaans culture; see ‘sosiologiese faktore in die westerse kultuur-ontwikkeling en kultuurbevordering’ ['sociological factors in the development and advancement of western culture'], in: westerse kultuur in suid-afrika, p. 96. the author should like to thank carina venter for bringing this passage to my attention.


see merensky manuscript, p. 102.

‘music’s exile: the autobiography of bosman vere di ravelli’, vita musica (june/july 1963), pp. 8-10, esp. p. 10. another example of this tacit identification with the boer forces during the war reads as follows: ‘but, of course, the germans were so excited and pleased about the initial successes of our republican warriors in south africa, that i found it relatively easy to make friends’.; ‘music’s exile: the autobiography of bosman vere di ravelli, vita musica (august/september 1963), pp. 6-8, esp. p. 7.

loots manuscript, book 1, unnumbered p. 27.

gustav. s. preller in: eugène nielen marais. gedigte [poetry] (cape town, 1932), 2nd edition, pp. 3-4. translated from the afrikaans. the present author should like to thank prof. gerhard geldenhuys for alerting me to this reference. it is possibly this reference alluded to by jan bouws when he writes that preller found bosman too young to understand chopin during his south african sojourn of 1905-1910. see jan bouws. suid-afrikaanse komponiste van vandag en gister [south african composers of today and yesteryear] (cape town:1957), pp. 27-29, esp. p. 28.

jan bouws. komponiste van suid-afrika [composers of south africa] (stellenbosch, 1971), p. 50. translated from the afrikaans. the works mentioned are the three songs comprising drie liederen [three songs]. they are ‘die howenier’ [the gardener] (totius), ‘winternag’ [winter’s night] (eugène marais), ‘die veldwindjie’ [the veldt breeze] (jan celliers). they were published in 1908 by de volkstem; see c.g. henning, ‘bosman, jan gysbert hugo’, in dictionary of south african biography, ed. c.j. beyers, vol 4 (pretoria: ) pp. 38-39, esp. p. 39. jacques malan dates the publication of the songs in 1909 and f.z. van der merwe as 1908. see malan, suid-afrikaanse musiekensiklopedie [south african music encyclopaedia] p. 219 and f.z. van der merwe, suid-afrikaanse musiekbibliografie 1787-1952 [south african music bibliography 1787-1952] (pretoria, 1958) p. 133. two piano works, zulu wedding chant and zulu funeral chant date from 1910. the present author has been unable to find copies of these works in south africa. in sabc archive recording 16024, catalogue number a67/68, jan bouws also calls these compositions bosman’s ‘most important contributions’ to the musical life of south africa, and connects them to the second afrikaans language movement while anointing bosman as the first composer of the afrikaans art song.

15. van der Merwe's description is no doubt based on Bosman's own 'preface' to the publication of his songs: 'to forestall the probable accusation that the music of my lyrics is plagiarism, I would like to explain its origin. My ideas about what our national music should be have so often been discussed by the press that they do not necessitate elucidation here. Those who will aver that they have heard my lyrics before are perfectly right, because all South Africans, especially those living in the vicinity of Kaffir territories, have heard that music from their youth upwards. In order to study Kaffir music at its source I made several holiday excursions, especially into Zululand, where through the kindness of the chief I had all the opportunities I would wish for. I find that the Kaffirs in their great national songs, like wedding song and battle song, have a remarkable ear for almost Bach-like harmonies – harmonies which are extraordinarily rich on account of the frequent use of even third tones. There certainly is not much change of key amongst them, but otherwise with the limited means at their command they produce marvellous results. I have tried to remain faithful to my models, except where for the sake of atmosphere I employed excessive modern construction. These few songs were not drawn from their great songs, but are simply everyday folk-songs that are very well-known. I hope that these attempts will be the corner-stones of the foundation of a great national movement in music.'

This iconic status cannot be disputed. He appears, for instance, in a limited edition book entitled Suid-Afrikaanse Heldegallery [South African Hero's Gallery] (Cape Town, 1947) with writers, politicians, generals, sports heroes and artists; pp. 220-221. Bosman is one of only two musicians included; the other is the soprano Betsy de la Porte. Bosman's entry describes him not as a composer, but as 'South Africa's greatest pianist', and states erroneously that he died in 1938. According to Henning this mistake arose due to confusion over Bosman's brother's death in Munich in 1938, an occurrence that could not be verified. See C.G. Henning, Dictionary of South African Biography, ed. C.J. Beyers, vol. 4 (Pretoria, Butterworth), p. 39.

Article reprinted in 'Bosman di Ravelli (1882-1967)', the South African Music Teacher, no. 73 (December 1967), pp. 13-14, esp. p. 13. In a later interview, Bosman would claim that he could read and write eighteen languages (SABC archive recording 6514, catalogue number 17/37-38(60), SABC, Johannesburg).

Apart from the published volume, in an Italian mirror (London: Erskine Macdonald, 1921), the Bosman collection in NALN in Bloemfontein contains eighty-eight typed poems (NALN reference number m240/89/474) on loose leaves. In the Loots manuscript Bosman writes about his early reading: Marie Corelli (pseudonym of Mary Mackay), Mrs Henry Wood, Quida (pseudonym of Marie Louise Ramé), Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, Charles Dickens and the poetry of Byron, Shelley, Keats and Shakespeare. See Loots Manuscript, Book 1, Unnumbered p. 23-24.

Saint Theodore and the Crocodile, p. 106.
Saint Theodore and the Crocodile, p. 8.
NALN manuscript, p. 7.


SABC archive recording 6509, catalogue number 21/19(58), SABC, Johannesburg.
Since the early twenties of the previous century, Bosman lived near the Baboli Gardens in Florence, in the Merensy manuscript Bosman alleges that he lived there for twenty-five years (p. 185).

Ibid. The dictionary of South African Biography sets the date as 1955, presumably to bring it in line with its own statement that Bosman performed until 1955. This date has perhaps been inferred from Bosman's return to South Africa in 1956. See Henning, Dictionary of South African Biography, p. 39.
SABC archive recording 6509, catalogue number 21/19(58), SABC, Johannesburg.
The copy that is reproduced here is in the possession of Alta Roux, whose mother was a cousin of Bosman. Roux got to know Bosman as a child in 1965, and recalls seeing this reproduction on Maggie Laubsher's desk. All efforts to find the originals of the sketch reproduced here, and the one published in Vita Musica, came to naught.
Dalene Marais writes in the preface to her book Maggie Laubser, her paintings,
drawings and graphics (Pretoria: Perskor, 1994) – the most comprehensive catalogue on Maggie Loubser’s works to date – that the sketches are ‘well documented and can be viewed at the art documentation centre of the history of art department at the Rand Afrikaans University’. However, the history of art department was shut down during the 1990s and most of their collection was transferred to the Johannesburg art gallery, however, the curator at the Johannesburg art gallery assured the present writer that the university would never transfer such valuable art works elsewhere, and knew nothing of their existence. Both the rare books department and the new arts centre at the university were unable to help and referred enquiries elsewhere. Further enquiries to Dalene Marais and the Sasol Museum in Stellenbosch (which houses much of Loubser’s work) were unfortunately fruitless. The present writer should like to thank Hilde Roos for her help in conducting this search.

Saint Theodore and the Crocodile, p. 106.

June 12, 2017

Willemien Froneman: Ex-Centric Hermeneutics in Stephanus Muller’s Nagmusiek

Filed under: Literature, Reviews, Stephanus Muller, The Legend of Jiwe — Abraxas @ 9:51 am

Abstract

In this review article the author reads Nagmusiek – Stephanus Muller’s monumental metafictional biography of South African composer Arnold van Wyk – as an extended allegory on the geopolitics of academic writing. She argues that the book articulates, through its unusual physical apparatus, narratological techniques and metafictional hermeneutic deconcealment, a valuable theory-in-praxis of the aporetics of peripheral writing. In so doing, Muller materializes Walter Mignolo’s notion of ‘epistemic delinking’ in radically original and risky ways.

Keywords: decolonial hermeneutics, delinking, peripheral writing, biography, Arnold van Wyk, South African art music, geopolitics of academic writing


surprising for a biographical project on a south african composer, oxford – as physical site and allegorical setting – is present throughout stephanus muller's nagmusiek. ‘i had only recently arrived in oxford’, the narrator recalls, ‘when david gombrich (1) enquired about my study’:

‘musicology,’ i tried to cut the conversation short. i always cut conversations short, but back then it was almost pathological.

‘but what?’

‘the institutionalized discourse about music,’ was my well-rehearsed response.

in retrospect it sounds preposterous and uncharacteristically impudent of me. i did not know who gombrich was. i did not know academics like him. indignation resounded in his eyes. he held my descent in his sustained gaze, and calculated it to the nothing it meant in a place like oxford. this was, i realized then, a place where people know what musicologists do. (2)
in another incident the narrator, buttressed by the requisite academic dress, makes his way to st catherine’s college for his doctoral defence. he had spent the previous evening formulating lengthy responses (in afrikaans) to questions about the identity and function of musical works of art in his reading of arnold van wyk’s missa in illo tempore. but his examiners do not interrogate him on any of these matters. later that year the degree dphil is conferred to him in the Sheldonian theatre with a thesis entitled ‘sounding margins: musical representations of white south africa’. (3)

these misfirings – one dramatic, the other archetypal in its dreamlike parapraxis – illustrate the breach between the things that matter in a place like oxford and those that matter elsewhere; say, in a place like south africa. it is not a breach of the institutional discourse of music per se, or a lack of disciplinary proficiency on the part of the narrator. rather, the breach becomes discernible only through the subaltern’s reluctance, or incapacity, to take up the role of universal participant in that discourse – a role ostensibly on offer to him in each of these episodes. (4)

upon his return to south africa, and despite his intimations of a professional breach, the fresh graduate attempts to reinstall oxford in his immediate surroundings. at night he labours on his new project – a biography of arnold van wyk – by the light of
a headington lamp. a jacket of soft scottish tweed, bought in oxford, but wholly unsuited to the south african climate, becomes essential to his elaborate interviewing kit. robert burton’s the anatomy of melancholy is always at hand. (who, he wonders, writes a 1000-page book and pretends someone else has written it?) and, in the most sustained allegory of the process of becoming unmoored from the discourses of the centre, he moves into a ground floor apartment in the heart of the cape winelands, where he obsesses over cultivating a square of lawn: ‘perfect turf in every way … my small patch of christ church in stellenbosch.’

these are some of the story points of the metafictional frame stephanus muller has devised to narrate the process of writing the life of arnold van wyk. nagmusiek, meaning ‘night music’ and referencing one of van wyk’s most accomplished compositions for piano, is told from the perspective of fictional musicologist, werner ansbach, who stands before the dilemma of fashioning a story out of an excess of archival material, perspectives, opinions and nuances that are increasingly spinning out of his control. parallel to the proliferation of his intellectual predicaments, described in underground metaphors of ‘burrowing’, ‘digging’ and ‘blind tunnelling’, a labour of moles colonizes and starts upheaving his perfectly maintained turf. as he tries to repress the invaders, exhausting every humane mole deterrent in the process, things start going south for ansbach in every other way.

at the very least, books sold in bookstores are expected to have a front and back cover and a spine. nagmusiek’s three volumes enclosed in a slipcase hover suspended in a 360-degree field of vision as if the art of bookmaking had especially to be reinvented for it.

in some sense this is indeed what muller is proposing. in the first instance a biography of the south african composer arnold van wyk, nagmusiek was awarded several south african literary prizes in 2014 – in both the fiction and non-fiction categories. volume i is a painstakingly compiled catalogue of all van wyk’s works and sketches, including programme notes and reviews. cross-references to letters and other documents housed at the documentation centre for music (domus) at stellenbosch university, in which the individual works are discussed, are also included. volume ii comprises the notes and index, and volume iii is the biographical narrative proper. when grabbing the wrong end of the case the individual volumes tumble out along with every conventional sense of academic turf maintenance (figure 1). it soon becomes clear that the book’s ambition as a serious, multi-volume
reference biography – which it is – is only half the equation. equally determining of muller’s concept is the audible grinding of gears as he writes this complicated, interlocking and disturbingly self-aware text into existence.

it is the book’s metafictional narrative depth, catechismal both in form and dimension, that lends itself to all sorts of allegorical readings. for chris walton the book is ‘an engrossing allegory of south africa and afrikanerdom in the 20th century’ that asks ‘troubling questions about the relationship between art, academia and fascism’, (6)

while juliana pistorius reads it as using the example of one life ‘to examine larger questions on the construction of biography, on music and its role in a discriminatory environment, and the sometimes blurred lines between life and fiction’. (7)

to this one might add that it shines a rather desultory light on the current state of south african academic life, and on music studies in particular. nagmusiek captivates because its fictional allegories are so obviously workings-out of real and painful professional experiences: a late coming-of-age story of a south african academic who, trained in an english tradition of disinterested tolerance, has to confront the challenge of holding together an ambitious intellectual project in a very different political and academic environment. this environment is rarely addressed directly; rather its outline and effects are sketched through the private psychological and libidinal investments of the book’s protagonist, of which his obsession with maintaining a patch of oxbridge lawn is a pertinent example.

considered in the wake of the polemics surrounding fredric jameson’s much maligned words that ‘[third-world texts] necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory’, (8)

i read nagmusiek as an extended parable on the geopolitics of academic writing. in particular, i argue that it articulates a valuable metacritical position on the hermeneutics of peripheral texts. from the outset, then, it should be evident that my own project is essentially paradoxical. in considering the place the book might find in international discourses by arguing for its importance as peripheral text, and by addressing you, an international english-speaking audience, i am at risk of merely confirming the geopolitics of periphery/centre that govern the global business of academic writing. viewed from this perspective, the best i can hope for is to theorize nagmusiek into the margins of the anglophone mainstream. such are the anxieties of every peripheral writer, and unpacking the reasoning behind this anxiety – especially the implicit assumptions about academic canonization – is particularly important to my argument.
‘you south africans are so fixated on theory, because that’s all you have,’ a
Cambridge professor once told me, he was right, of course. at least in the sense that
the geopolitical locations we write from and the academic currency of the topics we
choose to write about fundamentally determine our theoretical and methodological
approaches – and that is true enough for all of us. but according to this centric vision
the efforts of geographically peripheral writers (like me, or like stephanus muller),
should we choose to engage with ‘ex-centric’ material (like nagmusiek, or the life and
work of arnold van wyk), are inevitably directed towards alignment with a centric
ideal. as a result of the theoretical prerogatives of this directive, marking the material
as peripheral even while ostensibly providing an avenue for opening it up for
absorption into the mainstream, such writing is forever doomed to the margins. this
view dictates, in other words, that where scholars of the centre can use theory –
playfully, lightly – to embellish their work with intellectual predicaments, scholars of
the periphery can only ever use theory to illustrate centric relevance. put yet another
way: where scholars of the centre can focus on the characteristics and landmarks of
the academic-theoretical landscape, the basic prefiguration of peripheral writing is
attentiveness to the ‘mappiness’ of the world map of theory – its folds, flaws, tears
and errors of scale. unsurprisingly, therefore, the strategy customarily used by
scholars of the periphery to make themselves heard in the global arena is to
capitalize on the ‘internal contradictions, gaps, loopholes, and niches in the
this approach, however, only confirms the telos of western capitalist modernity, which decrees, in dipesh chakrabarty’s well-known formulation: ‘first in europe, then elsewhere.’ (10)

any attempt to canonize peripheral knowledge therefore presents a rather intractable scholarly problem, not to mention displaying an almost inevitable tendency to sound whiny, hagiographic or both.

these constraints form the basis of the very first discussion of van wyk in the biographical narrative of volume iii. speaking from the knowledge economies of the centre the existence of nagmusiek is highly implausible – and not only on account of its odd structure or expensive minimalist exterior. there is no international scholarly trend or corpus of writing whose logical trajectory would inevitably have pointed to the gap in our knowledge of the life and works of this largely unknown composer, born, as walton writes in his review of the book, in ‘a tiny nowhere place in the midst of a much bigger nowhere’. despite the lure of wine and mountains, a tribe of van wyk scholars is not about to descend on stellenbosch. ‘fact is’, discloses the biographer in the opening chapter, ‘few people outside south africa knew about arnold van wyk or his music – even in 1983 [the year of his death]’, ‘internationally it is only a small group of older musicians and academics, primarily in britain, who still recognizes the name’, and even in south africa arnold van wyk is known only within a small academic circle. (11)

these disclosures about the composer’s relative (un)importance are anchored to a transcript of an obituary read at his funeral service. here muller highlights the stark difference in the assessment of the centre and periphery respectively. where john lowe of the bbc wrote in 1951 about van wyk’s first symphony: ‘i do not feel able to recommend it for a broadcast, but, of course, you may have special overseas policy events for it – it is quite interesting and well scored and should not offend any wavelength,’ the obituary reads:
arnold van wyk, who died [on march 27, 1983] in the jan s. marais hospital in bellville, 
was not only the first south african composer to win international recognition on 
our behalf, but our foremost composer, the doyen of our music. he placed us on the 
world map of composition. (12)

in what he calls a series of ‘intuitive, loose, playful deconstructions’ the biographer 
ofers several readings of the claim that van wyk was the ‘first’, the ‘foremost’ and 
the ‘doyen’ of south african composition. this is aimed not only at contextualizing 
the historical particulars of van wyk’s influence, but as a means of thinking about the 
different angles the biography might have taken and the alternative stories it might 
have told. implied in these shifts of perspective is also the question of the reception 
each of these approaches might be expected to have in a broader scholarly context.

on the metaphorical world map of composition van wyk’s local and global 
importance vacillates with each iteration of the argument. is the claim that van wyk 
was south africa’s foremost composer to be deconstructed by the fact that he could 
hardly be seen as representative of the whole of south africa in 1983, or should the 
statement be seen as a ‘more general and universal ideological viewpoint’ in a 
modernist clash between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture? is the claim indicative of van wyk’s 
embroilment in a nationalist drive for the ‘own’, or does it mostly reveal the 
provincialism of south african art music discourse? (13)
should the biography make room for localized socio-political inquiry, or is it the fact that van wyk was an exponent of a ‘notated, learned, western musical tradition’ that should occupy the biographer?

rather than in the particulars of each approach the biographer is primarily interested in the ironic counterpoint between them: (14) in the fact that the image of van wyk grows and shrinks and mutates from whichever angle one views him. such questions about perspective and scholarly strategy, one could argue, are common to all academic inquiry, but in this instance the tension is explicitly (if ironically) anchored to the obituarist’s evocation of a ‘world map of composition’ and its imagined musicological corollaries. in other words, it is not only van wyk’s relationship to the western musical canon that occupies the biographer. he is also interested in considering the institutions, theoretical discourses and methodological approaches that would best assist the biographer in ‘accompanying [van wyk] past his death to immortality’. (15)

how, the subaltern biographer is asking oxymoronically, can i canonize what is essentially peripheral?

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nagmusiek can be seen as part of a larger body of scholarship proposing alternative approaches to the problem of canonizing peripheral knowledge. Walter Mignolo characterizes the ethos of this work as ‘epistemic delinking’. Mignolo’s point of departure is that the ‘rhetoric of modernity’ and the ‘logic of coloniality’ are two poles of a power differential between the west and its others that has marked entire parts of the globe as mentally and economically backward in order to sustain the west’s ideology of progress. (16)

The first aim of delinking – a ‘de-colonial epistemic shift [that] brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economies, other politics, other ethics’ – is to understand the geopolitical situatedness of knowledge production. (17)
Mignolo refers to this as the locus of enunciation, which, in the case of western knowledge production, is assumed to be universal. Mignolo outlines the factors involved in the authorization of knowledge as a function of hermeneutics that engages every aspect of the process of understanding and interpretation:

The audience addressed and the researcher’s agenda are equally relevant to the construction of the object or subject, as are the information and models available to the understanding subject. Thus, the locus of enunciation is as much a part of the knowing and understanding processes as are the data for the disciplinary (e.g., sociological, anthropological, historical, semiological, etc.) construction of the ‘real.’ Consequently, the ‘true’ account of a subject matter, in the form of knowledge or understanding, will be transacted in the respective communities of interpretation as much for its correspondence to what is taken to be real as for the authorizing locus of enunciation constructed in the very act of describing an object or a subject. Furthermore, the locus of enunciation of the discourse being read would not be understood in itself but in the context of previous loci of enunciation that the current discourse contests, corrects, or expands. It is as much the saying (and the audience involved) as it is what is said (and the world referred to) that preserves or transforms the image of the real constructed by previous acts of saying. (18)

If one takes Mignolo’s constructivist approach to knowledge seriously— that is, if knowledge cannot be separated from its locus of enunciation— canonization, too, must take on an expanded meaning. The ‘canon’, then, is a complex hermeneutic system wherein the world of the researcher, the world as described in academic language, and the interpretative horizon of scholarly audiences, intersect according to a logic of scholarly authorization that mirrors and sustains the unequal distribution of global power. Yet Mignolo’s hope is that the delinking project will not result in the existence of a ‘major’ and a ‘minor’ canon, or in a set of alternative canons, but in ‘heterotopic’ bodies of knowledge that operate according to their own idiosyncratic rules, thereby breaking through the modern/colonial binary.
this idea – that peripheral knowledge relies for its proper articulation on a hermeneutic system that has to be reconstructed as if from scratch – is powerfully demonstrated in nagmusiek. in explaining his approach to cataloguing van wyk’s archive, the result of which is included in volume i of nagmusiek, ansbach has the following exchange with one of his interlocutors:

‘a page by page commentary and description. it will take me many years to complete.’

‘but surely you don’t need to do all of this just to write a biography?’

‘i’m not just writing a biography, if i may say so. i’m discovering a lost world. and my sense of fear, my suspicion of the violence inherent in cataloguing is, i have come to realize, the result of the unwrought and confused richness of the territory i’m mapping. and my desire to control it.’ (19)

in nagmusiek this ‘lost world’ is shown to consist not only of the experiential world of the composer, but also, among other things, the theoretical frames, the literary apparatus and the idiosyncratic intellectual space its author has had to devise to bring the book into being, and, in this sense, under his control. through the formal structure of the book, and its physical and literary apparatus, muller shows how the
veracity of the image/s he is constructing of van wyk, and, hence, their canonical potential, are intertwined not only with perceived correspondences to what is taken to be real, but, perhaps more importantly, with ‘the authorizing locus of enunciation constructed in the very act of describing an object or a subject’, as mignolo puts it.

taking his cue from paul ricoeur’s time and narrative, muller explicitly materializes in nagmusiek the three overlapping worlds of ricoeur’s model of interpretation. in the context of a biographical project, mimesis1 refers to the life-world of the biographical subject, available to the biographer only in its chaotic material deposits. this is most convincingly portrayed by the catalogues of van wyk’s works in volume 1, but also by the photographs, lists of insignificant facts, and other archival material embedded in sebaldian fashion within volume 3. mimesis2, the emplotment of the material within a narrative, corresponds with muller’s configuration of the factual data of van wyk’s life into a story. the three extensive chronologies of van wyk’s life best materialize this stage. but muller also complicates ricoeur’s model with an additional layer: the mimesis of process. he works out the third hermeneutic world, where the biographer’s horizon of understanding merges with and is transfigured by the story of the composer’s life by creating the character of werner ansbach, who inserts himself as agent in the invention of all three hermeneutic worlds.
at the start of the narrative of volume iii, the fictional biographer’s self-deprecation
reminds strongly of julian barnes’s geoffrey braithwaite in flaubert’s parrot. his
‘listless list-making’, the three extended life chronologies of van wyk around which
the narrative takes shape, and the inclusion of writing in a range of registers and
formats also recall barnes’s text. on the surface the function of the metafictional
conceit seems similar too: the fictional narrator serves to portray the interpretative
violence of bending the excessive documentary remains of a life into the constraints
of a narrative biography, questioning notions of completeness, significance and the
accuracy of historical understanding.

but, as the narrative progresses, the brutality of ansbach’s self-derision points to
something more than a postmodern literary-technical problem circumvented by
resorting to metafictional conceit. what sets it apart from other texts that could be
classified, following linda hutcheon, as ‘historiographic metafiction’, (20) is that
nagmusiek makes a serious claim to knowledge; it is an attempt at ‘metafictional
historiography’. in his radical departure from the safety nets of academic writing, of
which its ascription to real authors and its status as non-fiction were hitherto
incontrovertible values, muller transforms the playful deconstructive intellectualism
of postmodern fiction into a form of scholarly self-reflection directly related to the
problem of peripheral writing, the metafictional mirror in nagmusiek is not only that
of a narcissus, but also of a ng g.
through metafictional techniques muller gives form to the hermeneutics of doubleness that arises inevitably from working outside the lines of the western canon. j.m. coetzee’s elizabeth costello, another fictional character used to examine peripheral authors and their writing, articulates this doubleness as follows:

the english novel … is written in the first place by english people for english people. the russian novel is written by russians for russians. but the african novel is not written by africans for africans. african novelists may write about africa, about african experience, but they are glancing over their shoulder all the time as they write at the foreigners who will read them. whether they like it or not, they have assumed the role of interpreter, interpreting africa to the world. how can you explore a world in all its depth if at the same time you are having to explain it to outsiders? (21)
being a peripheral writer means embodying an essentially paradoxical position. Mignolo characterizes the position of the peripheral writer as ‘thinking from his or her body and experience, subsuming the imperial reason that makes an other, an anthropos out of him or her’, writing ‘with one’s body on the border’, or ‘dwelling and thinking in the borders of local histories confronting global designs’. (22)

This paradoxical position engenders a conflicting ‘need’ and ‘challenge’ in peripheral writing: the need to explain itself in relation to the asymmetrical distribution of power, and the challenge ‘to detach itself from the presuppositions of the established methodological and philosophical foundations from which it departs’. (23)
however, mignolo’s instructions on ‘delinking’ from the philosophical foundations of the west are mostly dehistoricized, and, by his own admission, ‘somewhat messianic’. (24)

it is equally impossible for the peripheral author to escape the fact that: (1) questioning the epistemological assumptions of the west relies on that same epistemology for its subaltern articulation; and (2) that texts refusing to play along with the methodological and philosophical foundations of the west will remain unread and ineffectual. beyond theoretical musings and a play on words and their meanings, mignolo offers no specific strategies for how writers at the margins should negotiate the aporetics of their compromised positions.

Nagmusiek does.

not only does muller enact the dividedness of peripheral understanding by exposing the text’s own hermeneutic arc in the book’s apparatus and metafiction, but the double consciousness of peripheral hermeneutics is also part of the internal plot development of volume iii. muller develops within the biographical narrative a
this is particularly evident in the allegorical depiction of how ansbach comes to understand van wyk's world. the hermeneutics of the inside becomes a one-to-one collapse of the psychological and material space dividing biographer and subject. crucially, aspects of ansbach's biography merge with those of van wyk's in the first chronology of van wyk's life. 'i must get to know you [van wyk] in a relationship in which i am important, otherwise you slip out of my visual grasp, my field of hearing, out beneath my hands,' ansbach writes. (25)

after the first chronology the narrative retraces its steps. the second incarnation of the story pivots on much the same themes and documentary evidence as the first, but the world of ansbach and that of van wyk show increasing overlaps. in the first part, for example, ansbach describes van wyk's dietary preferences and evening routines objectively; in the second, ansbach incorporates them into his own daily routine: eating what van wyk ate; doing as van wyk did. as the narrative develops, this allegory of understanding becomes so literal that it begins to parody the hermeneutic process: ansbach works in the same office once occupied by van wyk; ansbach dreams van wyk's dreams; ansbach finds that his hand is the same size as van wyk's; ansbach smuggles van wyk's tuxedo out of an archival holding, and wears it in the evenings when playing the piano; on the last page of volume iii muller/ansbach's hands strike the same pose as van wyk's on the cover.
the parodic element indicates that this is no utopian vision of peripheral knowledge. ‘i’ve lost my orientation towards my own text,’ ansbach laments. ‘perhaps it started when i could no longer distinguish whether i were reliving another’s life, creating it, or exorcizing it.’ the process of ansbach’s understanding of van wyk’s world correlates inversely and starts depending on his loss of control over other aspects of his life, depicted in similar seemingly naive allegories of forgetting and the loss of intellectual innocence: ansbach’s mother is diagnosed with alzheimer’s disease and dies; ansbach suffers a series of violent over-the-top sexual encounters: the first bringing him closer to understanding gay desire; the second, at the mercy of the aggressive cecile with whom he enacts as dialogue extracts from van wyk’s lectures and radio talks, leaving him particularly humiliated, confused and aroused. at the same time ansbach’s entire intellectual project is allegorically anchored in exaggerated scale to the mole activity he is struggling to contain below the small patch of grass outside his apartment. (26)
the content of these allegories, the latter in particular, suggests that getting to know van wyk’s world and writing his biography in a ‘de-linked’ way depend on the psychologically harmful double consciousness of peripheral understanding (unmoored from western academic discourse, but focalized through it nonetheless). but more importantly, the allegorical structure itself implies and strategically exploits the hermeneutics particular to peripheral texts.

i have already referred to jameson’s theory of allegory in ‘third-world’ texts in the opening of this article, but his exposition on the hermeneutics of peripheral texts is pertinent too:

as western readers whose tastes (and much else) have been formed by our own modernisms, a popular or socially realistic third-world novel tends to come before
us, not immediately, but as though already-read. we sense, between ourselves and this alien text, the presence of another reader, of the other reader, for whom a narrative, which strikes us as conventional or naive, has a freshness of information and a social interest that we cannot share. the fear and the resistance i’m evoking has to do, then, with the sense of our own non-coincidence with that other reader, so different from ourselves; our sense that to coincide in any adequate way with that other ‘ideal reader’ – that is to say, to read this text adequately – we would have to give up a great deal that is individually precious to us and acknowledge an existence and a situation unfamiliar and therefore frightening – one that we do not know and prefer not to know. (27)
the double consciousness engendered in western readers by allegorical texts from elsewhere is the mirror image of the anxiety-inducing double consciousness of the subaltern, even though the western reader is in a position to ignore the other in a way the subaltern is not. julie mcgonegal has argued convincingly that jameson’s notes on ‘national allegory’ should be read from a metacritical viewpoint, in other words, that jameson’s essay says very little about ‘third world texts’ and more about ‘how these differences are maintained and reproduced by a first world literary criticism that remains blithely unaware, for the most part, of the ways its own historical and social conditions impart various givens to the interpretive situation.’
The strategically naive allegories of nagmusiek are metacritical in this sense: they invite the west’s entrenched responses to peripheral writing and augment the anxieties aroused by encountering the unfamiliar. By deconcealing the hermeneutic system within which nagmusiek has been conceptualized, and within which it is embedded and finds its meaning, Muller invents – albeit precariously – the conditions for Arnold van Wyk’s canonization.

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In 2002 the prolific Afrikaans author Karel Schoeman (1939–2017) titled his autobiography the last Afrikaans book, for, he argued: ‘the publication of another large-scale work of Afrikaans non-fiction in traditional format and through the traditional commercial press seems highly improbable.’ Schoeman continued:

Writing these notes was a personal endeavor, but as the work progressed I had to acknowledge that it had unwittingly grown into a record of the end of an era in the history of the Afrikaans language and culture of which I am a product, and now also a survivor and witness. (29)
the problem schoeman articulated is not about the commercial viability of afrikaans writing, as such, but about the inevitably flailing trajectory, in a liberated south africa, of a literary tradition that has focused almost exclusively on canonizing the lives and work of white, male, afrikaans writers. under the patronage of white-owned media enterprises a generation of afrikaans non-fiction writers enjoyed the freedom to work on large-scale projects, largely unencumbered by concerns for readability or for how well their books would sell. although musicologists’ contribution to this tradition was minimal – limited to the odd academic journal article – previous writing on van wyk and his contemporaries adopted the formal register, dry positivism and implicit nationalist agenda of their literary counterparts – an aesthetic that allowed twentieth-century afrikaans academics to focus on their subjects without questioning the political structures that enabled their work to continue in the way it did.

the need to ‘delink’ from this tradition should be as obvious to the contemporary south african biographer as the difficulties of doing so.
on the one hand, muller’s biographical text does an admirable job of pointing out the ambivalences and contradictions at the borders of the modern/colonial divide, having as subject matter a white, male, apartheid-era composer; someone with little formal musical training, who, despite growing up in a south african rural backwater, went on to compose to some acclaim in a western late-romantic idiom; a composer who clearly benefitted from the structures of high apartheid, but who, perhaps due to his reticence towards the regime, or due to his homosexuality, never found the institutional recognition he deserved; a man who felt himself perpetually displaced and uprooted, whether he lived in england or in south africa. but, inevitably, nagmusiek’s window on the nuances of colonial aesthetic production (and with that, muller’s attempt to canonize van wyk) is obstructed by the afrikaans biographical tradition that muller, by implication, is extending. it should be unthinkable to attempt to canonize someone like van wyk as if it were 1980s business as usual, and the metafictional depth and idiosyncratic approach allows the author to wonder out loud about how to write about a peripheral figure (and one who lived on the wrong side of history, at that), and to question his own work in relation to local and global antecedents.
muller treats his difficult relationship with the afrikaans biographical tradition by creating a character foil, ‘the great biographer’, who works alongside ansbach in the archival section of stellenbosch university’s main library – an underground structure dug out below the central square of the campus. ansbach describes this ‘bunker’ where he ordered van wyk’s estate, in words that could be applicable to the sheltered literary space of afrikaans non-fiction more broadly:

but for my work it was from the outset an amiable space: lily white and artificially homogenous, given the broader context of the country, but one in which – maybe as a result thereof – the money, attention and time i dedicated to van wyk were not questioned in principle.

i’ve never lost sight of the fact that, should i lift my chin to take a peek at the world outside the bomb shelter, and look beyond the minutiae of the biographical project towards the context out there, it would be clear that i’m busying myself with an ideologically conservative project. especially given the time and place in which it unfolds. of course, biography is traditionally an anointment of priestly oils on the fine lives of selected ‘great figures’. a conservative project, if ever there were one. (30)
whereas Ansbach is perturbed and overwhelmed by Van Wyk’s archive, burdened by questions of interpretation, and affected by every document he picks up, the great biographer proceeds with discipline and persistence, having perfected a method that sacrifices interpretation for productivity. The tension between the two biographers mounts throughout, until they face off in the chapter Oedipus Rex over their many intellectual and methodological differences. This treatment of the anxiety of influence illustrate how Muller both accepts and departs from Mignolo’s reasoning, focusing not on writing himself out of the dilemma of delinking as both a ‘need’ and an ‘impossibility’, but on dramatizing the aporetics of his position within the text itself. Broadly, his narrative strategy is inspired by Ricoeur’s dictum that the relationship between time and narrative culminates in a dialectic between an aporetics and a poetics, (31) which is to say that narrative ‘does not solve aporias, but only resolves them poetically (and not theoretically)’. (32) whereas aporias are by definition covert points of possible deconstruction where a text turns against itself, Muller overtly writes these points of dissolution into the text, sometimes in very disconcerting ways.
an important case in point is the introduction to volume i, which contains the complete catalogue of van wyk’s music. in a tenor at odds with the self-effacing style of the biographical narrative of volume iii, the author explains the possible impact and importance of the project. by again referencing van wyk’s marginality, he unambiguously identifies the project as an ‘act of canonization’:

a gesture on the part of its compiler and funders and institutional supporters that says: through the scope of this labour we confirm arnold van wyk’s importance to all our people and his unique contribution to expressing our position and humanity in south africa in sound. … this is clearly an ideological project which, through its weight and scope, stakes its claim to canonization. (33)
this all sounds like regular – if particularly eloquent – funding application stuff, but these statements about canonization are hollowed out by the book’s confusing chronology. nagmusiek’s three volumes follow no single linear trajectory, the book’s pagination contradicting its volumetric designations. volume iii starts on page 1 and volume i on page 611. on an experiential level the retrograde pagination suggests at least two ways of navigating through the text – each with its own implications for authorship, intent and monumentality. read by volumetric chronology the work catalogue was compiled by stephanus muller. but read by page chronology (as most readers would), the work list becomes an appendix to werner ansbach’s aborted biography of van wyk. it is possible, in other words, to read the work list as part of the fictional metabiographical conceit of volume iii – the documentary remains of a failed project – and when read in this way it is impossible to take the author’s words on canonization at face value.
alongside nagmusiek’s canonization drive and the implicit monumentalism of the biographical genre there is another agenda at work: a deconstructive one that allows van wyk’s biographical edifice to unravel in a controlled way, and one in which the author strategically vandalizes the idea of the magisterial biographical project. ‘exclusions and remainders, it would seem, inherently accompany any attempt to generate a canonical form,’ writes colby dickenson:

the fundamental aporia of a canonical text, one that seems inextricably intertwined with its authoritative claims, is that it is a text divided from within, by its messianic (prophetic) and canonical (pharisiac) tensions. there are some memories which must be forgotten, and, inevitably, a sort of ideological script of history takes form around those remaining particular memories. yet, these are memories which are capable of being contested by the tensions present within the canonical text itself. any (canonical) authority is consequently beset by the aporias which linger interminably at its core. (34)
nagmusiek is animated by the aporias of canonization. by working with the aporetic logic of canonical texts rather than against it muller allows forgotten memories to resurface and exclusions and remainders to assert a counter-authority over the text's canonical claims. superficially, this double agenda is visible in the book's highly stylized packaging. it is at once an imposing and fragile artefact. its loose parts (two photographs, a reproduction of a letter on thin typewriter paper in which van wyk describes the day he received an honorary doctorate from university of cape town, and a pocket-sized score of nagmusiek) easily get lost and come undone from their original contexts within the collection. the aporia is also visible in the exposed bricks of the fourth wall. scattered throughout the text are incomplete or discarded authors' notes, or ideas for planned sections that were never finished. the index, too, hints at both the authority of a canonical text and its secreted loose ends. although it is bulky and consumes half of volume ii, it is strangely opaque to the book's many metatheoretical concerns.
one of the most brutal instances of canonical desecration is found in the section supposedly containing a peer-review report of the text, close to the end of the biographical narrative of volume iii:

the author plays with the novel, the biography, and the autobiography, and the risky rejection of the weightiness of all, some, or any of these genres, has everything to do with someone who has lost his faith in god.

it pains me to have to say: the author could not find a satisfactory solution to the formal problem of how to approach a project like this one in a new way. in the end the work is neither fish nor fowl. the delicate internal motifs are not enough for integration, to hold the material together. the vast scale of the book is in some respects a sign of this unresolved problem. in the introduction to the catalogue the author expounds his reasons for including the weighty catalogue in the publication. he motivates it in more detail, but in short it comes down to the fact that he wants to make a gesture that could lead to the canonization of van wyk. i think this gesture, however commendable, is made at the expense of the possibility of the biography being published. (35)

the critique is devastating for the authority of the text and for the reader’s trust in the authority of its narrator, for its inclusion jolts the reader irredeemably out of the suspension of postmodern disbelief. the reader of a late work of metafiction like nagmusiek expects to share in the author’s creative act and in the burden of its production. readers have learnt to make sense of the piecemeal and fragmentary nature of the genre. but muller’s uncanny ability to project himself into the position of reader and critic, and to imagine devastating receptions of his own text alienate him from his readers, who would at this point not only have sympathized strongly with ansbach’s futile attempts at creating cohesion, but would have taken on some of the responsibility for fashioning a story from the disjointed set of narrative facts. the narrator’s hermeneutic omniscience may enable a form of self-canonization by dramatizing the arc of interpretation, but it comes at a cost.
nagmusiek not only undermines its canonical claims by violating them internally, but, more essentially, because it is not written in English. When a nervous and self-castigating Ansbach does present a paper in English at a conference entitled ‘composing apartheid’ (36) he explains at length his decision to write the biography in Afrikaans:

this decision to revisit the possibilities of writing in Afrikaans was not only prompted by the promise of a broadening of register, a change of style, a discovery of spaces hidden in the nuances of a different vocabulary and semantics. But I also found that when I wrote in Afrikaans I instinctively wrote for a different audience. This would happen without any intent or planning. Writing the language I grew up in, I found that I (also) spoke to people like my parents and siblings, my school friends, aunts and uncles, or rather: ooms en tannies. Writing in the language I have grown more proficient in professionally, I invariably found that I addressed learned colleagues. I wanted to see how my writing would change (the ‘what’ as well as the ‘how’) after an enforced change of tongue. […] but let it also be said that it is a painful process, bifurcating between an honest desire for communication with a broader scholarly community in which the lingua franca is English (and the flip-side fear of parochialism), and the desire to think and write and conduct verbal retrospection in the language of one’s home and therefore inevitably coupled with the politicized responsibility of Afrikaans academics to maintain Afrikaans as an academic language, and ultimately as a spoken language, for future generations of South Africans. The responsibility I speak of is not a responsibility to a political idea, at least it is so no longer to me, but to all who might be driven out of themselves in future by finding the doors of the past locked in strange accents and unknown combinations of sounds. More controversially, I would claim, it is to keep the options open of positioning oneself in a discursive space with the potential to stake out in an authentic voice a postcolonial South African position in a global discourse shaped by English.
here muller further unpacks the aporetics of peripheral writing: it entails a painful splitting of registers, audiences, desires and scholarly responsibilities, culminating in the paradox that in order ‘to stake out in an authentic voice a postcolonial south african position in a global discourse shaped by english’, the line of communication with that global discourse needs to be shut down. nagmusiek’s canonical potential is severely restricted because it is not written in english, just as its decolonial ambitions are compromised by its canonical aims.

muller/ansbach’s reasons for writing in afrikaans (i permit myself the intentional fallacy on this occasion, since muller published part of this particular chapter under his own name elsewhere) (37) form part of the chapter’s broader argument on the hermeneutics of peripheral writing and theorization, in relation to global discourses and canonical understandings. turning to a no less controversial subject than the meaning of apartheid, muller/ansbach takes issue with the conference’s foregone conclusions that white apartheid-era composers ‘were having a pretty good time, thanks to their … patrons … and the apartheid system itself’. (38)

muller attempts to qualify the paradigmatic view of a mutually profitable relationship between the apartheid regime and white composers by arguing that the agency implied in the title of the conference, composing apartheid, ‘rests perhaps more convincingly in the concerns and preoccupations of scholars today than in the hands of the creators of musics during the apartheid era’. he goes on:
even though apartheid, and in a broader sense colonialism in general, is destined to remain a paradigmatic conceptual framework for south african (musical) culture of the twentieth century and well beyond, i find myself at a personal junction where defining a position with respect to apartheid – whether it be one of atonement or justification or revelation – can no longer be the sole reason for my visitations to my, and our collective, pasts. i find the apartheid-framed skirmishes and debates directed at audiences gathered together by a global english-speaking consensus mentality – an apartheid spelt but rarely pronounced in the afrikaans fashion, as though english wishes to distance itself from the word even when using it to english-language effects: apartheid – to be indifferent, if not antagonistic, to my own research interests.

in order to register an alternative to the ‘global english-speaking consensus mentality’, he analyses a set of photographs of van wyk’s hands, taken in 1954. again following paul ricoeur’s model of threefold mimesis in time and narrative, muller asks how the horizon of the world in which these photographs acquired their meaning (ricoeur’s mimesis2) might intersect with the world of its present-day ‘readers’ (ricoeur’s mimesis3). ‘[t]hese photographs in their coagulated state,’ says muller/ansbach, ‘was about communicating something to the future, my present, that was of some deep and not entirely intelligible significance.’ (39)
ironically, he interprets these photographs from yet another western paradigmatic model of understanding, this time german in conception. ‘[i]t is undeniable’, he says, ‘that the photographs signify the kind of romantic – with a capital r – adulation of an individual as something special, perhaps even genius, that the beethoven death mask also communicates to us more than two hundred and fifty years after it was made.’ by virtue, then, of the images’ similarity to other canonic imagery of composers that symbolically materialize a romantic aesthetic – busts, portraits, casts, death masks – the images of van wyk’s hands exceed the logic of apartheid:

it asserts the primacy of its agent and his music intersecting with our world – my world – in a manner, that, i maintain, i cannot approximate under a subject potentially assuming so much historically as ‘composing apartheid’ within the context of a celebration of ‘ten years of democracy’.
i’m not as interested here in the merits of muller’s argument about composers and apartheid (he overturns, deconstructs and relativizes it in numerous ways, anyway) as in his unusual neo-romantic reasoning on marginal unintelligibility. at the end of his exposition on the meanings of the images, he concludes:

there exist things from the past, sometimes incomprehensible and inexplicably significant, that cannot become part of the story this conference wishes to tell, and in this, constitute a crucial, discordant part of its plot.

the first part of this formulation articulates a standard romantic position on the value of the unknowable: not only is the image of van wyk’s hands incomprehensibly significant in ‘our’ hermeneutic world; the image attains its significance by projecting itself, in a romantic short-circuit of empty meanings, as signifying incomprehensible significance. in the second part of his formulation, however, he uses the romantic rhetoric of incomprehensible significance to argue for the importance of the marginalized in the geopolitical master narrative of what he earlier called the ‘global english-speaking consensus mentality’. in a (dis)ingenuous way, then, muller/ansbach uses universal concerns to elevate the incomprehensibility of the marginal into something essentially, but inexplicably, meaningful. in so doing he finds a provisional way through the problem of how to stake out in an authentic voice a postcolonial south african position in a global discourse shaped by english.
this mode of neo-romantic reasoning does not only pertain to van wyk’s world, but, via its metafictional self-awareness, to nagmusiek’s own status as object of interpretation. that the image of van wyk’s hands is conspicuously embossed on the cover confers on the book some of the same qualities embedded in the photograph: the suggestion that romantic representation is at work here, but also, that it attains its value precisely through putting itself forth as an unintelligible part of the geopolitical narrative. muller/ansbach’s neo-romantic reasoning culminates in the decision to write in afrikaans, as muller explains in an interview:

i gambled on the idea that a book like this cannot be written in english. i felt that if you really want to write books that do extraordinary things, really mad things, risky things, hugely risky things, then you must do it in a marginal language, in a marginal geography, about a marginal composer, about music that’s marginal even in its own society. the benefit of all this marginality is the risks it enables you to take, the scale of the experiment it allows you to make. (40)
by not trying to remedy the book’s marginality, its intelligibility to the west, or the tendency for peripheral texts to be read as national allegories, instead positing it on the edge with wholehearted excessiveness, muller creates a theory-in-praxis of decolonial hermeneutics. as such, muller puts into operation mignolo’s mantra that ‘there is no rhetoric of modernity without the logic of coloniality’, but he goes about it in a fundamentally new and different way. instead of attempting to provincialize western musicological discourse, or to posit van wyk’s world as an alternative but equal centre of knowledge, tensions around canonization, marginality and the geopolitics of knowledge are worked out within the apparatus of the book, its formal structure, its metafiction, its narrative development, and its sheer bulk. these ex-centric hermeneutic horizons take shape in the shadows of anglophone musicology and critical scholarship, even while remaining resolutely outside their frames of reference.

what accounts for nagmusiek’s startling newness is the faith its author places in the value of peripheral knowledge, the lengths he is prepared to go to in order to demonstrate and to canonize this faith, and the sacrifices he makes in the process. nagmusiek becomes canonical by proposing its own doctrine. it is a catechism for the marginal, and a lesson in how to theorize at the borders of intelligibility. and even then the text seems to be pointing derisively at its own catechismal and didactic impulses, which once more confirm the inescapable aporias of writing from the other side of the world.

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http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/veapdkqmc7yyfwenmwks/full
notes

1 the allusion is to sanskrit scholar richard gombrich, but the usual disclaimers for fiction apply.

2 stephanus muller, nagmusiek, 3 vols. (johannesburg, 2014), iii, 30. translated from the original.

3 muller, nagmusiek, iii, 210–11.

4 see žižek, living in the end times (london, 2011), 52. ‘[t]he universalism of a western liberal society does not reside in the fact that its values (human rights, etc.) are universal in the sense of holding for all cultures, but in a much more radical sense, for individuals relate to themselves as “universal,” they participate in the universal dimension directly, by-passing their particular social position.’

5 muller, nagmusiek, iii, 81.

6 chris walton, ‘something of the night’, the musical times, winter (2015).

7 juliana m. pistorius, ‘nagmusiek [night music]’, fontes artis musicae, 62/2 (2015), 130.


9 a. suresh canagarajah, a geopolitics of academic writing (pittsburgh, 2002), 30.

10 dipesh chakrabarty, provincializing europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference (princeton, 2000),

11 muller, nagmusiek, iii, 10.

12 muller, nagmusiek, iii, 18. translated from the original.

13 muller, nagmusiek, iii, 10–11.

14 muller, nagmusiek, iii, 18.

15 muller, nagmusiek, iii, 92. translated from the original.

16 walter mignolo, ‘delinking: the rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality’, cultural studies, 21/2–3, 453; 464.


19 Muller, *Nagmusiek*, iii, 248.


24 Mignolo, *Delinking* 452.

25 Muller, *Nagmusiek*, iii, 234.

26 Muller, *Nagmusiek*, iii, 271.


30 Muller, *Nagmusiek*, iii, 83. Translated from the original.


32 Muller, *Nagmusiek*, iii, 394.

33 Muller, *Nagmusiek*, i, 612. Translated from the original.
34 Dickinson, Between the Canon and the Messiah: The Structure of Faith in Contemporary Continental Thought (London, 2013), 162.

35 Muller, Nagmusiek, iii, 513.

36 In line with the notes on audience above, it is perhaps no coincidence that this particular chapter is readily accessible, and indeed, addressed to English-speaking readers, although they will have to forego Muller’s caricatured typology of South African academics.


38 Muller, Nagmusiek, iii, 379.

39 Muller, Nagmusiek, iii, 393.

40 Available at. Translated from the original.

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‘things happen once only and are never repeated, never return. except in memory.’ (galgut 2010, 123)

reeling from the experience of watching aryan kaganof’s night is coming: threnody for the victims of marikana, a documentary commissioned by the hearing landscape critically network in conjunction with their conference at the university of stellenbosch, south africa, in 2013, it is difficult to escape an overwhelming sense of dislocation, powerlessness, and collusion. the film forces us to confront our worst fears, namely that even as we seek to understand the environments and impulses that motivate the most brutal forms of human violence and degradation, we are inescapably implicated in their continual unfolding. furthermore, the film irresistibly insists that our reactions as intellectuals, academics, or even simply as reluctant witnesses, ultimately compounds the histories of asymmetry, exploitation, and domination upon which such violence relies and which it ritualistically performs. it leaves us no space from which to try and comprehend the magnitude of a recent historical moment that, as peter alexander (2013, 131) has written, became for south africa ‘a seismic event’, albeit one that may simply have ‘produced new faults from existing tectonic stress’. and it broadcasts our culpability, tearing away the critical veil and demanding that academic practice urgently reassess its relationship with direct action and with the institutional frameworks from which it gains and amplifies its authority.
writing as a European scholar based at an institution that has done insufficient work thus far to redress fully the legacy of colonial oppression that it has historically helped to instate and sustain, not least in the wake of the Rhodes Must Fall protests, and as an agent whose mawkish presence in the film makes for particularly awkward viewing, is to signal a partiality that relativizes any sustained attempt at responding adequately to Kaganof’s film. Indeed, the most immediate reaction is both one of outrage and also of speechlessness, a sudden rendering mute or dumb in the face of such horror. Such silence, however, should not necessarily be mistaken for a passive acquiescence. All too often, silence is assumed to signal a turning away or refusal to engage; as Nomi Dave (2014, 19) notes, ‘silence does not simply mean an un-thought void or submission.’ Rather, in this context, the inability to speak paradoxically addresses directly a series of more searching questions posed by the film: whose right is it to speak or listen; where should such dialogues properly take place; and how can one escape the hypocrisy of writing musicologically from such a privileged platform without reinscribing precisely the same patterns of exploitation that have instigated such violence and that perpetuate its affects? In other words, how can academic writing recognize and engage effectively with what Slavoj Žižek (2008) has called violence’s objective qualities – the symbolic and systematic violence of language and its inextricably entwined relationship with the social-economic conditions of late capitalism – without losing sight, or sound, of its immediate subjective impacts, the physical damage that it leaves behind? Watching Night is coming challenges us on at least three levels: to acknowledge the bloodshed of the Marikana massacre; to think again about the relationships between landscape, power, sight, and sound (not only in a South African context but elsewhere); and to reflect critically upon the responsibility of scholarly research and on the role of academic writing in the context of such fragile and politically charged debates – not least, in its repeated failure to respond sufficiently to violence both historically and in its immediate aftermath.
my own silence, after watching the film for the first time, was also born out of a sense of devastation: through an inability to frame or contain intellectually the historical legacy of totalitarianism which the footage of the massacre lays bare, and equally from a recognition of the limits of language and of the landscape’s excessive quality: that is, the way in which it resists any attempt at linguistic boundedness or containment. in this way, my experience of the film collided with two earlier moments of encounter with the south african landscape. the first was a screening of documentary film footage from district six in cape town, a richly multi-ethnic area of the central city that was zoned for white occupation under the apartheid government and subsequently cleared, accompanied by the capetonian jazz pianist and composer kyle shepherd, at the hearing landscape critically meeting – where the failure to address the marikana massacre explicitly in its proceedings became the catalyst for kaganof’s film. listening to shepherd’s sonorous and at times violent improvisation began to fill an acoustic gap opened up by the exhibition ‘lingering absences’, curated at the sasol art museum in stellenbosch by lizabé lambrechts and ernst van der wal in conjunction with the conference, which painfully allegorized through its austere spatial organisation of the exhibition space the ideology and practice of racial segregation that led to the bulldozing of district six and the apartheid regime’s attempts to control and discipline the activities of the eoan opera group in the late 1960s. pressing my ear to the speakers suspended along the exhibition’s sound wall, the only sounds that emerged were a faint hissing, the distant trace of passing traffic noise, and the deafeningly ambient buzz of my own nervous system.

the second, but earlier, moment of encounter was my first visit to cape town, twelve
months previously, to give a series of lectures on music and landscape at stellenbosch in preparation for the conference discussions the following year. on our first evening in the city, still recovering from the claustrophobia and disorientation of the flight, we wandered into the company’s gardens, a space overwhelmingly marked by its histories of colonial occupation, exclusion, suppression and resistance. two large loudspeakers set up at the formal gates of the south african national art gallery (a venue that already serves as a highly ideological threshold) played a version of the soviet-era popular tune, ‘v keiptounskom portu’ (‘in the cape town port’), pavel gandelman’s cover of jacob jacobs and sholom secunda’s yiddish hit ‘bei mir bistu shein’ (‘to me you’re beautiful’), originally composed in 1932 for the musical comedy men ken lebn nor men lost nisht (normally translated as ‘i would if i could’, but more accurately rendered as ‘one could live, but they won’t allow it’). the complex sedimented layers of historical presence and absence folded within the seemingly incongruous soundtrack sharply brought into focus music’s intimate and simultaneously impersonal relationship with place, territorialisation, and displacement. marked by the scratchy, distorted sound of the speakers – a very different kind of grittiness from the barely audible background noise of the sound wall at the sasol exhibition – our experience of the landscape was channelled by the presence of the music’s ghosts and revenants, but also by the physical bodies of those still displaced. the following day, visiting an elementary school project in langa on the cape flats, the landscape assumed another set of acoustic key notes: the sound of the wind blowing dust across the township, a sudden rain storm falling like bullets on corrugated tin roofs, and the exuberant laughter of the kids in the classroom, assembled from a set of prefabricated steel containers next to a rubbish-strewn culvert.

night is coming prompts us to reflect more intensively upon sound and the domination of landscape. this is, in some ways, a topic that has received extensive attention in recent years. significant lacunae, however, still remain. in the revised preface to the second edition of his seminal volume, landscape and power, for example, w. j. t mitchell (2002, vii) writes:

if one wanted to continue to insist on power as the key to landscape, one would have to acknowledge that it is a relatively weak power compared to that of armies, police forces, governments, and corporations … as the background within which a figure, form, or narrative act emerges, landscape [sic] exerts the passive force of setting, scene, and sight. it is generally the ‘overlooked’, not the ‘looked at’, and it can be quite difficult to specify what exactly it means to say that one is ‘looking at the
Mitchell’s awkward qualification illustrates the perils of attempting to conceive landscape primarily from a western European art-historical perspective. Even the conjunction in the volume’s title, ‘landscape and power’, inadvertently reinforces the sense that the politics and aesthetics of landscape are somehow discrete epistemologies, in dialectic opposition, a separation which even the most superficial experience of the vivid materiality of the South African landscape (and indeed of landscapes elsewhere, such as the Israel-Palestine border discussed later in Mitchell’s volume) immediately challenges and overturns. Mitchell’s essential notion of landscape is thus premised on both distance and a mode of elective deafness, an elevated site of critical prospect (‘looked at’/’overlooked’) which his writing briefly threatens to dismantle but ultimately reaffirms. ‘The landscape imperative is a kind of mandate to withdraw’, he suggests, ‘to draw out by drawing back from a site’ (Mitchell 2002; viii). But the testimony of the striking miners who survived the Marikana massacre, as documented by Peter Alexander, Luke Sinwell, Thalepo Lekgowa, Botsang Mmope and Bonagni Xezwi, however, does not permit such an easy or deflective turning away or double motion. Rather, one of the most striking aspects of their testimony is their insistence on the acoustic quality of the landscape: ‘the workers were singing ‘makulive’ [Isixhosa for ‘let there be a fight’] / we felt the force of the movement’ they recall at one point; ‘as the workers explained, “we can all sing, but we can’t all speak at once”’ (Sinwell et al 2013, 13). Alexander’s (2013:33) record of the event is similarly conceived in sonic terms, through the reported sounds of speaking voices, singing, and gunshot:
mineworker 2 recounts that a zulu-speaking policeman then warned that he would count to ten, and that if they had not conceded [their weapons] by then he would give the order to fire. after the counting had started the workers began singing and moved off together towards the weakest point in the police line, which was probably to the north-east, the direction of the mountain. at first the police gave way but, according to mineworker 2, after about ten metres they started shooting.

in such accounts, sound spatializes and adds a temporal dimension to the landscape: the field of fire and the miners’ singing are described as a means of mapping the massacre’s location, in counterpoint with the physical and symbolic presence of the mountain that occupies its north-east corner. but at the same time, sound is the sign of presence, of physical action and vulnerability. noise penetrates the listening body, collapsing our feeling of proximity and distance as we read the text, and rupturing the sense of ground or containment upon which the narrative resides. this is a crucial turn. in kaganof’s film, the marikana massacre is transfigured into a ritualised act, a theatre of paramilitary execution that occupies a space congruent with mitchell’s reading (elsewhere in his volume) of the holy land, a similarly violated place of reverence, transformation, and despair, ‘a paradise from which we have been expelled, a sacred soil that has been defiled, a promise yet to be fulfilled, a blessed site that lies under a curse’ (mitchell 2002, 261). such reified landscapes are
frequently marked by primal moments of mutilation and abandonment (both ecological and humanitarian), in direct opposition to their spiritual and material wealth. ‘the perverse logic of holy landscape seems to turn it from god’s gift into an obscene idol that demands human sacrifice’, mitchell (2002, 262) explains, through a grisly harvest: ‘the sacred groves are watered by blood, and the fields are fertilized with human flesh and bones’. at such moments, landscape and power are no longer polarised in binary opposition, but melded into a single event: the sound of singing which gives way to bullets and the cries of policemen, mineworkers, and vain repeated calls to ‘cease fire’ as the shots kick up the dust.

how can, or should, musicology approach such shattered (and shattering) soundscapes, not least given their fractured reassemblage in kaganof’s film? this problem poses a larger question about the proper role of academic discourse and its relationship with political activism and resistance. luke sinwell (2012, 670) writes scathingly of ‘ivory-tower intellectuals who criticise neoliberalism at international and other conferences without undertaking movement-building themselves that engages with the strategies and tactics employed by the masses, provide little hope for constructing a radical socialist agenda at this, or any other, juncture’, a charge which no amount of earnest liberal hand-wringing can hope to resolve. nor does that allow us to penetrate the complex historical contexts for the marikana massacre, its immediate political motivations, and its traumatic aftermath, with any sense of coherence. perhaps the most useful response to sinwell’s critique can be found in njabulo s. ndebele’s essay ‘redefining relevance’, an analysis that, crucially, predates the 1994 watershed. for ndebele (1994, 68-9),
the writer [in south africa] has tended to plunge into the task of writing without fully grappling with the theoretical demands of that task in all its dimensions. armed with notions of artistic commitment still constrained by outmoded protest-bound perceptions of the role of art and of what constitutes political relevance in art, [she] has set about reproducing a dead-end.

one could argue that, in the light of events such as marikana, ndebele’s call for a more coolly dispassionate dialogic process of engagement risks seeming fatally anachronistic. but the task laid out by ndebele is not as straightforward or compliant as it seems. ‘the relationship between politics and art is by definition always mediated by reflection’, ndebele (1994, 69) explains, ‘but this distinction does not necessarily enable us to make a mechanical choice between politics and art: rather, it enables us to participate in the dialectic between the two’. the real challenge in ndebele’s model is hence to meet the artistic demands provoked by such events with a sufficient sense of urgency, but simultaneously to fold back critical analysis in a continual process of reflection and re-evaluation that asks more intractable questions of genre, textuality, and scholarly practice. the difficulty of that task seems greater than ever before, not least given the political indictment of liberal academe made by kaganof’s film, but that should not prevent us from adopting its basic principles in lieu of more scattered methodologies.
the challenges for musicology, however, run even deeper. this is in part because of the pervasive resistance, both within the discipline and without, to engaging with messy questions of musical meaning and ontology in genuinely transformative ways. even a critic as politically savvy as žižek (2005) falls disarmingly, in his call for a radical decontextualisation of wagnerian music drama, for a faded notion of musical immanence, albeit within the context of a utopian revolutionary critique of late capitalism. this trend was identified as early as 1993 by writers such as philip bohlman, addressing explicitly the political nature of what was perceived as musicology’s historical indifference to issues of representation and social context. writing in the immediate aftermath of the rodney king riots in los angeles, bohlman (1993, 424) notes that ‘musicology has not been a field wont to respond to social and critical crisis, much less to any sort of crisis that we might call discursive – that is to say, a crisis that might lie within itself as an intellectual discipline’. more than two decades after the emergence of what was once called the ‘new musicology’ in response to calls such as bohlman’s for a thorough re-evaluation of the discipline’s epistemological foundations, it is possible for scholars to ask themselves how much has genuinely changed, at least at the level of infrastructure and representation. certainly, musicology’s claims to a degree of critical self-immunity have remained by-and-large intact, paradoxically perhaps in part because of recent pressures, within the united kingdom at least, to demonstrate its ‘relevance’. yet here lies musicology’s double-bind, as bohlman notes: ‘it is because musicology has insisted on its apolitical status – call it positivistic, call it value-free, call it aesthetically independent – that the field has come face-to-face with its own political act.’ writing about music, in other words, swiftly becomes another form of domination, both disciplinary and political, a process of ontological seizure and determinism. ‘this act of essentializing music, the very attempt to depoliticise it,’ bohlman (1993, 419) argues, ‘has become the most hegemonic form of politicising music’; to which the only adequate response, once again, might appear to be silence.
critically contemplating the relationship between music and landscape, however, forces us to open such questions again, and to begin to speak and write cautiously once more. deconstructing landscape's deceptive 'second nature', and attending more acutely to the discursive dangers of passive immersion in notions of aesthetic contemplation, either of landscape or the musical work, compels musicology to readdress its own recurrent critical amnesia and short-sightedness, as painful as this process has become. this is, in part, what kaganof’s film demands of its viewers. but music, as ever, ultimately plays a less regulated and disciplined role within kaganof’s film, one that precludes any neat interpretative enclosure or instrumentalisation. thrown amidst the sharply spliced news footage of the massacre and the angrily juxtaposed longeurs of the conference proceedings, among the most heart-rending moments in the film is the extract from neo muyanga’s performance, ‘songs of soil and water: an exploration of music of protest, love and transformation’, which was the theme of one of the conference’s lunchtime concerts. for kaganof, the bitter irony of muyanga’s hymn, in loving and reverential praise of god, slams into the sheer brutality of the police massacre. it becomes, in kaganof’s reading, the most searing evidence of our failure to respond, not only to marikana, but to the violence of landscape more generally: to the fate of the dispossessed and the crimes of occupation, segregation, and inequality perpetuated upon the land. even at this bleakest moment, however, insisting on music’s ability to speak in other registers is absolutely not to reinscribe outdated assumptions of cultivation and autonomy, even less to re-monumentalise an oppressive nineteenth-century western european notion of musical transcendence. rather, it is to try and allow music to regain its own agency, its ability to invert, surprise, gather, cajole, mourn, rage, and console, or to do nothing at all. it is to embrace a more productive dissonance. like the rich bakhtinian laughter that erupts from the narrator at the end of es’kia mphahlele’s story, ‘grieg on a stolen piano’ (2006 [1967]), it is music’s routine, quotidian character, alongside its transgressiveness, that is its most powerful and unsettling quality. recognising music’s creative potential, as well as its historical embeddedness, in conjunction with the demand for justice articulated repeatedly in kaganof’s film, only increases the urgency of our response, however compromised that may seem. writing, hesitantly, in its aftermath becomes not simply a possibility but an obligation. two greater imperatives nevertheless remain: to remember; and to listen more closely.

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1. the hearing landscape critically network is funded by the leverhulme trust (award
ref. in-2013-016). details of the conference programme and related events are listed
at: https://musiclandscapeconference.wordpress.com.
2. for a sobering report that examines the complex patterns of collusion and protest
up to and following the massacre, see böhmke 2012.
3. for a wider theoretical discussion of this folding-together of collusion and
responsibility, see sanders 2002.
4. the best account of the rhodes must fall movement in oxford is amit chaudhuri’s ‘the real meaning of rhodes must fall’ (2016). oxford university’s record of admission for non-white applicants remains a frequent topic of debate in the british media, and the institution’s attitude to race has recently been the subject of a student-led campaign, ‘i too am oxford’. see the project website at http://itooamoxford.tumblr.com. the university’s african studies centre (http://www.africanstudies.ox.ac.uk) supports a wide range of environmental, political, and sociological research on african topics, and inaugurated an msc in african studies in 2006. oxford also has a long-standing record of civil rights activism; for a reflective history, see tuck 2014.
5. Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006, 31) has written of this negative circularity of response, noting that, ‘people often recommend relativism because they think it will lead to tolerance. But if we cannot learn from one another what is right to feel and do, then conversation between us will be pointless. Relativism of that sort isn’t a way to encourage conversation; it’s just a reason to fall silent’.

6. I am indebted to Stephanus Muller for this point, which is drawn out of his paper, ‘Spectres of Excess’, at the Stellenbosch HLC meeting.

7. This omission was compounded by the network’s decision not to screen the film at its following meeting, at Harvard University, in January 2015. A statement, followed by a response from Kaganof, was published on the network’s website at https://hearinglandscapecritically.net/page/2/.

8. See the EOAN History Project’s volume, EOAN: Our Story (2013). The group website is at http://www.eoangroup.co.za.

9. For an account of Secunda’s career, and the story of the song’s genesis and subsequent commercial success following its 1938 recording by the Andrews Sisters, see Whitfield, 1999.

10. The materiality and symbolism of loud speakers has increasingly been the subject of scholarly attention. See, for example, Sewald 2012, and Moustapha 2014.

11. It is important, in this context, to turn once again to Peter Alexander’s (2013, 40) account drawn from the miners’ testimony: ‘of the 34 workers who were slaughtered on 16 August, 12 died in the opening encounter. About eight died in various locations around the battlefield. The remainder were killed in one small location. This is the place known by the inquiry as Kleinkopje. But South Africa is littered with small...’
koppies and it seems more appropriate to call it killing koppie. Here, some 300 metres to the west of the mountain, on a low rocky outcrop covered with shrubs and trees, the police killed 13 or 14 workers. On a grassy plane with few large bushes this was an obvious place to hide from bullets and hippos, but it was relatively easy for the police to encircle and then move in for the kill.’

12. I am wary of the potentially naturalising quality of the term ‘soundscape’, and the extent to which it brings a very different intellectual heritage into the discussion; for an influential critique, see Ingold 2007, 10-13.
13. Ndebele’s essay was written in the aftermath of the decision to fire 23,000 miners at Impala Platinum Mine, Bophuthatswana, in 1986.
14. Ndebele’s position shifted as political events developed. In a later essay, titled ‘guilt and atonement’ from 1991, the text’s recurrent refrain is ‘terrible choices!’
15. See also the influential introduction in Bohlman’s co-edited volume with Robert Radano, Music and the Racial Imagination (2000).
16. For a trenchant discussion, see MacGregor 2012.
18. For a particularly powerful attempt to address these concerns, see Gordon 2015.
i

from alcatraz to robben island is a page
in my notebook away.
i said goodbye to the devil last night,
bought her one last bourbon.
tho’ we parted as friends
i won’t see her again.
she’s got a mean streak, is not to be trusted.

from robben island to alcatraz is a
tightrope walk away.
hope i don’t slip or get busted.

well i walked up haight looking for my dream.
what i got was a row of shops selling me packages of a scene.
now anarchy’s on offer and the anti-
christ’s marked down,
it’s a post-apocalypso special.

but what i don’t understand
is why the bars all shut down
at 2am in san francisco.

ii

the devil ‘n me we hung out
on mason, just jazzin’ with the deadbeats,
listening to their squalor, watchin’
the tables get turned. changing of the guard took place about six so we rolled in to the punjab. waiting for our curries, devil got listless, start in to breathin’ fire all over the place.
damn! she irritate me. i mean we buddies ‘n all but this flame-on shit jes draw attention to the fact that we strangers in town, who need that ferchrissakes?
devil she jes don’ give a shit, she say, “i is lucifer. i do what i please. god knows i do. god knows.”
i think about what god knows about me. all those ladies i abused, especially the ones that loved me, them the most. lord yes, god knows all that. still shines her sun down on me. still breathes her cool breath on me when my brow be sweatin’. what about the devil? she got a conscience?
i ask her. she say, “all god’s chillun got a conscience. conscience like a sell-by date of the soul.” “but you the devil. you got a soul?” “i’m god’s favourite angel, niggah, i am all soul!”
devil snuck outta da punjab.
i finish my korma. sip that mango lassi. whoopee, devil sure one touchy sunnoffabish!

iii
captain hook is a veteran. usedta believe in the marlboro man. now he’s not allowed to smoke in public. captain hook says to me “i think we’re both insane.” i reply “aren’t we all, ultimately?”
captain hook is snoozin’ under his bowler hat. now can you top that?

this is how it started
in the beginning there was no beginning just the time before time began no space either nothing you could touch, walk into or out of then the goddess got lonely wanted some company a mirror to reflect in and on youniverse came birthed as electric and magnetic energies call ‘em male and female harmony, melody and rhythm these are the keys to creation
well the sun’s shining brightly,
it’s almost spring equinox but there’s
a cold wind blowing so i stay wrapped
in my pony skin.
i just ordered a second cup of coffee.
it’s drinkable; my license to sit in
this lonely corner diner on 9th and lincoln
writing this summons to you.
what more can i add?
wish you were here to hold on to
when they kick me out of that bar
tonight at 2am in san francisco.

iv

sitting in the blue front café window
watching haight ashbury’s multicoloured
petals of innocence unfold with the accuracy
of a razor blade or a judicious helping of
louisiana hot sauce.
the world is cool now in the late
afternoon breeze and even the
trees can’t be bothered to take
shelter from the man in the moon
and his candy coated darts of loneliness.
there is no cure for the underdose
of affection that’s an inevitable side-
effect of the strychnine kick from
the tabuloid and the download bug
that pretended to communicate while
you got on-line. then before you knew
it we were all in line for the sales pitch
fix that hooked us up to the brain-
machine that thinks our thoughts
for us while we go endlessly
shopping at the identity bazaar
looking for the requisite garments
to cover up the scars that were left
when they stole our souls.

i was walking up eddy,
turned left into divisadero,
found you this birthday card
in a shop called gargoyle.
gonna mail it tomorrow.
when you get it i want you to know
you’re my hero.
yeah sure, i can go it alone,
i’m self-sufficient. i’ve got my pony
skin jacket, my boots made for walking.
it’s not that i’m needy.
i’d simply prefer to have you at my
side tonight when they call last round
in all those bars that shut down at
2am in san francisco.

v

ok. now check this. i’m sitting in
the cha cha cha on the corner of
shrader ‘n haight. minding my own
business. sipping on a bottle of cerveza
pacifico. waiting for my black bean soup to arrive. dude walks in. ferocious looking afropessimist. face all chewed up like he been through something real bad. napalm. walks straight up to me. big loud voice. muddy waters big.

“you know what?”
he barks the question at me.
i sip my pacifico slowly. set the tempo. regain initiative. read the label while he eyeballs me. government warning 1) according to the surgeon general women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects.
time to reply.
“No. what?”
“you an asshole. that’s what!”
i’m surprised by his perspicacity.
he turns to go.
“How you find out?”
he stops in the doorway. faces me.
“you not only an asshole. you a snake!” – yelling now – “that’s what you are! a snake!” afropessimist shambles off into the busy street.
my black bean soup arrives. it’s tasty.
ragga music starts booming out of a system.
i sip my pacifico. study the bright yellow label: 2) consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery, and may cause health problems.
waiter tries to short change me five dollars.
i deck him. damn!
cha cha cha.

vi

well the devil was drinking bourbon when i sat down right beside her.
she didn’t look up. whispered straight into her bourbon glass, voice hoarse ’n raspy like miles davis.
“i know what you’ve come for, i know why you’re here, but there’s no getting out of this deal. the contract’s long-signed, i’ve fulfilled my part of the pact. you’ve got your fame ’n your gold, leave your soul in the box at the door.”

you know the devil was sippin’ bourbon when i delivered my impromptu speech.
“mrs. d when we last spoke things hadn’t been going too well. i’d done gotten out of touch with myself, lost track of who i was. thought that i needed silver and gold and silken clothes and my face on tv to be someone. now i’ve had all of that – thanks for the help – i realise that i only needed to get it to find out i don’t need it. see i was born without a wallet and i’ll leave this world without a stitch on my back. everything you offered
me is incidental. what i am is me.
and all i wish for is to be free.
so on our deal i must renege.
here’s your silver, your gold, your cape
of silk. my soul is precious to me,
it’s the one thing i can’t afford to lose.
sorry for the inconvenience,
but your malicious arrangement
i must refuse!

well the devil gulped her bourbon
down, looked up at me with an evil
frown etched all over her ghastly face.
this is what she said:
“look here punk, you’re as good
as dead, your soul is mine and you must
deliver or you’ll pay the fine of 9000
lifetimes in purgatorial damnation waiting!”
she ordered another bourbon with
a maleficient smile curling over her lips,
started in to sippin’ it, steam rising
out of her nostrils. the devil’s drinking
woodford reserve. labrot & graham
distiller’s select. in woodford country kentucky,
on the site is now labrot & graham distillers,
whiskey was first produced in 1812.
woodford reserve honours this almost
200 year old landmark on glenn’s
creek and its legacy to the distilling industry.
“you guys have to finish ‘em up: time to go.”
the barmaid’s voice from
the depths of the bar.
we stumbled out of there, the devil an’ me.
she held my hand; we hailed a cab.
she fell into the backseat.
i whispered to the driver:
“take this bae back to her hotel.”
held the release form under lucifer’s nose.
“just sign over here.”
she did with an “x”.
as the taxi sped away i smiled up
at the full moon.
her ‘n me ‘n woodford reserve
done got the better of satan!

march 20. spring equinox.
last night i drank bourbon
with the devil. at 2am they
chucked us out. the devil
cussed and threatened the
barmaid with eternal damnation.
“that may well be but still you have to go.”
“lady, do you have any idea who you
talking to? i am the devil.
lucifer. beelzebub!”
barmaid look the devil straight in the eye,
“sistah, you could be beyoncé
for all i care, federal law requires
come 2am i haveta throw you outtahere,
’n that’s what i’m doing!”
barmaid upped the devil’s glass over her head
and suddenly two burly thugs appeared
out of nowhere, manhandled the both of us out of that joint.
“let’s party. take it to the next level!”
the devil’s gravelly voice rasped into my ears.
“shut up bish. you’re giving me a headache.”

it’s 2:02am. me an’ the devil tryin’ ta hail a cab on the corner of 16 and valencia. cabs ride by, drivers won’t look us inna eye. we stumble on down to mission.
“hey bish, if you the friggin’ devil how come you don’ snap your fingers, summon us the archangel’s chariot?”

“point.”
she clicks her fingers.

boom. woosh.
gabriel’s fire chariot standing on the tar-mac. huge motherfuckin’ dragon bristling at the reins. devil hops on board. grabs hold of the reins.

“whoa boy, easy.”
looks down at me, smiles a wicked toothless grin, “hop on board gringo, we heading for obituary drive!” she laughs the deranged laugh of a womxn who doesn’t have to be anywhere in the morning. clears her throat. spits. i haul myself in. next thing we’re hurtling through the cosmos like the friggin’ silver surfer. my hair catches fire but i don’t notice until my head’s burnt down to the neck.

vii

in a hotel room on mason and eddy the devil sheds a few tears holds a few more in sun peaks through a gap in the curtains devil looks up says “hi” sun gives the devil a wink they’re old buddies go back a long way good ole days devil shuts the curtain puts the tv on cnn amen.

…and déjà vu is a place that i’ve been in a time to come or before where that trumpet swells from a sousa march (or a funeral dirge by ornette) whatever the source, it’s the one perfect note balancing between the root and the fruit of the tree of my knowledge of god and the devil – the realm you have to go through to discover yourself and when you do
you'll find out that
you're all good –
even your evil...

i'm sitting on the corner of 9th and
lincoln, got a vegetarian submarine
#2 and lukewarm coffee spread out
before me and i wondering where
i'm gonna do my drinking when
the bars all close tonight
at 2am in san
francisco.

comments off on tenderloin passage

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Is South Africa Reverting to a Repressive State? by Jane Duncan

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Introduction

Since the Marikana massacre in 2012, several journalists, academics and media commentators have argued that South Africa is reverting to a repressive state. They have interpreted violence at the hands of the South African Police Service (SAPS) generally, and Marikana specifically, as signs that the post-apartheid social order can no longer be held in check through consent alone. They argue that the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and other powerful actors have concluded that naked violence is now needed to stabilise increasingly fractious social relations (McMichael 2014; Pithouse 2016: 1-5). Some have even used the term ‘police state’ to describe post-Marikana South Africa (Hlongwane 2014; Kasrils 2013; Essop, Eliseev and Grootes 2015; Bezuidenhout 2016). As a police state is one where the police act as a political force to contain social dissent using arbitrary force, it is an important manifestation of a more repressive state: a society that is ruled by its military is another.

How likely is South Africa to descend into a state of full-blown repression? How likely is it that there will be more Marikanas? Needless to say, being able to answer these questions will have a major impact on the future trajectory of the country’s politics. In attempting to do so, I will move beyond arguments set out in my previous book ‘The Rise of the Securocrats: The Case of South Africa’ (Duncan 2014). In this book, I assessed the significance of the growth in the strength of the state’s repressive apparatus, but did not really consider limits on the state’s capacity to repress. I do so in this paper, and in doing so, I draw on arguments set out in my new book ‘Protest Nation: The Right to Protest in South Africa’ (Duncan 2016).

There can be little argument with the statement that South Africa’s democratic government under its fourth president, Jacob Zuma, has strengthened the coercive capacities of the state, consisting of the police, the intelligence and the military and located in the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security cluster. In fact, it would appear that this cluster has become the praetorian guards of an increasingly embattled presidency (Duncan 2014: 2-4). The well-reported growth in the levels of police violence against ordinary civilians and protestors and police militarisation are the most visible manifestation of this shift, as is the normalisation of the military in domestic policing functions, which suggests a growing militarisation of society (Nicholson 2015). However, the huge public controversies over police violence and police militarisation, mask the fact that there are fundamental shifts in the coercive
capacities of the state, away from overt repression and towards less visible, more pre-emptive forms of repression. What are the indicators of this shift and why is it significant?

From human intelligence to signals intelligence

The first indicator is that intelligence work has become increasingly important to stabilising social relations. Surveillance provides the state with a politically low-cost form of social control, as abuses are very difficult to detect. Political surveillance is part of an arsenal of tools available to the state to profile problem subjects, and to use this knowledge to stymie protests they may consider to be problematic. The state can use such surveillance, or the threat of surveillance, to create fear that organised violence will be used against perceived opponents. At the same time, the fear of being watched may force people to self-police their own behaviour, as theorised by Foucault in his appropriation of James Bentham’s panopticon (Foucault 1979: 200-216).

In South Africa, the state has expanded its surveillance capacities over the past decade. In 2003, the Thabo Mbeki presidency issued a directive requiring an expansion of the then National Intelligence Agency’s (NIA) mandate to include political and economic intelligence. In the case of political intelligence, the NIA was to focus on ‘…the strengths and the weaknesses of political formations, their constitutions and plans, political figures and their roles in governance, etc’ (Africa 2012: 117). These changes led to the intelligence services ballooning in size; by 2004, personnel accounted for an unsustainable 74 percent of the total domestic intelligence budget (Kasrils 2008). A year later, signs emerged that intelligence operatives were becoming embroiled in internal factional battles in the ANC: A problem that was proved to exist by a commission of enquiry, which partly blamed the culture of secrecy in the intelligence services as a source of the problem (Ministerial Review Commission on Intelligence 2008).

Shortly after Zuma took office, the domestic and foreign intelligence services were centralised into the State Security Agency (SSA), in spite of the fact that the 1996 white paper on intelligence cautioned against such centralisation (South African Government 1995). The political intelligence-gathering mandate has also allowed the government to normalise spying on domestic political groupings on the most tenuous of grounds (Right 2 Know Campaign 2015). A document leaked to the media, and apparently summarising the SSA’s national intelligence priorities for 2014 (which are classified, although they should not be) – and which are developed every year to guide the use of the state’s surveillance capacities – states that the SSA should investigate and engage in counter-planning for a ‘so-called “Arab Spring” uprising prior to [2014 national] elections’ (Swart 2016). The SSA claims it will resort to the ‘maximum use of covert human and technical means’ to counter these threats (Swart 2016). The document’s citing of the Arab Spring – a legitimate struggle against authoritarianism – is significant, as it implies that this protest wave in the Arab region was essentially illegitimate. In the South African context, the risk of such a priority straying from the covert surveillance of illegal political activity into legitimate activities should be self-evident: A risk that is strengthened by the SSA’s overly broad mandate, excessive secrecy, recent history of abuse of this mandate and inadequate reforms to increase public accountability.

The risk associated with human intelligence is that the identities of intelligence operatives deployed to spy on organisations can always be uncovered, leading to politically-costly scandals about intelligence abuses. As a result, the intelligence community has taken advantage of the digital ‘revolution’ to shift away from using human intelligence (intelligence gathered through physical means) to signals intelligence (intelligence gathered from communications surveillance). It is difficult to tell whether South Africa has embraced this global shift, but it would be unsurprising if it has. While the government’s targeted interception capacities are regulated in terms of the regulation of interception of communications and provision of communications-related information act (RICA), mass surveillance remains completely unregulated in terms of the law, which predisposes these
capacities to abuse. In fact, not only does South Africa produce mass surveillance technology, but the state has funded its development (page 2013) and allowed it to be exported, including to authoritarian regimes such as Libya, where the equipment was used to spy on Muammar Gaddafi’s political opponents (Vermeer 2013).

From militarised policing to intelligence-led policing

The second indicator, closely related to the first, is the shift from militarised policing to intelligence-led policing. As its name suggests, this policing model uses risk assessment as its main tool to direct policing decisions about where and how to intervene. The model is more recent than paramilitary policing, as it was conceptualised in Britain and the United States (US) in the 1990’s, but it really gained currency after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington. Intelligence-led policing relies heavily on covert techniques for crime-detection, including paying informants, spying on individuals and organisations, the use of closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras, communications surveillance and the interception of voice and data traffic (Bezuidenhout 2008).

Intelligence-led policing does not necessarily make human rights violations go away; it merely makes them less visible. This form of policing encourages problematic profiling of individuals or social groups that may resort to crime, which can lead to stereotyping of particular social groups as being predisposed to crime. Activists who are considered to be politically threatening to existing ruling groups may be placed under surveillance to gain more information about their activities and to intimidate them, which risks chilling political activity. The US police used intelligence-driven policing to infiltrate organisations linked to the anti-globalisation movement, to identify and isolate ‘troublemakers’ (Fernandez 2008). But like overt forms of violence, generalised surveillance techniques also erode public trust in the state: in fact, the latter can do so more readily than the former as surveillance proceeds from the premise that states do not trust their citizens from the outset (Van Brakel and de Hert 2011: 163-192).

In South Africa, the crime intelligence division of SAPS holds the key to this new policing strategy, so it is unsurprising that this division has become so powerful (and controversial) in recent years, as this policing model makes it the lynchpin of policing strategies (SAPS 2011). Heightened power without heightened accountability is a recipe for disaster. A case currently being heard in the Pretoria commercial crimes court points to members in the division having used the surveillance capacities of the state to spy on journalists. Yet, in spite of its increasing importance to policing work, there are signs of crime intelligence having lost its effectiveness, leading to a resurgence of organised crime (Burger 2013).

SAPS has embraced intelligence-led policing for several reasons. Police violence is eroding trust between the police and communities, making it more difficult to revert back to community policing (Bezuidenhout 2008: 48-49). Yet at the same time, SAPS cannot risk many more high profile shoot-outs with protestors, as the long-term political costs will simply be too great. So, it stands to reason that SAPS would search for a policing model that still allowed them to contain dissent using a less politically-risky approach, and intelligence-led policing provides just such a model.

From post-hoc to pre-emptive repression of protests

The third indicator is an increasing use of pre-emptive methods of containing protests through manipulations of the Regulation of Gatherings Act (RGA), to stop more protests from spilling out onto the streets in the first place. In a research study led on the right to protest in eleven municipalities – and which involved the physical collection and logging of municipal data about gatherings and protests over a five-year period (2008-13) – I found that none of the municipalities studied received a clean bill of health. The full findings of this project are set out in my new book, ‘Protest Nation: the right to protest in South Africa’ (Duncan 2016). A research team collected all notifications for protests and gatherings sent to municipalities in terms of the RGA: they yielded incredibly rich data about how many protests were taking place relative to gatherings, the reasons for the protests, the protest actors and
municipal responses to the protests.

the municipal and the police statistics suggest that the majority of protests take place peacefully and uneventfully, which is not the dominant image of protests either in the media or the public imagination. in fact, from saps’s incident registration information system (iris) database for the areas with the most unrest-related incidents between 2009 and 2012, it became clear that despite being labelled unrest-related, most of the protests did not escalate beyond barricade-building and tyre-burning into violence, and in fact were recorded as being fairly incident-free. the protests recorded in the municipal records constitute a humdrum of protests, taking place day in, day out throughout the country with little incident. between the media and police hype about ‘violent service delivery protests’, it is this wider picture of peaceful protests that is so often missed, and unsurprisingly so. the security cluster can use images of marauding mobs, apparently predisposed to violence, to create moral panics in the public about protests, to turn the public against protestors (even those whose demands are legitimate), and to justify heightened security measures against them.

yet in spite of protests remaining largely peaceful, all the municipalities surveyed instituted unreasonable restrictions on the right to protest, and these have curtailed this right to varying degrees. while the misapplication of the rga has been a problem at least since the early 2000’s (duncan 2010: 105-127), a particularly significant shift became apparent from 2012 onwards. in the wake of the local government elections, the department of co-operative governance sent out a circular to local governments that outlined proactive measures that municipalities need to take to deal with protests. these measures included ‘…[working] with the office of the speaker [and] public participation units to ensure ongoing engagement between councillors and communities and residents’. several municipalities used this memo as a pretext to change how they administered the rga.

this shift increased the already-onerous bureaucratic obstacles municipalities put on protests, many of which already shared an assumption that the notification process in terms of the rga was actually a permission-seeking exercise, and that they had the right to grant or deny ‘permission’ to convenors to engage in a gathering or protest. this municipal misapprehension of the process set the tone for how notifications were dealt with, both by the municipalities and by the police. practices that limited the right unduly included a requirement on the part of convenors to seek a letter from the institution or person they were marching against, guaranteeing that they would be willing to accept the memorandum. the rationale for seeking such an assurance appears to be to prevent frustration on the part of protestors, which could boil over into violence. however, it has also become a censorship device, where those who are being marched against can squash the protest simply by refusing to accept the memorandum.

the city of johannesburg requires protest convenors to seek permission from a ward councillor to protest, and after the 2012 co-operative governance memo, they and the mbombela municipality, instituted a filtering system to reduce the number of service delivery protests, where convenors need to show that a meeting took place between the mayor’s office, the community and the ward councillor involved in that community, or at the very least that an attempt was made to bring all parties to the table to resolve the issues at hand. but this prescription is not lawful, as the rga does not prescribe what process people should follow before they take to the streets. the number of ‘approved’ protests increased in mbombela once the filtering process was introduced, suggesting that the potentially ‘troublesome’ protests did not even enter into the system. but the municipality did admit that the condition had led to an increase in the number of ‘unrest-related’ protests, taking place outside the framework of the rga, and that the police were more likely to be heavy-handed against such a protest as they were not involved in facilitating it in the first place. these were led mainly by individuals or organisations that were in dispute with the structures they were meant to negotiate with, suggesting that an increasingly restrictive approach towards protests on the part of the municipality was changing the character of the protests, forcing them to become what the authorities would
consider ‘unlawful’ and driving up the potential for the protests to become disruptive.

while the municipalities studied have gradually closed spaces for the right to protest, this closure is highly uneven and subject to considerable contestation. spaces were much more closed where the political and economic elite were united in their intentions to stifle protests and prevent criticism and alternative forms of mobilisation (the rustenburg municipality being a case in point): but this unity was not found uniformly across the municipalities. as oliver has argued, erratic government repression arises not because the government has chosen to be erratic, but because of inconsistencies among political actors (oliver 1998). furthermore, non-conventional actors are more likely to be repressed than conventional ones (such as unions or well-known political parties), as the security apparatus consider the former to be less predictable than the latter (combes and fillieule 2011). the evidence supports a view of the state put forward by gramsci that it is not monolithic, but is rather a site where ruling class alliances take place or even shift (cox 2013). in times of significant political de-alignment, elements of the state can even work against one another. erratic repression is likely to occur when divisions have opened up within the political elite, or between the political elite and the bureaucratic layer: in such circumstances, spaces for alternative voices remained open, albeit constrained and subject to reversal.

internationally, the academic literature has recognised the fact that ruling elites have expanded their repertoires of social control beyond outright repression: as a result, the literature has shifted away from focussing on the concept of repression, to that of pacification. according to keinscherf, pacification includes measures that ‘… produce undisruptive and unthreatening forms of collective action’ (keinscherf forthcoming: 3). however, this is not to say that repression as it is commonly understood, and pacification, are mutually exclusive: in fact, they can be complimentary strategies. for instance, the intelligence services can be used to separate out ‘good’ protestors from ‘bad’ protestors, and the resulting protest policing may be either facilitative or militarised depending on the type of risk management strategies that the police identify through the intelligence gleaned (keinscherf forthcoming: 14). but the fact that the elites have found it necessary to shift from more visible to less visible forms of social containment at all, is not a sign of their strength; rather it is a sign of their weakness as they recognise the fact that they lack the capacity to repress openly. why is this so? the next section will attempt to answer this question.

organic crisis: growing popular capacity for independent action

it seems fair to say that south africa is manifesting more elements of a classic gramscian organic crisis: in other words, for gramsci, crises become organic when they are thrown up directly by contradictions in how the capitalist system functions, when they are dynamic in that they are not confined to particular actors, events, issues, or moments in time or place, and consequently when they are a process rather than a momentary eruption. the demands being raised may be diverse, and at times even incompatible. such crises usually arise when a particular regime of capitalist accumulation becomes unsustainable because of its own internal contradictions. in such circumstances, the ruling bloc (or the coalition of interests that underpin a particular ruling group) loses its legitimacy on a mass scale. an organic crisis develops when the following conditions obtain:

• popular capacity for action increases;
• more people can be detached from the previous hegemonic block and be convinced to side with the subaltern classes;
• there is a decline in capacity of the elite to offer significant concessions, but;
• there is also a decline in the capacity of the hegemonic bloc to mobilise effective repression.

when these conditions obtain, the hegemonic bloc cannot offer concessions easily, yet neither can it repress easily either (cox 2014).

with regard to popular capacity for action increasing, while the number of crowd
Management incidents increased year-on-year since 1996, too little can be deduced from this upward swing, as the police database that logs these incidents (the iris system) records both protests and gatherings. However, from the municipal data referred to earlier, it is apparent that protests peaked in 2011 (the year of the local government elections) in municipalities such as ethekwini, johannesburg and lukhanji, which is when crowd management incidents recorded by SAPS peaked too. So it is not unreasonable to assume that the peaking of incidents in 2011 can be attributed at least in part to an uptick in protest action, suggesting an increase in popular capacity for action as expressed through protests.

Figure 1: Peaceful and unrest-related crowd management incidents between 1995 and 2013. Source: Own graph, based on SAPS iris information, released in response to a South African History Archive (Saha) information request.

There was little evidence of co-ordination across protest sites, though; co-ordination occurred when a trade union movement organised a national action, or where a strike took place in different parts of the country, for instance a public sector strike. While there was little evidence of these protests coalescing into more generalised political demands, they have the potential to if a national political movement comes into being that links these different struggles together. The municipal data pointed to high levels of organisation, and of new formations or even organisations emerging all the time, suggesting that Patrick Bond’s term ‘popcorn protests’ (Bond 2012) – used to describe seemingly sporadic, spontaneous protests – ignored the extent of organisation that actually exists. There was no evidence of unions and community organisations uniting around shared grievances. However, it was apparent from the municipal data that struggles at the point of consumption are becoming as important to the political life of direct action politics as struggles at the point of production, and in some cases (in the Makana municipality, for instance), the former are overtaking the latter as flashpoints of struggle.

When South African protests are viewed in the global context, it becomes apparent that popular capacity for action is not only increasing, but these increases are being sustained. The protests could easily be described as a cycle in the sense used by Tarrow (1989). However, is the protest cycle in South Africa of even greater historical significance? For instance, could it be part of a broader regional or even global protest wave? The question of whether the protests, including those in South Africa, are part of a wave, rather than being isolated, single-country protest cycles, is an important one, as it speaks to whether the protests will fizzle out in time or escalate into fundamental and transformative challenges to the system on a worldwide scale.

According to Colin Beck (Beck 2011: 167-207), the difference between a protest cycle and a protest wave is that the latter is present in at least two or more societies within a decade of each other, and these protests are tantamount to revolutionary situations. In other words, the protests affect more parts of the world over a longer period, and are not concentrated in a fixed period in time or driven by a small, well-defined set of actors. These features suggest that the unfolding struggles are responses to broader crises in the world economy, and in spite of their heterogeneity, they are capable of being sustained and even escalated into an insurrection precipitating an organic crisis.

The mobilisations in Chiapas, the Occupy movement in the United States, the ‘Pink Tide’ in Latin America and ‘Arab Spring’, Palestinian struggles against Israeli occupation, and anti-austerity protests in different parts of the world, are all examples of challenges to the system in different regions of the world (some more successful than others). Less well-known and studied are the wave of protests that engulfed sub-Saharan Africa in the wake of the Tunisian and Egyptian political revolutions, with the most pronounced ones erupting in Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi.

For Cox (2013; 2014), if protest cycles are sustained in more than one region of the world over a period of at least fifteen years, then this is a further indication that the crisis is organic, rather than episodic; as a result, the multiple resistances that have been mounted against the system could be described credibly as a revolutionary...
wave. Sustained regional disruptions usually happen at least once every twenty years. The fact that some have not led to regimes falling, and where political revolutions have been achieved, they have not necessarily deepened into social revolutions, becomes less significant if revolutionary waves are understood as a process rather than an event. If these protests have brought new political actors onto the streets, resulting in new forms of organisation, and extracted significant concessions from ruling elites, shaking the state in the process, then they could be described as moving in an anti-systemic direction. This is because the protests build confidence in the power of collective action, and consequently have the potential to extract even more significant concessions in future (Cox 2014). When viewed in this global context, it becomes apparent that South Africa's protests are of world-historical significance, and point towards them being part of a broader global wave of heightened popular action. They are also likely to place popular limits on the state's ability to use organised violence, as doing so may well intensify popular action rather than dampen it.

With respect to more people detaching themselves from the hegemonic bloc, the municipal data before 2011 pointed to the ANC alliance dominating the protest space – especially in smaller towns and rural areas – but that its dominance declined after 2011. The ANC alliance has proved to be a combustible one, with political alignments with the ruling party coming under considerable pressure. At community levels, the municipal data suggested that the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) – often considered to be a fourth member of the ANC alliance – is largely a spent force, and is being overtaken by a host of independent community organisations or civics. In fact, while the protests cannot be said to have a distinct ideological character, the data points to the hegemony of the ANC diminishing. This does not support arguments advanced by Booysen (2011: 126-173) and Fakir (2014) that the protests are merely about holding the ANC to account: rather, there is growing evidence of more communities becoming subjectively available for alternative politics to that offered by the ANC alliance.

Organic crisis: concessions or repression

With respect to Gramsci's two other conditions for an organic crisis, namely that the elite cannot offer concessions very easily, but neither can they repress very easily, the neo-liberal phase of capitalism has entered a period of organic crisis in several regions of the world. This phase is characterised by the financialisation of the economy, the rise of permanent mass unemployment and declining rates of profit, creating conditions for a political crisis. In other words, these features make this phase particularly unstable in that it creates conditions for mass revolt, as fewer concessions can be offered than in earlier expansionary periods (such as was the case under social democracy), while the system cannot generate enough profit to prevent itself from contracting and even collapsing, worsening the socio-economic conditions even more. In the case of South Africa, while the Zuma administration promised a more redistributive state, and undoubtedly many of its more principled office bearers remain subjectively committed to a more just and equal society, the objective conditions in which they came to office did not favour radical redistribution.

Yet at the same time, managers of the neo-liberal system – governments, financiers and other big capitalists – need to maintain consent in order to continue ruling, which they find increasingly difficult to obtain. If they resort to coercion to stabilise the system, they risk legitimacy and state violence is used most effectively when consent remains for its use (Cox 2013). Their inability to resolve these crises lies at the heart of the current period's organic crisis. For instance, there are limits on the extent to which paramilitary policing can be used to contain growing dissent. While many police are clearly 'getting away with murder', public antipathy is building against the police and the political order they seem to be propping up. There have not been nearly the same levels of protests against police violence in South Africa as there have been in cities such as Ferguson, in the wake of Michael Brown's fatal shooting by the police. But, Marikana has hastened political shifts that have been underway for some time now, and has not dampened protest levels: to that extent, it
has not been a particularly successful massacre for the ruling elite. The massacre was a precipitating factor in the formation of the economic freedom fighters (EFF), and Cosatu’s largest affiliate, the national union of metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), has been expelled from the federation, spurring it on to form a united front in collaboration with community organisations and social movements. The state cannot risk going down even further down this path. Violence against dissenters on a mass scale is likely to eat into the ANC’s still-considerable legitimacy, and hasten its slow but steady demise at the polls. This is especially so if a national movement comes into being that generalises protestors’ demands, and relates them to the neo-liberal system of governance. Workers and the poor, who face the brunt of the system, are increasingly unlikely to consent to supporting and funding their own oppression.

Another factor that makes full-scale repression unlikely is that the security cluster appears to be an increasingly divided house, and not insignificant cracks are beginning to show. The police commissioner at the time of the Marikana massacre, Riah Phigeya, has been suspended and may well be dismissed for her role in the massacre (Nicolaides 2016). A spate of top management resignations in the SSA in 2011 has been linked to refusals to use the surveillance capacities of the state to spy on Zuma’s detractors ahead of the ANC’s elective conference in Mangaung (Molele, Letsoala and Sole 2011). Furthermore, in order to repress openly, the police would probably need the assistance of the military, but the military is industrialised and unionised. In spite of arguments that unionisation can compromise combat-readiness, in 1999 the South African constitutional court legalised the formation of military unions (Sachs 1999: 33). There is evidence that a significant number of soldiers have a consciousness of themselves, not just as soldiers, but as workers, who are exploited like other workers. Frustrations with poor working conditions boiled over during the ill-fated march on the seat of political office, the Union Buildings, in August 2009. This very public confrontation – the dynamics of which were misreported by many media organisations (Duncan 2014) – led to the chief of the army, Solly Shoke, accusing the soldiers involved of mutiny, and warning them that some other countries would have shot them for their actions (Duncan 2009).

In view of these fractious relations, the political elite face a gamble: if the current administration put soldiers in front of exploited, protesting workers (like the soldiers are), and told them to shoot, what would they do? What if they refused? Can they really risk a rebellion in the military, which really would amount to mutiny? The political risks could be too great for them to gamble on the military.

The more historically-aware security officials are also likely to make political calculations about how long they will last if they intensify open repression. As the embarrassingly weak presidency of Jacob Zuma splutters to a close, the ignominious fates suffered by the likes of Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, could well be top of mind when they attempt to weigh up the long-term political costs of engaging in an all-out defence of their positions. Regimes that relied on repression to maintain power have never lasted (Cox 2013). It is not coincidental that since 2009 – the year that Zuma came to office – evidence has mounted of some even resorting to political assassinations to silence their critics, especially in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal (Duncan 2014). The 2014 murder of Abahlali base Mjondolo activist Thuli Ndlovu by two ANC councillors is a case in point (Pillay 2016). But resorting to informal repression is itself an indication that more violent sections of the political elite recognise that they cannot engage in open repression. The conviction of Ndlovu’s killers makes it less likely that political assassinations will escalate into unstated state policy, although as the country heads up to possibly its most fractious local government elections yet, it would be naïve to ignore that the risks are there.

Conclusion: Implications for Universities

The current government’s ability to offer meaningful concessions is limited, but so too is its ability to repress easily. This means that the South African political landscape bears all the hallmarks of having entered an organic crisis. Crises of this nature are not necessarily negative; they can allow fundamental societal contradictions to surface in ways that force society to confront them, grow from them, and move
forward. In spite of the fact that the current political moment seems so dark, the fact needs to be recognised that the political space is wide open, and is actually pregnant with great promise. Does the state have the capacity to repress on a broader scale? It appears not. There are unlikely to be more Marikanas in the sense of an organised, armed assault on protestors, although the possibility cannot be ruled out that state violence could occur as an unplanned reaction to particular events. While there are clear and well-acknowledged legal limits on its ability to use violence, the political limits, and more specifically the limits imposed by popular agency, are less well-acknowledged (Cox 2013). This is because repression is often studied as a static structural factor constraining movement activities, but not as a factor that is changed dynamically through interactions between state structures and popular agency. Arguably, the social and political conditions that would allow the state to use ongoing (as opposed to sporadic) violence, do not exist in this current conjuncture, as the balance of power is shifting gradually towards popular movements outside the hegemonic bloc. No matter how powerful the men and women with guns seem, there are important signs that they are actually quite vulnerable, and the shifting modes of repression point to that. While overstatements about the power of the coercive capacities of the state are understandable in the wake of Marikana, they are not helpful, as they can lead to fear, and even political paralysis. What Cox (2013) has referred to as ‘repression horror’, can lead to movements seeing the state as omniscient and omnipotent, even when this is, in fact, not the case.

But this does not mean that democratic movements must become complacent. Appropriate activist strategies to counter repression and win back democratic space are likely to be both timely and effective. On the other hand, ill-considered, misdirected ones, may be ineffective. In this regard, campaigns that focus on the accountability and transparency of the intelligence services are particularly important, as are campaigns to defend the right to protest from administrative censorship (and not just police violence). In the wake of the Edward Snowden revelations, civil society and social movements are waging a global fightback against unaccountable mass surveillance, and already, they have won significant victories. For instance, the Barack Obama administration in the US has been forced to roll back some of its most pernicious mass surveillance programmes (Jacobs and Roberts 2015). But in South Africa, the most effective method of limiting state violence in all its forms, is for movements to intensify popular organisation and action, and deepen the political shifts that are already underway.

These strategies are relevant for all movements seeking to bring about a just and transformed society, and exercise their right to protest to do so, including the emerging student movement. Universities are autonomous institutions. They are not part of the state; but neither are they private entities, either, as they perform a public function. The university’s autonomy presents the student movement with a paradox. This autonomy is necessary for them to enjoy academic freedom; without it, they could become the mouthpieces of ruling elites, where spaces for critical enquiry are snuffed out. Yet, by virtue of their special status, they are not subject to the electoral pressures from below experienced by those in government, and indirectly, the state. This means that universities can become detached from the realities of the societies in which they operate. While they do not enjoy the same monopoly on violence that the state does – and when threatened with violence, they need to call on the state’s monopoly to protect themselves – universities can deploy wide-ranging security measures without necessarily being held to account in the ways that government is. Universities should not use institutional autonomy as an excuse to use excessive security powers, as doing so would constitute abuses of this autonomy.

Several violent incidents have taken place on South African campuses this year, including the petrol bombing of university facilities on several campuses. The perpetrators have not been identified and brought to book. Yet, rather than dealing with these incidents as individual acts as criminality, several universities have limited protest rights in a sweeping, overbroad manner, including through wide-ranging interdicts. In doing so, they have implied that the violent incidents are, actually, assembly offences which feeds into prevailing media discourses and moral panics about ‘the violent protesting mob’: moral panics that exist in spite of the available
evidence pointing to the majority of protests remaining peaceful. Private security guards have been deployed on many campuses, even when they were peaceful and no protests were taking place, suggesting that a national decision had been taken to deploy them, irrespective of the actual threat levels on the ground (Evans 2016). Surveillance measures are being implemented with no account being taken of the chilling effect they have on academic freedom. In the wake of the September 11 attacks on the US, and the more recent Edward Snowden revelations, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) argued that privacy of electronic communications on campus was a condition for academic freedom, as academic communications can be very sensitive (AAUP 2013). For a university to claim the right to intercept communications anytime, anywhere, anyhow, undermines these principles, and make collegiality more difficult as it communicates the message that university authorities are operating with a presumption of wrongdoing. These measures risk poisoning the academic environment, and will most likely harden attitudes in ways that can only hasten the downward spiral of conflict.

What is so unfortunate about this downward spiral is that it echoes well-recognised, even theorised, protest cycles. It could be assumed that as places of learning, including about protests, these developments would be recognised and the downward spiral arrested. But it would appear that the necessary lessons of history are not being learned. According to Della Porta and Diani, protest repertoires change in interaction with the authorities in a series of reciprocal adjustments. Depending on the authorities’ responses, some protestors may be pushed towards radicalisation, where more extreme, even violent actions are engaged in, or institutionalisation, where activists become sucked into official decision-making structures (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 189). They argue that political violence by protestors is rarely ever adopted overnight or consciously; rather, in the early stages of the protest cycle, such violence is generally unplanned, small in scale, limited in scope, and often occurs as a spontaneous reaction to an escalation of force by the police (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 190). Many protestors are frightened off by the escalating violence, but small groups of protestors – whose attitudes have been hardened by official recalcitrance – begin to specialise in more organised acts of violence. According to Della Porta and Diani, ‘During this process small groups begin to specialise in increasingly extreme tactics, build up an armory for such actions, and occasionally go underground. The very presence of these groups accelerates the exodus of moderates from the movement, contributing to a demobilisation which only the most violent groups escape (at least temporarily)’ (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 190).

to the extent that this cycle is now manifesting itself on several campuses around South Africa (and the hard facts that it is still need to be established), then the official narrative of ‘last year, the student movement was noble, but this year it has lost its legitimacy and descended into violence’ (Habib and Mabizela 2016), rings hollow. This argument fails to take into account how official overreaction to last year’s largely peaceful protests may well have created the ground for this year’s events. University actors must do more to break with this self-fulfilling prophecy. Universities need to have the clarity of vision to recognise that more security cannot be the only response to this downward spiral: A lesson that more historically-aware elements in the state are beginning to learn. It is the easier route for universities to say and do ‘security’ in response to growing campus unrest, but it is also the more simplistic route. In fact, it would be ironic if universities are among the last public institutions to learn these important lessons, and an indictment on their role in society.

Endnotes


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comments off on is south africa reverting to a repressive state? by jane duncan

june 9, 2016

how to build a universe that doesn’t fall apart two days later by philip k. dick, 1978

filed under: censorship,philosophy — abraxas @ 2:38 pm
first, before i begin to bore you with the usual sort of things science fiction writers say in speeches, let me bring you official greetings from disneyland. i consider myself a spokesperson for disneyland because i live just a few miles from it—and, as if that were not enough, i once had the honor of being interviewed there by paris tv.

for several weeks after the interview, i was really ill and confined to bed. i think it was the whirling teacups that did it. elizabeth antebi, who was the producer of the film, wanted to have me whirling around in one of the giant teacups while discussing the rise of fascism with norman spinrad… an old friend of mine who writes excellent science fiction. we also discussed watergate, but we did that on the deck of captain hook's pirate ship. little children wearing mickey mouse hats—those black hats with the ears—kept running up and bumping against us as the cameras whirred away, and elizabeth asked unexpected questions. norman and i, being preoccupied with tossing little children about, said some extraordinarily stupid things that day. today, however, i will have to accept full blame for what i tell you, since none of you are wearing mickey mouse hats and trying to climb up on me under the impression that i am part of the rigging of a pirate ship.

science fiction writers, i am sorry to say, really do not know anything. we can't talk about science, because our knowledge of it is limited and unofficial, and usually our fiction is dreadful. a few years ago, no college or university would ever have considered inviting one of us to speak. we were mercifully confined to lurid pulp magazines, impressing no one. in those days, friends would say me, “but are you writing anything serious?” meaning “are you writing anything other than science fiction?” we longed to be accepted. we yearned to be noticed. then, suddenly, the academic world noticed us, we were invited to give speeches and appear on panels—and immediately we made idiots of ourselves. the problem is simply this: what does a science fiction writer know about? on what topic is he an authority?

it reminds me of a headline that appeared in a california newspaper just before i flew here. scientists say that mice cannot be made to look like human beings. it was a federally funded research program, i suppose. just think: someone in this world is an authority on the topic of whether mice can or cannot put on two-tone shoes, derby hats, pinstriped shirts, and dacron pants, and pass as humans.

well, i will tell you what interests me, what i consider important. i can't claim to be an authority on anything, but i can honestly say that certain matters absolutely fascinate me, and that i write about them all the time. the two basic topics which fascinate me are “what is reality?” and “what constitutes the authentic human being?” over the twenty-seven years in which i have published novels and stories i have investigated these two interrelated topics over and over again. i consider them important topics. what are we? what is it which surrounds us, that we call the not-me, or the empirical or phenomenal world?

in 1951, when i sold my first story, i had no idea that such fundamental issues could be pursued in the science fiction field. i began to pursue them unconsciously. my first story had to do with a dog who imagined that the garbagemen who came every friday morning were stealing valuable food which the family had carefully stored away in a safe metal container. every day, members of the family carried out paper sacks of nice ripe food, stuffed them into the metal container, shut the lid tightly—and when the container was full, these dreadful-looking creatures came and stole everything but the can.

finally, in the story, the dog begins to imagine that someday the garbagemen will eat the people in the house, as well as stealing their food. of course, the dog is wrong about this. we all know that garbagemen do not eat people. but the dog's extrapolation was in a sense logical—given the facts at his disposal. the story was about a real dog, and i used to watch him and try to get inside his head and imagine how he saw the world. certainly, i decided, that dog sees the world quite differently than i do, or any humans do. and then i began to think, maybe each human being lives in a unique world, a private world, a world different from those inhabited and experienced by all other humans. and that led me wonder, if reality differs from person to person, can we speak of reality singular, or shouldn't we really be talking
about plural realities? and if there are plural realities, are some more true (more real) than others? what about the world of a schizophrenic? maybe, it’s as real as our world. maybe we cannot say that we are in touch with reality and he is not, but should instead say, his reality is so different from ours that he can’t explain his to us, and we can’t explain ours to him. the problem, then, is that if subjective worlds are experienced too differently, there occurs a breakdown of communication… and there is the real illness.

i once wrote a story about a man who was injured and taken to a hospital. when they began surgery on him, they discovered that he was an android, not a human, but that he did not know it. they had to break the news to him. almost at once, mr. garson poole discovered that his reality consisted of punched tape passing from reel to reel in his chest. fascinated, he began to fill in some of the punched holes and add new ones. immediately, his world changed. a flock of ducks flew through the room when he punched one new hole in the tape. finally he cut the tape entirely, whereupon the world disappeared. however, it also disappeared for the other characters in the story… which makes no sense, if you think about it. unless the other characters were figments of his punched-tape fantasy. which i guess is what they were.

it was always my hope, in writing novels and stories which asked the question “what is reality?”, to someday get an answer. this was the hope of most of my readers, too. years passed. i wrote over thirty novels and over a hundred stories, and still i could not figure out what was real. one day a girl college student in canada asked me to define reality for her, for a paper she was writing for her philosophy class. she wanted a one-sentence answer. i thought about it and finally said, “reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away.” that’s all i could come up with. that was back in 1972. since then i haven’t been able to define reality any more lucidly.

but the problem is a real one, not a mere intellectual game. because today we live in a society in which spurious realities are manufactured by the media, by governments, by big corporations, by religious groups, political groups—and the electronic hardware exists by which to deliver these pseudo-worlds right into the heads of the reader, the viewer, the listener. sometimes when i watch my eleven-year-old daughter watch tv, i wonder what she is being taught. the problem of miscuing; consider that. a tv program produced for adults is viewed by a small child. half of what is said and done in the tv drama is probably misunderstood by the child. maybe it’s all misunderstood. and the thing is, just how authentic is the information anyhow, even if the child correctly understood it? what is the relationship between the average tv situation comedy to reality? what about the cop shows? cars are continually swerving out of control, crashing, and catching fire. the police are always good and they always win. do not ignore that point: the police always win, what a lesson that is. you should not fight authority, and even if you do, you will lose. the message here is, be passive. and—cooperate. if officer baretta asks you for information, give it to him, because officer beratta is a good man and to be trusted. he loves you, and you should love him.

so i ask, in my writing, what is real? because unceasingly we are bombarded with pseudo-realities manufactured by very sophisticated people using very sophisticated electronic mechanisms. i do not distrust their motives; i distrust their power. they have a lot of it. and it is an astonishing power: that of creating whole universes, universes of the mind. i ought to know. i do the same thing. it is my job to create universes, as the basis of one novel after another. and i have to build them in such a way that they do not fall apart two days later. or at least that is what my editors hope. however, i will reveal a secret to you: i like to build universes which do fall apart. i like to see them come unglued, and i like to see how the characters in the novels cope with this problem. i have a secret love of chaos. there should be more of it. do not believe—and i am dead serious when i say this—do not assume that order and stability are always good, in a society or in a universe. the old, the ossified, must always give way to new life and the birth of new things. before the new things can be born the old must perish. this is a dangerous realization, because it tells us that we
must eventually part with much of what is familiar to us. and that hurts. but that is part of the script of life. unless we can psychologically accommodate change, we ourselves begin to die, inwardly. what i am saying is that objects, customs, habits, and ways of life must perish so that the authentic human being can live. and it is the authentic human being who matters most, the viable, elastic organism which can bounce back, absorb, and deal with the new.

of course, i would say this, because i live near disneyland, and they are always adding new rides and destroying old ones. disneyland is an evolving organism. for years they had the lincoln simulacrum, like lincoln himself, was only a temporary form which matter and energy take and then lose. the same is true of each of us, like it or not.

the pre-socratic greek philosopher parmenides taught that the only things that are real are things which never change... and the pre-socratic greek philosopher heraclitus taught that everything changes. if you superimpose their two views, you get this result: nothing is real. there is a fascinating next step to this line of thinking: parmenides could never have existed because he grew old and died and disappeared, so, according to his own philosophy, he did not exist. and heraclitus may have been right—let’s not forget that; so if heraclitus was right, then parmenides did exist, and therefore, according to heraclitus’ philosophy, perhaps parmenides was right, since parmenides fulfilled the conditions, the criteria, by which heraclitus judged things real.

i offer this merely to show that as soon as you begin to ask what is ultimately real, you right away begin talk nonsense. zeno proved that motion was impossible (actually he only imagined that he had proved this; what he lacked was what technically is called the “theory of limits”). david hume, the greatest skeptic of them all, once remarked that after a gathering of skeptics met to proclaim the veracity of skepticism as a philosophy, all of the members of the gathering nonetheless left by the door rather than the window. i see hume’s point. it was all just talk. the solemn philosophers weren’t taking what they said seriously.

but i consider that the matter of defining what is real—that is a serious topic, even a vital topic. and in there somewhere is the other topic, the definition of the authentic human. because the bombardment of pseudo-realities begins to produce inauthentic humans very quickly, spurious humans—as fake as the data pressing at them from all sides, my two topics are really one topic; they unite at this point. fake realities will create fake humans. or, fake humans will generate fake realities and then sell them to other humans, turning them, eventually, into forgeries of themselves. so we wind up with fake humans inventing fake realities and then peddling them to other fake humans. it is just a very large version of disneyland. you can have the pirate ride or the lincoln simulacrum or mr. toad’s wild ride—you can have all of them, but none is true.

in my writing i got so interested in fakes that i finally came up with the concept of fake fakes. for example, in disneyland there are fake birds worked by electric motors which emit caws and shrieks as you pass by them. suppose some night all of us sneaked into the park with real birds and substituted them for the artificial ones. imagine the horror the disneyland officials would feel when they discovered the cruel hoax. real birds! and perhaps someday even real hippos and lions. consternation. the park being cunningly transmuted from the unreal to the real, by sinister forces. for instance, suppose the matterhorn turned into a genuine snow-covered mountain? what if the entire place, by a miracle of god’s power and wisdom, was changed, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, into something incorruptible? they would have to close down.

in plato’s timaeus, god does not create the universe, as does the christian god; he simply finds it one day. it is in a state of total chaos. god sets to work to transform the chaos into order. that idea appeals to me, and i have adapted it to fit my own intellectual needs: what if our universe started out as not quite real, a sort of illusion, as the hindu religion teaches, and god, out of love and kindness for us, is slowly transmuting it, slowly and secretly, into something real?
we would not be aware of this transformation, since we were not aware that our world was an illusion in the first place. this technically is a gnostic idea. gnosticism is a religion which embraced jews, christians, and pagans for several centuries. i have been accused of holding gnostic ideas. i guess i do. at one time i would have been burned. but some of their ideas intrigue me. one time, when i was researching gnosticism in the britannica, i came across mention of a gnostic codex called the unreal god and the aspects of his nonexistent universe, an idea which reduced me to helpless laughter. what kind of person would write about something that he knows doesn’t exist, and how can something that doesn’t exist have aspects? but then i realized that i’d been writing about these matters for over twenty-five years. i guess there is a lot of latitude in what you can say when writing about a topic that does not exist. a friend of mine once published a book called snakes of hawaii. a number of libraries wrote him ordering copies. well, there are no snakes in hawaii. all the pages of his book were blank.

of course, in science fiction no pretense is made that the worlds described are real. this is why we call it fiction. the reader is warned in advance not to believe what he is about to read. equally true, the visitors to disneyland understand that mr. toad does not really exist and that the pirates are animated by motors and servo-assist mechanisms, relays and electronic circuits. so no deception is taking place.

and yet the strange thing is, in some way, some real way, much of what appears under the title “science fiction” is true. it may not be literally true, i suppose. we have not really been invaded by creatures from another star system, as depicted in close encounters of the third kind. the producers of that film never intended for us to believe it. or did they?

and, more important, if they did intend to state this, is it actually true? that is the issue: not, does the author or producer believe it, but—is it true? because, quite by accident, in the pursuit of a good yarn, a science fiction author or producer or scriptwriter might stumble onto the truth... and only later on realize it.

the basic tool for the manipulation of reality is the manipulation of words. if you can control the meaning of words, you can control the people who must use the words. george orwell made this clear in his novel 1984. but another way to control the minds of people is to control their perceptions. if you can get them to see the world as you do, they will think as you do. comprehension follows perception. how do you get them to see the reality you see? after all, it is only one reality out of many. images are a basic constituent: pictures. this is why the power of tv to influence young minds is so staggeringly vast. words and pictures are synchronized. the possibility of total control of the viewer exists, especially the young viewer. tv viewing is a kind of sleep-learning. an eeg of a person watching tv shows that after about half an hour the brain decides that nothing is happening, and it goes into a hypnoidal twilight state, emitting alpha waves. this is because there is such little eye motion. in addition, much of the information is graphic and therefore passes into the right hemisphere of the brain, rather than being processed by the left, where the conscious personality is located. recent experiments indicate that much of what we see on the tv screen is received on a subliminal basis. we only imagine that we consciously see what is there. the bulk of the messages elude our attention; literally, after a few hours of tv watching, we do not know what we have seen. our memories are spurious, like our memories of dreams; the blank are filled in retrospectively. and falsified. we have participated unknowingly in the creation of a spurious reality, and then we have obligingly fed it to ourselves. we have colluded in our own doom.

and—and i say this as a professional fiction writer—the producers, scriptwriters, and directors who create these video/audio worlds do not know how much of their content is true. in other words, they are victims of their own product, along with us. speaking for myself, i do not know how much of my writing is true, or which parts (if any) are true. this is a potentially lethal situation. we have fiction mimicking truth, and truth mimicking fiction. we have a dangerous overlap, a dangerous blur. and in all probability it is not deliberate. in fact, that is part of the problem. you cannot legislate an author into correctly labelling his product, like a can of pudding whose
ingredients are listed on the label... you cannot compel him to declare what part is true and what isn’t if he himself does not know.

it is an eerie experience to write something into a novel, believing it is pure fiction, and to learn later on—perhaps years later—that it is true. i would like to give you an example. it is something that i do not understand. perhaps you can come up with a theory. i can’t.

in 1970 i wrote a novel called flow my tears, the policeman said. one of the characters is a nineteen-year-old girl named kathy. her husband’s name is jack. kathy appears to work for the criminal underground, but later, as we read deeper into the novel, we discover that actually she is working for the police. she has a relationship going on with a police inspector. the character is pure fiction. or at least i thought it was.

anyhow, on christmas day of 1970, i met a girl named kathy—this was after i had finished the novel, you understand. she was nineteen years old. her boyfriend was named jack. i soon learned that kathy was a drug dealer. i spent months trying to get her to give up dealing drugs; i kept warning her again and again that she would get caught. then, one evening as we were entering a restaurant together, kathy stopped short and said, “i can’t go in.” seated in the restaurant was a police inspector whom i knew. “i have to tell you the truth,” kathy said. “i have a relationship with him.”

certainly, these are odd coincidences. perhaps i have precognition. but the mystery becomes even more perplexing; the next stage totally baffles me. it has for four years.

in 1974 the novel was published by doubleday. one afternoon i was talking to my priest—i am an episcopalian—and i happened to mention to him an important scene near the end of the novel in which the character felix buckman meets a black stranger at an all-night gas station, and they begin to talk. as i described the scene in more and more detail, my priest became progressively more agitated. at last he said, “that is a scene from the book of acts, from the bible! in acts, the person who meets the black man on the road is named philip—your name.” father rasch was so upset by the resemblance that he could not even locate the scene in his bible. “read acts,” he instructed me. “and you’ll agree. it’s the same down to specific details.”

i went home and read the scene in acts. yes, father rasch was right; the scene in my novel was an obvious retelling of the scene in acts... and i had never read acts, i must admit. but again the puzzle became deeper. in acts, the high roman official who arrests and interrogates saint paul is named felix—the same name as my character. and my character felix buckman is a high-ranking police general; in fact, in my novel he holds the same office as felix in the book of acts: the final authority. there is a conversation in my novel which very closely resembles a conversation between felix and paul.

well, i decided to try for any further resemblances. the main character in my novel is named jason. i got an index to the bible and looked to see if anyone named jason appears anywhere in the bible. i couldn’t remember any. well, a man named jason appears once and only once in the bible. it is in the book of acts. and, as if to plague me further with coincidences, in my novel jason is fleeing from the authorities and takes refuge in a person’s house, and in acts the man named jason shelters a fugitive from the law in his house—an exact inversion of the situation in my novel, as if the mysterious spirit responsible for all this was having a sort of laugh about the whole thing.

felix, jason, and the meeting on the road with the black man who is a complete stranger. in acts, the disciple philip baptizes the black man, who then goes away rejoicing. in my novel, felix buckman reaches out to the black stranger for emotional support, because felix buckman’s sister has just died and he is falling apart psychologically. the black man stirs up buckman’s spirits and although buckman does not go away rejoicing, at least his tears have stopped falling. he had been flying home, weeping over the death of his sister, and had to reach out to someone,
anyone, even a total stranger. It is an encounter between two strangers on the road which changes the life of one of them—both in my novel and in acts. And one final quirk by the mysterious spirit at work: the name felix is the Latin word for “happy.” which I did not know when I wrote the novel.

A careful study of my novel shows that for reasons which I cannot even begin to explain I had managed to retell several of the basic incidents from a particular book of the Bible, and even had the right names. What could explain this? That was four years ago that I discovered all this. For four years I have tried to come up with a theory and I have not. I doubt if I ever will.

But the mystery had not ended there, as I had imagined. Two months ago I was walking up to the mailbox late at night to mail off a letter, and also to enjoy the sight of Saint Joseph’s church, which sits opposite my apartment building. I noticed a man loitering suspiciously by a parked car. It looked as if he was attempting to steal the car, or maybe something from it; as I returned from the mailbox, the man hid behind a tree. On impulse I walked up to him and asked, “Is anything the matter?”

“I’m out of gas,” the man said. “And I have no money.”

Incredibly, because I have never done this before, I got out my wallet, took all the money from it, and handed the money to him. He then shook hands with me and asked where I lived, so that he could later pay the money back. I returned to my apartment, and then I realized that the money would do him no good, since there was no gas station within walking distance. So I returned, in my car. The man had a metal gas can in the trunk of his car, and, together, we drove in my car to an all-night gas station. Soon we were standing there, two strangers, as the pump jockey filled the metal gas can. Suddenly I realized that this was the scene in my novel—the novel written eight years before. The all-night gas station was exactly as I had envisioned it in my inner eye when I wrote the scene—the glaring white light, the pump jockey—and now I saw something which I had not seen before. The stranger who I was helping was black.

We drove back to his stalled car with the gas, shook hands, and then I returned to my apartment building. I never saw him again. He could not pay me back because I had not told him which of the many apartments was mine or what my name was. I was terribly shaken up by this experience. I had literally lived out a scene completely as it had appeared in my novel. Which is to say, I had lived out a sort of replica of the scene in Acts where Philip encounters the black man on the road.

What could explain all this?

The answer I have come up with may not be correct, but it is the only answer I have. It has to do with time. My theory is this: in some certain important sense, time is not real. Or perhaps it is real, but not as we experience it to be or imagine it to be. I had the acute, overwhelming certitude (and still have) that despite all the change we see, a specific permanent landscape underlies the world of change: and that this invisible underlying landscape is that of the Bible; it, specifically, is the period immediately following the death and resurrection of Christ; it is, in other words, the time period of the Book of Acts.

Parmenides would be proud of me. I have gazed at a constantly changing world and declared that underneath it lies the eternal, the unchanging, the absolutely real. But how has this come about? If the real time is circa A.D. 50, then why do we see A.D. 1978? And if we are really living in the Roman Empire, somewhere in Syria, why do we see the United States?

During the Middle Ages, a curious theory arose, which I will now present to you for what it is worth. It is the theory that the evil one—Satan—is the “ape of God.” That he creates spurious imitations of creation, of God’s authentic creation, and then interpolates them for that authentic creation. Does this odd theory help explain my experience? Are we to believe that we are occluded, that we are deceived, that it is not 1978 but A.D. 50... and Satan has spun a counterfeit reality to wither our faith in
the return of christ?

i can just picture myself being examined by a psychiatrist. the psychiatrist says, "what year is it?" and i reply, "a.d. 50." the psychiatrist blinks and then asks, "and where are you?" i reply, "in judaea." "where the heck is that?" the psychiatrist asks. "it's part of the roman empire," i would have to answer. "do you know who is president?" the psychiatrist would ask, and i would answer, "the procurator felix." "you're pretty sure about this?" the psychiatrist would ask, meanwhile giving a covert signal to two very large psych techs. "yep," i'd replay. "unless felix has stepped down and been replaced by the procurator festus. you see, saint paul was held by felix for—" "who told you all this?" the psychiatrist would break in, irritably, and i would reply, "the holy spirit." and after that i'd be in the rubber room, inside gazing out, and knowing exactly how come i was there.

everything in that conversation would be true, in a sense, although palpably not true in another. i know perfectly well that the date is 1978 and that jimmy carter is president and that i live in santa ana, california, in the united states. i even know how to get from my apartment to disneyland, a fact i can’t seem to forget. and surely no disneyland existed back at the time of saint paul.

so, if i force myself to be very rational and reasonable, and all those other good things, i must admit that the existence of disneyland (which i know is real) proves that we are not living in judaea in a.d. 50. the idea of saint paul whirling around in the giant teacups while composing first corinthians, as paris tv films him with a telephoto lens—that just can’t be. saint paul would never go near disneyland. only children, tourists, and visiting soviet high officials ever go to disneyland. saints do not.

but somehow that biblical material snared my unconscious and crept into my novel, and equally true, for some reason in 1978 i relived a scene which i described back in 1970. what i am saying is this: there is internal evidence in at least one of my novels that another reality, an unchanging one, exactly as parmenides and plato suspected, underlies the visible phenomenal world of change, and somehow, in some way, perhaps to our surprise, we can cut through to it. or rather, a mysterious spirit can put us in touch with it, if it wishes us to see this permanent other landscape. time passes, thousands of years pass, but at the same instant that we see this contemporary world, the ancient world, the world of the bible, is concealed beneath it, still there and still real. eternally so.

shall i go for broke and tell you the rest of this peculiar story? i’ll do so, having gone this far already. my novel flow my tears, the policeman said was released by doubleday in february of 1974. the week after it was released, i had two impacted wisdom teeth removed, under sodium pentathol. later that day i found myself in intense pain. my wife phoned the oral surgeon and he phoned a pharmacy. half an hour later there was a knock at my door: the delivery person from the pharmacy with the pain medication. although i was bleeding and sick and weak, i felt the need to answer the knock on the door myself. when i opened the door, i found myself facing a young woman—who wore a shining gold necklace in the center of which was a gleaming gold fish. for some reason i was hypnotized by the gleaming golden fish; i forgot my pain, forgot the medication, forgot why the girl was there. i just kept staring at the fish sign.

"what does that mean?" i asked her.

the girl touched the glimmering golden fish with her hand and said, "this is a sign worn by the early christians." she then gave me the package of medication.

in that instant, as i stared at the gleaming fish sign and heard her words, i suddenly experienced what i later learned is called anamnesis—a greek word meaning, literally, "loss of forgetfulness." i remembered who i was and where i was. in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, it all came back to me. and not only could i remember it but i could see it. the girl was a secret christian and so was i. we lived in fear of detection by the romans. we had to communicate with cryptic signs. she had
just told me all this, and it was true.

for a short time, as hard as this is to believe or explain, i saw fading into view the black prison-like contours of hateful rome. but, of much more importance, i remembered jesus, who had just recently been with us, and had gone temporarily away, and would very soon return. my emotion was one of joy. we were secretly preparing to welcome him back. it would not be long, and the romans did not know. they thought he was dead, forever dead. that was our great secret, our joyous knowledge. despite all appearances, christ was going to return, and our delight and anticipation was boundless.

isn't it odd that this strange event, this recovery of lost memory, occured only a week after flow my tears was released? and it is flow my tears which contains the replication of people and events from the book of acts, which is set at the precise moment in time—just after jesus’ death and resurrection—that i remembered, by means of the golden fish sign, as having just taken place?

if you were me, and had this happen to you, i'm sure you wouldn't be able to leave it alone. you would seek a theory that would account for it. for over four years now, i have been trying one theory after another: circular time, frozen time, timeless time, what is called “sacred” as contrasted to “mundane” time... i can’t count the theories i’ve tried out. one constant has prevailed, though, throughout all theories. there must indeed be a mysterious holy spirit which has an exact and intimate relation to christ, which can indwell in human minds, guide and inform them, and even express itself through those humans, even without their awareness.

in the writing of flow my tears, back in 1970, there was one unusual event which i realized at the time was not ordinary, was not a part of the regular writing process. i had a dream one night, an especially vivid dream. and when i awoke i found myself under the compulsion—the absolute necessity—of getting the dream into the text of the novel precisely as i had dreamed it. in getting the dream exactly right, i had to do eleven drafts of the final part of the manuscript, until i was satisfied.

i will now quote from the novel, as it appeared in the final, published form. see if this dream reminds you of anything.

the countryside, brown and dry, in summer, where he had lived as a child. he rode a horse, and approaching him on his left a squad of horses nearing slowly. on the horses rode men in shining robes, each a different color; each wore a pointed helmet that sparkled in the sunlight. the slow, solemn knights passed him and as they traveled by he made out the face of one: an ancient marble face, a terribly old man with rippling cascades of white beard. what a strong nose he had. what noble features. so tired, so serious, so far beyond ordinary men. evidently he was a king.

felix buckman let them pass; he did not speak to them and they said nothing to him. together, they all moved toward the house from which he had come. a man had sealed himself up inside the house, a man alone, jason taverner, in the silence and darkness, without windows, by himself from now on into eternity. sitting, merely existing, inert. felix buckman continued on, out into the open countryside. and then he heard from behind him one dreadful single shriek. they had killed taverner, and seeing them enter, sensing them in the shadows around him, knowing what they intended to do with him, taverner had shrieked.

within himself felix buckman felt absolute and utter desolate grief. but in the dream he did not go back nor look back. there was nothing that could be done. no one could have stopped the posse of varicolored men in robes; they could not have been said no to. anyhow, it was over. taverner was dead.

this passage probably does not suggest any particular thing to you, except a law posse exacting judgment on someone either guilty or considered guilty. it is not clear whether taverner has in fact committed some crime or is merely believed to have committed some crime. i had the impression that he was guilty, but that it was a tragedy that he had to be killed, a terribly sad tragedy. in the novel, this dream
causes felix buckman to begin to cry, and therefore he seeks out the black man at the all-night gas station.

months after the novel was published, i found the section in the bible to which this dream refers. it is daniel, 7:9:

thrones were set in place and one ancient in years took his seat. his robe was white as snow and the hair of his head like cleanest wool. flames of fire were his throne and its wheels blazing fire; a flowing river of fire streamed out before him. thousands upon thousands served him and myriads upon myriads attended his presence. the court sat, and the book were opened.

the white-haired old man appears again in revelation, 1:13:

i saw… one like a son of man, robed down to his feet, with a golden girdle round his breast. the hair of his head was white as snow-white wool, and his eyes flamed like fire; his feet gleamed like burnished brass refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.

and then 1:17:

when i saw him, i fell at his feet as though dead. but he laid his right hand upon me and said, “do not be afraid. i am the first and the last, and i am the living one, for i was dead and now i am alive for evermore, and i hold the keys of death and death’s domain. write down therefore what you have seen, what is now, and what will be hereafter.”

and, like john of patmos, i faithfully wrote down what i saw and put in my novel. and it was true, although at the time i did not know who was meant by this description:

…he made out the face of one: an ancient marble face, a terribly old man with rippling cascades of white beard. what a strong nose he had. what noble features. so tired, so serious, so far beyond ordinary men. evidently he was a king.

indeed he was a king. he is christ himself returned, to pass judgment. and this is what he does in my novel: he passes judgment on the man sealed up in darkness. the man sealed up in darkness must be the prince of evil, the force of darkness. call it whatever you wish, its time had come. it was judged and condemned. felix buckman could weep at the sadness of it, but he knew that the verdict could not be disputed.

and so he rode on, without turning or looking back, hearing only the shriek of fear and defeat: the cry of evil destroyed.

so my novel contained material from other parts of the bible, as well as the sections from acts. deciphered, my novel tells a quite different story from the surface story (which we need not go into here). the real story is simply this: the return of christ, now king rather than suffering servant. judge rather than victim of unfair judgment. everything is reversed. the core message of my novel, without my knowing it, was a warning to the powerful: you will shortly be judged and condemned. who, specifically, did it refer to? well, i can’t really say; or rather would prefer not to say. i have no certain knowledge, only an intuition. and that is not enough to go on, so i will keep my thoughts to myself. but you might ask yourselves what political events took place in this country between february 1974 and august 1974. ask yourself who was judged and condemned, and fell like a flaming star into ruin and disgrace. the most powerful man in the world. and i feel as sorry for him now as i did when i dreamed that dream. “that poor poor man,” i said once to my wife, with tears in my eyes. “shut up in the darkness, playing the piano in the night to himself, alone and afraid, knowing what’s to come.” for god’s sake, let us forgive him, finally. but what was done to him and all his men—“all the president’s men,” as it’s put—had to be done. but it is over, and he should be let out into the sunlight again; no creature, no person, should be shut up in darkness forever, in fear. it is not humane.

just about the time that supreme court was ruling that the nixon tapes had to be turned over to the special prosecutor, i was eating at a chinese restaurant in yorba
Linda, the town in California where Nixon went to school—where he grew up, worked at a grocery store, where there is a park named after him, and of course the Nixon house, simple clapboard and all that. In my fortune cookie, I got the following fortune:

deeds done in secret have a way of becoming found out.

I mailed the slip of paper to the White House, mentioning that the Chinese restaurant was located within a mile of Nixon’s original house, and I said, “I think a mistake has been made; by accident I got Mr. Nixon’s fortune. Does he have mine?” The White House did not answer.

Well, as I said earlier, an author of a work supposed fiction might write the truth and not know it. To quote Xenophanes, another pre-Socratic: “even if a man should chance to speak the most complete truth, yet he himself does not know it; all things are wrapped in appearances” (fragment 34). And Heraclitus added to this: “the nature of things is in the habit of concealing itself” (fragment 54). W. S. Gilbert, of Gilbert and Sullivan, put it: “things are seldom what they seem; skim milk masquerades as cream.” The point of all that is that we cannot trust our senses and probably not even our a priori reasoning, as to our senses, I understand that people who have been blind from birth and are suddenly given sight are amazed to discover that objects appear to get smaller and smaller as they get farther away. Logically, there is no reason for this. We, of course, have come to accept this, because we are use to it. We see objects get smaller, but we know that in actuality they remain the same size. So even the common everyday pragmatic person utilizes a certain amount of sophisticated discounting of what his eyes and ears tell him.

Little of what Heraclitus wrote has survived, and what we do have is obscure, but fragment 54 is lucid and important: “latent structure is master of obvious structure.” This means that Heraclitus believed that a veil lay over the true landscape. He also may have suspected that time was somehow not what it seemed, because in fragment 52 he said: “time is a child at play, playing draughts; a child’s is the kingdom.” This is indeed cryptic. But he also said, in fragment 18: “if one does not expect it, one will not find out the unexpected; it is not to be tracked down and no path leads us to it.” Edward Hussey, in his scholarly book the pre-Socratics, says:

If Heraclitus is to be so insistent on the lack of understanding shown by most men, it would seem only reasonable that he should offer further instructions for penetrating to the truth. The talk of riddle-guessing suggests that some kind of revelation, beyond human control, is necessary... the true wisdom, as has been seen, is closely associated with God, which suggests further that in advancing wisdom a man becomes like, or a part of, God.

This quote is not from a religious book or a book on theology; it is an analysis of the earliest philosophers by a lecturer in ancient philosophy at the University of Oxford. Hussey makes it clear that to these early philosophers there was no distinction between philosophy and religion. The first great quantum leap in Greek theology was by Xenophanes of Colophon, born in the mid-sixth century B.C. Xenophanes, without resorting to any authority except that of his own mind, says:

One God there is, in no way like mortal creatures either in bodily form or in the thought of his mind. The whole of him sees, the whole of him thinks, the whole of him hears. He stays always motionless in the same place; it is not fitting that he should move about now this way, now that.

This is a subtle and advanced concept of God, evidently without precedent among the Greek thinkers. “The arguments of Parmenides seemed to show that all reality must indeed be a mind,” Hussey writes, “or an object of thought in a mind.” Regarding Heraclitus specifically, he says, “in Heraclitus it is difficult to tell how far the designs in God’s mind are distinguished from the execution in the world, or indeed how far God’s mind is distinguished from the world.” The further leap by Anaxagoras has always fascinated me. “Anaxagoras had been driven to a theory of the
microstructure of matter which made it, to some extent, mysterious to human
reason.” Anaxagoras believed that everything was determined by mind. These were
not childish thinkers, nor primitives. They debated serious issues and studied one
another’s views with deft insight. It was not until the time of Aristotle that their views
got reduced to what we can neatly—but wrongly—classify as crude. The summation
of much pre-socratic theology and philosophy can be stated as follows: The Kosmos
is not as it appears to be, and what it probably is, at its deepest level, is exactly that
which the human being is at his deepest level—call it mind or soul, it is something
unitary which lives and thinks, and only appears to be plural and material. Much of
this view reaches us through the logos doctrine regarding Christ. The logos was both
that which thought, and the thing which it thought: thinker and thought together. The
universe, then, is thinker and thought, and since we are part of it, we as humans are,
in the final analysis, thoughts of and thinkers of those thoughts.

Thus if God thinks about Rome circa A.D. 50, then Rome circa A.D. 50 is. The universe
is not a windup clock and God the hand that winds it. The universe is not a battery-
powered watch and God the battery. Spinoza believed that the universe is the body of
God extensive in space. But long before Spinoza—two thousand years before him—
Xenophanes had said, “effortlessly, he wields all things by the thought of his mind”
(fragment 25).

If any of you have read my novel Ubik, you know that the mysterious entity or mind
or force called Ubik starts out as a series of cheap and vulgar commercials and winds
up saying:

I am Ubik. Before the universe was I am. I made the suns. I made the worlds. I created
the lives and the places they inhabit; I move them here, I put them there. They go as I
say, they do as I tell them. I am the word and my name is never spoken, the name
which no one knows. I am called Ubik but that is not my name. I am. I shall always be.

It is obvious from this who and what Ubik is; it specifically says that it is the word,
which is to say, the logos. In the German translation, there is one of the most
wonderful lapses of correct understanding that I have ever come across; God help us
if the man who translated my novel Ubik into German were to do a translation from
the Koine Greek into German of the New Testament. He did all right until he got to the
sentence “I am the word.” That puzzled him. What can the author mean by that? He
must have asked himself, obviously never having come across the logos doctrine, so
he did as good a job of translation as possible. In the German edition, the absolute
entity which made the suns, made the worlds, created the lives and the places they
inhabit, says of itself:

I am the brand name.

Had he translated the Gospel according to Saint John, I suppose it would have come
out as:

When all things began, the brand name already was. The brand name dwelt with God,
and what God was, the brand name was.

It would seem that I not only bring you greetings from Disneyland but from
Mortimer Snerd. Such is the fate of an author who hoped to include theological
themes in his writing. “The brand name, then, was with God at the beginning, and
through him all things came to be; no single thing was created without him.” So it
goes with noble ambitions. Let’s hope God has a sense of humor.

Or should I say, let’s hope the brand name has a sense of humor.

As I said to you earlier, my two preoccupations in my writing are “What is reality?”
and “What is the authentic human?” I’m sure you can see by now that I have not
been able to answer the first question. I have an abiding intuition that somehow the
world of the Bible is a literally real but veiled landscape, never changing, hidden from
our sight, but available to us by revelation. That is all I can come up with—a mixture
of mystical experience, reasoning, and faith. I would like to say something about the
the authentic human being is one of us who instinctively knows what he should not do, and, in addition, he will balk at doing it. he will refuse to do it, even if this brings down dread consequences to him and to those whom he loves. this, to me, is the ultimately heroic trait of ordinary people; they say no to the tyrant and they calmly take the consequences of this resistance. their deeds may be small, and almost always unnoticed, unmarked by history. their names are not remembered, nor did these authentic humans expect their names to be remembered. i see their authenticity in an odd way: not in their willingness to perform great heroic deeds but in their quiet refusals. in essence, they cannot be compelled to be what they are not.

the power of spurious realities battering at us today—these deliberately manufactured fakes never penetrate to the heart of true human beings. i watch the children watching tv and at first i am afraid of what they are being taught, and then i realize, they can't be corrupted or destroyed. they watch, they listen, they understand, and, then, where and when it is necessary, they reject. there is something enormously powerful in a child’s ability to withstand the fraudulent. a child has the clearest eye, the steadiest hand. the hucksters, the promoters, are appealing for the allegiance of these small people in vain. true, the cereal companies may be able to market huge quantities of junk breakfasts; the hamburger and hot dog chains may sell endless numbers of unreal fast-food items to the children, but the deep heart beats firmly, unreached and unreasoned with. a child of today can detect a lie quicker than the wisest adult of two decades ago. when i want to know what is true, i ask my children. they do not ask me; i turn to them.

one day while my son christopher, who is four, was playing in front of me and his mother, we two adults began discussing the figure of jesus in the synoptic gospels. christopher turned toward us for an instant and said, “i am a fisherman. i fish for fish.” he was playing with a metal lantern which someone had given me, which i had never used… and suddenly i realized that the lantern was shaped like a fish. i wonder what thoughts were being placed in my little boy's soul at that moment—and not placed there by cereal merchants or candy peddlers. “i am a fisherman. i fish for fish.” christopher, at four, had found the sign i did not find until i was forty-five years old.

time is speeding up. and to what end? maybe we were told that two thousand years ago. or maybe it wasn’t really that long ago; maybe it is a delusion that so much time has passed. maybe it was a week ago, or even earlier today. perhaps time is not only speeding up; perhaps, in addition, it is going to end.

and if it does, the rides at disneyland are never going to be the same again. because when time ends, the birds and hippos and lions and deer at disneyland will no longer be simulations, and, for the first time, a real bird will sing.

thank you.
landmark in film history, though the film was almost completely ignored until its reissue on DVD several years ago. *Venom and Eternity* came out in the year 1951 in an unfinished version at the Cannes Film Festival; later, finished, it was shown in a few selected cinemas. The press and the public didn't like it at all, so it sank into obscurity soon afterwards, but then had an interesting second life in the US where, as of 1953, Raymond Rohauer distributed a subtitled version.

*Venom and Eternity* is one of the first non-documentary films to use found footage.

> ...have become causes of dissolution with the surrealists.

> I myself am above my own film. And I will do more and I will do it differently.
it is produced, though not entirely, from already existing materials, and that’s why we’re discussing it here. moreover, with all its elaborate processing of the filmstrip, it’s a handmade film. for this, and for its visceral rhythm, stan brakhage admired it a lot.3

it’s also the first “film discrépant”, as isidore isou himself named it, the first “discrepant film”, meaning there is a complete disjunction between sound and video tracks. as frédérique devaux, the best expert in the field, has put it, sight and sound have “rien à voir”,4 they have nothing to do with each other.

Venom and eternity even anticipates expanded cinema. please recall the first scene, when daniel, the protagonist of the novel narrated in the soundtrack, proposes his iconoclastic views after a screening of charlie chaplin’s a woman of paris. most of the other moviegoers in the audience are disturbed and enraged by these provocative ideas. daniel announces how he will make his movie, this movie. he thinks: “for the first time a film’s subject will be the eternity of cinema, the cinema reflecting itself.”5

in a way, the heated debate between daniel and the others anticipates the lettrist concept of cinema as a happening. for lettrism, the art movement founded by isou in 1946, cinema is not restricted to the screening of a movie. everything that happens in the cinema hall during a certain time span belongs to cinema, too, not only the reflection and debate, as isou suggests, but also all kinds of action. maurice lemaître, assistant to isou for venom and eternity, fully realized this expanded cinema concept that same year, 1951, with le film est déjà commencé? [has the film begun?] it’s not only a very beautiful and funny movie, but also a “séance”, as lemaître himself called it, a session. the audience that wants to see the picture is systematically prevented from doing so by not letting them in, by complete darkness in the hall, by a staged riot, by extras who shout, by ladies with very big hats, and so on.6
in sum, venom and eternity uses a large amount of found footage, it’s a handmade film, it’s a discrepant film, and it even anticipates expanded cinema. we can put the film in many different contexts. but although it is possible to put an art work into different contexts, it’s also possible and even necessary to see its intrinsic features, its structures, the views and visions of its maker. we can look at a piece of art from the outside and from the inside.

i will try to give you an inside look. first i will acquaint you with the ideas and projects of isidore isou, insofar as they concern his film and the use of found footage. in a second section i will give you some information about the movie’s production. in the third and last section of my short introduction i will, very tentatively, try to position venom and eternity within the tradition of found footage.
let me begin with the man. Isidore Isou was born Jean-Isidore Goldstein in 1925 in Romania. His family was Jewish. A fascist and anti-Semitic regime ruled the land. This explains the turmoil of Isou’s youth. He quit school early, was a self-educated person who read widely, with a predilection for French poetry of the nineteenth century. As soon as Romania was liberated, he went to Paris. By then he was twenty years old.

His personal life is highly significant for his artistic and political philosophy. Like Andy Warhol, Isou was an immigrant who wanted so much to succeed, even to be famous in his new country. His ambition was boundless. You have noticed this in the opening sequence of venom and eternity, where Isou shows us his books, his aspiration to be like the great masters. A bit embarrassing for us, but quite explainable for an outsider who claws with tooth and nail to get in. The same goes for all the interspersed amateurish clips that show famous personalities of the time side by side with Isou. The message is: “me and Marcel Achard, me and Blaise Cendrars, me and Jean Cocteau” and so on. Isou with the elders; he himself the up-and-coming man.

In his political concepts developed at the end of the forties, Isou distinguishes between insiders and outsiders. Insiders are all those involved in the exchange of commodities and communications. Outsiders are all those who are not involved, those who don’t get paid, who are ignored – the young, the migrants, the artists, the prisoners, the lumpen intellectuals. The outsiders are potentially creative; they advocate the new because they suffer the old. Change can only come from outside. Outside is creativity, is freshness, is the new. You’ll recognize a certain similarity to the ideas of Herbert Marcuse and May ‘68.

Now, who supports Daniel when he is proposing his disjunctive, discrepant cinema? You’ll find there are only three supporters: his friend Pierre, his girlfriend Ève and the stranger; a young man and two migrants. Support of the new and the creative comes only from the outsiders. Pierre as a young man is eager for change and new art. Ève, skeptical at first, ultimately embraces Daniel’s intent. She is a Norwegian who will be expelled at the end of the story by the French authorities. The stranger is an apparently much older person, a wise one, who fervently acclaims Daniel’s revolution as well. Funnily enough, Isidore Isou himself lends his voice to this character, the stranger. He speaks French with a heavy Romanian accent. And for the audience in the ciné-club Daniel, too, is a “métèque”, a foreigner who comes out of nowhere.
so isou portrays himself in five different ways in this movie. first, as the great
grothcoming master of cinema, as announced in the opening credits. second, in
many short clips, as the social climber who is on first-name terms with the elite of
parisian artists. third, in the soundtrack, as the wise and open-minded stranger from
romania. fourth, also in the soundtrack novel, as daniel, the “métèque”, the
mysterious poet and cynical seducer. and fifth and most prominently, as the good-
looking, strong-willed, cool young man strolling around boulevard saint-germain in
the first part or “chapter” of venom and eternity.

eric rohmer was much impressed by this first chapter, the stroll of a non-actor, the
casual way of filming a historical place in a non-historical way – saint-germain-des-
prés, the breeding ground for new philosophy, new literature, new music, new
cinema.8 he didn’t bother much about isou’s claim to have invented everything,
even the famous quarter. for rohmer this was kind of neorealistic, even conservative.
and that’s not quite wrong, but rohmer’s favorable review was also a fundamental
and even deliberate misunderstanding of isou’s ideas. the title of his review
establishes this: “isou or the things just as they are”. things just as they are: the
description could be accurate for the images in the first chapter. but isou didn’t want
to leave the things unchanged. he came to paris to make things over, to transform,
to renew – as will be seen in the second and third chapters of venom and eternity.
when isou arrived in paris at the age of twenty, his philosophy was nearly full-blown. in his first books you’ll find all his ideas, sometimes embryonic, but often very mature. i will outline only two concepts that are of paramount importance not only for our film here but for his whole undertaking: the activity of creation and the so-called ciselant, the chiseling.

i’ve mentioned the political importance of creativity already. creation or, as he later termed it, “le créatique” remains the driving force behind isou’s thinking and working.

as the sociologist andreas reckwitz recently stated, creativity is today one of the key values of our culture. everybody has to be creative today. that’s surprising from a
historical point of view because creativity initially stood in sharp contrast to the rationalist tendencies of modernism. Creativity as a value historically derives from the romantic, from the bohemian world. It was a counter-project to an alienating rationalist world.

Isou takes up this counter-project but mixes it with Jewish theology and a belief in progress very typical for him. His creators and creations are a revolutionary force from the margins that moves in to occupy the center of society. One of Isou’s disciples, Alain Satie, defines the creative process as “the overcoming of the acquired, the insufficient and the incomplete”. But why then the use of found footage? Found footage, you might say, is the acquired, insufficient, incomplete stuff par excellence.

This contradiction can be resolved. According to Isou, nowadays all arts are deconstructing themselves. Poetry is deconstructing its verses and words, painting and sculpting are deconstructing their forms, film is deconstructing its images. The creative act for the poet and the painter no longer consists of creating verses or representations but of decomposing them. The creative act for the filmmaker consists not of finding new pictures but of overcoming the old ones.

In his view, all arts pass through two stages: “la phase amplique” and “la phase ciselante”, the amplifying stage and the chiseling stage. In the first stage, art finds new stories, new aspects of the world; it constantly enhances and enriches itself. In the second stage, art is not about the world but about itself; it is self-reflective, self-destructive. But out of this so-called chiseling, a metaphor for the deranging and rearranging and combining and destroying the given elements of a work, a new language, a new world should emerge. Hopefully.
how beautiful and powerful chiseled lettrist poetry can be – a poetry that shatters words, combines syllables of many languages and adds gestural expressions – you’ve heard this in the third chapter of the film, when francois dufrène performs his poems. the lettrist choir that returns throughout the film is also an example of this chiseled lettrist poetry.

for isou, the first poet of the chiseling age was baudelaire, cézanne was the first painter, debussy the first composer. and isidore isou is the first filmmaker ciselant. the new era begins with his first film, venom and eternity.
2. venom and eternity

now, as announced, a few words about the production and structure of this singular film. it was the first production not just for isou but for almost all involved. suzanne cabon, the editor, was the only professional. she had worked with marcel pagnol, marcel l'herbier and others. ironically, she had to be fired soon, because she was unable to infringe on all the rules of her trade. lemaître completed the montage, although he had never done it before. they reduced the length of the movie from four hours and thirty minutes to two hours for commercial reasons, because isou really thought he could make some money with it.11

producer marc gilbert guillaumin, better known as marc’o, belonged to the lettrist group at that time, but left it a few months afterwards. you can see him several times in the first chapter; he is the young man in jeans on the boulevard, almost isou’s double. like isou he laces his shoes. maybe you remember the shot. as the producer of venom and eternity marc’o didn’t have to raise much money, although he pretended to have sold some of his furniture and even his wife’s diamond ring in order to collect the budget.12 frédérique devaux suggests that found footage was also used for financial reasons.13 i wouldn’t overestimate that. sure, everything had to be very low-cost. but found footage was also introduced for strong aesthetic reasons; i shall come back to this.
there is not much to make out about the camera operator, saufer, only that the camera work was done by some pals of the director. so maybe the name saufer is an alias for all of isou’s pals who operated the 35mm camera while shooting venom and eternity. clearly enough, the cinematographer is the lowest man on this set. it’s explicitly a picture against all cinematographers. daniel says: “those who will despise my film are the cinematographers, the experts of cinema.”

from all i’ve said already, it is evident that the element of venom and eternity that isou valued the most is the soundtrack. the literary and philosophical element here is held in highest esteem. not only does isou call the parts of his film “chapters”, like in a book, not only does he want to proclaim a manifesto on cinema in cinema and to present the sound poetry of the lettrists, most of all he wants to tell a literary story, fictional to be sure, but one that elucidates the origins of this work and of his ideas in general.
the story and the vivid radio drama that tells it were completed first. and so it came to a scandal at the cannes film festival, because isou earnestly believed that it would be sufficient to present only the first part of the unfinished film and just the already produced soundtrack of the rest. he said that an unfinished book by joyce would also be more amusing than a finished book by a stupid writer. the festival audience had to sit in the dark and listen to isou’s radio. the experts of cinema were outraged – to isou’s delight. but this scandal didn’t help him like the ones he had managed to create a few years earlier when he founded the lettrist movement. in fact, by 1951 his fame was already fading.

to continue, the story structures the film; its three chapters are: “the principle”, “the development” and “the proof”. 
in the first chapter, “the principle”, daniel explains his cinematic principles in front of an enraged audience. he is absolutely in line with isou and his beliefs in the act of creation, in the new, the chiseling, and so on. noticeable is the emphasis on the iconoclastic aspect. against the images! that’s something isou arrives at in these years that marks the beginning of his conceptual thinking, the possibility of an imaginary art without images and even without any signs at all. he later called that the “supertemporel”, the supratemporal. the notion of eternity in the title venom and eternity signifies exactly this – overcoming the venom, the chatter, the words, the pictures, the sensual, in order to come to a mental art beyond time.

the second chapter, “the development”, relates the wild love story of daniel and ève, the runaway from norway. in many ways isou here continues the story line, the characters, and even the metaphors of his first printed novel, l’agrégation d’un nom et d’un messie [launching a name and a messiah] from 1947.

the third and last chapter, “the proof”, combines the two first chapters. now daniel discusses his artistic and cinematic plans with ève. after some objections she finally agrees with him. but she doesn’t benefit from this. daniel repudiates her, just like the protagonist of agrégation repudiates all those who are in love with him.16

at any rate, these discussions are important to our concerns. because daniel explains in a very poetic way why he uses found footage: “i’ll be the first to abandon myself to these leftovers just as dostoevsky abandoned himself to his fall from grace.”17 the french word for “leftovers” or “scraps of film” is chute, meaning also falling, tumbling down.
so we can draw up a first summary. the creative act of venom and eternity is to separate sound and image, to prize sound over the pictures, to chisel and mistreat the pictures in order to come to an imaginative, mental art. it’s a falling down into the materials of film with the aim of losing everything that’s old in cinema and art and of gaining something new.

so the quality and content of his found footage weren’t of great importance to isou. when he began looking for found footage he initially asked directors such as roger leenhardt if they could give him some stuff from their wastebaskets. they all refused.18 so he went to the department of the army, public relations, and made a rich find in their trash pile.

all the found material – scenes from the first indochina war, sportsmen, fishermen and so on – is a chance discovery. it is banal material, just anonymous images. almost any other scraps of film would have been equally appropriate.19 the use of
film leader and other markers in the midst of the film serves to disarrange narrative cinema’s usual order.

3. found footage

if we now try to compare this application of found footage to those of other filmmakers, we’re confronted with big differences. consider for instance three prominent positions in making found footage films: first joseph cornell with rose hobart from 1936, then bruce conner and a movie from 1958, and finally ken jacobs’s films from the sixties until today. in every one of these positions, the use of found footage has a different function: devotion in cornell, parody in conner, and study in jacobs, if you’ll forgive my simplification.

but all three filmmakers do care about their images. isou doesn’t. he needs pictures so that he can overcome them – by putting them together in absurd ways, by combining them with a disjointed soundtrack, by playing them backwards and upside down, by painting on and scratching them, and so on.

the first person who almost prophetically understood where all this leads was jean cocteau. after watching venom and eternity, which he liked, he wrote in a letter: “unless i am mistaken, isou tries to purge by emptying out.”20 cocteau compares the film with the famous scene from his own orphée, where orphée sees the fashionable magazine nudisme that contains only blank pages. isou later confirmed this interpretation when he declared he wanted to “couper du vide”.21
venom and eternity marks an intermediary state, the decline of the images, the state just before they’re no longer pictures. it’s the precursor of a conceptual cinema and art. what did this conceptual cinema look like? i’ll give you a few examples: in 1952, one year after venom and eternity, isou and others organized a “film-débat”, a debate, in a ciné-club about the death of the old cinema. this “film-débat” was seen by them as a substitute for a traditional screening. to quote isou: “after the death of cinema, the debate becomes the work. the discussion, supplement to the spectacle, now becomes the real drama.”22 that same year, 1952, français dufrêne created tambours du jugement premier [drums of the first judgment], a film without filmstrip and screen, almost a stage play.23 also in 1952, marc’o, the producer of venom and eternity, came out with the idea of his “cinéma nucléaire”, using the seating of the cinema hall, the screen, the projection booth as parts and props of a cinema-performance in order to activate the public; in his view it should have been a kind of gladiator fight.24 thank god that was never realized. in 1960 isidore isou disposed film-scraps, scripts, scores and other things in the rooms of the gallery atome in paris. the public was invited to make its own film out of all these bits and tools.25 these are ideas very similar to those of fluxus and conceptual art, clearly ahead of their time.

but if venom and eternity were only this, the precursor of a conceptual cinema, the disappearance of pictures, the proof of a dogma, a purgation, it never would have had such an impact, it wouldn’t still be so fascinating. in my concluding remarks, i will single out some effects that contradict the professed iconoclasm of this work.

effect 1 results from the fact that it’s not possible to make an out-and-out discrepant film. you can separate picture and sound, okay, but viewers soon establish their own
connections and associations. Some connections might even have been intended by
the filmmaker. When the commentator says that Daniel was leaving the ciné-club, we
see Isou coming out of a cinema. When the character Ève is introduced, we see the
famous actress Blanchette Brunoy taking a walk with Isou in the bois de Boulogne.
When it is said that Daniel was thrown out of the communist party, we see a
communist rally. And so on. Even if these coincidences occur by pure chance, it’s
impossible to prevent the viewer from associating the representation with something
represented.26 Nelson Goodman got to the heart of it by writing: “Almost any picture
may represent almost anything.”27

Contrary effect 2: If you excise even the most boring picture from its context and
connections it will gain something absurd, often surreal. And that’s the case here.

Effect 3: If we’ve really had enough of the great pictures, as Daniel proclaims in the
first chapter, if we really want no new cheese but only the decadent smell of the old,
there could be no better material than the celluloid used here. The conventional,
never really looked-at material acquires a subtle iridescence. It’s an effect similar to
that emanating from the photo collections by Christian Boltanski, Hans-Peter
Feldmann or Isa Genzken.
effect 4: the “recovery of what has been eliminated, thrown out” is, as Michel Butor has pointed out, also a kind of recycling. Butor says in an interview that for him recycling in the arts “always ends up as human recycling.... we move easily from the lost object ... to the lost man, thrown out in the big cities”. So why not comparing the recycling of found footage to Isou’s political project, the recycling of the outsiders?

effect 5: most of the material shown here is chiseled, meaning repainted, sometimes with scratches, sometimes with fingerprints, sometimes with pictograms like the star of David, a heart with an arrow, a crown, a question mark and many others. Isou and the Lettrists frequently used the technique of covering a surface with new signs in their paintings and in their so-called hypergraphic novels, combining signs and small pictures. This elaboration does not weaken the images but reinforces them.

to draw the moral from all this: you can be an iconoclastic artist and try to throw out the images, but they often return.


2.


10. alain satié: le lettrisme, la création ininterrompue. rocher: paris 2003, p. 27.


13. devaux, traité, op.cit., p. 52.


16. despite the fact that the film premiered in berlin, marc siegel (frankfurt) protested fiercely against its screening. for him venom and eternity not only has no interest whatsoever, but is a sexist work. he referred to the scene where daniel expresses his hatred for a group leader of the communist party, which had expelled him: “elle était trop moche pour qu’on la viole en bande.” (isou: traité, op.cit., p. 41) prof. siegel’s polemic remarks reveal an astonishing lack of understanding of the text’s fictionality. the protagonist is clearly characterised as being uncontrollable, sadist, brutal (ibid., p. 60), nevertheless it is a story about his lover ève, not about him (“il ne sera au fond que l’histoire d’elle”; ibid., p. 82). i don’t deny the controversial quality of many of isou’s writings and works. only a few months before the making of venom and eternity the author was sentenced to imprisonment and financial penalty for publishing isou ou la mécanique des femmes. the book was banned for pornography. cf. bernard joubert: histoires de censure. la musardine: paris 2006, pp. 91–95. obviously the lust for censorship never ends.

17. isou, traité, op. cit., p. 73.


19. in the discussion christa blümlinger (paris) raised a fundamental critique of my (and isou’s) positions by saying the images of this film were neither banal nor accidental but well chosen, carefully framed and even “beautiful”. i consider her critique to be...
aestheticist and hold on to my view, that it’s possible to make a fascinating film despite the banality or arbitrariness or pettiness or even ugliness of the “images indifférentes” (isou). how it’s possible, i try to explain in my concluding remarks, see below.

20. jean cocteau: entretiens sur le cinématographe, cited in devaux, traité, op.cit., p. 18seq.


22. ibid., cited in devaux, cinéma, op. cit., p. 106.


25. ibid., p. 153seq.

26. i discuss this in “isous abfall”, bildzweifel. textem: hamburg 2011, pp. 43–46.


29. i would like to thank andrea lerner for revising the first version of this text.

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comments off on stefan ripplinger – returning images – an introduction to isidore isou’s traité de bave et d’éternité (venom and eternity)

april 19, 2016

knausgaard on form

filed under: literature — abraxas @ 2:49 pm

before i wrote my struggle, i had a feeling that novels tend to obscure the world instead of showing it, because their form is so much alike from novel to novel. it’s the same with films, with their attention to narrative structure. most films, anyway. one thing i did while i was at work on the project was to watch the film shoah, about the holocaust. in the end, after you’ve seen these nine and a half hours, there is no form. or it’s a kind of extreme form, which brings it closer to a real experience. i’d been thinking about that and about the world as it ordinarily comes to us filtered through news, through media. the same form, the same language, makes everything the same. that was a problem i had before i started my struggle. the traditional form of the novel wasn’t eloquent. i didn’t believe in it, for the reasons i’ve said. now, i don’t really pay much attention to the world. i’m not very present. i’m detached from almost everything. i’m very occupied with myself and my own mind. i’m not in connection with the world—but in writing, i can be. that’s a way for me to open a world up.

but this is a personal problem, not a general problem.

read the full interview here:

comments off on knausgaard on form
unpacking the habits of “whiteness”, mo shabangu responds to samantha vice’s 2010 article “how do i live in this strange place?”. in so doing, he argues that vice extends rather than unsettles the parameters of white entitlement.

sometime before samantha vice published “how do i live in this strange place”, i had encountered and been moved by the narrator-protagonist of j.m. coetzee’s age of iron – mrs curran – an old white woman living in interregnum south africa. mrs curran, true to vice’s proposition, feels a deep sense of shame as a result of her being a white woman in divided cape town. as she suffers from a terminal disease, the novel is in the form of a confessional letter which mrs curran writes to her daughter in america. in this letter, she exposes the meretricious role of the apartheid state and the condition of being white in post-apartheid south africa.

it is important to stress that i proceed by reading vice as a rationalist, who would sympathise with the kantian philosophy of the individual.[1] this, it seems, is by and large the liberal predisposition that favours a suspension of judgment upon encountering the other, that to which one is different. it brings to mind the dichotomy that inevitably emerges when one considers the notion of the good and moral community. this idea has its roots in the kantian philosophy which, on the one hand, privileges equal recognition on the basis of individuality and a form of autonomy that is capable of formulating neutral principals which lead to the construction of an enlightened community. on the other hand, the idea that cultural difference has to be recognised and acknowledged since, in our interactions with others, we habitually conceive of difference between communities by making use of stereotypes, thereby constituting our own communities oppositionally or dialectically and in relation or relative to the other. it makes sense, then, that proponents of such a notion, premised on the need for recognition of cultural difference, would accuse the former kantian conception (which is founded on equal dignity) of universalising its claims, since the notion of the individual or the celebration of reason is in itself a form of cultural particularity. what must be understood is that an individual is located in community, rather than somehow transcending it and, therefore, supposedly occupying a position that is instinctual and unmediated (326). vice’s argument is that the white person should seek to redeem herself. coetzee’s, through mrs curran, is different. one can only redeem oneself by forfeiting what one is, what one has been made to be by the social context in which one is located. one has to become other than what one is. in a sense, one has to die. in other words, his argument is not as self-directed as vice’s, and this is because she adheres to the notion of an internal core of selfhood.
one of the main arguments that continues to permeate south african discourse around race is the notion that the country, having emerged from a debilitating system of institutionalised racism, has become a 'home for all', in which a dynamic ethico-politico equilibrium has been achieved, twenty years after democracy. this idea of inclusivity – first conceptualised by archbishop desmond tutu as 'the rainbow nation' – has become axiomatic in contemporary south africa, where both black and white citizens claim a position in a country in which individuals and members of groups identify their similarities and differences as a means to unity. in what follows, i examine the manner in which this rainbowism has limited explanatory power in the face of empirical evidence in the form of the lived experiences of black people who come into contact with a white world, and south african non-whites[2] in particular, who continue to experience their blackness (non-whiteness) relative to a hegemonic whiteness.

in recalling critical conceptual frameworks within which the debates concerning race are conceived, particularly the hegelian dialectic of 'master' and 'slave', i argue that black people in south africa have been made to feel alienated by the white culture that has produced them. i take, as a point of departure, samantha vice’s “how do i live in this strange place?” and explore some of the appropriate reactions white people may have to shame, guilt and regret. i conclude that white south africans need not feel guilty per se, but should rather convert any feelings of guilt towards an ethics of responsibility to the re-negotiation of the country’s image in an attempt to curtail the unfortunate experience that is the result of whiteness being rendered invisible. the suggestion, then, is that ‘whiteness’ as it stands has been, and continues to be, unmarked and transparent to white people themselves and that its ontology needs to become perceptible and recognised as a state of being that does not exist ex nihilo, but one that has been constructed in order to establish and maintain white supremacy. the two responses of ‘silence’ and ‘humility’ that vice calls for, consequently, serve only to reinforce the invisibility upon which such white privilege is founded.

the need for recognition

the thesis of the ‘need for recognition’ finds its relevance particularly where the construction of whiteness is concerned. whiteness emerged, as melissa steyn correctly intuits, as a ‘master narrative’ long before european colonial expansion, when encounters with the ‘non-white’ world were cast merely in terms of difference, and not inferiority (4). however, the self-interest of european colonialists meant that they were “fiercely competing for the world’s economic spoils [and] recognised an identity in this competition which they baptised ‘white’ ” (5). steyn suggests that the more european expansion and conquest prevailed, the more whitened europeans became, developing “a common identity by using africans as the main foil against which they defined themselves” (5). to risk stating the obvious, it is not only that race a construct, but that it is one that has been established relationally. steyn mentions how blackness and whiteness “can only be understood as a pair […] european colonists became white only in parallel with their identification of those they colonised as blacks” (5). this notion finds its roots in the hegelian dialectic that aims to describe a specific form of human relation in which domination, and the
power to define, have a central role to play. The dialectic takes the form of an analysis of the machinations of self-consciousness and delineates the manner in which the self can only become conscious of itself "by the presence of, and recognition of itself by an-other" (Villet 40). This process, however, must necessarily take place at the expense of the other, thus Steyn comments: "Whiteness brought the power to define both self and other, a power that whites could wield" (8). As Hegel pointed out, the dialectic must be understood as that moment in which the self becomes conscious of itself, "declaring itself as an 'i'" and thereby negating and destroying the other as an-other (Villet 40). Both the self and the other, then, engage in a process of self-consciousness which results in a relationship of strict opposition. The irony, of course, is that both the master and the slave are in need of each other's recognition in order to exist and, subsequently, survive. This implies that, since the master:

[achieves] his recognition through another consciousness (the slave), and in so doing becomes dependent on the thing for his own self-consciousness [...] the chains of the slave become that of the master as well. As a consequence, there exists no manner of freedom, only mutual enslavement to the thing. The slave is dependent on his thinghood and thus on his definition as the thing by the master. (41)

This irony, as Steyn mentions, can also be analysed in terms of the Lacanian split subject, or Derridian deconstruction, but the end result will be the same – the (psychological) dependence of "the oppressor on the oppressed for a sense of identity" (Steyn 16). Hence the difficulty of conceiving of whiteness in isolation:

It is the black condition, and only that, which informs the consciousness of white people. It is a terrible paradox, but those who believed that they could control and define black people divested themselves of the power to control and define themselves [...] the purer white the identity, the more dependent it is on its black other. (16)

The paradox, of course, is that 'homogenous white identity' is constantly seeking to disavow that on which it is dependent. For this reason, the construction of an 'other' more degenerate and less virtuous emerges out of the self-hatred and guilt that lies inherent in the construction of whiteness. However, as Fanon seems to suggest, while the need to recognise difference is important, it serves us best only when the white 'master' is willing to see difference as simply dissimilarity and not inferiority. To acknowledge difference, to know one's whiteness or blackness, is an affirmation of
difference that is significant in a sense that knowledge of the ontology of whiteness or blackness is invested with epistemological certainty about one’s identity, an identity which is thus constructed oppositionally. The difference between the two, however, should not lead to an idea that there is only difference, but that, between the two racial groups, the need to recognize the different enterprises means that we do not allow for a forgetfulness of the atrocities of both colonialism and racism because we simply desire to elide the specificities in our heterogeneous and conflictual history. The starting-point in recognizing our differences is accepting that it has become the centre of dominance where one group is advantaged and privileged at the expense of another.

White privilege in action

In his semi-autobiographical study of racism, the heart of whiteness: confronting race, racism and white privilege, Robert Jensen describes white privilege as a facet of white supremacy, by which he means “a society whose founding is based in an ideology of the inherent superiority of white Europeans over nonwhites, an ideology that was used to justify the crimes against indigenous people and Africans that created the [American] nation” (Jensen 4). While, at a juridical level, white supremacy has been destabilised, the concept of ‘white power’ and privilege is still very much alive in South Africa today. If to many white people this seems preposterous, it is perhaps because of the lack of absolution that many people (both black and white) desire from the mere existence of the new constitutional imperatives which have allowed for all South Africans to be viewed with as ‘human’. ‘White power’ continues to be contested, since it is generally accepted that vestiges of racial inequality do indeed exist, and that, additionally, racial tensions can be felt, and that many white people still take recourse in a sense of apartheid nostalgia. If we analyze the national statistics since, at the level of collective experience, they are generally taken to be a regular barometer of the social condition, we begin to take the first step towards making whiteness visible. This is because whiteness is tied up with a privilege that necessarily is impossible to overlook. Consider, for instance, that “one of the key ways of theorising whiteness is as a global norm that is invisible, working in the background as a standard, not of one particular being in the world, but as normalcy, as universalisizability, of just being ‘the way things are’” (Vice 324). Through such a system, whites are positioned advantageously since this way in which ‘things are’ is simply invisible to them and so is not seen as an advantage.

The latest census results released in October 2012, for instance, revealed that the average income of a white household is seven times the average income of the black household (Statistics South Africa: census results). This points to the reality of the disparities between these races, which, if continually denied, compromises the very notion of the ‘rainbow nation’. What does it mean, then, to say that whiteness needs to be made visible? Commensurate with Steve Garner, I proceed from the notion that the invisibility of whiteness stems from never having to consider itself as ‘raced’ and,
therefore, of never having to define itself explicitly in comparison to 'non-whiteness' (39). as a result, whiteness is represented as normality, the universality of humanness: whites are not simply a certain type of race, they are the human race. anything that is not white is, accordingly, deviant from the normative[3] code (35).

the argument, in fact, would be better encapsulated if we were to use the term ‘unmarked’ rather than ‘invisible’, since whites are indeed visible but, in their eyes, whiteness has become unmarked for the majority of whites under the weight of privileges bestowed upon them (35). this project of marking whiteness means that white people need to ‘see their particularity’ and to ‘make whiteness strange’ by recognising that the state of whiteness occupies a privilege bearing position, notwithstanding the different contingent privileges attached to it and the contextual differences that exist (39). hence, to acknowledge whiteness is to admit that “one is inherently tied to structures of domination and oppression, that one is irrevocably on the wrong side” (vice 326). it means, as vice would argue, that whites have to see and conceive of themselves as “a problem” that is constituted by “moral offenses” (326). the project of visibility begins, apparently, by disabusing oneself of the notion that things simply happen to individuals and that whites cannot bear a collective burden of responsibility on the grounds of those who are only implicitly involved, or are involved by association with a group, that is, by virtue of the fact that they are born white. this is why, for instance, the much-cited essay by peggy mcintosh, “the invisible knapsack of privilege”, deals with the common responses of white people to their privilege, which responses, according to her, stifle the project of particularising whiteness. on the face of it, one may term these responses “denialism” but i want to suggest that it is far more complex in the south african context, and that, this 'denial' or passive reluctance to acknowledge and particularise the white race is seen by well-meaning liberal whites as a polite and constructive means to negotiating identity.

when robin diangelo develops the neologism “white fragility”, she seeks to account for the systematic processes through which the black experience is delegitimised by an irrational sensitivity of whiteness. quite often, this sensitivity is concealed within silence as well as within the universal platitude that whites use in response to the assertion that black lives matter. such a universalism insists that ‘all lives matter’ and that, as result, the question as to whether or not black lives in particular matter, is not significant since the matter can be set aside by invoking the abstract equality of all lives, regardless of the socio-politico specificities of our moment. could it be that the silence whiteness presumes in such an instance, evades the very question; do black lives matter? is it not the case that attempting to answer that question opens whiteness up to be revealed as the moral and political scandal that it is, since of course, when such a question is asked, the asker is simultaneously invoking the hegelian other by implying another question: for whom do black lives have value? of course, to ask the question, or to pronounce the aphorism “black lives matter” is already to lodge an appeal to whiteness. so, to ask the question is simply to show that, in the spaces where the value of lives is adjudicated, there is no consensus on the matter, and that in these valuing communities, the question can be asked in the first instance and that this should not be the case. a white fragility, in the first place, cannot respond to such a question since it is ever in a defensive mode, a mode which vacillates between audible assertions of individualism (we are not all the same) or universalism (we are all the same, humanity – no colour), or simply in the form of a precarious silence (we ought to be silent, this is a black issue a la vice).
while vice’s thesis of ‘habitual white privilege’ acknowledges that the white subject is born into a world that is not directly controlled by her, she finds it easy to “disentangle guilt from any direct relation to actions one has performed” (328). she argues that it is difficult to avoid feeling guilty, since one is “a continuing product of white privilege and benefiting from it, implicated in and enacting injustice in many subtle ways” (328). vice concludes, therefore, that “feelings of guilt are appropriate” when one considers the unfortunate positionality of white south africans who do not choose to be in the privileged situation in which they find themselves. however, the problem associated with the use of the term ‘guilt’ is that it does not take into account the extent to which white people are involved in white privilege, since it suggests that the one from whom the guilt emanates is implicated and stained by the privilege as if she was directly involved in the act of oppression (328). under these circumstances, vice suggests that we instead turn our attention to ‘shame’, since it is the one feeling that is often met with a defensive approach on the part of those who are said to bear it. shame, a suitably fungible term, is therefore marked by its difference from guilt to the extent that it is “directed towards the self, rather than outwards toward a harm one brought about” (328).

“[w]hite silence will only serve to sustain white privilege, whereby those perceived as occupying towering positions over the rest will continue to do so, without taking opportunities to engage meaningfully and learn from the ‘diverse’ cultures within the ‘rainbow nation’.”

the feeling of shame, then, is the causal result of failing to meet the self-imposed standards that we accord ourselves, as opposed to the result of an unpleasant feeling that is associated with what one has done (328). shame, as vice correctly observes, is concerned, first and foremost, with whom one is. this is a radical thesis insofar as the responses to white privilege are concerned, because it acknowledges that while not all white people were directly involved in the oppression, they still benefit from a system that relied on their whiteness in order to survive and, consequently, they must undergo a deep emotional and cognitive dissonance between their inherent whiteness and the oppression of those who were used to sustain it.

this is akin to albert memmi’s notion of “the coloniser who refuses”, a proposition that presents a white person who is not complicit in the environment in which she finds herself, since it is understood in light of the ‘white master’ who comes to dwell among the ‘black natives’ but is “astonished by the number of beggars, the children wandering about half-naked” (63) and the scandal that is racial domination. on sight of this, the ‘white master’ then refuses to indulge in the systems of oppression, naive to the fact that his complicity in the oppression means that “what he is actually renouncing is a part of himself” (63) since the individual is located within the community and does not occupy a type of acosmic position, transcending her
surroundings and freed from the burden of skin colour. For Memmi, the ‘white master’ who refuses the conditions under which blacks are subjugated is in fact complicit insofar as her skin enables her to “participate in and benefit from those privileges” in which the master revels:

does he receive less favourable treatment than his fellow citizens? doesn’t he enjoy the same facilities for travel? how could he help figuring, unconsciously, that he can afford a car, a refrigerator, perhaps a house? how can he go about freeing himself of this halo of prestige which crowns him and at which he would like to take offense? should he happen to rationalise this contradiction so as to come to terms with this discomfort… (64)

the white master is clearly cast into an inherited world and must therefore choose to accept or refuse the machinations of such a world. In feeling shameful, the white master rejects the oppressive – and indeed constructed – superiority of whiteness. It would seem, then, that the feeling of shame is correctly identified, by both Memmi and Vice, as an appropriate response to the question of white privilege, since it shows some inclination towards a responsibility not for the past systemic oppression, but for being the by-product of a system which aimed only to benefit white people and distance them from the sufferings of others. It is common to hear whites in South African declare that they do not feel ashamed of the past, because they are not to blame. The presumption of innocence and worthiness are part and parcel of the privilege that is bestowed on white people – the knowledge that they were not involved directly or even collectively in creating a system of oppression and marginalisation absolves them from responsibility. However, to say this is to miss an opportunity to take on a responsibility not for the past, but rather, a responsibility to the future. This is primarily because white people have inherited a legacy and, as such, cannot merely deflect the shame that comes with the horrific past as if to suggest that their innocence means that, even incidentally, they played absolutely no role at all in maintaining subjugation. For this reason, Vice argues that the “sense of historical innocence is often self-serving and not merely ignorant” and must therefore result in further shame (331). I would argue, though, that once white people begin to see the evidence of the past as ever more prevalent, in other words once the pathology of whiteness begins to be marked and made visible, the indifference to the historical implications will at that point be enough to generate another kind of shame, resulting in an instance in which shame stems from their shamelessness! Ultimately, white people may have to confront feelings of shame once whiteness is made visible, and will therefore have no recourse in the silence that Vice suggests is necessary in order to take seriously the ethical primacy of the individual moral self. Thus, white silence will only serve to sustain white privilege, whereby those perceived as occupying towering positions over the rest will continue to do so, without taking opportunities to engage meaningfully and learn from the ‘diverse’ cultures within the ‘rainbow nation’. To retreat, therefore, is not to take a feeling of shame and use it to direct an ethical impetus: it appears to me that silence is to be so guilt-ridden that one is reluctant to speak out, fearing that a disagreement with non-whites may be conceived as a demonstration of white supremacy. For Vice, the prescription is to

live as quietly as possible, refraining from airing one’s views on the political situation in the public realm, realising that it is not one’s place to offer diagnoses and analyses, that blacks must be left to remake the country in their own way [because] whites have too long had influence and a public voice; now they should in humility, step back from expressing their thoughts or managing others. (335)

while Vice notes the limitations of silence on a personal and professional level, citing the platonic relationship between self-knowledge and dialogue with those different from you – the idea that one finds oneself only through earnest interaction and engagement with other people divergent from oneself – her ‘silence’ prescription has limitations beyond those which she so readily acknowledges. Vice’s resolution that “the relevant kind of silence is therefore a political silence” (335) has inadequate explanatory power in a country that vowed never to silence the voices, political or professional, of any one group. Hence, the suggestion that whites should exercise
silence in the political realm, rather than a professional silence or the stifling of all conversation with others in which race or privilege, for instance, is the topic” falls nothing short of a pipe-dream. how, in a country in which everything is so highly and overtly politicised, can it be suggested that whites retreat and withdraw from the political realm? at once, the notion of politics which vice invokes seem reductive at best and derisive at worst since the professional realm is political as vincent so carefully demonstrates in her analyses of the institutional at rhodes university. the personal, what is termed the ‘private sphere’ is also political, mediated primarily by that in which the individual is located.

one of the first public respondents to vice’s prescription was political commentator and associate at the wits centre for ethics, eusebuis mckaiser, who argued that it is deeply problematic for a country to argue that the idea of silence, political or otherwise, would be the morally correct course of action for white people, even if shame and regret are appropriate feelings for those who have benefited unjustly. he mentions, therefore, that the project of making whiteness visible does not necessarily mean that blackness replaces it. thus mckaiser:

it is not black south africans’ turn to be political. it is all south africans’ duty to engage each other as equals both within the public and private spheres. whites need to engage their whiteness publicily […] i do not want to be shielded from whiteness i want to be given the space to rehearse my own full personhood as a black south african by engaging […] publicly; it is the only way healthy relationships between blacks and whites can develop. (para. 18)

it would seem that the political is personal and the personal is political; whiteness is not merely the pigmentation of the skin, but also involves the systems of power and privilege that are sustained in the professional realm. remaining silent simply means that these systems are reinforced in ways that would otherwise not be possible had there been earnest ongoing dialogue between whites and non-whites. the problems with whiteness in the political realm need to be approached in the same way that the problems with whiteness are approached in the personal and professional realm, specifically, by making whiteness visible and, by virtue of this visibility and the resultant shame with which it is coupled, changing the ways in which white people interact with the structures that exist from a white supremacist discourse of the past, to a self-reflexive discourse of humility.

the south african media is plagued with examples of whiteness, be it print media, radio or television. whether it is the unproductive and racist comments that can be found daily in every response to an online news article, or the disgruntled white people who mobilise whiteness as a signifier of “clean governance, reliability, and competence” (steyn 128) on talk radio, incessant illustrations of what steyn calls “white talk” need to be replaced with talks that seek to negotiate an identity of south africa that is not insensitive to the damage caused by the audibility of white talk. this is something which can only occur once whiteness is made visible, a visibility that cannot be obtained through silence. to repress oneself into a state of self-flagellation seems to me an exercise that reaffirms the ontology of white domination in that the characteristics of “white talk” are not elided, but merely suppressed even though they exist in the minds of white people. bearing in mind the overarching nature of white supremacy, a forced white silence seems tantamount to arguing that racism is fine so long as it is lodged in the hearts and minds of those from whom it emanates. genuine non-racist encounters with people of different backgrounds may never occur, since the sentiments held by white people would be silently repressed under a pretentious humility! mckaiser, then, rightly recommends to vice that the way to confront whiteness is not to adopt a strategy of silence, but to engage black people while being mindful of not presenting whiteness as a normative standard to which they should aspire (para.18).

steyn contends that ideas around european superiority “are strong enough to ensure a certain amount of ‘buy-in’ from some african people” (127) who would then be made to beg for white people to break their silence by participating in the political realm. writing against this inevitable legitimation by reverse, the black mail and
reading vice, i was caught between two reactions. the first and most flagrant and visceral was: i don’t flipping care. i wanted to meet this white threat of silence with a black silence of my own. the second reaction was more measured, but i hated it more, because it requires that i say: “please speak, baas!” (para. 17)

ngcoya’s aversion to his second reaction to the ‘threat’ of silence must be read as a disavowal of the meretricious role that silence plays, disguising itself as the manifestation of an ethical impulse, but in reality, inconspicuously requiring the black subject to beg for validation from the white master by asking her to break her silence, if only for the black subject’s need for recognition. in conjunction with such a meretricious role, there are a number of white supremacists who are hell-bent on maintaining the status quo, and therefore leaving whiteness the invisible entity that it is. such individuals are outspoken in public forums on a daily basis, and persistently enlist to their supremacist agenda like-minded white people who have no qualms about living in a white supremacist society. let us take, for instance, the likes of andre visagie, the former secretary general of the afrikaner weerstandsbeweging (awb), who became infamous for violently storming off a live television interview with a black woman political analyst who challenged him about the ideology of white supremacy shortly after the murder of his leader eugene terre'blanche. here, visagie, too, was exercising a certain kind of silence when he refused to engage the black woman, whose argument was that black south africans continue to be subjected to macro-structural antagonism: “whites versus us [blacks]” (maroleng 2010, interview). for the most part, the limitations of this silence imply that well-meaning white people, like vice herself, would not be able to influence morally depraved whites, and would thus pave the way for racists such as visagie and his sympathisers to continue to dominate the discourse by obstinately claiming a position of victimhood and subsiding into silence when that position is challenged.

“The problems with whiteness in the political realm need to be approached in the same way that the problems with whiteness are approached in the personal and professional realm, specifically, by making whiteness visible”.

in response to the commotion that vice’s paper created, the f.w. de klerk foundation released a press statement asking her to withdraw her “witless” comments on whiteness and refrain from aiding the ‘reverse apartheid’ to which white people are subjected in a democratic south africa:

we must challenge ms vice’s views because they are dangerous. they will be eagerly grasped by a new generation of black racists who will use them to justify their increasingly aggressive campaign of anti-white stigmatisation and exclusion. (para.12)

what we have is a discursive strategy that attempts to reconfigure whiteness as disadvantageous and not beneficial. whites such as f.w. de klerk would argue, as he is known to have argued on international platforms, that whiteness in south africa has become a liability. the suggestion conveyed by the press release on vice’s paper was, in the first instance, a flagging of the possibility that whites were increasingly becoming an unprotected minority in the country. this idea stems from the view that whites consider the slate as having been wiped cleaned by the new dispensation and political reforms that have come into place in a post-apartheid context – affirmative action (aa) and black economic empowerment (bee) to name a couple. the proposition, it seems, is that even talking about race is itself racist, since we ought to see people for their individuality rather than as members of a collective group.

i return to the conceptual framework which earlier adumbrated hegelian the need for mutual recognition. since vice’s silence would ensure that, yet again, the political discourse swings into a fixation with whiteness: it perpetuates and endorses its invisibility and continues to deny black people an opportunity to negotiate their own identity. it therefore lends itself quite neatly to the master narrative that suggests that the relationship between the master and the bondsman is dialectically established.
the silence, then, functions merely as a self-indulgent, narcissistic tool that serves to keep white people in a state of heedlessness about the unearned privileges that they simply take as entitlement, privileges which are in fact built on the dependence on blacks. it is safe to conclude, then, that the critical theorising of white privilege has become a cornerstone of whiteness studies in South Africa. So, while white privilege manifests itself in many different contextual ways, it is accrued to white people by virtue of their being born into a white supremacist society. Since hegemony is relationally established, there is not only an epistemological frame within which to understand the other, but also a power structure that locks both the master and the slave so that they can only exist at one another’s behest. The importance of this dialectic is pivotal to our conception of race in the first place, not least the ideas around superiority and servitude. Only once we recognise the irony of this relationship, that the chains of the slave are those of the master as well, will we be able to understand the arbitrary nature of race, while at the same time realising the need to make the racial distinctions known. White privilege operates in a deceitful way because part of the privilege is the freedom from the burden of knowing one’s whiteness, or thinking of oneself in terms of colour. The danger, then, is the normative nature whiteness assumes, making it invisible and therefore difficult for its group members to recognise.

Upon recognition of this whiteness, however, action rather than inaction is indispensable, and vice’s prescription of silence seems to me, although unintentionally so, insidious. While the type of silence recommended is intended to de-centre and disempower white privilege, the inadvertent result is that it ultimately re-centres and re-inscribes the very whiteness it wishes to silence. The notion of silence is not silent; it is as loud and boisterous as any overt attempt at maintaining white supremacy.

endnotes

1. See Michel Monahan’s response to her argument.

2. Throughout this essay, I use the term non-white deliberately to emphasise a point. I want to put whiteness at the centre, but not in the sense of valorising or claiming it as the norm. Contrarily, by using ‘non-white’, the concept of ‘white power’ is highlighted and shown only to be vested in one category – whiteness. One may argue, indeed following Steve Biko’s decentring of the term, that the focus is then placed on white people. But in an essay about making whiteness visible and ‘marketing’ it, the term can be useful only as a rhetorical strategy since I wish to accentuate the political nature of the struggle and indeed point towards the dependency of whiteness on ‘non-whiteness’.

3. In the context of ordinary South African discourse, this brings to mind a poignant point raised by Louise Vincent in her paper “the limitations of interracial contact”, in which she argues that Rhodes University, attempting to be all-inclusive and liberal, has provided a variety of dietary options in its residence menus. However, “the options are labelled ‘african’ and ‘normal’” (1433). She concludes, there can be “no more explicit exemplification of Richard Dyer’s point (1997) that to be white is to occupy the position of privileged normalcy” (1433).
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comments off on mohammad shabangu – precarious silence: decentering the power of whiteness in south africa

march 11, 2016

jesus sepulveda – the garden of peculiarities – 21

filed under: drugs,jesus sepulveda — abraxas @ 2:03 pm

21

drugs are the only taxonomy possible. there are two kinds of drugs: chemical and natural. the former depend on mass industrial production. the latter are part of nature. they are cultivated, harvested or found in open country (plains, mountains
or desert. through the use of natural drugs humans are able to revisit a time of ancestral wisdom when natural and holistic medicine was practised use of chemical drugs, on the other hand, grew with the industrial revolution and with the ascent of scientific medical doctors to power. this was beginning of the tyranny of the men in white lab coats chemicals drugs control patience, rhythm and passion. their objective is to make sure that the dysfunctional subject readjusts itself to the system in order to continue producing submissively. if perchance the white-toga’d priests fail in this attempt and lose control of the patient, their treatment of last resort is to throw the patient into those ideological centers of social reclusion: mental hospitals, hospices, shelters, old folks’ homes, etc. these centers are the refuse dumps of terminal illness.

legal chemical drugs—administered by the state through its health ministries—have as their twin illegal chemical drugs. besides being a lucrative business, these drugs allow the state to justify repression in zones considered by the state to be out of control: urban ghettos, marginal neighbor hoods or the guerrilla’s jungle. in other cases, illegal hard drugs are used as pretexts when “justice” and its praetorian guard pursue individuals who are subverting the dominant order.

it is exactly the illegality of these drugs that generates large profits and rationalizes authoritarianism.

natural drugs, on the other hand, liberate because they allow one to see in the darkness of alienation. they help the body. they are biodegradable and are sources of energy. the hemp plant, for example, is a source of rebellion against the very industries that exercise ideological and energy control. the pharmacological industry imposes one vision of reality. then, the petroleum, mining and forestry industries—the triumvirate of the society of production and mass consumption—carry out the material concretization of this vision of reality. natural drugs, on the other hand, are curative. while any alteration in consciousness in highly alienated societies provides an escape hatch that allows individuals to appreciate nature, in primitive societies—neither alienated nor alienating—natural drugs are a ratification of the fact that reality is not linear, nor does it manifest itself on only one plane.

in effect, through natural drugs primitive communities have experienced the multiple character of reality. as the earth is not flat, neither is reality singular. rather it is populated by as many folds and multiplicities as nature has peculiarities. the surrealists pointed out that the dream world is also part of reality, just as much as the waking world. the possibility that there are other worlds, without three-dimensional linear logic, has been proven through the use of psychedelics. the experts and doctors—those who work for the society of production and mass consumption—call any attempt to alter the perception of reality through natural drugs escapism. when the escape toward the appreciation of nature becomes an energetic force, the experts and doctors leave their work in the hands of the army or police. this is the so-called war on drugs.

natural drugs are highly subversive. every leaf or blade that liberates and alleviates already exists in the planetary garden. thus, there is no reason to manufacture them. it is a fact that ancestral wisdom is related to natural medicine. many women were accused of being witches—by the doctors and experts of their times—and burned alive at the stakes of the catholic, protestant and patriarchal inquisition. that’s civilization.

eating, smoking, boiling and swallowing natural drugs are acts of shared solidarity. the occurrence of these acts depends on the health of people. when the rhythm of life is controlled by the automated tic-tac of the standardizing machine, the general level of health is diminished. alienation and ideology are a sickness. natural drugs weed the garden and work the soil. every time natural drugs—organic like we are—are ingested, we recuperate from the biological and social diseases produced by alienation and ideology. humanity needs to recover from the trauma of civilization. for chellis glendinning, civilization is a state from which one needs to get better. the trauma of the first day of classes, the nervousness provoked by the threat of expulsion from school, stomach pains, irrational punishments, or the impact of institutional repression against the libertarian manifestation of the being that wants
to flee from alienation and ideology, are all consequences of a traumatic experience that we try to ignore day in and clay out. civilization is the foundation of the forced training that privileges the symbolic over the imaginary in order to break the state of natural “savagery” that we all inhabit.

natural drugs unfold the petals of the imagination. this might be the effect we produce ourselves every time we interact organically with the environment and we expand our universe toward that which we haven’t yet dreamed, but can imagine. our presence has a hallucinogenic effect. we are, in effect, a powerful drug that can illuminate everything we imagine. and once we are liberated, there is no chemical drug, nor screen, nor army that can stop the enticing and opiating effect of our own presence. in order to construct a new world it is necessary to imagine it. and to imagine it, it is necessary to liberate oneself. this liberation entails the creation of a new humanity. this is the importance of natural drugs.

abstract
this paper discusses four representations of the massacre of striking mineworkers that took place on 16 august 2012 at the marikana platinum mine in south africa: aryan kaganof’s unconventional documentary night is coming: a threnody for the victims of marikana (2014); rehad desai’s emmy-award-winning documentary miners shot down (2014); a performance of the massacre by the women of marikana as recorded in aliki saragas’s documentary mama marikana (2015); and ayanda mabulu’s painting “yakhal‘inkomo” (2013). drawing on walter benjamin’s comments on strikes, police violence and democracy in “critique of violence”, the essay investigates what cultural texts about the marikana massacre can tell us about post-“rainbow nation” south africa after two decades of democracy. bearing in mind the intertextual allusions that operate across semiotic mediums in texts such as night is coming and “yakhal‘inkomo”, and historical links between features of landscape and events, it asks what is suggested and/or occluded in different representations of marikana. the essay concludes by focusing on the link between structural violence and the massacre, and on the importance of excavating a history of rural resistance in understanding key aspects of the marikana strikes.

keywords: marikana massacre, post-apartheid, miners shot down, night is coming, mama marikana, “yakhal‘inkomo”.
introduction

More than two decades after the formal end of apartheid, South Africa does not seem to have come of age as the “rainbow-nation” that seemed so attainable in the Mandela years. Rather, as student movements such as “Rhodes Must Fall” have pointed out, we have a society suffering from continuing structural racism, economic exploitation, growing inequality, limited access to quality education, large-scale black landlessness, poverty and unemployment, and state violence against those who express their dissent through protest action. The major event in which all of these problems congealed, and that exploded the myth of post-apartheid harmony, was the killing by police of striking mineworkers at the Marikana Platinum Mine on 16 August 2012. In this essay, I examine four representations of the Marikana massacre: Aryan Kaganof’s Night is Coming: A Threnody for the Victims of Marikana (2014), an unconventional cinematic response to the massacre that raises questions of seeing and not seeing in academic discourse; Rehad Desai’s Miners Shot Down (2014), a highly acclaimed documentary that meticulously reconstructs events immediately leading up to the massacre; a performance of the massacre by the women of the mine as recorded in Aliki Saragas’s Mama Marikana (2015); and Ayanda Mabulu’s “Yakhal’Inkomo”, a controversial painting about the massacre. Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s comments on strikes, police violence and democracy in “Critique of Violence”, the essay investigates what cultural texts about the Marikana massacre can tell us about South Africa after two decades of democracy. Bearing in mind the intertextual allusions that operate across semiotic mediums in texts such as Night is Coming and “Yakhal’Inkomo”, and historical links between places features of landscape and events, it asks what is suggested and/or occluded in different representations of Marikana. The essay concludes by focusing on the link between structural violence and the massacre, and on the importance of excavating a history of rural resistance in understanding key aspects of the Marikana strikes.
in his essay “critique of violence” ("zur kritik der gewalt", 1921), walter benjamin claims that a strike by organized labour is threatening to the law precisely because strikes can be legitimate within an apparently stable legal system but they are simultaneously able to change the law, to become a law-making force. as jacques derrida has pointed out, although it is often translated as “violence”, the german word “gewalt” used by benjamin in his essay also means “legitimate power, authority, public force” (234). one of the most remarkable aspects of benjamin’s essay is that he acknowledges the law-making and law-preserving “gewalt” that underlies the apparently “normal” status quo of modern democracy. for the purposes of my essay, it is also significant that he writes about strikes by organized labour as a form of “gewalt”, noting that although the state may be obliged to concede its legitimacy, a strike has the power to remake the law, and in a time of crisis the state “meets the strikers, as perpetrators of [potential law-making] violence, with violence”. benjamin was writing, as he himself acknowledges, about the european state in the early twentieth century. as i argue in this essay, his thoughts on strikes, the law and police violence in democracies are relevant to what happened at marikana on 16 august 2012, as explored through cultural texts about this event. indeed, cyril ramaphosa’s doublespeak about marikana, as recorded in miners shot down, appears to come straight from benjamin’s essay. when asked about the massacre, ramaphosa states, with a smile that is meant to be reassuring: “we are not the first country to have a wave of strikes... and some of these strikes have even toppled governments.”

an overview of world history reveals that strikes by mineworkers have rarely been well received by the modern democratic nation state. contemporary south africa has the most progressive constitution in the world, and that constitution recognises the right of workers to strike. there is no such thing as an “illegal strike”, even though striking workers may be “unprotected” under labour law if strike action does not comply with the labour relations act of 1995. the strikes at marikana in 2012 were legal wildcat strikes that were “unprotected” in terms of labour law. they took place without the blessing of the national union of mineworkers (num), the recognised union that was formed in 1982 and built largely through the efforts of ramaphosa, who became its first general secretary. the fact that mine workers at marikana had a legal right to strike, however, did not stop police from hemming them in with razor wire and gunning them down.
at the time of the massacre in which 34 miners were killed and at least 78 wounded, ramaphosa, currently a strong candidate to succeed jacob zuma as state president, had moved from trade union activism to the corporate world, and was not only a high-ranking member of the anc, but also a board member of lonmin, the british company that operated mines at marikana. as the strike escalated, he was called on by lonmin to deal with the situation. instead of encouraging negotiations, he turned to the police minister and the minister of mineral resources, and his attitude is evident in an email to the acting head of lonmin, which refers to the striking miners as “dastardedly criminal”. despite the fact that the police were clearly acting on orders from above, and that the government and the police were under pressure from a multi-national corporation to crush the strike, the official investigation of the massacre, the farlam commission, did not hold lonmin, its officials, or any government ministers directly accountable for events at marikana. in a truly kafkaesque turn of events, the national prosecuting authority used an apartheid-era law of “common purpose”, which had been used against black anti-apartheid activists, to charge two hundred and seventy of the surviving miners with the murder of their compatriots who had been killed by police. twenty-one miners still face these murder charges.
in looking at violence “awry” through discussion of cultural texts about marikana rather than confronting the massacre directly, i take a leaf out of slavoj zizek’s 2008 book, violence. as zizek claims, “there is something inherently mystifying in direct confrontation with [violence]”. at the same time i am aware that cultural texts risk reification, taking the place of the violence they represent, as acknowledged in kaganof’s night is coming through quotations from jesus sepulveda’s the garden of peculiarities. i would also like to make it clear that by focusing on representations of the events of 16 august 2012, i do not intend to overlook the fact that ten people were killed in the lead-up to the massacre, or the numerous deaths of black workers that are part of the “normal” operations of the south african mining industry. rather, i seek to explore, via cultural texts, the deep structural violence that underlay this outburst of spectacular violence.
the cultural texts examined here offer perspectives that are at odds with those of the state, and/ with certain strands of white academic discourse, and may therefore be said to be disruptive of powerful or dominant ways of seeing. In fact, three out of four of the texts under discussion have been suppressed in ways that bring to mind censorship. Night is coming was considered so offensive to the people who commissioned the film that they tried to suppress it. The documentary was meant to record a conference on landscape, “hearing landscape critically: music, place and the spaces of sound”, held at stellenbosch university in 2013, the centenary of the natives land act. Instead of delivering a product that massaged academic egos, however, kaganof used his creative license to comment through the film on the extreme disconnect between white middle-class academic jargon and the conditions in which most south africans are forced to live and die. Montaging images of the marikana massacre (at times framed like landscape paintings), with irrelevant, fatuous and flatulent academic discourse, kaganof confronts us with images of white blindness. Other clips that form part of the montage include footage of a filthy overflowing public toilet in a township outside stellenbosch, and of people mining the nearby rubbish dump for scraps to sell. Kaganof’s point is clear: at a conference on land and landscape shortly after the marikana massacre, not one of these learned academics is talking about marikana, black landlessness, or the racialised dispossession and poverty that exist all around them. Perhaps predictably, the film was not well received by the hearing landscape critically academic panel, which decided that it should not be shown at harvard university in 2014 as originally planned.
South Africa's national broadcaster, the SABC, has so far refused to screen Desai's 
miners shot down on national television, though the film was screened in January 
2016 on ETV, an independent, free-to-air television channel. After the film won an 
international Emmy award in New York for best documentary in 2015, the ANC was 
forced into the position of having to make an official statement about the merits of 
the film. On behalf of the party, Zizi Kodwa wrote: “the ANC extends its compliments
to all cast members of the documentary for their hard work and determination which resulted to this achievement.” The statement proved particularly unpopular on Twitter, with black intellectuals asking whether the party was referring to the “deceased miners” as “cast members”. User @tomolefe said: “the ‘cast’ is either dead or waiting on the state you control to compensate them for their suffering.” Another user, @thando_mgqo, tweeted: “and now the ANC congratulates ‘all cast members of the documentary’, and that’s supposed to be who? the deceased?” @shottazee added sardonically: “unless by ‘cast members’ the ANC is referring to the police who were shooting down miners. It makes sense to congratulate them.” The ANC issued a formal apology for the error, changing “cast members” to “crew members”, but its official statement is deeply contradictory as it praises a film that the party is not allowing to be shown on the national television station.

Similarly, in 2013 Ayanda Mabulu’s “Yakhal’inkomo”, which depicts the state as complicit in the Marikana massacre, was temporarily “banned” from the Johannesburg Art Fair. Speaking on ENC’s news channel after his painting had been singled out for removal from the fair, Mabulu claimed that powerful people in government wanted to stop the artwork from being exhibited, suggesting that the organisers had capitulated to this pressure. “Yakhal’inkomo” was only reinstated after photographer David Goldblatt threatened to boycott the art fair if the painting was not shown.

It has been suggested that some texts on Marikana fit within the “true crime” genre, but this does not take proper account of the type of “gewalt” that is being explored in texts about Marikana. In “Critique of Violence” Walter Benjamin points to the difference between the violence used by a criminal when breaking the law, and the force used by workers in solidarity during a strike. As he points out, “the figure of the ‘great’ criminal, however repellent his ends may have been”, often arouses “the secret admiration of the public” or the “sympathy of the mass against law.” By contrast, Benjamin argues, “organized labor is, apart from the state, probably today the only legal subject entitled to exercise violence” (Benjamin, 281-2).

Following Benjamin’s analysis, we can conclude that the appeal of “true crime” narratives, from Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood to the hit podcast “Serial”, lies in the public’s fascination with violence perpetrated by certain individuals or criminal groups that disrupts the state’s monopoly on violence. Because they depict this transgression, there is a certain “guilty pleasure” in reading or hearing such narratives. Watching a film such as Miners Shot Down, however, offers no such “guilty pleasure” whatsoever. Instead, the documentary is deeply harrowing to watch, uncovering as it does the ultimate triumph of the state’s monopoly on violence. Kaganof’s Night is Coming goes so far as to grimly satirize the idea of regarding the type of violence that it portrays as entertainment. Almost halfway through the film a woman’s voice announces: “ladies and gentlemen, please take a moment to locate your cellphone and ensure that it is switched off. Thank you and enjoy the show”. The film then cuts to the hill at Marikana, with the miners
assembled prior to the massacre. Ayanda Mabulu's painting "yakhal'inkomo" also uses satire to critique a prurient, commodifying gaze: at the lower right of the composition a white man is taking action shots of the scene like a predatory war photographer. Clearly, these cultural texts do not deal with the subject matter of a criminal who may be possessed of a pathological violence, and whose alleged actions fly in the face of the law and transgress the state's monopoly on violence. Instead, they explore to varying degrees the violence of the state in collaboration with a multi-national corporation, and the abject failure of both entities to deal humanely with a workers strike, the rights of which are enshrined in the South African constitution.

White blindness filmed in a police state: night is coming

Kaganof's Night is Coming: A Thenody for the Victims of Marikana begins with a self-referential white typescript description on a black screen: "Prologomena to any future landscape hearing that will be able to present itself as a critical science". The screen fades to utter black and we hear an audio recording of the Marikana massacre: a volley of exploding gunshots interspersed with police shouts of "cease fire", and "I'll shoot you." The opening credits of the film then roll and its biting satirical edge becomes evident: "In association with/ Badly trained cops on steroids" is followed by the title of the film. The words "Filmed in a", which overlay a visual image of the word "police" on the side of a police van, become "Filmed in a police state" after someone graffiti the word "state" onto the police van, under "police", to the sound of a hip-hop track. The film then cuts to an interview with black consciousness artist Lefifi Tladi, elaborating on the aims of black consciousness and the predicament of post-apartheid South Africa: "[Black consciousness] didn't filter down, because we got independence... which simply means that the imperialists give you the machinery that they were oppressing you with so you oppress yourself." After this the viewer is confronted with slow motion footage of the Marikana massacre (which Kaganof claims was downloaded from YouTube and used without permission), overlaid with the score of Handel's "Sarabande". The footage is horrific to watch, even through this mediation, or perhaps it is even more horrific because of the slow motion and accompanying sound track. It ends with police armed with R5 assault rifles standing over the bodies of slain miners, collecting their "weapons" - a few wooden sticks and knobkerries. Throughout the film Kaganof seems to be exploring the reification of violence and questions about post-apartheid democracy that he references in a poetry performance entitled "When Kaganof Met Death" at the 2015 Poetry Africa Festival:

There is no Marikana, only media images.... over the shoulder of the police I focus my lens, and as he pulls his trigger I get my shot. Snap. Snuff shots. That's what the news has become, live death TV. A visual shittery shooting the citizenry through the eyes of the state. You may not simply sit and consume anymore. Never mind the scattered bodies, how do we survive Marikana? How do the survivors survive? What
democracy? whose? who does this nervous condition belong to? are you still scared of the police? (kaganof 2015)

after the opening credits, night is coming cuts to what would in a conventional documentary be a “talking head”, that of daniel grimley, director of research in the faculty of music at the university of oxford, and principal investigator of the hearing landscape critically research network. professor grimley’s “talking head”, however, is filmed from a low angle, in extreme close up such that the top of his head and his chin are cropped off. this is clearly a film in which the conventions of documentary film-making are being parodied and interrogated.

the rest of the film comprises footage (sometimes literally “footage”, i.e. shots of the feet of academic presenters) of the conference, interspersed with cinematic documentary of nearby squatter camps and a rubbish dump, and visual and aural references to the marikana massacre. in a satire of what is left out of the conference, kaganof presents us with the marikana massacre as soundtrack. the film shows at repeated intervals what appears to be a cd cover for an album entitled “south african music/ marikana symphony…. four south african folk-tunes”, attributed to the “national symphony orchestra of the sabc.” the audio of the massacre is repeated again and again, sometimes as if the gunshot sounds come from a black man hammering as he labours to fix a road, sometimes as if they are emitted by the applause of academics in appreciation of a live piece of music. in its entirety the film could be regarded as a highly dissonant audio-visual fugue, comprising recurring motifs and leitmotifs that are successively developed and interwoven.
intertextual allusions abound: the title alludes to the 1960 musical composition, threnody for the victims of hiroshima, by krzysztof penderecki; night is coming confronts us with typescript quotes from jose saramago's 1998 novel blindness; and entire paragraphs from jesus sepulveda’s anti-capitalist, anarchist, ecological speculations on ideology and images are read in setswana by lefifi tladi, with english subtitles and no attribution, and with sepulveda’s speculations at times altered or rescripted by kaganof to suit the contemporary south african context. one of the main recurring motifs is the figure of a blind white woman, played by carina venter, a blind postdoctoral fellow at oxford university who attended the hearing landscape critically conference. close-up shots of her unseeing eyes and of her sitting in a chair are accompanied by billie whitelaw’s voice reading lines from samuel beckett’s “rockaby”. most significantly, night is coming constantly references seeing and not seeing. footage from the conference showing willem boshoff, a self-professed white male afrikaner “druid”, claiming that “you have to be wide awake to check things out… a druid looks in the dust… in places where nobody else looks”, is montaged with shots of the rubbish dump outside stellenbosch where people are literally looking in the “dust”, or “skarrelling” (scavenging) for discarded waste to sell or use. at a conference on landscape that has glaringly omitted to talk about black landlessness or marikana, one of the conference presenters, jessica dubow, is recorded as quoting kafka: “i tell stories as a way of closing my eyes”.
in this context the allusion to saramago’s blindness, appearing on the screen in the form of a typescript quote from the novel – “images see with the eyes of those who see them” – becomes resonant. the “white blindness” that dissolves characters’ vision into a milky luminous whiteness in saramago’s novel becomes in kaganof’s film the blindness of white people. though the blind woman played by carina venter in night is coming does not correct the elision of marikana at the hearing landscape critically conference, her statements about her blindness come across as some kind of cryptically encoded moral or philosophical message. somehow wonder whether this character, like the one woman who could see among the blind in saramago’s novel, is the one woman who can see among the blind academicians.

in an informal interview, kaganof has explained that one of the major influences on night is coming was reading massimiliano tomba’s article “another kind of gewalt: beyond law/ re-reading walter benjamin”. tomba’s analysis hinges on the re-interpretation of a key sentence in benjamin’s “critique”:

and though the police, may, in particulars, appear the same everywhere, it cannot finally be denied that in absolute monarchy, where they represent the power of a ruler in which the legislative and executive supremacy are united, their spirit is less
as tomba’s essay reveals, there are at least two ways of reading this apparently opaque sentence (the opacity of which inheres in the german original). firstly, benjamin may be suggesting that “the spirit of the police” is more “devastating” in democracies than under absolute monarchy because one does not expect such violence in a democracy. this seems to be derrida’s reading in his essay “force of law”, which looks forward to a democracy “to come” (derrida 281) that will be “just” and not “degenerative”. yet a more disturbing interpretation of benjamin’s sentence is also possible. it can be read as stating that the violence of police serving an absolute monarch is less “degenerative” because it must always reflect the combined legislative and executive powers of the monarchy, while in a democracy, the police are acting in a context where the “the sole political subject is the people” and “individuals become… politically insignificant” (tomba 130). the police are answerable to “the people” and thus to no one in particular. moreover, at any point the police can appropriate law-making and law-upholding forms of gewalt, collapsing the distinction between them:

the nature of the modern state emerges clearly in the praxis of the police. here, the distinction between a power/violence that imposes law [rechtsetzende gewalt] and one that defends it [rechtserhaltende gewalt] is suppressed: the police imposes law in the act itself in which it preserves it, intervening in precisely those cases ‘where no clear legal situation exists’....

one must here respond that police violence does not corrupt the democratic principle, as derrida thinks, but, rather, expresses its most intimate essence. (tomba 130-1)
Tomba’s interpretation of Benjamin, suggesting that modern democracy is always potentially a police state, yields some radical insights and questions for a relatively new democratic postcolony. These become all the more urgent when one considers that ranks and titles in the South African police force were remilitarized during Zuma’s presidency, shortly before the Marikana massacre, after the police were demilitarized following the formal end of apartheid. When the police become militarized, one essentially has a force that is officially at war with citizens of the state, on behalf of “the people.” The Marikana massacre also reveals continuities between police operations under apartheid and in post-apartheid democracy: The special police unit (the tactical response team armed with R5 rifles) that perpetrated the massacre has murky origins in apartheid-era cross-border military campaigns against “terrorists” in Angola and Namibia.

What is overlooked in an analysis of the police state here, however, is the power of multinational corporations. For events such as the Marikana massacre reveal that the state has not, as tomba claims, “[totally razed] every extra-statist power” (130). As foreseen by Lenin as early as 1916-7 in “Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism”, the tentacles of multinational corporation traverse national boundaries, often intertwining with those of the state, which has a vested interest in supporting corporate monopolies.
the men and women of marikana: miners shot down and mama marikana

the impact of unholy alliances between multi-national corporations and the state in the twenty first century is explored in rehad desai’s miners shot down. indeed, what gives this film its international appeal is the way the marikana massacre is portrayed as the result of an all-too-familiar collusion between state and corporate power. as opposed to night is coming, which has a non-linear, fugue-like structure, and which disrupts verisimilitude (most notably in a scene where kaganof’s voice can be heard directing a close up shot of carina venter’s face and eyes), miners shot down represents marikana as a realist narrative, in the tradition of more conventional documentaries. beginning with footage of the massacre, desai’s film tells the story of events immediately leading up to the massacre through flashback, voice-over narration and interviews, finally returning to an account of what happened on 16 august 2012. as a narrative, the striking miners who gather on the “mountain” emerge as protagonists, and if there is a main antagonist in the film, it is cyril ramaphosa, who is represented as embodying collusion between the state and corporate power. aliki saragas’s documentary mama marikana, which began as an ma project at the university of cape town, aims to tell a story elided from desai’s narrative, that of the women of marikana. in her narrative, the widows and women mine workers living at marikana are clearly the protagonists, with the most haunting moments of the film occurring when these women create a theatrical production of the massacre, with themselves “starring” both as policemen and their victims.

one of the main criticisms of desai’s documentary has come from blade nzimande, the current general secretary of the south african communist party, which forms
part of the ANC government through the tripartite alliance. In a 2015 article for the Rand Daily Mail, Nzimande called desai a “biased pseudo-left” filmmaker, and accused him of reproducing the apartheid-era narrative of “black-on-black” violence propaganda:

Back in August 2012, and inconsistently since, one – basically capitalist, right-wing – story-line has attempted to simply reduce the tragedy to a case of intra-union rivalry – AMCU versus the national union of mineworkers…. it is a story of “mindless” blacks bashing each other. We reject it outright.

Although the Marikana story has been described elsewhere as a clash between rival mineworkers’ unions (Du Preez, 419), desai’s documentary in fact corrects this view. The striking miners were not aligned as a group to any particular union, though they clearly felt, as desai narrates in the film, that the official mineworkers’ union, NUM, was “in the pockets of the mines”. NUM had indeed brokered an “arrangement” with mine-owners in the late 1980s, whereby the mines contributed substantially to the salaries of NUM officials. As revealed in desai’s documentary, the first bloodshed that occurred in the lead up to the massacre was perpetrated by NUM officials who opened fire on the crowd when miners marched to its offices to make their demands. Two miners were seriously injured and are believed to have then died. In the next few days, two Lonmin security guards, two policemen and four miners were killed. Desai’s documentary reveals that by the time of the massacre the striking workers had such contempt for NUM that one of them urinated openly in front of a union leader who came to address them. Joseph Mantunjwa, the head of the rival union AMCU, appears in miners shot down as deeply sympathetic to the plight of the striking miners, but he is not represented as a strike leader.

The great value of desai’s documentary is the meticulous case it makes against state and police versions of the massacre. The film shows clearly how police ordered mortuary vans to the site prior to the massacre and hemmed in the miners with razor wire before boxing in with armoured cars those leaving “the mountain” and opening fire on them. Miners who had their hands up in surrender were shot, some of them in the back, and the police refused to allow ambulances access to the wounded for over an hour. After watching this film, the police version of self-defence becomes totally unbelievable. Miners shot down also shows the extent of collusion between Lonmin and the police, and the ways in which Lonmin officials hid behind police and private security, avoiding negotiations with the strikers and pressuring ministers to instruct the police to break the strike. The filmmakers claim that, partly as a result of their efforts, state versions of the massacre have been rejected by the largest trade union in South Africa, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), which is now the first major union to break out of the tripartite alliance. As I point out in the final section of this essay, another extremely valuable aspect of Miners Shot Down is its recording of key statements by miners and incidents that provide insights into the link between the strikes at Marikana and a long history of rural resistance.

Desai’s close-up focus on the massacre and events immediately leading up to it has some self-imposed limitations. One of these is that the colonial and postcolonial histories of Lonmin are left out of the picture, and we do not see the longer history of violence that underlay Marikana. Lonmin began as a British colonial company, the London and Rhodesia mining and land company (Lonrho), which exploited the land, labour and mineral wealth of Southern Africa. Its postcolonial history, however, is even more significant. After the second world war, Lonrho became a major multinational corporation under the leadership of “tiny” Rowland, who was born as a German citizen Rowland Walter Fuhrhop in an internment camp in India, and was later a member of the Hitler youth. Described by the British prime minister Edward Heath as the “unacceptable face of capitalism”, Rowland was a ruthless and unscrupulous businessman who was notorious for the ways he co-opted emerging African nationalist leaders before and after independence. When Rowland died in 1998, tributes to him poured in from African leaders, including Nelson Mandela and Kenneth Kaunda (Shaoul 1998). What this reveals is that capitalism could survive in Africa after colonialism, and that Lonrho and its successor Lonmin have a long history
of co-opting and compensating powerful African leaders for their support. In miners shot down, Ramaphosa is singled out as complicit in the Marikana massacre, but he is certainly not the first Black African leader to be co-opted by a multi-national corporation.

As Aliki Saragas has pointed out, what is also occluded in Desai’s narrative is the story of the women of Marikana. Thus far the widows living at Marikana have not received any compensation for the loss of their partners, and some of them have had to replace their partners as breadwinners in the mines. Mama Marikana examines their lives and the roles these women played during the Marikana strikes. As stated above, one of the most arresting aspects of the film is footage of the women of Marikana becoming cast members in a play they choreographed about the massacre. Unlike Joshua Oppenheimer’s “An Act of Killing” this reconstruction of events through performance focuses on the victims of a massacre, and was not directly solicited by Saragas’s film crew. According to Saragas, the women decided they wanted to create a performance about the massacre, like the hit theatrical production Sarafina!, which tells the story of the Soweto Uprisings of 1976.

Mama Marikana opens with a shot of the outside of a corrugated metal shack at Marikana. Inside the shack, a group of women are singing and performing the narrative of the massacre. This is montaged with footage of miners assembled on the “Mountain”, with voice-over narration by a woman in isiXhosa. At the end of the film, again we see the outside of this shack followed by footage of what is going on inside: women who represent the striking miners are holding sticks and singing, and the domestic dramas that occurred around the strike are played out: a woman is asked to look after someone else’s home and child, as the men must join the strike on “the mountain”. A woman acting as a policeman then warns the women performing the roles of the striking miners, “Men, this place you are occupying is...
not right!", and one of the women playing a strike leader exclaims “men, they are locking us in, let’s leave them here”. Footage of the women’s performance in the shack is then intercut with shots of the actual massacre, and with footage of the women performing their play on an open-air stage in front of the mining community. What becomes clear is that the women know exactly how the massacre unfolded, and that the mediation deployed by Saragas – filming women acting out the massacre of their men – enables a response that is different from watching direct footage of the massacre. Watching the performance on the outdoor stage in particular is incredibly affecting as Saragas uses shot-reverse-shot editing to show how the audience is reacting. Some of the men are in tears, others are holding hands. The “mountain” where the miners once gathered to strike has now become a part of an outdoor amphitheater.

South African Guernica: “Yakhal’inkomo”

Staging horror is also a feature of Ayanda Mabulu’s painting about Marikana, “Yakhal’inkomo: Black Man’s Cry”. In a bull-fighting ring, a black male figure with the horns of a bull, naked save for a white loincloth resembling that of a slave, is being lured to his demise by the flag of South African democracy wielded by a white bullfighter. The state is represented as complicit in the massacre through the portrayal of President Zuma, who is laughing while he steps on the head of a dying miner and holds the leash of a hyena-like dog that seems intent on attacking the horned figure. Clearly, the rabid dog is meant to represent the police and the figure with horns the massacred miners. Like Saragas’s film, Mabulu’s artwork depicts reactions to the scene of carnage, though to a completely different effect. On the top right hand side of the painting, Cyril Ramaphosa and one of the white directors of Lonmin are sitting together as spectators of the bullfighting ring, laughing at the massacre, and at the top left of the painting Prince Charles and the Queen are also enjoying the show. Thus Mabulu portrays the state, the police, Lonmin and the history of British corporate interests as complicit and colluding in the Marikana massacre.
The title of Mabulu’s painting should alert the viewer to a complex intertextual conversation that is being mobilized across the boundaries of different mediums. “Yakhal’inkomo” is the title of a jazz melody composed in 1968 by South African musician Winston “Mankuku” Ngozi, and also the title of a 1972 collection of poems by Mongane Wally Serote. In rewriting modernity, David Attwell points to a “multidisciplinary modernism of a fierce and fiercely local kind” that informs the title of Serote’s book of poems. Explaining his title, Serote claims:

Dumile, the sculptor, told me that once in the country he saw a cow being killed. In the kraal the cattle were looking on. They were crying for their own like, dying at the hands of human beings. Yakhal’inkomo. Dumile held the left side of his chest and said that is where the cry of the cattle hit him…. Yakhal’inkomo. The cattle raged and fought, they became a terror to themselves; the twisted poles of the kraal rattled and shook. The cattle saw blood flow into the ground.

I once saw Mankunku Ngozi blowing his saxophone. Yakhal’inkomo. His face was inflated like a balloon, it was wet with sweat, his eyes huge and red. He grew tall, shrank, coiled into himself, uncoiled and the cry came out of his horn. This is the meaning of Yakhal’inkomo. (Serote, iii)
through its title, mabulu’s painting therefore alludes to a web of intertextuality whereby music and perspectives from visual arts bleed into a book of poems, and all of this then feeds back into the visual arts. for ngozi as witnessed by serote, jazz is a cry of black pain, which possibly explains the second part of the title of mabulu’s artwork: “black man’s cry.” yet mabulu’s painting is as much in conversation with feni’s work as it is with that of serote and ngozi. indeed, the figure with the horns of a bull, the bullfighter and the bull-fighting ring should warn us that we are in terrain that has a long history in the visual arts. feni’s most famous work is entitled “african guernica”, and, through this title as well as the formal composition and shapes of figures in this charcoal drawing, engages with picasso’s confrontation with horror in his famous painting “guernica”, which depicts the artist’s vision of the spanish town of guernica when it was bombed by the germans in 1937. both artworks depict cattle, leading us back again to the words “yakhal’inkomo”, literally meaning the cry of the cattle while they are being slaughtered. unlike picasso’s “guernica”, however, which depicts the horrors of war through focusing on an incident that took place at a specific place and time, feni’s view of horror is unmoored, suggesting the ongoing, nightmarish violence imposed on africa by colonialism and apartheid. through this network of intertextuality, mabulu’s painting suggests that the marikana massacre
was South Africa’s “Guernica”, but also that the Marikana massacre is deeply connected to a legacy of structural violence in this country.

Conclusion

In the face of “white blindness” and state attempts to expunge the Marikana massacre from public view and public memory, documentary makers and artists have produced works that have kept the events of 16 August 2012 in focus, showing how these point to the reality of police violence in a postcolonial democracy, collusions between state and corporate power, and post-apartheid continuities with the violence of colonialism and apartheid. In their respective films both Kaganof and Desai compare the Marikana massacre to police killings at Sharpeville in 1960 and/or in Soweto in 1976. I would like to end this essay, however, by asking what is occluded in such perspectives. The languages and words recorded in Miners Shot Down and Mama Marikana offer some clues. Although Mama Marikana was filmed at Marikana where the vernacular is Setswana, in order to translate the speech of the women in the film Aliki Saragas had to work closely with a translator from the Eastern Cape province in South Africa, who described the language she was translating as “deep” IsiXhosa, the language spoken in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape, an area almost one thousand kilometres away from Marikana. An understanding of Marikana is not possible without considering the structural violence of the migrant labour system that still exists, and the history of rural resistance that informed the strikes.
in the marikana mining area lonmin employs 28 000 workers, and of these, 6000 are housed by the mines, but 23 000 are some degree of migrant labourers, living at marikana in shanty towns. indeed, if one compares photographs taken by ernest cole of the mining compounds in the 1960s with those by greg marinovitch of the squalid shacks in which the majority of minerworkers currently live, the only thing that seems to have changed is that miners are no longer prohibited from living with their partners and families. their living conditions are arguably no better than they were under apartheid. moreover, being a largely migrant population, most of the miners are supporting not only themselves at marikana, but also their families “back home” in the rural areas.
the majority of the striking miners, including strike leader mgcineni “mambush” noki, otherwise famously known as “the man in the green blanket”, were rock drillers from the former transkei, a native “reserve”, and later bantustan, now incorporated into the eastern cape, with a smaller number of the strikers hailing from the neighbouring kingdom of lesotho. in 1913 the natives land act, which endowed south africa’s white minority with ninety three percent of the country’s land, provided legislation that gradually ossified the “reserves” into a vast migrant labour camp, the legacy of which is still felt today. black south africans were only allowed to own land in 7% and then 13% of the country, and even in these areas land could not be privately owned but was held in communal tenure. the density of population in the transkei in particular was such that life could not be sustained without resort to migrant labour, and the people of this area continue to be used as a reserve of cheap labour for the mines. the eastern cape had a strong black intellectual tradition even under colonialism, but the apartheid authorities crushed this by instituting bantu education which prepared black people throughout the country for menial labour.
miners shot down begins with aerial footage of the site of the marikana massacre, focusing on the small hill where the striking miners chose to gather, and which they referred to as “the mountain”. what is evident in this footage, as well as in all news media footage, is that this hill at marikana is not “a mountain”. yet again and again in this film, as well as in mama marikana, the men and women of the area refer to this small hill in as “intaba”, the isixhosa word for “the mountain”. they chose it as a public space in which to assemble, and in their first confrontation with police as represented in miners shot down, they ask the police to allow them to pass to “intaba”. although this hill was surely a strategic point simply because it was a public space located on communal land and not mine property, the word “intaba” recalls a long history of migrant labour and rural resistance in south africa.

the pondoland uprising, commemorated in rural resistance in south africa: the mpondo revolts after fifty years (2011), took place in the transkei against the apartheid-era bantu authorities act, which was passed in 1951 to increase the power of chiefs and the system of indirect rule that was operating in the black “reserves”. people began meeting in secret on mountain ridges and formed a movement named “intaba”, meaning “mountain”. on the 6 june 1960 police attacked a meeting at ngquza hill with teargas before opening fire on the crowd, killing eleven people and injuring at least fifty eight. thirty leaders of the revolt were sentenced to death. the pondoland revolt is less well known than the sharpeville massacre or the soweto uprisings, but this was the history invoked when the striking miners at marikana referred to the small hill on which they gathered as “intaba”. the three documentaries discussed above, and two existing book-length studies on the marikana massacre, marikana: a view from the mountain and a case to answer and greg marinovitch’s murder at small koppie (both of which reference geographical features of landscape in their titles), say nothing explicit about “intaba” and the link to rural resistance.
the long history of rural resistance in the eastern cape also includes the story of the
cattle killing of 1856-7, when many of the amaxhosa slaughtered their cattle and
destroyed their crops, believing that the ancestors would rise from the dead,
bringing with them new, purified cattle and grain, and that the white colonists who
had brought so much oppression and misery, including the dreaded lungsickness
that was infecting their cattle, would be driven into the sea. after the slaughter of
around 400 000 cattle, as many as 40 000 people starved to death, finally breaking the
power of the xhosa nation, and forcing survivors into a system of migrant labour. as
jennifer wenzel has pointed out in bulletproof, the cattle killing was one of a number
of nineteenth-century anti-colonial millenarian movements that “responded to the
alienation of land and vital resources”, and drew on earlier xhosa prophecies “that
included promises of invulnerability to bullets”. this legacy of anticolonial prophecy
may go some way towards explaining why some of the striking miners at marikana
chose to visit a sangoma (traditional healer) to obtain “muti” (medicine) to make
them “bulletproof” prior to the massacre.
bearing in mind the history of rural resistance in the eastern cape, the narrative of the cattle killing may be put into conversation with dumile feni’s words about the phrase “yakhal’inkomo” as recorded by serote, and with mabulu’s painting of marikana, which represents the miners in the figure of a black man with the horns of a cow. indeed feni’s words about “yakhal’inkomo” take on chilling resonance in light of the cattle killing. through mabulu’s “yakhal'inkomo: black man's cry” and its allusions, the strikes at marikana in 2012 can be seen not only as an instance of “gewalt” by organized labour, but also as a millenarian cry of black pain.
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oom Piet * is sitting one night on his farm stoep by a fire. He is alone except for his dog Butch, which lifts its head slowly as a strange figure steps silently into the firelight. Deep in his cups, Piet realises he might be seeing an alien, but it could just be a figment of his inebriation. When his dog wags its tail and goes to greet the tall grey figure, he decides to trust its intuition and, with a slightly trembling hand, offers the large-eyed, curiously sexless creature his glass of brandy.

Turns out, after a couple of dops, that the alien has been studying mankind since it arrived through the medium of Google, so it’s English is pretty much immaculate, though its Afrikaans is at best, patchy. Piet’s English is passable, but he prefers the Taal.

The alien’s name is unpronounceable, and from where it hails (though Piet forgets that name too) they have no sexes, replicating from offshoots of their body which are then spliced onto … anyway, it’s understandably curious about the whole issue of gender, and surmising correctly that Piet knows almost nothing of the experience of being a woman, it asks the oom for some firsthand information about what it means to be a man.

“Well, men are supposed to be stronger than women,” is Piet’s first reaction, to which the alien whips out an iPad and starts checking if this is indeed true. “Well, yes, men are stronger physically,” (1) confirms the alien, enquiring how this factor affects interactions with women.

“Well, we can use our strength to protect our women,” says Piet gallantly.

From what, or whom, the alien wants to know?

Oom Piet thinks a bit. “In the old days, it was against wild animals and other tribes and things, but deesdae, I guess it’s mostly from other men.”

The alien is busy with the iPad again. Piet notices its small mouth pull down slightly at
the corners. “or you can use your superior strength to beat your women. many women, especially here in south africa, experience violence, and often from their own partners. (2) how is this ‘protecting’ them?”

piet fingers his beard thoughtfully. “ja nee, things have indeed changed. a marriage used to be a holy thing, and men were more, how can we put it … more noble, more chivalrous, like knights. but that strength i am talking about, it’s not just physical; men have to put up with a lot, they had to earn the money, and they can’t just break down and cry when the going gets tough, you know.”

the alien is consulting google again. piet is sobering up fast, realising he must think on his feet. also, the alien has his glass of brandy and is showing no signs of sharing it.

“yes, men don’t like to share their problems, as this may make them appear weak.”

(3)

“really? ja. we also tend to dop when we are stressed,” agrees piet. “but that doesn’t really fix the problem, it just postpones it.”

“and women, do they do this too?” enquires the alien, draining the glass of piet’s favourite brandy, and stretching out a slim hand for more.

“i think so now, man, but they never used to. my grandma never touched a drop!”

“times have changed in this regard, too,” says the alien. “women now have more freedom and money, so they can booze it up like the boys. or take ‘mothers’ little helpers’.”

(4)

“you know, we humans are like that,” muses the oom, tossing a faggot onto the fire.

“we can’t always see the bigger picture. sometimes we don’t want to, so we create another problem, like becoming an alcoholic, and it obscures the first one.”

“logically, if you wish to fix the drinking problem, you could go into a rehabilitation centre. or work on fixing the problem that caused the drinking.”

(5)

“you seem to have all the answers,” retorts piet with a snort. “isn’t that what men believe? that they know everything?”

“you haven’t said anything positive about us men at all!” shouts piet, suddenly losing his cool and grabbing the ipad. butch growls for the first time, sensing his master’s rising temper.

“i know how to use this thing, my granddaughter showed me,” he mutters, swinging into surf mode.

“aha! i know what you’re doing. you’re man-bashing! (6)” he cries triumphantly.

“you’re painting all of us men, decent or bastards, with the same brush. it’s nogal fashionable these days.”

“that was never my intention. its just that so far, men haven’t exactly come up smelling like roses.”

“i’m starting to suspect you might actually be a woman, or even one of those blerrie feminists,” says the feather-ruffled oom.

“reproductively, i’m more like a tree. the ‘side’ i am taking is that of maintaining harmony, and sharing tasks equally (7). such values are prized highly where i come from. from what i have read, it seems most men want sex, but few want babies. they leave them for the women to raise; they make a mess and expect the women to clean it up. they are poor or absent role models for their sons.”

piet is silent, looking down. this stuff is too close to the bone.

“but come, let us put the pad away and talk more freely.” the alien takes the pad softly from piet’s hands, who does not object, and turns it off. “tell me the good points of being a man! what are men good at?”

piet perks up immediately.

“Well, we might not be good at the family stuff, but we’re good at some things, like building stuff, and fixing it. men run countries (9) you know …”

“isn’t that because women are busy with raising the kids?”

but piet continues unabated; he is on a roll.

“men are good at having fun! women get too serious sometimes, too responsible. men lighten up the situation, act more recklessly, misbehave; they love adventure!”

the alien leans unsteadily back into its chair. “yes, yes, carry on!”

“men take decisions fast; sometimes you have to. they’re not scared of taking control. they can kill a wounded animal to put it out of its misery. they can work together in a team well (10). what would we do without men?”

the alien giggles. “there was this one joke on the internet: if you can find a vibrator that can also mow the lawn, you don’t need a man.”
“ja, but who would chase the goggos out then?” asks piet. he stands up, starts pacing to continue his train of thought, gesticulates with his hands, rants about da vinci, beethoven, einstein.

“without men, there would be no competition … no pursuit of excellence … no progress. no risks! women just want security. men are visionaries. men know how to leave their mark. men create history! we have even sent things out into space!”

and then he just can’t resist asking: “by the way, is it true that men come from mars? perhaps you would know?”

piet pauses and turns, wondering why he is not getting a response. he sees the alien’s glass has fallen out of its hand and is spilling brandy onto its pyjama-like outfit.

“hey … are you okay?” asks piet, but the large, hairless head of his visitor has slumped forward.

the oom steps closer and takes a better look. its grey skin is particularly smooth, almost translucent, and the fingers are finely sculpted. closer up, the alien is, he realises, quite attractive.

“i’ve been lonely for too long,” thinks piet. then he goes inside and returns with a blanket, which he drapes gently over his guest. “kom, butcha.” next morning, it is gone, and so is, he notices ruefully, the rest of his favourite brandy. having not taken any photos (“it didn’t even leave a crop circle,” his brother observes), nobody believes the oom’s story, but he did find my ear, and so, too, my pen.

* not his real name

gender fact box

[note: these are some of stories i suspect the alien found on google]

1) men are 30% to 50% stronger than women in brute strength. they also have more red blood cells and hence more endurance. but women definitely have a stronger grip on life — they live up to five years longer than men do, possibly due to a stronger immune system.

http://drjamesdobson.org/solid-answers/answers?a=ff773023-2693-410d-b9e1-662f6985be4e

2) south africa has the highest rate of rape in the world, according to interpol. the law reform commission estimates there are over 1.7 million rapes a year; over three each minute. around 19% of south african women report being subjected to marital or partner rape on one or more occasions. the statistics are probably higher as many women prefer to avoid the arduous process of reporting a rape.


3) studies reveal that men under stress generally respond by becoming more withdrawn, and acting more as an individual. women share their stress with others, hoping to elicit empathy. many men caught up in gender stereotypes see health-seeking behavior, like attending support groups, as a sign of weakness.

http://mg.co.za/article/2015-12-01-hiv-treatment-where-are-the-men

4) south africa’s drug usage is around double that of the rest of the world. women catch up with men in addiction rates as they earn more and are freed from traditional familial roles, especially in developed countries.

https://www.thefix.com/content/addiction-global-gender-gap-women-equal-opportunity8151

5) women seek help faster, but don’t enter specialised recovery programmes as readily as do men, due to family duties and the stigma attached to being an addict and a mother; thus they often enter programmes at a later stage of the addiction process.


6) “depictions of decent men are strikingly absent online. the overall suggestion is that men are guilty until proven innocent; this only reinforces gender stereotyping,”
7) according to a united nations fact sheet, women spend one to three hours a day more than men on housework, and two to 10 times more time a day caring for children, old people or the sick.
8) a 2013 statssa report reveals that only 36% of children below the age of four live with both biological parents. while 43% live with their biological mother, just 2% live with their biological father, and 19% do not live with either of their biological parents.
9) there have been over 70 female prime ministers and presidents in the world since sri lanka elected sirimavo bandaranaike in 1960. there has still never been a us female president.
10) men do co-operate better with other men than women do with each other, a phenomenon that may have evolutionary roots: men had to work together to find food or fight wars.

comments (1)

january 5, 2016

tendayi sithole says “# handsoffpennyandchris”
filed under: politics,race,tendayi sithole — abraxas @ 9:09 pm

white racism is not mindless, stupid, or irrational.

if we take it to be such, which is the problem of conceptual elasticity that entrapped the banal black rage, then we will then lose the grammar of what is it.

we stand the danger of making it fade without consequence, alas, this has been so in the post-1994. how many times in a year do we see the penny and chris phenomenon?
has that ended racism? to me it is not this question we should be asking: what is racism? rather, in the cesairian, fanonist, and bikoist grammar, the fundamental question is: what fundamentally is the infrastructure of anti-black racism?

this will at least unmask how it is institutionalized, naturalized, and normalized. how it is systematic, systemic, and continuous.

the black rage, which gets expressed in the tone of condemnation thinking that it will ward off this racism, or worse, engaging in the politics of counter-factualization (the nonsense of “we are human too”) against the racist utterance, vulgarizing racist deeds and blood boiling in fury, is just an empty gesture that will not put a single dent on white supremacy.

for, it is trapped in answering the question as opposed to unmasking the fundamental question. what if penny, chris and co. did not express their racist fantasy in public? will we then claim there is no racism?

i am thinking of dinner tables, tea meetings, gyms, whites family gathering etc. where whiteness is in its private realm sharing a thing or two about apartheid nostalgia and condemnation of blacks – that is penny’s “monkeys” and chris’ “victims.”

the da will deal with penny and standard bank will deal with chris. does that mean dealing with racism?

we should not be caught into the liberal trap of “fire them! ” whereas both institutions they serve cannot be divorced from the racist infrastructure that dehumanizes blacks. we should not be caught in the reactive stimulus of the symptom; but rather, the cause and its constitutive operating logic by diagnosing it, unmasking it and dismantling it.

this will mean seeing racism in cliches like “i adopted a black kid”, “i don’t see color”, “i have black friends”, “it is not about race, but class”, “i never supported apartheid”, “let’s move forward and forget about apartheid” – the list goes on. these
are the cliches of race denialism and for me, no matter how innocent they are, they smack of anti-black racism.

i refuse to see racist individuals but, rather, the infrastructure that swells their privilege.

south africa as a racist state is the micro-structure of the anti-black world which is informed by genocidal impulses that dehumanise black bodies – in short, the total arc of a civilisation of death – a better world if there were no blacks and, if they are there, they must be erased.

south africa is a colonial settler polity and it is ontologically racist. it’s history has been that of settler colonial land theft, plunder, and grand dehumanization of the black flesh.

whiteness sees south africa as better without blacks. that is why racism still exists – because we have allowed it to be symbolically vanished instead of it being uprooted.

racism is allowed by the anc and the black liberal apologists who are clutched into rainbowism, race denialism, race transcendence, nonracialism, and pseudo-futurism of nation building.

racism has been entrenched to the extent that it has become banal and it exists in the invisible domain – but that does not mean it is not there.

i am not moved by the chris and penny’s et al’s racist gestures or any other deeds. they are just a tip of the racist “largesse.” i would even go to the extent of saying #handsoffchrisandpenny.

both are just distracting us from the real problem – the racism of the everyday.

i see racism when i see fanon’s manichean reality – white privilege side-by-side with black dispossession. does not the binary of alexandra and sandton ring a bell? is it not the same space but having a parasitic ontological arrangement of fanon’s zone of being and zone of non-being?

that is what makes me feel the black pain, not to mention the rdp pondokkies in the middle of nowhere, shacks and blacks not having a dignified place to shit.

did we forget that black children are still falling in toilet pits and blacks are still fighting for a toilet? yeah, a place to shit.

as long as we don’t have our land, and continue being hobos in occupied azania, there is no way the infrastructure of anti-black racism will not end.

let us go for the structures that produce the penny and chris of this anti-black world. hotep!

comments off on tendayi sithole says “#handsoffpennyandchris”

december 28, 2015

mphutlane wa bofelo on the influences and representations of biko and black consciousness in poetry in apartheid and “post” apartheid south africa/azania

filed under: mphutlane wa bofelo, poetry, politics, race — abraxas @ 11:52 am

this essay examines the influences of stephen bantu biko and black consciousness on (black) poetry in south africa, focusing particularly on the points of convergence and
divergence, connection and disconnection between the poetry movement of the era between the 1960s and 1980s—the so-called “black consciousness era”—and the post-1994 poetry resurgence. It looks at the aesthetic, stylistic, and thematic content of the works of some of the prominent “bc-era” poets (socalled soweto poets) and the thoughts and works of some of the current generation of south african poets. The chapter also explores the issue of the representations of black consciousness and biko in the works of these poets and concludes with some thoughts on connecting the black consciousness era and post-1994 poetry movements.

The life and thoughts of stephen bantu biko have been immortalized in various works and mediums of literary, visual, and performed arts such as songs, books, websites,
theatre plays, poems, films, paintings, sculptures, clothing labels, and graffiti on the walls in various townships of South Africa declaring: Biko lives! It is apt that literature and the arts be one of the media to serve as a tapestry for the invincibility and immortality of Steve Biko’s message of self-definition, self-realization, self-love, self-respect, self-reliance, and self-expression as a potent weapon for the physical and psychological liberation of oppressed and downtrodden people. The development of black culture and thus black literature was one of the main tenets of the black consciousness movement. Through the influence of Biko and the philosophy of black consciousness the poets and writers of the late 1960s and early 1970s saw themselves as spokespersons for blacks in the country, refusing to be beholden to “proper” grammar and style, searching for black aesthetics and literary values, and Afro-centric artistic and cultural expressions rooted in the historical-material experiences of black people and grounded on the socioeconomic and political realities of South Africa/Azania and the global struggles of oppressed people.

"The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

Bantu Stephen Biko
likes of casey motsisi. many of the drum decade writers exposed the brutalities and banalities of settler/colonial domination and apartheid/capitalism. the fallout from the sharpeville massacre led to exile for many of these writers and artists. the political oppression of the resistance itself led to a new growth of black south african literature mainly inspired by the new consciousness and new forms of struggle that emanated from the birth of the black consciousness movement under the leadership of saso-bpc and people like stephen bantu biko, mthuli ka shezi, barney pityana, mosiuwa patrick “terror” lekota, ben khoapa, mualusi mpumlwana, winnie molalepule kgware, aubrey nchaupe mokoape, and strinivasa “strini” raju moodley.

the rediscovery of the reality of being black in the world

playwright, poet, and journalist strinivasa “strini” raju moodley (also known as “connection,” the name he acquired on robben island) was a member of the black radical theatre group the clan when he met biko, and was instrumental in the formation of the first union of black theatre, the south african black theatre union (sabtu), and the theatre council of natal (tecon). the clan was made popular by its satirical depiction of black people’s lives and the inequities and injustices in south africa in plays like “black and white,” “resurrection,” and “africa hurrah!”—a collaboration with the jazz group dashiki that fused poetry in its music. a former member of the clan and a stalwart of the bc movement, asha moodley is of the view that the noticeable situation of inequality was responsible for the politicization of black students and black writers and the black community in general. she asserts that the works of writers and artists were a symbolic reflection of the rediscovery of blackness and a reflection of the general heightened state of awareness of “the reality of being black.” asha moodley recounts that in addition to its overtly political and revolutionary message, what was radical about their theatre at that time was its integration of drama, music, poetry, and visual art, its reliance more on improvisation than on props, and the interaction and dialogue between the audience and the performers. moodley refers to this form of theatre as “total theatre.” she mentions that the effective use of humor in the writings of drum decade writers like casey motsisi appealed to them. she also cites writers and poets of the negritude movement like diop, senghor, and césaire as one of the influences in their works. moodley indicates that they found affirmation from reading the works of black writers in the classic, the earliest literary journal of the time. 1 in later years, south african literary practitioners became influenced by black american and british poets such as giovanni, langston hughes, mutabaruka, linton kwesi johnson, gil scott heron, amiri baraka (formerly leroi jones) and the last poets— one of the earliest poetic voices of influence on hip-hop. the post-1976 era also saw writers like gcina mhlophe tapping into traditional african folktales and fables as a medium of popular education and alternative entertainment.
according to moodley, the clan's reputation led to the group being invited to perform at bc movement events, and ultimately to the participation of some of the members, including strini moodley and herself, in the formal structures of the movement. although the writers and artists operated independently of the movement, the bc movement played a significant role in the development of writers by establishing journals such as black perspective and black creativity and development, and the black review. these provided an annual review of the state of affairs in the country as seen through the eyes of black people, and therefore countered the often jaundiced and jazzed-up view presented in the mainstream media. moodley adds that they also organized biannual national drama festivals at orient hall in durban where groups like wits drama society and the serpent players performed. staffrider magazine became the dominant forum for the publication of bc-inspired and bc-oriented literature, mostly in the form of poetry and short stories. the soweto uprising was the pinnacle point of the new consciousness and the creation of a new form of black person—free of the mental chains and infused with a sense of dignity and pride as well as the spirit of resilience and resistance. sipho sipamla, mongane wally serote, mafika pascal gwala, and don mattera paved the way and inspired a myriad of followers, most notably poet-performance artist ingoapele madingoane; painter and musician matsemela manaka; the fire-brand word-bomber leseg o rampolokeng; and the renowned mzwakhe mbuli. mzwakhe, who became closely associated with the structures of the congress movement and became known as the people's poet in the 1980s, popularized the idea of doing oral poetry over music.

black consciousness and the resurgence of poetry in the late 1960s and early 1970s with its emphasis on psychological liberation and self-reliance, the black consciousness movement became a rallying point for cultural reclamation, cultural rejuvenation and artistic production. apart from its message of political consciousness, the bc movement articulated a message of cultural and religious awakening as reflected in the questioning of mainstream christianity and the development of black theology (bt) that rejected the status quo to produce a new christian paradigm geared toward revolutionizing both the material and cultural structure of south africa. writers of the bc movement period were in the forefront of heeding that cultural call and poetry and plays became the major genres of that period. couched in graphic language designed to arouse the emotions of listeners, their poems were often performed at political rallies.
the first poetry book to be published by a black poet in this era is most probably oswald mtshali’s the sound of a cowhide drum, which was an appeal for sympathy for the plight of poor black people. sipho sepamla was at first considered a “contemplative” poet, but by the time of the soweto i love (1977) his poetic persona fully identified with the oppressed. sepamla also wrote a novel of this turbulent time, a ride on the whirlwind (1981), several other novels, and his selected poems were published in 1984. the early poems of mongane wally serote published in volumes like yakhal’inkomo (1972) and tsetlo (1974) are short and sharp, and tackle the life and attitudes of a politically aware black person, looking at his society and its discontentment. in later volumes, serote begins to develop an epic, incantatory voice with the long poems of behold mama, flowers (1978) and come and hope with me (1994), winner of the noma award for publishing in africa. don mattera’s poems in the poetry anthology azanian love song became anthems of the struggle, recording the pain and anguish of the oppressed and the injustices of the system, but also infusing the spirit of hope and resistance in the oppressed black majority. the volume also includes beautiful love poems as well as poems simply celebrating the beauty of humanity. although writers like es’kia mphahlele have attributed the drastic shift toward poetry among those south african writers who lived and worked inside south africa in the 1960s to the fact that the immediacy of the political realities demanded poetry which did not need the long, consistent work of prose, nadine gordimer and others have argued that the poetic form was simply less obvious and would bypass government censorship.
however, poetry did get banned; the first collection of poems banned under the publication act was Cry rage by James Mathews and Gladys Thomas. Subsequent poetry books suffered the same fate. According to Amatoritsero,2 this was probably because poets, particularly the poets of the black consciousness period, were too emotionally close to the subject and not subtle but rather explicit in their choice of diction and imagery. Amatoritsero asserts that perhaps one good reason for the persistence of poetry, apart from the fact that the government tolerated it more readily since they assumed it reached a smaller audience, was the performance culture that began to emerge in the face of ironclad control and the lack of adequate publication outlets. He reminds us that literature anywhere in Africa was actually “orature” in several forms like parables, fables, work songs, praise songs, lullabies, genealogy chants, the folk ballad, the dirge, the abuse, and stories—all verbally transferred generation to generation. In many ways, the advent of performance poetry (now popularly known as the spoken word scene, and tapping the slam poetry and hip-hop traditions) could be seen as poetry returning to its oral roots in the form of readings and performances, in the absence of traditional mediums of orature.
the thematic and aesthetic concerns of post-1976 poetry

the stylistic, aesthetic, and thematic concerns of the black consciousness poets were based in the idea of a complete break with the economic base and sociocultural superstructure of settler/colonial capitalism and aimed at recreating political and cultural expression of the south african reality, rooted in historical-material experiences of black people and defined by the concrete and tangible conditions of the black majority. this meant confronting the white power structure and providing inspiration for black solidarity as an instrument of black power, as well as destroying the complex of inferiority and the culture of subservience—and on their ashes building a culture of resilience and resistance. although the stylistic and aesthetic part of this project meant breaking with eurocentric conventions of literature—which included deliberately breaking the english language, mixing it with indigenous african languages, township slang, and fusing the literary genres—the thematic part meant engaging and disengaging every aspect and apparatus of the system and putting together the building blocks for the creation of a new society.

peter horn observes:

to the black poet, as to any black, the white power structure is visible in very concrete terms; just as the american negro “in the ghetto sees his white landlord come only to collect exorbitant rents and fail to make necessary repairs . . . sees the white policeman on the corner brutally manhandle the black drunkard in a doorway, and at the same time accept a pay-off from one of the white-controlled rackets . . . sees the streets in the ghetto lined with uncollected garbage, and he knows that the powers which could send trucks in to collect that garbage are white.”3
in confronting state control over south african black life, the poetry raged against constant supervision by the white government and by white employers, and therefore poured scorn and ridicule upon the main tool of this constant surveillance of black people’s every move—the “pass,” a document which determined where one was allowed to live, work and travel. in a satirical poem, “to whom it may concern,” sipho sepamla expounds the absurdities of this instrument of white power. mafika pascal gwala gave poetic voice to the cries of black people whose loss of the dompass (or forgetting it at home) earned them a “kwela ride” — a ride in the police van—to the next jail, which, as described in a poem by oswald mtshali, could easily become a “ride upon the death chariot.” this poetry did not just record the injustices but exposed the fact that the power structures perpetuated and entrenched the
master-servant, rich-poor relations between white and black south africa because of the necessary relationship between white privilege and black poverty.

SPEAK magazine argued:

that standards of whites are high because those of the black are low, and that the total machinery of the state, all its apartheid laws, are necessary to protect this privilege against the demands of the black worker. if the white can benefit from plentiful and undemanding labour, it is because the blacks can be exploited at will and are not protected by the laws of the country; if he can easily obtain positions of power and influence, it is because they are reserved for him and others are excluded from them.”

Black consciousness-inspired poetry portrayed the reality of the underprivileged and exposed the hollowness of attempts to justify oppression on the basis of the fallacious notion that black people cannot rule themselves and should be under the tutelage of white people. It also dealt with the reality that white supremacy thrived on a black inferiority complex and internalized sense of submissiveness, and the realization that psychological emancipation of black people required new political strategies and a new consciousness that would combat the realities of racist society effectively. The greatest obstacle to this spirit of self-assertion was that centuries of colonial and imperialist domination, and decades of apartheid capitalism, had imposed on black people a “rigid discipline” of unconditional submission, an innate sense of inferiority and paralyzing fear of the white man and the power structures of white supremacism.
Mongane Wally Serote’s “Anonymous Throbs + A Dream” is a poetic articulation of the break with the culture of submissiveness and of a search for a new consciousness and for forms of struggle other than nonviolent, passive resistance:

I did this world great wrong
With my kindness of a dog
My heart like a dog’s tongue
Licking too many hands, boots and bums.

Although many critics have dismissed the bc-era poets as protest poets, many of the poems, like Serote’s “Sunset,” moved beyond lamenting the conditions of oppression and looked forward to the triumph of the forces of liberation, and also painted a vision of the kind of society a liberated Azania would be. The certainty of an autopian
tomorrow is significantly symbolized by black night and not white day, yet there is also an expression of the poet’s fear of terror, even necessary terror: the humanistic ethos of the poetry is expressed by the articulation of a black poet’s fear that he may become as brutal, as insensitive, and as callous as the white oppressor, and in doing what is needed he might lose his essential humanity. Serote’s poetic contemplation of the dialectics of violence and counter-violence, inhumanity and arising counter-inhumanity, best expressed this fear. Horn observes that the theme of the cleansing power of rain and storm, of the rebirth of the barren and drought-stricken field by water, is a common theme in South African poetry, denoting (in the case of black poets) the total upheaval to restore the life of humanity of African society, the destruction of “white lies” by “black truth,” as in Stanley Motjuwadi’s poem, “white lies.”

The relationship between the poets and the political structures of the BC movement apparently, the black consciousness influence was the result of general political education and mass conscientization efforts of the BC movement rather than a product of an attempt to recruit writers and artists into the fold of the BC movement. Though almost every poet wrote politically-inspired and socially-engaged poetry with clear indication of the BC influence, not all poets operated within the formal structures of the BC movement. Some writers eventually joined the BC movement formally while other writers and groups simply operated autonomously and independently but with some link with and support from the black consciousness movement, which helped to organize venues for performances and provided them with platforms at rallies. This interdependent relationship between the BC movement and the writers and artists is confirmed by Lefifi Tladi’s account:

dashiki became a very important group because we were fusing music and poetry and our music was more towards malopo, this traditional music. The poetry was socially committed . . . Dashiki worked within the political structure [of] black consciousness with absolute independence. The BC movement used to book places where we could perform, whatever we wanted. That was one of the best outreach programmes. From there we started organizing other groups like Batsumi, Medumo, Ya Bo BRA Paul Motaung, the late, and other groups like Medupe. We went into universities broadening the consciousness of students, and organizing exhibitions . . . Dashiki was an important band of that era.
according to mzi mahola, theatre performers like john kani, malefetse bogolane, george luse, nomhle nkonyeni, winston ntshona of the serpent players, and mzwandile maqhina of the black slaves and others like khaya mqhayisa were members of the bc movement but were not directed or mandated by the bc movement. mahola is of the view that although the bc movement did not necessarily recruit writers to join it, writers were drawn into the movement by the platform and the opportunity to be heard as well as the chance for growth. mzi mahola, who experimented with poetry writing when he was doing matric in 1969 and joined the bc movement in 1970, says his writing was encouraged in the bc movement where he was told to write in english because black people did not have to be told that they were suffering; that it was white people who caused our suffering and, therefore, should be told. however, it is apparent that there was a voice within the movement for writing in african languages.
ike muila

rismathi mathonsi recounts that at one of the writers’ meetings, discussions centered on the use of English and African languages, and that people like Sipho Sipamla and himself advocated for more writings in African languages. Though he does not have any work published in an African language, Sipamla is renowned for writing in a mix of English, Afrikaans, and IsiXhosa and was a major influence on the writers of the 1980s like Ike Muila, who only writes in IsiXhosa, the South African township-born slang—so-called tsotsi taal. Poet, jazz artist, and painter Lefifi Tladi—who was a leading member of Dashiki—writes most of his poems in Setswana and experiments with proverbial and idiomatic expressions. He says this is his way of highlighting the richness and depth of African languages:

I was telling my young students that we need a new generation that is going to write poetry that draws from African proverbs, and which is able to translate to our contemporary setting. I used as an example these few lines of a poem: “gophuthulla metsweditswedi ya hlago, kego ngatholla masedi a sedimosang ditoro” which means something I like “unfolding the oasis of nature is to share the light that makes dreams visible.” The beauty and depth of this is that for any person to see anything, you need light, but what kind of light is it that makes dreams visible? This shows you how much we can go into our languages. Our languages are fantastic! There are so many ways to say things; I find my language more sophisticated. Our linguists actually need to invent new symbols to express some of this wealth . . . when it comes to ways of thinking for example, African languages have no “he” or “she.” So they suggest no gender “hierarchy.” 9

The presence of writers of the era who wrote in African languages and their commitment to the development of indigenous African languages, as captured in Tladi’s words, indicates that the BC movement did not impose rigid and fixed rules and/or prescriptions on writers and artists in as far as the choice of language is
concerned. actually, many writers have observed the fact that many musical groups and artists started writing in their own languages more in the 1970s. mzi mahola traces his journey into the bc movement to listening to biko give a public address at fort hare in 1968 when he was doing matric at lovedale. he declares that the bc movement inculcated in the individual a sense of being, pride, dignity, and self-confidence. “it changed people’s passive and negative attitude of viewing themselves as inferior and made them feel equal with whites. its ideology was premised on the legitimization of blackness.”10

mahola also mentions that his writing matured from the influence, advice, and evaluation of bc movement members like barney pityana and john kani. “either you had talent or there was no platform for your poor work. there was a program of encouraging and stimulating cultural awareness in black people. individuals were encouraged to read and write and to express themselves in crafts and visual arts,” says mahola, lamenting that culture has vanished. he says the lack of interest in reading has resulted in the loss of the love of languages. and hence the poor quality of the manuscripts that many of the current generation of writers produce. however, mahola is quick to add that though the black consciousness era produced inspiring cultural expressions, the repressive conditions and police brutality served to demoralize and demotivate writers. for example, mahola’s first poetry manuscript was confiscated by the police in august 1975, and this devastated him so much that he spent the next fourteen years without writing a single line of poetry.

perhaps such repression, complemented by the dictates of market forces and the trappings of capital in the mainstream entertainment industry, played a major role in some of the poets, playwrights, and artists toning down their political messages later in their careers. however, poets like mzwakhe mbuli maintained the culture of social commentary poetry in the 1980s and inspired many in the younger generation of writers.

the response of poetry to global capitalism and neoliberalism

with the advent and euphoria of a democratic south africa, the huge political audiences waned and less attention was paid to poetry as compared to other literary genres in as far as government and corporate funding and prominence in academia
and the media was concerned. Poetry continued to be housed mainly in small journals, websites, and café venues, and prose remained the medium that commanded more publicity and commentary in academia, with attention and discussions centered on established names like Coetzee and Gordimer, along with a number of emerging voices such as Zakes Mda, Ivan Vladislavic and Sindiswa Magona. Kelwyn Sole observes that the prose writers in the first decade of democracy have tended to concentrate their attention on themes that resonate with and seem to offer space for representation of a number of social issues that have been widely discussed in public life and in the media since 1994. He asserts that perhaps most academic attention has been focused in the direction of prose because most novels and short stories are impregnated with narratives of reconciliation, multiculturalism, examination of memory, and the redefinition of identity. However, Sole argues that such themes are not absent in poetry, and that in actual fact the younger generation of poets seems prepared to both expand its social purview and experiment with form. Although heeding the post-apartheid mood of exploring human life more multidimensionally rather than merely through political narratives, many of these poets continued to lay emphasis on and put into practice the notion that poets also have roles of social responsibility and political commentary. The political developments post-1994 helped to ferment and sustain socio-political commentary poetry. The shift of the ANC in power—from its previous position of “national democracy plus economic egalitarianism” to unbridled capitalism/free-marketism—unsettled popular expectations of an equitable distribution of wealth and resources and the opening of doors to education, health, and other social services in a new dispensation. The most significant element of this shift was the adoption of the growth employment and redistribution (GEAR) policy, effectively meaning the adoption of an orthodox neo-liberal framework as both a policy and vision of the government, and therefore the erosion of the relatively welfare-oriented principles of the reconstruction and development program (RDP). At the local level the implementation of neo-liberal policies resulted in the poorest of the poor being victims of massive retrenchments and escalating levels of unemployment, electricity and water cutoffs, evictions, and outbreaks of cholera, typhoid, and klepsella. Although ordinary people are the ones who feel the squeeze of neoliberal capitalist policies the most, and therefore have a much clearer perception of the barbarism and corruption of global capitalism, they seldom speak out and they are rarely listened to. Kelwyn Sole is of the view that literature can act as a vehicle for such ordinary views and that poetry has done this in an eloquent fashion in South Africa. He cites the critical voices of poets like Mxolisi Nyezwa, Nkwapa Moloto, Sphokazi Mthathi, Vonani Bila, Phedi Tlhobolo and even members of the ruling party like Mongane Wally Serote and Jeremy Cronin. Their works frankly question the meaning of freedom in the new South Africa and highlight the contradictions of the new dispensation, the vagaries of the market, the enormous chasm between the quality of the lives of the poor and the rich, the corruption of power, the pomp and decadence of the emergent black bourgeoisie and the mediocrity of “parrot poetry.” However, there is no homogeneity with regard to the relationship of poets/poetry with the political elite and corporate capital, or as far as poetry’s response to the seductions of power and the vicissitudes of the market.
ever since zolani mkiva rose to prominence in 1990 by praising nelson mandela and later becoming ordained imbongi yesizwe, poet to the nation, and the president’s poet laureate, a number of oral poets see their task as the public praising of leaders and their policies, curtainraising for every state function or corporate event. the most well-known poet of the 1983–1990 era of political turbulence, mzwakhe mbuli, even performed praises on television advertisements for commercial products and parastatals, such as cremora coffee creamer and spoornet (south africa rail).

spoken word and social activism post–1994

the era of political independence, with its emphasis on freedom of expression and the opening of access to information, saw many young people getting interested in poetry. many of these young people were influenced by hip-hop and the slam poetry phenomenon. only a few remnants of the bc generation of writers are still active today and, according to mzi mahola, “one can surmise that the negation of literature in the class and disappearance of the culture of reading brings about the demise of bc socially engaging poetry” (my own emphasis). mahola attributes this to the fact that the censorship board of the nationalist government had cleaned the shelves of all relevant literature, and periodically banned certain publications and journals like time magazine and south african outlook which played major roles in inspiring and informing communities, and to the current absence of projects similar to the tertiary programs run by the bc movement. he explains:

at tertiary institutions the bc movement had programs of developing and encouraging public speaking where popular guest speakers were invited to deliver speeches; debates formed part of the program as well as mock trials for law
students. It was varsity culture and norms to come across public debates where students would be analyzing topical issues in public places. Alternative media and popular journals encouraged people to read so as to empower and broaden their minds. All that is history now. Today one does not see the role of literature in developing writers and educating our people because it has been neglected from lower levels. In certain schools and provinces literature has become anathema to learners.12

Mahola sees the slam poets as filling the vacuum that was left behind after the gradual exit of the socially-engaging BC protest poetry of the pre-1994 era. He explains that the present generation has other problems to deal with. However, Mahola laments that the expression of their problems tends to take the form of an articulation of personal frustrations. He says, “The BC poetry was meant to conscientize, mobilize, moralize, politicize, inspire and motivate. It sought to spread and promote BC philosophy and ideas. Spoken word seems to attract youth only and it does not carry any particular message or philosophy espoused by the community. The stage is for individualism where DJs battle. Unlike BC poetry, spoken word relies on musical backing, rhyming, repetition, and weird language which are meant to entertain. Spoken word is not meant to be analyzed and understood but to entertain.”13

This sweeping generalization about spoken word and slam poetry ignores the plurality and diversity of voices within the spoken word scene. The label “slam poet” is misleading when applied to many of the poets who also write so-called “page poetry,” essays, and drama, but who use the spoken word/slam poetry platform to reach out to a wider audience, and also to free poetry from the elitist enclave of “high art.” Unfortunately, the media and academia (preoccupied by labels) impose the slam poetry / hip-hop label on any young poet or any poet who also uses the stage as a platform of sharing his poetry. Hence Lebo Mashile’s poetic combat of this stereotype: “Shake off the dust of ‘slam poetry’ expectations / and relieve the green words / where the world is no obstacle to my desire.” In Durban, cultural workers, social activists, poets, MCs, and hip-hop activists within Izimboni Zesimanje/Nowadays poets, Slam Poetry Operation Team (Spot), the Ghetto Prophecy Movement (GPM), and Young Basadzi Projects (YPB) are at the forefront of attempts to use art as a platform and medium of popular education, political conscientization, social development, and economic empowerment. One significant program is the Ghetto Kids project initiated by the GPM band led by Sandile Sibiya. This project imparted life-skills education to displaced children (so-called “street kids”) through the vehicles of hip-hop, break-dance, graffiti, gumboots, creative writing and disc-jockeying. According to MC and hip-hop activist Bullet, the aim of the project was to move beyond pity and sympathy to embrace the displaced children as a part of the
broader ghetto prophecy movement, which included gpm, its fan-base, and all the artists, groups, and social activists participating in the project. the key aspect of the project was to give the children a sense of being and belonging, and to unlock their hidden potentialities, capacities, and talents and help them to use these for their own empowerment. miracle (sphephelo mbhele), who joined the movement in 2001, recounts: “ghetto kids became something else. it grew and embraced kids from all over. we had ‘white’ kids breaking with ‘street’ kids. we had parents initially dropping off kids but now staying through the whole show. ghetto kids had rules like no smoking or drinking of alcohol during the session, none of the older cats were allowed to perform, etc.”

miracle and zorro (lwazi xaba) have initiated izwi poetry nights, a series of collaborative performances between poets and jazz bands at the zulu lounge, inaugurated with a performance on February 1, 2007. spot, headed by dj cool-fire (eric nkosinathi hadebe), conducts creative writing workshops and slam jams in high schools and also uses slam showcases to address issues like hiv/aids, poverty, and homelessness. members of the nowadays poets have participated in programs such as the fatherhood project and were also commissioned by the ethekwini municipality to run the creative ink project, a part of the urban renewal programme in the inanda, ntuzuma kwamashu (ink) area. the young basadzi project has run several creative writing workshops in high schools and has collaborated with various ngos in community outreach projects. in 2006, the ybp published a collection of poetry and prose by young south african women.
example of a satirical take on the corrupting effect of power and the lures of capital on leaders is found in magogodi’s poem “no more carrots,” which shows how the system dangles material wealth and offers of high offices like a carrot to co-opt and corrupt conscientious people. in his debut poetry cd, magogodi paraphrases biko’s famous signature, “i write what i like” into i mike what i like. the title-poem is a poetic testament of the poet’s resolve not to be a parrot poet and his refusal to let his literary expression be dictated by political correctness. anticapitalist activist, poet, and publisher vonani bila’s poetry is marked by its expression of sympathy and empathy for the most marginalized and underground sections of society.

another important feature of bila’s poetry is its narratives of village anecdotes and legends that capture everyday life experience in rural limpopo, particularly elim village, as well as its tributes to celebrated and unsung practitioners of the literary, visual, and performing arts—jackson hlungwani, lucy shivambu, noria mabasa, john baloyi, willi mangayi, obed ngubeni, and elias baloyi—mostly from the limpopo province. bila is also renowned for his poetic critique of neoliberal capitalism and the washington consensus agenda, particularly the squeeze of neoliberal policies on the poorest of the poor in south africa and the world:
“in the
name of amandla / tell me what has changed in this village / the tap is dry/
coughs hot air/the pump is off/granny has no cash to buy diesel/she walks
distances to draw dirty water/in the still pool/in the poisoned dam / where
people share water with animals.”

bila’s boldness comes out in a critical
look at freedom struggle heroes who are regarded as holy cows by many
african poets. he asks mandela troubling questions in “mandela have you
ever wondered,” and is very frank with mugabe in “dear gabriel”:

i don’t care
how many tobacco & flower white farmers
the war vet-chefs ambushed & butchered last night
nor how many shops were torched
not even the rise & fall of hitler hunzwi bothers me
nor the aborted & bogus lancaster house agreement
nor how many foreigners & funders have fled the country
i care about men and women by the roadside
liberated vagabonds
who walk from harare to johannesburg on foot
swimming across the crocodile infested limpopo
braving the mewing wild cats
& the pecking vultures
victims of the roving green fly.

bila’s poem “mr president, let the babies die” has effectively become an anthem
within the circles of the anti-capitalist social movements. it was performed at the
world social forum in brazil and is quoted in full at the end of patrick bond’s critique
of south africa’s neo-liberal trajectory, talk left, walk right:

this is the millennium plan
followed by declarations and slogans
poor men and women goaded by the western whip
dawn of a new century
money talks
the rich get richer
we can only sell our breasts and thighs for a living
i’m scared of urban beasts
their tongues are too sharp
in the meantime
ghetto babies die in public toilets.

mahola’s is a patriotic voice but outspoken in its criticism of the leader ship and
populace. he tackles themes such as corruption, moral degeneration, talk of an
african renaissance, the aloofness of the erstwhile freedom fighters from the masses,
and the lack of accountability. The latter is aptly captured in the poem “impassable bridge”:

i phoned for an mp
a former bosom friend
his secretary asked
in connection with what
it punctured my ego
i felt my manhood shrinking.17

Lebo Mashile

In “In a Ribbon of Rhythm,” television personality and poet Lebo Mashile articulates the joys and sorrows of being a (black)woman in a patriarchal and male-centric world, celebrates the beauty, resilience, and resourcefulness of women, and gives voice to the stories and songs/cries of ordinary women. She calls on women to “tell your story / let it nourish you / sustain you / and claim you / tell your story / let it twist and remix your shattered heart / tell your story / until your past stops tearing your present apart.” Her call is for every child to know she is “wrapped in a ribbon of rhythm” and her mission is “to show pretty black girls / how to look at their hearts / with eyes blaring full blast / the way you did / together we can build a bridge / to the promises in their faces / and pull them towards poems / by pretty black girls / wearing the crown of change.”18

Lebogang Mashile’s colleague in the Feela Sister Spoken Word Collective, Myesha
jenkins, breaks the private/public, personal/social dichotomy, articulating and capturing the human side of social issues like women abuse, the disempowerment of women, and patriarchal and sexist practices and stereotypes. She celebrates the connectedness of the black experience and the resilient spirit of black people in “diaspora,” rages against war in “fighting men,” and declares her love for revolutionary women (Dora Maria Tellez, Nora Astorga, Haydee Santamaria, Asanta Aguilar, Nguyen Thi Binh, Laila Khalid, Thenjiwe Mthintso, Sheila Weinberg) in “revolutionary woman.”

Bandile Gumbi

Bandile Gumbi describes herself as a guerrilla poet and defines her poetry as “conversations with myself.” In the poetry collection Pangs of Initiation, Gumbi addresses the politics and complexity of identity, interrogates art, poetry, and freedom, and highlights the contradictions of the New South Africa and the dangers of assimilation:

“we are definitely stuck / between the s’s / of assimilation / a banana is an exotic fruit in Africa / when chasing / coconut dreams.”

The poem “After the Fact” evokes the spirit of Biko to triumph above the commodification and commercialization of his name on the alter of “bumper sticker consciousness.” Here the poet rages against the transformation of former freedom fighters into corporate fat cats and laments the demise of the struggle:

“someone seems to be shouting / Biko is in parliament / driving a Yengeni / living in Yuppiedom / these are definitely post times / Vibrations: struggle my life! / burned with the 80s / but the Phoenix is yet to rise from the ashes.”

For Gumbi, the hopeless and desperate characteristics of black people’s lives in the New South Africa marks “the death of black consciousness”:

he lap-danced / to the jukebox tunes / home of the brave / with his head buried in sand dune / bc, he! Bantu! / ngiyamgcoba!

Post-struggle praise-singing and performance poetry

In post-1994 South Africa, the praise poetry genre was repopularized with the huge prospects for government and corporate funding and the lucrative chances of being praise-singers for the president, premiers, mayors, and ministers, and official advertisers/amassadors of particular corporate products/companies. The mass media, with its proclivity to promote mediocrity and to churn out instant celebrities, plays a critical role in promoting poetry for its own sake as opposed to the poetry of commitment. Although many of these poets raise contemporary
issues like HIV/AIDS, sexist and patriarchal practices, gender-based violence, and poverty and inequality, a lot of them are either courtier clowns and praise poets or simply escape into the world of neo-romanticism away from socioeconomic and political issues emanating from the neocolonial, neoliberal capitalist dispensation. The mainstream corporate world and government and civil society organizations have all recognized the power of the spoken word/performed poetry and traditional African oral poetry as mediums of communication. Therefore, there is an increase in the use of poetry and hip-hop and kwairo music for advertising and public relations. Performance poets are increasingly being commissioned by corporations or the government to write or perform their works to advance one cause or the other. This adds another dimension where the lure of quick bucks and celebrity status as well as awards, honors, and titles like poet laureate or the prospects of being the official imbongi of a high-powered political individual or office, threatens the dedication and commitment of the poets to poetry as an art form and to the poetry of conscience and, therefore, threatens the literary quality of the works produced. The competitive aspect of the slam poetry scene in particular, along with rampant commercialization, has led to more individualistic rather than communitarian.

In this regard, the instructive observations of freelance journalist and poet Goodenough Mashego deserve some lengthy quotation:

The spoken word scene is abuzz with talented souls who are mostly bc, or anti-establishment. The problem is that the scene is only exclusively an urban phenomenon. Jo’burg has got its people who walk around with groupies who will ululate even when they fart. I have a feeling it has developed elitist tendencies which are going to kill it and the message . . . you have “celebrated” slam poets who will come at book launches and never recite, only to distribute flyers about where their next paid gig will be. That’s the undoing. One is left wondering how they can claim bohemia while their attitude smirks of utopia . . . money can buy anything. I never believed it until I saw some bc heavy-hitters who are appointed to head state institutions toning down on their rhetoric. I think most of them who are now mainstream cannot write hard-hitting commentaries or poetry while they know they might be called to present their works in front of the president and his side-kicks. You can’t label Zuma corrupt when he is paying your bills, you can’t quiz the destructive nature of the arms industry when Denel has invited you to a luncheon. That poem that you have that says “Mandela is a blunder/ Leading the nation asunder” will die a natural death when you have to perform for Oprah during the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund Gala Dinner. Sometimes they just make you
lefifi tladi is of the view that the mediocrity and lack of direction prevalent in artistic and literary circles reflects the general crisis of identity in a post-independence, neocolonial dispensation characterized by amnesia and the assault of eurocentricism and western hegemony on the mindset of south africans. “the problem today is that the issues now have changed because it is not an issue of black people or white people. we don’t have focus. artists are on their own, and the direction is not defined. so we are improvising most of the time. that’s why it’s easy to be an artist because there are no guidelines . . . we have an identity crisis. everything is wishywashy . . . we are all part of this confusion where we are trying to define what is south african.”

the misappropriation of biko/bc

mashego argues that the dictates of capital are one of the major reasons for the lack of a black consciousness-oriented popular theatre and spoken word: “poets like kgafela (oa magogodi), vonani (bila), mpho (ramaano), and a few outspoken individuals do still talk from the heart. but at the end of the day even artists get hungry and have to eat, and it’s the ruthless capitalists who have the money. they are the ones who run the state theatre, polokwane auditorium and other venues where you need approval to utilize. connections between the arts, spoken or written, and bc still exist. one needs to read the text because i think that’s where honesty lies. performance is another thing, the audience dictates the direction. post-’94 one looks at the audience and sees the mayor and tones down on the venom. i’m not saying bc artists sell out, i’m just saying they need to eat, and that’s the consideration.” mahola posits that another reason for a lack of connectivity between bc-era poetry and the current poetry resurgence is the censorship and systematic purging of bc-oriented materials and works by writers like fanon and cabral off library bookshelves.

mashego’s account of the difficulty he experienced when trying to access books by the likes of césaire and ngugi wa thiong’o, as part of an initiative to establish the first african library, somewhat supports mahola’s assertion. “we faxed the list to embassies of all the countries that once colonized a certain part of africa to search for the books through their cultural desks and donate them to us. something like,
‘give us back our wisdom.’ nothing was happening and we were only exhausting money calling these embassies and one day i met mama miriam [tlali] at the same event where i met the late phaswane mpe and we started talking. tlali said, ‘o ka se di thole ngwanake. ke nahana hore ba di rekile tsohle ba di tshuma ka mollo.’ [i think they bought all bc literature and burned it.] now you see, the colonizers or racists had a swat team that was out to make sure that any literature that sympathized with bc got destroyed. they had a plan to separate oral and literature from a bc agenda because they knew african people are artistic people who sing and dance when happy, sad and celebrating. what needs to be done now is to make a call to our government,
‘please, give us back our wisdom, even if it’s on paperback.’”

this view is supported by asha moodley who says that, among other things, the fact that a great deal of time in the saso-bpc trial was taken on interrogating the writings of bc leaders like strini moodley and stephen bantu biko, shows that there was a constant and concerted attack on black creativity. she also highlights the fact that in addition to the murder of prominent bc leaders like mthuli ka shezi, mapetla mohapi, onkgopotse tiro, and steve biko by the apartheid regime in the 1970s, thousands of black consciousness adherents were killed for their political beliefs between 1983 and 1990. moodley goes further to suggest that there is currently a systematic attempt to gloss over—or obliterate from the memory of south africans—the era between 1960 and 1980 in narrating the history of the struggle for liberation in south africa, and to appropriate stephen bantu biko by political forces that have always been detractors and critics of biko and the philosophy of black consciousness. she says it is not unusual for corporate capital and the political establishment to appropriate the message of revolution and change and utilize it for their own interests. part of this, argues moodley, is the commodification of martyrs and heroes of the struggle as exemplified by the designer clothes bearing the names of biko and che guevara. mashego is more scathing in his attack on the misrepresentation and abuse of biko’s name: “true, biko is becoming the new media agenda, thanks to people like xolela mangcu, the steve biko foundation, writes associates and nkosinathi biko. but he is being commercialized like che guevara. biko is now a screensaver on a 14 year old’s cellphone and a ventersdorp farmer’s desktop. but, who is biko?; ask any of the people who are wearing his t-shirt while holding a can of black label and soliciting sex without a condom from a 15-year-old girl. the media is prostituting biko instead of representing him.”
some proposals on connecting the “bc era” and post-1994 poets and writers

splits and lack of unity and cooperation among the three political parties that claim black consciousness have left south africa with no visible and audible party-political force articulating a black consciousness perspective at the macro level of parliamentary politics. the general state of disorganization and dysfunctionality within these parties makes it difficult for them to connect with the resurgent literary and cultural movement that carries some resonance of black consciousness. the few community-based organizations and cultural organizations with some affinity to black consciousness operate in isolation from each other with no efforts to synergize and consolidate their works. the need to solicit corporate funding forces many organizations to lie low as far as a more pronounced commitment to black consciousness is concerned. the silence and/or marginalization of many bc-era writers and the cooption of a handful of them (either into the corporate world or the structures of government) make it difficult for the younger generation of writers and poets to connect with their literary predecessors. what is missing is a conscious and well-coordinated program to link up the present literary and cultural movement with the past and to educate the current crop of poets and cultural activists about their predecessors.
in spite of this lack of awareness about black consciousness-oriented writers and the actual contributions of the bc movement in pushing literature and the arts in south africa forward, biko and black consciousness continue to be points of reference (or at least a source of inspiration) for writers, including the slam poets and hip hop artists. bullet indicates that the philosophy of black consciousness, with its emphasis on self-reliance, serves as an inspiration to the artists and groups that do community development work. but they prefer to be nonaligned when it comes to party politics, and nonsectarian in their dealings with communities and organizations. attributing his political consciousness to his mother’s account of how his grandfather was dispossessed of his plot of land and how many african families and communities were displaced by forced removals, bullet declares that parents and the older generation have a responsibility to teach the younger generation their history and to raise their awareness about cultural, social, economic, and political issues affecting their communities.23

mashego suggests the way forward: “the same way the current us hip-hop practitioners are linking to ray charles, billie holiday, stevie wonder, and others, the old generation must not hold on to their masters as if they were their hearts. they should let the young generation exploit that. if there is a book entitled this way i salute you, it shouldn’t be a matter of a thousand lawyers converging around a copy of the copyright act before a young spoken word artist can be allowed to use that as a title of his hip-hop or spoken word album.” asha moodley suggests that one way of doing this is to create a platform where the bc-era poets and other artists of that era share the stage with the current crop of writers and artists in concerts, festivals, seminars, workshops, and exchange programs. she also calls for a drastic change in the school curriculum to ensure that african literature and writings by black writers take center stage in languages, literature, and moral and cultural studies from primary to tertiary education. mashego also proposes that the politics of ethnicity and tribalism need to be exposed and combated through the vehicles of drama, theatre, writing and poetry. these works should point out the weakness of such thinking, with black consciousness as the point of departure.

notes
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3. peter horn, “when it rains: u.s, bc and lyric poetry in south africa,” speak, cape
south african culture 13.
12. interview with mahola.
13. ibid.
14. interview with sphephelo mbhele aka miracle.
15. vonani bila, magicstan fires (elim hospital: timbila poetry project, 2006).
16. vonani bila, in the name of amandla (elim hospital: timbila poetry project, 2004).
17. mzi mahola, dancing in the rain (scottsville: ukzn press, 2006).
18. lebogang mashile, in a ribbon of rhythm (capetown, sa: oshun books, 2005).
19. myesha jenkins, breaking the surface (elim hospital: timbila poetry project, 2005).
20. bandile gumbi, pangs of initiation (somerset west: h.a hodgie, 2004).
21. pulse; hidden treasures; lefifi tladi (www.news.com/citypress/entertainment/0, 7515, 186-16982018078, 00html).
22. interview with goodenough mashego, january 8, 2007.

comments (3)

december 8, 2015

s.c.u.m. manifesto (society for cutting up men) by valerie solanas

filed under: politics, sex — abraxas @ 12:14 pm

life in this society being, at best, an utter bore and no aspect of society being at all relevant to women, there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation and destroy the male sex.
it is now technically feasible to reproduce without the aid of males (or, for that matter, females) and to produce only females. we must begin immediately to do so. retaining the mail has not even the dubious purpose of reproduction. the male is a biological accident: the y (male) gene is an incomplete x (female) gene, that is, it has an incomplete set of chromosomes. in other words, the male is an incomplete female, a walking abortion, aborted at the gene stage. to be male is to be deficient, emotionally limited; maleness is a deficiency disease and males are emotional cripples.

the male is completely egocentric, trapped inside himself, incapable of empathizing or identifying with others, or love, friendship, affection of tenderness. he is a completely isolated unit, incapable of rapport with anyone. his responses are entirely visceral, not cerebral; his intelligence is a mere tool in the services of his drives and needs; he is incapable of mental passion, mental interaction; he can’t relate to anything other than his own physical sensations. he is a half-dead, unresponsive lump, incapable of giving or receiving pleasure or happiness; consequently, he is at best an utter bore, an inoffensive blob, since only those capable of absorption in others can be charming. he is trapped in a twilight zone halfway between humans and apes, and is far worse off than the apes because, unlike the apes, he is capable of a large array of negative feelings — hate, jealousy, contempt, disgust, guilt, shame, doubt — and moreover, he is aware of what he is and what he isn’t.
although completely physical, the male is unfit even for stud service. even assuming mechanical proficiency, which few men have, he is, first of all, incapable of zestfully, lustfully, tearing off a piece, but instead is eaten up with guilt, shame, fear and insecurity, feelings rooted in male nature, which the most enlightened training can only minimize; second, the physical feeling he attains is next to nothing; and third, he is not empathizing with his partner, but is obsessed with how he’s doing, turning in an a performance, doing a good plumbing job. to call a man an animal is to flatter him; he’s a machine, a walking dildo. it’s often said that men use women. use them for what? surely not pleasure.

eaten up with guilt, shame, fears and insecurities and obtaining, if he’s lucky, a barely perceptible physical feeling, the male is, nonetheless, obsessed with screwing; he’ll swim through a river of snot, wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit, if he thinks there’ll be a friendly pussy awaiting him. he’ll screw a woman he despises, any snagle-toothed hag, and furthermore, pay for the opportunity. why? relieving physical tension isn’t the answer, as masturbation suffices for that. it’s not ego satisfaction; that doesn’t explain screwing corpses and babies.

completely egocentric, unable to relate, empathize or identify, and filled with a vast, pervasive, diffuse sexuality, the male is pyschically passive. he hates his passivity, so he projects it onto women, defines the make as active, then sets out to prove that he is (‘prove that he is a man’). his main means of attempting to prove it is screwing (big man with a big dick tearing off a big piece). since he’s attempting to prove an error, he must ‘prove’ it again and again. screwing, then, is a desperate compulsive, attempt to prove he’s not passive, not a woman; but he is passive and does want to be a woman.
being an incomplete female, the male spends his life attempting to complete himself, to become female. he attempts to do this by constantly seeking out, fraternizing with and trying to live through an fuse with the female, and by claiming as his own all female characteristics — emotional strength and independence, forcefulness, dynamism, decisiveness, coolness, objectivity, assertiveness, courage, integrity, vitality, intensity, depth of character, grooviness, etc — and projecting onto women all male traits — vanity, frivolity, triviality, weakness, etc. it should be said, though, that the male has one glaring area of superiority over the female — public relations. (he has done a brilliant job of convincing millions of women that men are women and women are men). the male claim that females find fulfillment through motherhood and sexuality reflects what males think they’d find fulfilling if they were female.

women, in other words, don’t have penis envy; men have pussy envy. when the male accepts his passivity, defines himself as a woman (males as well as females thing men are women and women are men), and becomes a transvestite he loses his desire to screw (or to do anything else, for that matter; he fulfills himself as a drag queen) and gets his dick chopped off. he then achieves a continuous diffuse sexual feeling from ‘being a woman’. screwing is, for a man, a defense against his desire to be female. he is responsible for:
war: the male’s normal compensation for not being female, namely, getting his big
gun off, is grossly inadequate, as he can get it off only a very limited number of
times; so he gets it off on a really massive scale, and proves to the entire world that
he’s a `man', since he has no compassion or ability to empathize or identify, proving
his manhood is worth an endless amount of mutilation and suffering and an endless
number of lives, including his own — his own life being worthless, he would rather
go out in a blaze of glory than to plod grimly on for fifty more years.

niceness, politeness, and `dignity': every man, deep down, knows he’s a worthless
piece of shit. overwhelmed by a sense of animalism and deeply ashamed of it;
wanting, not to express himself, but to hide from others his total physicality, total
ego-centricity, the hate and contempt he feels for other men, and to hide from
himself the hate and contempt he suspects other men feel for him; having a crudely
constructed nervous system that is easily upset by the least display of emotion or
feeling, the male tries to enforce a `social' code that ensures perfect blandness,
unsullied by the slightest trace or feeling or upsetting opinion. he uses terms like
`copulate', `sexual congress', `have relations with’ (to men sexual relations is a
redundancy), overlaid with stilted manners; the suit on the chimp.
money, marriage and prostitution, work and prevention of an automated society:
there is no human reason for money or for anyone to work more than two or three
hours a week at the very most. all non-creative jobs (practically all jobs now being
done) could have been automated long ago, and in a moneyless society everyone
can have as much of the best of everything as she wants. but there are non-human,
male reasons for wanting to maintain the money system:

1. pussy. despising his highly inadequate self, overcome with intense anxiety and a
deep, profound loneliness when by his empty self, desperate to attach himself to any
female in dim hopes of completing himself, in the mystical belief that by touching
gold he’ll turn to gold, the male craves the continuous companionship of women.
the company of the lowest female is preferable to his own or that of other men, who
serve only to remind him of his repulsiveness. but females, unless very young or very
sick, must be coerced or bribed into male company.

2. supply the non-relating male with the delusion of usefulness, and enable him to
try to justify his existence by digging holes and then filling them up. leisure time
horrifies the male, who will have nothing to do but contemplate his grotesque self.
able to relate or to love, the male must work. females crave absorbing,
emotionally satisfying, meaningful activity, but lacking the opportunity or ability for this, they prefer to idle and waste away their time in ways of their own choosing — sleeping, shopping, bowling, shooting pool, playing cards and other games, breeding, reading, walking around, daydreaming, eating, playing with themselves, popping pills, going to the movies, getting analyzed, traveling, raising dogs and cats, lolling about on the beach, swimming, watching TV, listening to music, decorating their houses, gardening, sewing, nightclubbing, dancing, visiting, ‘improving their minds’ (taking courses), and absorbing ‘culture’ (lectures, plays, concerts, ‘arty’ movies).

therefore, many females would, even assuming complete economic equality between the sexes, prefer living with males or peddling their asses on the street, thus having most of their time for themselves, to spending many hours of their days doing boring, stultifying, non-creative work for someone else, functioning as less than animals, as machines, or, at best — if able to get a ‘good’ job — co-managing the shitpile. what will liberate women, therefore, from male control is the total elimination of the money-work system, not the attainment of economic equality with men within it.

3. power and control. unmasterful in his personal relations with women, the male attains to masterfulness by the manipulation of money and everything controlled by money, in other words, of everything and everybody.

4. love substitute. unable to give love or affection, the male gives money. it makes him feel motherly. the mother gives milk; he gives bread. he is the breadwinner.

5. provide the male with a goal. incapable of enjoying the moment, the male needs something to look forward to, and money provides him with an eternal, never-ending goal: just think of what you could do with 80 trillion dollars — invest it! and in three years time you’d have 300 trillion dollars!!!

6. provide the basis for the male’s major opportunity to control and manipulate — fatherhood.

fatherhood and mental illness (fear, cowardice, timidity, humility, insecurity, passivity): mother wants what’s best for her kids; daddy only wants what’s best for daddy, that is peace and quiet, pandering to his delusion of dignity (‘respect’), a good reflection on himself (status) and the opportunity to control and manipulate, or, if he’s an ‘enlightened’ father, to ‘give guidance’. his daughter, in addition, he wants sexually — he givers her hand in marriage; the other part is for him. daddy, unlike mother, can never give in to his kids, as he must, at all costs, preserve his delusion of decisiveness, forcefulness, always-rightness and strength. never getting
one’s way leads to lack of self-confidence in one’s ability to cope with the world and to a passive acceptance of the status quo. mother loves her kids, although she sometimes gets angry, but anger blows over quickly and even while it exists, doesn’t preclude love and basic acceptance. emotionally diseased daddy doesn’t love his kids; he approves of them — if they’re `good', that is, if they’re nice, `respectful', obedient, subservient to his will, quiet and not given to unseemly displays of temper that would be most upsetting to daddy’s easily disturbed male nervous system — in other words, if they’re passive vegetables. if they’re not `good', he doesn’t get angry — not if he’s a modern, `civilized' father (the old-fashioned ranting, raving brute is preferable, as he is so ridiculous he can be easily despised) — but rather express disapproval, a state that, unlike anger, endures and precludes a basic acceptance, leaving the kid with the feeling of worthlessness and a lifelong obsession with being approved of; the result is fear of independent thought, as this leads to unconventional, disapproved of opinions and way of life.

for the kid to want daddy’s approval it must respect daddy, and being garbage, daddy can make sure that he is respected only by remaining aloof, by distantness, by acting on the precept of `familiarity breeds contempt', which is, of course, true, if one is contemptible. by being distant and aloof, he is able to remain unknown, mysterious, and thereby, to inspire fear (`respect').

disapproval of emotional `scenes' leads to fear of strong emotion, fear of one's own anger and hatred. fear of anger and hatred combined with a lack of self-confidence in one's ability to cope with and change the world, or even to affect in the slightest way one's own destiny, leads to a mindless belief that the world and most people in it are nice and the most banal, trivial amusements are great fun and deeply pleasurable.

the affect of fatherhood on males, specifically, is to make them `men', that is, highly defensive of all impulses to passivity, faggotry, and of desires to be female. every boy wants to imitate his mother, be her, fuse with her, but daddy forbids this; he is the mother; he gets to fuse with her. so he tells the boy, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, to not be a sissy, to act like a `man'. the boy, scared shitless of and `respecting' his father, complies, and becomes just like daddy, that model of `man'-hood, the all-american ideal — the well-behaved heterosexual dullard.
the effect of fatherhood on females is to make them male — dependent, passive, domestic, animalistic, insecure, approval and security seekers, cowardly, humble, 'respectful' of authorities and men, closed, not fully responsive, half-dead, trivial, dull, conventional, flattened-out and thoroughly contemptible. daddy's girl, always tense and fearful, uncool, unanalytical, lacking objectivity, appraises daddy, and thereafter, other men, against a background of fear ('respect') and is not only unable to see the empty shell behind the facade, but accepts the male definition of himself as superior, as a female, and of herself, as inferior, as a male, which, thanks to daddy, she really is.

it is the increase of fatherhood, resulting from the increased and more widespread affluence that fatherhood needs in order to thrive, that has caused the general increase of mindlessness and the decline of women in the united states since the 1920s. the close association of affluence with fatherhood has led, for the most part, to only the wrong girls, namely, the 'privileged' middle class girls, getting 'educated'.

the effect of fathers, in sum, has been to corrode the world with maleness. the male has a negative midas touch — everything he touches turns to shit.

suppression of individuality, animalism (domesticity and motherhood), and functionalism: the male is just a bunch of conditioned reflexes, incapable of a mentally free response; he is tied to he earliest conditioning, determined completely by his past experiences. his earliest experiences are with his mother, and he is throughout his life tied to her. it never becomes completely clear to the make that he is not part of his mother, that he is he and she is she.

his greatest need is to be guided, sheltered, protected and admired by mama (men expect women to adore what men shrink from in horror — themselves) and, being completely physical, he yearns to spend his time (that's not spent 'out in the world' grimly defending against his passivity) wallowing in basic animal activities — eating,
sleeping, shitting, relaxing and being soothed by mama. passive, rattle-headed
daddy’s girl, ever eager for approval, for a pat on the head, for the ‘respect’ if any
passing piece of garbage, is easily reduced to mama, mindless ministrator to physical
needs, soother of the weary, apery brow, booster of the tiny ego, appreciator of the
contemptible, a hot water bottle with tits.

the reduction to animals of the women of the most backward segment of society — the ‘privileged, educated’ middle-class, the backwash of humanity — where daddy reigns supreme, has been so thorough that they try to groove on labour pains and lie around in the most advanced nation in the world in the middle of the twentieth century with babies chomping away on their tits. it’s not for the kids sake, though, that the ‘experts’ tell women that mama should stay home and grovel in animalism, but for daddy’s; the tits for daddy to hang onto; the labor pains for daddy to vicariously groove on (half dead, he needs awfully strong stimuli to make him respond).

reducing the female to an animal, to mama, to a male, is necessary for psychological as well as practical reasons: the male is a mere member of the species, interchangeable with every other male. he has no deep-seated individuality, which stems from what intrigues you, what outside yourself absorbs you, what you’re in relation to. completely self-absorbed, capable of being in relation only to their bodies and physical sensations, males differ from each other only to the degree and in the ways they attempt to defend against their passivity and against their desire to be female.

the female’s individuality, which he is acutely aware of, but which he doesn’t comprehend and isn’t capable of relating to or grasping emotionally, frightens and upsets him and fills him with envy. so he denies it in her and proceeds to define everyone in terms of his or her function or use, assigning to himself, of course, the most important functions — doctor, president, scientist — therefore providing himself with an identity, if not individuality, and tries to convince himself and women (he’s succeeded best at convincing women) that the female function is to bear and raise children and to relax, comfort and boost the ego if the male; that her function is such as to make her interchangeable with every other female. in actual fact, the female function is to relate, groove, love and be herself, irreplaceable by anyone else; the male function is to produce sperm. we now have sperm banks.

in actual fact, the female function is to explore, discover, invent, solve problems crack jokes, make music — all with love. in other words, create a magic world.
prevention of privacy: although the male, being ashamed of what he is and almost of everything he does, insists on privacy and secrecy in all aspects of his life, he has no real regard for privacy. Being empty, not being a complete, separate being, having no self to groove on and needing to be constantly in female company, he sees nothing at all wrong in intruding himself on any woman’s thoughts, even a total stranger’s, anywhere at any time, but rather feels indignant and insulted when put down for doing so, as well as confused — he can’t, for the life of him, understand why anyone would prefer so much as one minute of solitude to the company of any creep around. Wanting to become a woman, he strives to be constantly around females, which is the closest he can get to becoming one, so he created a ‘society’ based upon the family — a male-female couple and their kids (the excuse for the family’s existence), who live virtually on top of one another, unscrupulously violating the females’ rights, privacy and sanity.

isolation, suburbs, and prevention of community: our society is not a community, but merely a collection of isolated family units. Desperately insecure, fearing his woman will leave him if she is exposed to other men or to anything remotely resembling life, the male seeks to isolate her from other men and from what little civilization there is, so he moves her out to the suburbs, a collection of self-absorbed couples and their kids. Isolation enables him to try to maintain his pretense of being an individual now becoming a ‘rugged individualist’, a loner, equating non-cooperation and solitariness with individuality.

there is yet another reason for the male to isolate himself: every man is an island. Trapped inside himself, emotionally isolated, unable to relate, the male has a horror
of civilization, people, cities, situations requiring an ability to understand and relate to people. So like a scared rabbit, he scurries off, dragging daddy’s little asshole with him to the wilderness, suburbs, or, in the case of the hippy — he’s way out, man! — all the way out to the cow pasture where he can fuck and breed undisturbed and mess around with his beads and flute.

The ‘hippy’, whose desire to be a ‘man’, a ‘rugged individualist’, isn’t quite as strong as the average man’s, and who, in addition, is excited by the thought having lots of women accessible to him, rebels against the harshness of a breadwinner’s life and the monotony of one woman. In the name of sharing and cooperation, he forms a commune or tribe, which, for all its togetherness and partly because of it, (the commune, being an extended family, is an extended violation of the female’s rights, privacy and sanity) is no more a community than normal ‘society’.

A true community consists of individuals — not mere species members, not couples — respecting each other’s individuality and privacy, at the same time interacting with each other mentally and emotionally — free spirits in free relation to each other — and co-operating with each other to achieve common ends. Traditionalists say the basic unit of ‘society’ is the family; ‘hippies’ say the tribe; no one says the individual.

The ‘hippy’ babbles on about individuality, but has no more conception of it than any other man. He desires to get back to nature, back to the wilderness, back to the home of furry animals that he’s one of, away from the city, where there is at least a trace, a bare beginning of civilization, to live at the species level, his time taken up with simple, non-intellectual activities — farming, fucking, bead stringing. The most important activity of the commune, the one upon which it is based, is gang-banging. The ‘hippy’ is enticed to the commune mainly by the prospect for free pussy — the main commodity to be shared, to be had just for the asking, but, blinded by greed, he fails to anticipate all the other men he has to share with, or the jealousies and possessiveness for the pussies themselves.

Men cannot co-operate to achieve a common end, because each man’s end is all the pussy for himself. The commune, therefore, is doomed to failure; each ‘hippy’ will, in panic, grab the first simpleton who digs him and whisks her off to the suburbs as fast as he can. The male cannot progress socially, but merely swings back and forth from isolation to gang-banging.

Conformity: although he wants to be an individual, the male is scared of anything in
himself that is the slightest bit different from other men, it causes him to suspect that he’s not really a ‘man’, that he’s passive and totally sexual, a highly upsetting suspicion. If other men are “a” and he’s not, he must not be a man; he must be a fag. So he tries to affirm his ‘manhood’ by being like all the other men. Differentness in other men, as well as himself, threatens him; it means they’re fags whom he must at all costs avoid, so he tries to make sure that all other men conform.

The male dares to be different to the degree that he accepts his passivity and his desire to be female, his fagginess. The farthest out male is the drag queen, but he, although different from most men, is exactly like all the other drag queens like the functionalist, he has an identity — he is female. He tries to define all his troubles away — but still no individuality. Not completely convinced that he’s a woman, highly insecure about being sufficiently female, he conforms compulsively to the man-made stereotype, ending up as nothing but a bundle of stilted mannerisms.

to be sure he’s a ‘man’, the male must see to it that the female be clearly a ‘woman’, the opposite of a ‘man’, that is, the female must act like a faggot. And daddy’s girl, all of whose female instincts were wrenched out of her when little, easily and obligingly adapts herself to the role.

Authority and government: having no sense of right and wrong, no conscience, which can only stem from having an ability to empathize with others... having no faith in his non-existent self, being unnecessarily competitive, and by nature, unable to co-operate, the male feels a need for external guidance and control. So he created authorities — priests, experts, bosses, leaders, etc — and government. Wanting the female (mama) to guide him, but unable to accept this fact (he is, after all, a man), wanting to play woman, to usurp her function as guider and protector, he sees to it that all authorities are male.
there's no reason why a society consisting of rational beings capable of empathizing with each other, complete and having no natural reason to compete, should have a government, laws or leaders.

philosophy, religion, and morality based on sex: the male's inability to relate to anybody or anything makes his life pointless and meaningless (the ultimate male insight is that life is absurd), so he invented philosophy and religion. being empty, he looks outward, not only for guidance and control, but for salvation and for the meaning of life. happiness being for him impossible on this earth, he invented heaven.

for a man, having no ability to empathize with others and being totally sexual, 'wrong' is sexual 'license' and engaging in 'deviant' ('unmanly') sexual practices, that is, not defending against his passivity and total sexuality which, if indulged, would destroy 'civilization', since 'civilization' is based entirely upon the male need to defend himself against these characteristics. for a woman (according to men), 'wrong' is any behavior that would entice men into sexual 'license' — that is, not placing male needs above her own and not being a faggot.

religion not only provides the male with a goal (heaven) and helps keep women tied to men, but offers rituals through which he can try to expiate the guilt and shame he feels at not defending himself enough against his sexual impulses; in essence, that
guilt and shame he feels at being male.

most men men, utterly cowardly, project their inherent weaknesses onto women, label them female weaknesses and believe themselves to have female strengths; most philosophers, not quite so cowardly, face the fact that make lacks exist in men, but still can't face the fact that they exist in men only. so they label the male condition the human condition, post their nothingness problem, which horrifies them, as a philosophical dilemma, thereby giving stature to their animalism, grandiloquently label their nothingness their `identity problem’, and proceed to prattle on pompously about the `crisis of the individual’, the `essence of being’, `existence preceding essence’, `existential modes of being’, etc. etc.

a woman not only takes her identity and individuality for granted, but knows instinctively that the only wrong is to hurt others, and that the meaning of life is love.

prejudice (racial, ethnic, religious, etc): the male needs scapegoats onto whom he can project his failings and inadequacies and upon whom he can vent his frustration at not being female. and the vicarious discriminations have the practical advantage of substantially increasing the pussy pool available to the men on top.

competition, prestige, status, formal education, ignorance and social and economic classes: having an obsessive desire to be admired by women, but no intrinsic worth, the make constructs a highly artificial society enabling him to appropriate the appearance of worth through money, prestige, `high’ social class, degrees, professional position and knowledge and, by pushing as many other men as possible down professionally, socially, economically, and educationally.

the purpose of `higher’ education is not to educate but to exclude as many as possible from the various professions.

the male, totally physical, incapable of mental rapport, although able to understand and use knowledge and ideas, is unable to relate to them, to grasp them emotionally: he does not value knowledge and ideas for their own sake (they’re just means to ends) and, consequently, feels no need for mental companions, no need to cultivate the intellectual potentialities of others. on the contrary, the male has a vested interest in ignorance; it gives the few knowledgeable men a decided edge on the unknowledgeable ones, and besides, the male knows that an enlightened, aware female population will mean the end of him. the healthy, conceited female wants the company of equals whom she can respect and groove on; the male and the sick, insecure, unself-confident male female crave the company of worms.

no genuine social revolution can be accomplished by the male, as the male on top
wants the status quo, and all the male on the bottom wants is to be the male on top. the male `rebel' is a farce; this is the male's `society', made by him to satisfy his needs. he's never satisfied, because he's not capable of being satisfied. ultimately, what the male `rebel' is rebelling against is being male. the male changes only when forced to do so by technology, when he has no choice, when `society' reaches the stage where he must change or die. we're at that stage now; if women don't get their asses in gear fast, we may very well all die.

prevention of conversation: being completely self-centered and unable to relate to anything outside himself, the male's `conversation', when not about himself, is an impersonal droning on, removed from anything of human value. male `intellectual conversation' is a strained compulsive attempt to impress the female.

daddy's girl, passive, adaptable, respectful of and in awe of the male, allows him to impose his hideously dull chatter on her. this is not too difficult for her, as the tension and anxiety, the lack of cool, the insecurity and self-doubt, the unsuresness of her own feelings and sensations that daddy instilled in her make her unable to see that the male's babble is babble; like the aesthete `appreciating' the blob that's labeled `great art', she believes she's grooving on what bores the shit out of her. not only does she permit his babble to dominate, she adapts her own `conversation' accordingly.

trained from an early childhood in niceness, politeness and `dignity', in pandering to the male need to disguise his animalism, she obligingly reduces her own `conversation' to small talk, a bland, insipid avoidance of any topic beyond the utterly trivial — or is `educated', to `intellectual' discussion, that is, impersonal discoursing on irrelevant distractions — the gross national product, the common market, the influence of rimbaud on symbolist painting. so adept is she at pandering that it eventually becomes second nature and she continues to pander to men even when in the company of other females only.

apart from pandering, her `conversation' is further limited by her insecurity about expressing deviant, original opinions and the self-absorption based on insecurity and that prevents her conversation from being charming. niceness, politeness, `dignity', insecurity and self-absorption are hardly conducive to intensity and wit, qualities a conversation must have to be worthy of the name. such conversation is hardly rampant, as only completely self-confident, arrogant, outgoing, proud, tough-minded females are capable of intense, bitchy, witty conversation.
prevention of friendship (love): men have contempt for themselves, for all other men whom they contemplate more than casually and whom they do not think are females, (for example `sympathetic' analysts and `great artists') or agents of god and for all women who respect and pander to them: the insecure, approval-seeking, pandering male-females have contempt for themselves and for all women like them: the self-confident, swinging, thrill-seeking female females have contempt for me and for the pandering male females. in short, contempt is the order of the day.

love is not dependency or sex, but friendship, and therefore, love can’t exist between two males, between a male and a female, or between two females, one or both of whom is a mindless, insecure, pandering male; like conversation, love can exist only between two secure, free-wheeling, independent groovy female females, since friendship is based upon respect, not contempt.

even amongst groovy females deep friendships seldom occur in adulthood, as almost all of them are either tied up with men in order to survive economically, or bogged down in hacking their way through the jungle and in trying to keep their heads about the amorphous mass. love can’t flourish in a society based upon money and meaningless work: it requires complete economic as well as personal freedom, leisure time and the opportunity to engage in intensely absorbing, emotionally satisfying activities which, when shared with those you respect, lead to deep friendship. our `society’ provides practically no opportunity to engage in such activities.

having stripped the world of conversation, friendship and love, the male offers us these paltry substitutes:

`great art’ and `culture’: the male `artist’ attempts to solve his dilemma of not being able to live, of not being female, by constructing a highly artificial world in which the male is heroized, that is, displays female traits, and the female is reduced to highly limited, insipid subordinate roles, that is, to being male.

the male `artistic’ aim being, not to communicate (having nothing inside him he has nothing to say), but to disguise his animalism, he resorts to symbolism and obscurity (`deep’ stuff). the vast majority of people, particularly the `educated’ ones, lacking faith in their own judgment, humble, respectful of authority (`daddy knows best’), are easily conned into believing that obscurity, evasiveness, incomprehensibility, indirectness, ambiguity and boredom are marks of depth and brilliance.

`great art’ proves that men are superior to women, that men are women, being labeled `great art’, almost all of which, as the anti-feminists are fond of reminding us, was created by men. we know that `great art’ is great because male authorities have told us so, and we can’t claim otherwise, as only those with exquisite sensitivities far superior to ours can perceive and appreciated the slop they appreciated.

appreciating is the sole diversion of the `cultivated’; passive and incompetent, lacking imagination and wit, they must try to make do with that; unable to create their own diversions, to create a little world of their own, to affect in the smallest way their environments, they must accept what’s given; unable to create or relate,
they spectate. absorbing `culture' is a desperate, frantic attempt to groove in an ungroovy world, to escape the horror of a sterile, mindless, existence. `culture' provides a sop to the egos of the incompetent, a means of rationalizing passive spectating; they can pride themselves on their ability to appreciate the `finer' things, to see a jewel where this is only a turd (they want to be admired for admiring). lacking faith in their ability to change anything, resigned to the status quo, they have to see beauty in turds because, so far as they can see, turds are all they'll ever have.

the veneration of `art' and `culture' — besides leading many women into boring, passive activity that distracts from more important and rewarding activities, from cultivating active abilities, and leads to the constant intrusion on our sensibilities of pompous dissertations on the deep beauty of this and that turn. this allows the `artist' to be setup as one possessing superior feelings, perceptions, insights and judgments, thereby undermining the faith of insecure women in the value and validity of their own feelings, perceptions, insights and judgments.

the male, having a very limited range of feelings, and consequently, very limited perceptions, insights and judgments, needs the `artist' to guide him, to tell him what life is all about. but the male `artist' being totally sexual, unable to relate to anything beyond his own physical sensations, having nothing to express beyond the insight that for the male life is meaningless and absurd, cannot be an artist. how can he who is not capable of life tell us what life is all about? a `male artist' is a contradiction in terms. a degenerate can only produce degenerate `art'. the true artist is every self-confident, healthy female, and in a female society the only art, the only culture, will be conceited, kooky, funky, females grooving on each other and on everything else in the universe.

sexuality: sex is not part of a relationship: on the contrary, it is a solitary experience, non-creative, a gross waste of time. the female can easily — far more easily than she may think — condition away her sex drive, leaving her completely cool and cerebral and free to pursue truly worthy relationships and activities; but the male, who seems to dig women sexually and who seeks out constantly to arouse them, stimulates the highly sexed female to frenzies of lust, throwing her into a sex bag from which few women ever escape. the lecherous male excited the lustful female; he has to — when the female transcends her body, rises above animalism, the male, whose ego consists of his cock, will disappear.

on the other hand, those females least embedded in the male `culture', the least nice, those crass and simple souls who reduce fucking to fucking, who are too childish for the grown-up world of suburbs, mortgages, mops and baby shit, too selfish to raise kids and husbands, too uncivilized to give a shit for anyones opinion of them, too arrogant to respect daddy, the `greats' or the deep wisdom of the ancients, who trust only their own animal, gutter instincts, who equate culture with chicks, whose sole diversion is prowling for emotional thrills and excitement, who are given to disgusting, nasty upsetting `scenes', hateful, violent bitches given to slamming those who unduly irritate them in the teeth, who'd sink a shiv into a man's chest or ram an icepick up his asshole as soon as look at him, if they knew they could get away with it, in short, those who, by the standards of our `culture' are scum... these females are cool and relatively cerebral and skirting asexuality.

unhampered by propriety, niceness, discretion, public opinion, `morals', the respect of assholes, always funky, dirty, low-down scum gets around... and around and around... they've seen the whole show — every bit of it — the fucking scene, the
dyke scene — they've covered the whole waterfront, been under every dock and pier — the peter pier, the pussy pier... you've got to go through a lot of sex to get to anti-sex, and scum's been through it all, and they're now ready for a new show; they want to crawl out from under the dock, move, take off, sink out. but scum doesn't yet prevail; scum's still in the gutter of our 'society', which, if it's not deflected from its present course and if the bomb doesn't drop on it, will hump itself to death.

boredom: life in a society made by and for creatures who, when they are not grim and depressing are utter bores, van only be, when not grim and depressing, an utter bore.

secrecy, censorship, suppression of knowledge and ideas, and exposes: every male's deep-seated, secret, most hideous fear is of being discovered to be not a female, but a male, a subhuman animal. although niceness, politeness and 'dignity' suffice to prevent his exposure on a personal level, in order to prevent the general exposure of the male sex as a whole and to maintain his unnatural dominant position position in 'society', the male must resort to:

1. censorship. responding reflexively to isolated works and phrases rather than cerebrally to overall meanings, the male attempts to prevent the arousal and discovery of his animalism by censoring not only 'pornography', but any work containing 'dirty' words, no matter in what context they are used.

2. suppression of all ideas and knowledge that might expose him or threaten his dominant position in 'society'. much biological and psychological data is suppressed, because it is proof of the male's gross inferiority to the female. also, the problem of mental illness will never be solved while the male maintains control, because first, men have a vested interest in it — only females who have very few of their marbles will allow males the slightest bit of control over anything, and second, the male cannot admit to the role that fatherhood plays in causing mental illness.
3. exposes the male’s chief delight in life — insofar as the tense, grim male can ever be said to delight in anything — is in exposing others. it doesn’t much matter what they’re exposed as, so long as they’re exposed; it distracts attention from himself. exposing others as enemy agents (communists and socialists) is one of his favorite pastimes, as it removes the source of the threat to him not only from himself, but from the country and the western world. the bugs up his ass aren’t in him, they’re in russia.

distrust: unable to empathize or feel affection or loyalty, being exclusively out for himself, the male has no sense of fair play; cowardly, needing constantly to pander to the female to win her approval, that he is helpless without, always on the edge lest his animalism, his maleness be discovered, always needing to cover up, he must lie constantly; being empty he has not honor or integrity — he doesn’t know what those words mean. the male, in short, is treacherous, and the only appropriate attitude in a male ‘society’ is cynicism and distrust.

ugliness: being totally sexual, incapable of cerebral or aesthetic responses, totally materialistic and greedy, the male, besides inflicting on the world ‘great art’, has decorated his unlandscaped cities with ugly buildings (both inside and out), ugly decors, billboards, highways, cars, garbage trucks, and, most notably, his own putrid self.

hatred and violence: the male is eaten up with tension, with frustration at not being female, at not being capable of ever achieving satisfaction or pleasure of any kind; eaten up with hate — not rational hate that is directed at those who abuse or insult you — but irrational, indiscriminate hate… hatred, at bottom, of his own worthless self.

gratuitous violence, besides ‘proving’ he’s a ‘man’, serves as an outlet for his hate and, in addition — the male being capable only of sexual responses and needing very strong stimuli to stimulate his half-dead self — provides him with a little sexual thrill.

disease and death: all diseases are curable, and the aging process and death are due to disease; it is possible, therefore, never to age and to live forever. in fact the problems of aging and death could be solved within a few years, if an all-out, massive scientific assault were made upon the problem. this, however, will not occur with the male establishment because:

1. the many male scientists who shy away from biological research, terrified of the discovery that males are females, and show marked preference for virile, ‘manly’ war and death programs.

2. the discouragement of many potential scientists from scientific careers by the rigidity, boringness, expensiveness, time-consumingness, and unfair exclusivity of our ‘higher’ educational system.

3. propaganda disseminated by insecure male professionals, who jealously guard their positions, so that only a highly select few can comprehend abstract scientific concepts.

4. widespread lack of self-confidence brought about by the father system that discourages many talented girls from becoming scientists.

5. lack of automation. there now exists a wealth of data which, if sorted out and correlated, would reveal the cure for cancer and several other diseases and possibly the key to life itself. but the data is so massive it requires high speed computers to correlate it all. the institution of computers will be delayed interminably under the male control system, since the male has a horror of being replaced by machines.

6. the money systems’ insatiable need for new products. most of the few scientists around who aren’t working on death programs are tied up doing research for corporations.
7. the males like death — it excites him sexually and, already dead inside, he wants to die.

8. the bias of the money system for the least creative scientists. most scientists come from at least relatively affluent families where daddy reigns supreme.

incapable of a positive state of happiness, which is the only thing that can justify one’s existence, the male is, at best, relaxed, comfortable, neutral, and this condition is extremely short-lived, as boredom, a negative state, soon sets in; he is, therefore, doomed to an existence of suffering relieved only by occasional, fleeting stretches of restfulness, which state he can only achieve at the expense of some female. the male is, by his very nature, a leech, an emotional parasite and, therefore, not ethically entitled to live, as no one as the right to life at someone else’s expense.

just as humans have a prior right to existence over dogs by virtue of being more highly evolved and having a superior consciousness, so women have a prior right to existence over men. the elimination of any male is, therefore, a righteous and good act, an act highly beneficial to women as well as an act of mercy.

however, this moral issue will eventually be rendered academic by the fact that the male is gradually eliminating himself. in addition to engaging in the time-honored and classical wars and race riots, men are more and more either becoming fags or are obliterating themselves through drugs. the female, whether she likes it or not, will eventually take complete charge, if for no other reason than that she will have to — the male, for practical purposes, won’t exist.

accelerating this trend is the fact that more and more males are acquiring enlightened self-interest; they’re realizing more and more that the female interest is in their interest, that they can live only through the female and that the more the female is encouraged to live, to fulfill herself, to be a female and not a male, the more nearly he lives; he’s coming to see that it’s easier and more satisfying to live through her than to try to become her and usurp her qualities, claim them as his own, push the female down and claim that she’s a male. the fag, who accepts his maleness, that is, his passivity and total sexuality, his femininity, is also best served by women being truly female, as it would then be easier for him to be male, feminine. if men were wise they would seek to become really female, would do intensive biological research that would lead to making the male into women.

whether to continue to use females for reproduction or to reproduce in the laboratory will also become academic: what will happen when every female, twelve and over, is routinely taking the pill and there are no longer any accidents? how many women will deliberately get or (if an accident) remain pregnant? no, virginia, women don’t just adore being brood mares, despite what the mass of robot, brainwashed women will say. when society consists of only the fully conscious the answer will be none. should a certain percentage of men be set aside by force to serve as brood mares for the species? obviously this will not do. the answer is laboratory reproduction of babies.

as for the issue of whether or not to continue to reproduce males, it doesn’t follow that because the male, like disease, has always existed among us that he should continue to exist. when genetic control is possible — and soon it will be — it goes without saying that we should produce only whole, complete beings, not physical defects of deficiencies, including emotional deficiencies, such as maleness. just as the deliberate production of blind people would be highly immoral, so would be the deliberate production of emotional cripples.

why produce even females? why should there be future generations? what is their purpose? when aging and death are eliminated, why continue to reproduce? why should we care what happens when we’re dead? why should we care that there is no younger generation to succeed us.
eventually the natural course of events, of social evolution, will lead to total female control of the world and, subsequently, to the cessation of the production of males and, ultimately, to the cessation of the production of females.

but scum is impatient; scum is not consoled by the thought that future generations will thrive; scum wants to grab some thrilling living for itself. and, if a large majority of women were scum, they could acquire complete control of this country within a few weeks simply by withdrawing from the labor force, thereby paralyzing the entire nation. additional measures, any one of which would be sufficient to completely disrupt the economy and everything else, would be for women to declare themselves off the money system, stop buying, just loot and simply refuse to obey all laws they don’t care to obey. the police force, national guard, army, navy and marines combined couldn’t squelch a rebellion of over half the population, particularly when it’s made up of people they are utterly helpless without.

if all women simply left men, refused to have anything to do with any of them — ever, all men, the government, and the national economy would collapse completely. even without leaving men, women who are aware of the extent of their superiority to and power over men, could acquire complete control over everything within a few weeks, could effect a total submission of males to females. in a sane society the male would trot along obediently after the female. the male is docile and easily led, easily subjected to the domination of any female who cares to dominate him. the male, in fact, wants desperately to be led by females, wants mama in charge, wants to abandon himself to her care. but this is not a sane society, and most women are not even dimly aware of where they’re at in relation to men.

the conflict, therefore, is not between females and males, but between scum — dominant, secure, self-confident, nasty, violent, selfish, independent, proud, thrill-seeking, free-wheeling, arrogant females, who consider themselves fit to rule the universe, who have free-wheeled to the limits of this ‘society’ and are ready to wheel on to something far beyond what it has to offer — and nice, passive, accepting ‘cultivated’, polite, dignified, subdued, dependent, scared, mindless, insecure, approval-seeking daddy’s girls, who can’t cope with the unknown, who want to hang back with the apes, who feel secure only with big daddy standing by, with a big strong man to lean on and with a fat, hairy face in the white house, who are too cowardly to face up to the hideous reality of what a man is, what daddy is, who have cast their lot with the swine, who have adapted themselves to animalism, feel superficially comfortable with it and know no other way of ‘life’, who have reduced their minds, thoughts and sights to the male level, who, lacking sense, imagination and wit can have value only in a male ‘society’, who can have a place in the sun, or, rather, in the slime, only as soothers, ego boosters, relaxers and breeders, who are dismissed as inconsequents by other females, who project their deficiencies, their maleness, onto all females and see the female as worm.

but scum is too impatient to wait for the de-brainwashing of millions of assholes. why should the swinging females continue to plod dismally along with the dull male ones? why should the fates of the groovy and the creepy be intertwined? why should the active and imaginative consult the passive and dull on social policy? why should the independent be confined to the sewer along with the dependent who need daddy to cling to? a small handful of scum can take over the country within a year by systematically fucking up the system, selectively destroying property, and murder:

scum will become members of the unwork force, the fuck-up force; they will get jobs of various kinds an unwork. for example, scum salesgirls will not charge for merchandise; scum telephone operators will not charge for calls; scum office and factory workers, in addition to fucking up their work, will secretly destroy equipment. scum will unwork at a job until fired, then get a new job to unwork at. scum will forcibly relieve bus drivers, cab drivers and subway token sellers of their jobs and run buses and cabs and dispense free tokens to the public.

scum will destroy all useless and harmful objects — cars, store windows, ‘great art’, etc.
eventually scum will take over the airwaves — radio and tv networks — by forcibly relieving of their jobs all radio and tv employees who would impede scum’s entry into the broadcasting studios.

scum will couple-bust — barge into mixed (male-female) couples, wherever they are, and bust them up.

scum will kill all men who are not in the men’s auxiliary of scum. men in the men’s auxiliary are those men who are working diligently to eliminate themselves, men who, regardless of their motives, do good, men who are playing pall with scum. a few examples of the men in the men’s auxiliary are: men who kill men; biological scientists who are working on constructive programs, as opposed to biological warfare; journalists, writers, editors, publishers and producers who disseminate and promote ideas that will lead to the achievement of scum’s goals; faggots who, by their shimmering, flaming example, encourage other men to de-man themselves and thereby make themselves relatively inoffensive; men who consistently give things away — money, things, services; men who tell it like it is (so far not one ever has), who put women straight, who reveal the truth about themselves, who give the mindless male females correct sentences to parrot, who tell them a woman’s primary goal in life should be to squash the male sex (to aid men in this endeavor scum will conduct turd sessions, at which every male present will give a speech beginning with the sentence: ‘i am a turd, a lowly abject turd’, then proceed to list all the ways in which he is. his reward for doing so will be the opportunity to fraternize after the session for a whole, solid hour with the scum who will be present. nice, clean-living male women will be invited to the sessions to help clarify any doubts and misunderstandings they may have about the male sex; makers and promoters of sex books and movies, etc., who are hastening the day when all that will be shown on the screen will be suck and fuck (males, like the rats following the pied piper, will be lured by pussy to their doom, will be overcome and submerged by and will eventually drown in the passive flesh that they are); drug pushers and advocates, who are hastening the dropping out of men.

being in the men’s auxiliary is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for making scum’s escape list; it’s not enough to do good; to save their worthless asses men must also avoid evil. a few examples of the most obnoxious or harmful types are: rapists, politicians and all who are in their service (campaigners, members of political parties, etc); lousy singers and musicians; chairmen of boards; breadwinners; landlords; owners of greasy spoons and restauraunts that play muzak; ‘great artists’; cheap pikers and welchers; cops; tycoons; scientists working on death and destruction programs or for private industry (practically all scientists); liars and phonies; disc jockies; men who intrude themselves in the slightest way on any strange female; real estate men; stock brokers; men who speak when they have nothing to say; men who sit idly on the street and mar the landscape with their presence; double dealers; flim-flam artists; litterbugs; plagiarisers; men who in the slightest way harm any female; all men in the advertising industry; psychiatrists and clinical psychologists; dishonest writers, journalists, editors, publishers, etc.; censors on both the public and private levels; all members of the armed forces, including draftees (lbj and mcnamara give orders, but servicemen carry them out) and particularly pilots (if the bomb drops, lbj won’t drop it; a pilot will). in the case of a man whose behavior falls into both the good and bad categories, an overall subjective evaluation of him will be made to determine if his behavior is, in the balance, good or bad.

it is most tempting to pick off the female ‘great artists’, liars and phonies etc along with the men, but that would be inexpedient, as it would not be clear to most of the public that the female killed was a male. all women have a fink streak in them, to a greater or lesser degree, but it stems from a lifetime of living among men. eliminate men and women will shape up. women are improvable; men are no, although their behavior is. when scum gets hot on their asses it’ll shape up fast.

simultaneously with the fucking-up, looting, couple-busting, destroying and killing, scum will recruit. scum, then, will consist of recruiters; the elite corps — the hard
core activists (the fuck-ups, looters and destroyers) and the elite of the elite — the killers.

dropping out is not the answer; fucking-up is. most women are already dropped out; they were never in. dropping out gives control to those few who don’t drop out; dropping out is exactly what the establishment leaders want; it plays into the hands of the enemy; it strengthens the system instead of undermining it, since it is based entirely on the non-participating, passivity, apathy and non-involvement of the mass of women. dropping out, however, is an excellent policy for men, and scum will enthusiastically encourage it.

looking inside yourself for salvation, contemplating your navel, is not, as the drop out people would have you believe, the answer. happiness likes outside yourself, is achieved through interacting with others. self-forgetfulness should be one’s goal, not self-absorption. the male, capable of only the latter, makes a virtue of irremediable fault and sets up self-absorption, not only as a good but as a philosophical good, and thus gets credit for being deep.

scum will not picket, demonstrate, march or strike to attempt to achieve its ends. such tactics are for nice, genteel ladies who scrupulously take only such action as is guaranteed to be ineffective. in addition, only decent, clean-living male women, highly trained in submerging themselves in the species, act on a mob basis. scum consists of individuals; scum is not a mob, a blob. only as many scum will do a job as are needed for the job. also scum, being cool and selfish, will not subject to getting itself rapped on the head with billy clubs; that’s for the nice, ‘privileged, educated’, middle-class ladies with a high regard for the touching faith in the essential goodness of daddy and policemen. if scum ever marches, it will be over the president’s stupid, sickening face; if scum ever strikes, it will be in the dark with a six-inch blade.

scum will always operate on a criminal as opposed to a civil disobedience basis, that is, as opposed to openly violating the law and going to jail in order to draw attention to an injustice. such tactics acknowledge the rightness overall system and are used only to modify it slightly, change specific laws. scum is against the entire system, the very idea of law and government. scum is out to destroy the system, not attain certain rights within it. also, scum — always selfish, always cool — will always aim to avoid detection and punishment. scum will always be furtive, sneaky, underhanded (although scum murders will always be known to be such).

both destruction and killing will be selective and discriminate. scum is against half-crazed, indiscriminate riots, with no clear objective in mind, and in which many of your own kind are picked off. scum will never instigate, encourage or participate in riots of any kind or other form of indiscriminate destruction. scum will coolly, furtively, stalk its prey and quietly move in for the kill. destruction will never me such as to block off routes needed for the transportation of food or other essential supplies, contaminate or cut off the water supply, block streets and traffic to the extent that ambulances can’t get through or impede the functioning of hospitals.

scum will keep on destroying, looting, fucking-up and killing until the money-work system no longer exists and automation is completely instituted or until enough women co-operate with scum to make violence unnecessary to achieve these goals, that is, until enough women either unwork or quit work, start looting, leave men and refuse to obey all laws inappropriate to a truly civilized society. many women will fall into line, but many others, who surrendered long ago to the enemy, who are so adapted to animalism, to maleness, that they like restrictions and restraints, don’t know what to do with freedom, will continue to be toadies and doormats, just as peasants in rice paddies remain peasants in rice paddies as one regime topples another. a few of the more volatile will whimper and sulk and throw their toys and dishrags on the floor, but scum will continue to steamroller over them.

a completely automated society can be accomplished very simply and quickly once there is a public demand for it. the blueprints for it are already in existence, and it’s construction will take only a few weeks with millions of people working on it. even though off the money system, everyone will be most happy to pitch in and get the
automated society built; it will mark the beginning of a fantastic new era, and there will be a celebration atmosphere accompanying the construction.

the elimination of money and the complete institution of automation are basic to all other scum reforms; without these two the others can’t take place; with them the others will take place very rapidly. the government will automatically collapse. with complete automation it will be possible for every woman to vote directly on every issue by means of an electronic voting machine in her house. since the government is occupied almost entirely with regulating economic affairs and legislating against purely private matters, the elimination of money and with it the elimination of males who wish to legislate ‘morality’ will mean there will be practically no issues to vote on.

after the elimination of money there will be no further need to kill men; they will be stripped of the only power they have over psychologically independent females. they will be able to impose themselves only on the doormats, who like to be imposed on. the rest of the women will be busy solving the few remaining unsolved problems before planning their agenda for eternity and utopia — completely revamping educational programs so that millions of women can be trained within a few months for high level intellectual work that now requires years of training (this can be done very easily once out educational goal is to educate and not perpetuate an academic and intellectual elite); solving the problems of disease and old age and death and completely redesigning our cities and living quarters. many women will for a while continue to think they dig men, but as they become accustomed to female society and as they become absorbed in their projects, they will eventually come to see the utter uselessness and banality of the male.

the few remaining men can exist out their puny days dropped out on drugs or strutting around in drag or passively watching the high-powered female in action, fulfilling themselves as spectators, vicarious livers*[footnote: it will be electronically possible for him to tune into any specific female he wants to and follow in detail her every movement. the females will kindly, obligingly consent to this, as it won’t hurt them in the slightest and it is a marvelously kind and humane way to treat their unfortunate, handicapped fellow beings.] or breeding in the cow pasture with the toadies, or they can go off to the nearest friendly suicide center where they will be quietly, quickly, and painlessly gassed to death.

prior to the institution of automation, to the replacement of males by machines, the male should be of use to the female, wait on her, cater to her slightest whim, obey her every command, be totally subservient to her, exist in perfect obedience to her will, as opposed to the completely warped, degenerate situation we have now of men, not only not existing at all, cluttering up the world with their ignominious presence, but being pandered to and groveled before by the mass of females, millions of women piously worshiping the golden calf, the dog leading the master on a leash, when in fact the male, short of being a drag queen, is least miserable when his dogginess is recognized — no unrealistic emotional demands are made of him and the completely together female is calling the shots. rational men want to be squashed, stepped on, crushed and crunched, treated as the curs, the filth that they are, have their repulsiveness confirmed.

the sick, irrational men, those who attempt to defend themselves against their disgustingness, when they see scum barrelling down on them, will cling in terror to big mama with her big bouncy boobies, but boobies won’t protect them against scum; big mama will be clinging to big daddy, who will be in the corner shitting in his forceful, dynamic pants. men who are rational, however, won’t kick or struggle or raise a distressing fuss, but will just sit back, relax, enjoy the show and ride the waves to their demise.

– end –

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speech by pastor xola skosana at the mass meeting marking the removal of the rhodes statue from uc

april 10, 2015

if we and our children cannot see ourselves in the architectural design around us, then we subconsciously remain visitors to the only corner of the world god gave us.

europe, we visit, africa we live in. we must never underestimate the psychological effect of foreign occupation, the occupiers seal their conquest with their language, signage, images, statues, art, all of which is the deliberate ongoing miseducation of us the conquered and the obscuring of our memory and identity.
food on the table of a people who have lost their land, identity, culture language, etc, will not answer their deepest quest and deepest longings for freedom. . to equate black pain with poverty or lack of food is to reduce black people to an animalistic existence of eating defecating and dying

one of the lessons we have learnt over the last few weeks is that a revolution is unpredictable, it may lie dormant for the longest time and erupt when it is least expected. we have also learnt through the courage of students here at this university that ivory towers and corridors of white power are not untouchable. the heroic act of chumani maxwele which sparked a tidal wave of solidarity from uct to oxford university, from rhodes university to colombia university, this act has helped demystify colonial enclaves of white dominance.

all disguises of white power and the preservation of white privilege must fall

black people all over the world are emboldened by what the students have been able to accomplish here and and we are assured once again that black pain will not be left to fester indefinitely, freedom for black people will not be postponed forever

black pain, whether in those rat infested hellholes we call townships or in academia, all its many dimensions and manifestations, it is a direct consequence of persistent white power. there can be no healing of black pain without the dismantling of white power

this victory is for chantel hoffmann, who was called a kaffir and shocked with a taser device in harfield village, on the 3rd of january 2015 by the 22 year old talana jo huysamer

this victory is for the 52 year old manenberg cleaner, delia adonis, brutally attacked and racially assaulted by five white boys – 19 year old chad de matos, 19 old aaron mack, and 20 year old mitchell turner, in front of her son in claremont, on the 17th of october 2014

this victory is for the 44 year old cynthia joni, the domestic worker who was attacked by tim osrin

this victory is for the 22 year old muhammed makungwa, sjambokked by jan van tonder in claremont while on his way to work simply because he is black and therefore a criminal

well, there are those who say we are exaggerating our pain, they say so because we have not yet told the story of black pain in an uncensored way

today with the falling of rhodes, we are telling our story and revealing our scars.

we must raise our voice and tell our story

lest the world forget about us

lest we be buried in the history books we did not write

ours is a story of resilience

ours is a story of hope and despair

ours is a story of faith foolishness and superstition

ours is a story of belief and disbelief

ours is a story of life and death

the world must know how we have survived years of servitude

the world must know how we remain scarred by the white power structure and the preservation of white privilege
our entire existence has been altered in ways words cannot tell
we have a message, we have a story to tell
it is our story
we must be the ones who tell it
tell those who collect stories by their big bank rolled cameras that this is our story
help me preach now, ” say our story”
tell the editor in the news room, this is our story
tell the writer with an ipad in his hand this is our story
tell the tourist with a sony digital camera, this is our story
tell the journalist with the deadline to meet, this is our story
tell the publisher and the new york times best seller, this is our story
tell all of them, tell them that they are thieves, that they have stolen our story of pain
tell them their camera lance has obscured our story
tell them their pen has watered down our pain
tell them their film maker and artist have mocked and trivialized ourstory
but our collective voice is returning
our collective memory is coming back
our collective faith is stronger now
our collective hope is higher
our collective scars are healing
this is our story
we will tell it as it is
and we will write it as we like
help me preach people
our sermons will tell our story
our songs will tell our story
our dance and our rythem will tell our story
the scars of our own flesh will tell our story
our tears will tell our story
our architecture will tell our story
signage will tell our story
public images will tell our story
our statues will tell our story
yes we are survivors of a brutal system (black pain)
we are remnants that are left behind
sons and daughter who come from a raptured womb
we suckled the breast and drank the milk of malnourishment (black pain)
through nevirapine , we narrowly escaped hiv infection
those of us whi did not, live today with courage and fortitude
we dare to dream though we are limping
we survived overcrowded classrooms full of infectious and contagious deceases
we survived dr death basson’ s biological warfare of genocidal proportions.
we lived through a police state of emergency
on our way to school, we jumped over charred bodies of black people necklaced for selling their soul
before we sat in the class and fed from bantu education, we stared at badly beaten bodies of suspected informers
on saturdays we buried bodies of the innocent, mistaken for the enemy
in church halls, we mourned children who died in a hail of bullets by an unsympathetic police force
in beer halls our fathers drank themselves into a stupor, temporarily numbing themselves from the pain of being a boy/man. a boy by day and a man by night
we are survivors of those caught in the crossfire of black on black violence
this is our story
we have fought and lost many battes
we have run the race and lost many along the way
many have been our afflictions
and our story is yet to be told
those who dared to tell, couched it in the language of peace and recincilliation
they romanticized our story
and painted the scars of our flesh on artificial canvases
while sipping wine in dinner tables prepared by our own mothers
our story is yet to be told in bold letters
it is the collective story of black pain
stored away for twenty years
because of its inconvenient truth
hidden away from the camera
because of its graphic and gruesome detail
it has been whitewashed
because, while it liberates god’s black children
it implicates god’s white children
this is our story
finish what you’ve started children of marcus garvey
finish what you’ve started children of thomas sankara
finish what you’ve started children of fanon
finish what you’ve started children of robert mugabe
finish what you’ve started children of robert mangaliso sobukwe
finish what you’ve started children of steven bantu biko
finish what you’ve started children of mama assata shakur
finish what you’ve started children of mama winnie mandela

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national melancholia and afrikaner self-parody in post-apartheid south africa

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abstract

the publication of alexander and margarete mitscherlich’s study of post-hitler germany, the inability to mourn, did much to advance the utility of freud’s essay, ‘mourning and melancholia’, in our understanding of the problem of nations’ failure to relinquish fully identifications with fallen regimes. following the path paved by the mitscherlichs, i examine, in the context of contemporary south africa, the prohibition of continued identifications with apartheid; i frame this prohibition as a loss that cannot be grieved. looking at the case of oppikoppi, a predominantly afrikaans south african music festival, i examine the recent phenomenon of afrikaner self-parody as a form of melancholic response to this loss, as a form national melancholia. i employ the freudian concept of melancholia in understanding self-parody as a spectacular technique that at once denigrates, preserves and transforms the past in its ironic repetition as parody.

keywords:

melancholia; self-parody; nationalism; post-apartheid south africa; afrikaner culture; oppikoppi

introduction

freud (1917) proposed that both mourning and melancholia are a ‘reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on’ (p. 243). what i am
examining here is the loss of apartheid. although there is a large body of literature examining the losses brought about by the apartheid regime, much of which is centered on the public mourning that unfolded around the south african truth and reconciliation commission (trc), few studies have examined a continued identification with or nostalgia for apartheid. being nostalgic for apartheid in post-apartheid south africa is frequently equated with being politically insane and morally questionable. yet recent studies (eg, jansen, 2007; dlamini, 2009) suggest that the end of apartheid occasioned a complex loss for south africans, which i propose was a melancholic loss.

in contradistinction to mourning, freud (1917) proposed melancholia as a kind of rebellion against the social world that has occasioned a loss, a refusal to accept ‘the verdict of reality’ (p. 255). in melancholia, to prolong psychically an attachment to a lost object, an object-cathexis is withdrawn into the ego, establishing ‘an identification of the ego with the abandoned object’ (p. 249). particularly when a loss is brought about through prohibition, identification with the lost object is formative of the psychic conflict of conscience as the object bears the trace of its problematic social status and is incorporated as such, becoming a problematic feature of the ego. put succinctly, ‘melancholia is a rebellion that has been put down, crushed’ (butler, 1997, p. 190). that is, identification with the lost object is the rebellion that is put down by conscience, which allows the lost object to live on as a castigated feature of the ego. while the pain of mourning takes the form of grief for the lost object, the pain of melancholia is discernable in a conflicted relation with oneself. the psychic conflict that ensues is, in other words, the conscious form of melancholic loss, a loss that is constellated in the symptom of persistent self-beratement.

freud (1921) provided a few speculative thoughts on how melancholia may be cultivated in the formation of groups. his argument was premised on the notion that group membership is subject to certain limitations. when these limitations entail the renunciation of a loved object and where ‘the object is given up because it has shown itself unworthy of love’ (p. 133), melancholia may ensue if in attempts to preserve the lost object it is ‘set up again inside the ego, by means of identification, and severely condemned by the ego-ideal’ (p. 133). freud (1923) then developed the argument that melancholia may be the precondition for mourning, rather than its opposite or its failure. as he stated, ‘it may be that this identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects’ (p. 29). thus, in this reformulation of melancholia, there is no pre-existent ego prior to melancholic loss. as freud put it, ‘[t]he character of the ego is a precipitate of the abandoned object-cathexes and it contains the history of those object choices’ (p. 29). freud’s (1921, 1923) later reconceptions enable a more properly psychosocial formulation of melancholia, foregrounding the relation between the social and the psychic, as the particular prohibitions of a given society occasion the losses whereby the character of the ego is formed and shaped.

freud’s (1917) thesis and his developments of it (1921, 1923) have recently received a significant amount of attention in critical scholarship and have been applied to various social and cultural contexts. although the groundwork for this wider applicability of mourning and melancholia, outside the clinic had been laid by freud, it was alexander and margarete mitscherlich’s (1975) study of post-hitler germany, the inability to mourn, that did much to develop the social dimensions of the freudian ideas of mourning and melancholia. what is more, the mitscherlichs offered a useful lens through which to examine the problem of nations’ failing to relinquish fully identifications with fallen regimes.

it is worth tracing the broad strokes of the mitscherlichs’ argument on the vicissitudes of germany’s identification with hitler after world war ii, as this has implications for an analysis of continued identifications with apartheid in a post-apartheid context.

not having observed either the processes of mourning or signs of melancholia in the german federal republic, the mitscherlichs (1975) proposed the ‘de-realization of the past’, the wholesale ‘denial of the past’ (p. 14), as the means by which many germans
defended against an acknowledgement of ‘collective responsibility and guilt’ (p. 14). they go as far as to argue that, had the Germans fully confronted their Nazi past in the years immediately subsequent to the war, mass melancholia and a devastating total loss of self-esteem would have crippled the population. the inability to mourn, faithful to Freud’s (1917) formulation, is thus primarily concerned with the rigid defences necessary for deferring the process of mourning and the repetition of the past that ensues with the failure to mourn. as the Mitscherlichs (1975) state, ‘history does not repeat itself, yet it often incorporates a repetition compulsion whose grip can only be broken when historical events bring about a change in the level of consciousness’ (p. 50).

the situations in postwar Germany and post-apartheid South Africa show some similarities, but also some marked differences. because the German situation entailed ‘processes that shook the entire society’ (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, 1975, p. 32), an individual burdened with guilt became merely ‘a sinner among sinners’ (p. 33) and was saved from isolation and moral abnormality. in South Africa, that kind of group absolution from guilt is not possible, for victims and perpetrators alike – those oppressed and those complicit in their oppression – are now subjects of the same nation. as a result, South Africans are continually confronted with the trauma of apartheid. another difference is that in Germany, as the Mitscherlichs point out, ‘[t]here were no political ideas (which might have been produced by an anti-Nazi resistance movement had there been one) to fall back on’ (p. 13), whereas in South Africa the foundations of the anti-apartheid movement, fractured and heterogeneous as these were, have become the foundations of the post-apartheid nation. the preamble to the South African constitution begins, ‘we, the people of South Africa, recognise the injustices of our past’. it is a collective recognition of the apartheid past as an injustice that has constituted the post-apartheid nation. the commandment of the post-apartheid nation, in other words, is to live against, be affectively opposed to, apartheid. thus, an anti-apartheid disposition, functioning as a principle of authentication for subjects of an emerging national community, has constituted a post-apartheid national biopolitics of the heart. at a moral level, one must have an anti-apartheid conscience to be an authentic post-apartheid South African.

this injunction is complicated for Afrikaners by the entanglement of apartheid and Afrikaner identity. although Afrikanerdom predates apartheid, apartheid was the inductorium of Afrikaner identity; apartheid legislation, the cauldron in which it was forged. the conflict produced by the commandment to live against apartheid is well put by afrikaans author and poet Antjie Krog (2002), who asks in Country of My Skull, her book on the TRC, ‘how do I live with the fact that all the words used to humiliate, all the orders given to kill, belonged to the language of my heart?’ (p. 238). to continue to identify as an Afrikaner is to be located in a language of domination, but to vacate an Afrikaner identity amounts to an alienation from the world as it has been known and the loss of a coherent sense of self. critical scholarship employing the idea of melancholia frequently invokes a primary loss of an unremembered union with the world, wherein subjects must pursue what has been lost through the compromise of language. as Julia Kristeva (1989), following Hanna Segal, has put it, ‘[t]he child produces or uses objects or vocalizations that are symbolic equivalents of what is lacking’ (p. 23). what we have here, though, is a secondary loss, a loss of the order and ordering principles of apartheid as the narcissistic support for Afrikaner subjectivity and an abandonment in the limited freedom of the new order of anti-apartheid post-apartheid South Africa.

we can proceed, then, on the assumption that, much as was the case in post-war Germany, the post-apartheid nation has occasioned a loss for Afrikaners, a loss that should not be a loss at all but should be a sign of moral progress, a cause for celebration only: love for apartheid is a limitation imposed on the group ‘because it has shown itself unworthy of love’ (Freud, 1921, p. 83), as fundamentally unlovable. it is, in other words, a melancholic loss, a loss that ‘is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious’ (Freud, 1917, p. 245). to be specific, we should say that this is true for Afrikaners with interests in being authentic
post-apartheid south africans. apartheid, for post-apartheid south africans, cannot be anything but an unconscious loss, an unthinkable loss: how, indeed, does one mourn the loss of what has been officially declared a crime against humanity? as freud continued, speaking of the unconsciousness of melancholic loss, ‘this, indeed, might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him’ (p. 245). it follows that, while it is clear enough that apartheid as an ideal is dead, what, precisely, it is about this ideal and the life that it enabled that was loved and has been lost is unavowable.

in following this path paved by the mitscherlichs (1975), i draw on research conducted on the oppikoppi music festival, an event that has drawn thousands of young, white afrikaners, since south africa became a democracy in 1994, on an annual pilgrimage to a dusty, thorny, 150-hectare game-farm called nooitgedacht (never would have thought), located a short distance from the mining town of swartklip, in the northernmost province of limpopo, south africa. my overarching objective here is to use the festival to understand some of the ways in which young afrikaners are adapting to the post-apartheid nation, to the ‘renunciations and limitations’ (freud, 1921, p. 131) imposed by the nation, and the ways in which afrikaner subjects have formed themselves and stylized themselves according to the conditions of the new nation.

describing group formation, directly before his discussion of the cultivation of melancholia implicit in group formation, freud (1921) offered a provocative thought on the function of festivals: ‘in all renunciations and limitations imposed upon the ego a periodical infringement of the prohibition is the rule; this indeed is shown by the institution of festivals’ (p. 131). festivals, for freud, offered the opportunity for ‘transgression of what are at other times the most sacred commandments … [for an] abrogation of the ideal’ (p. 131). in contradistinction to freud’s thoughts on the socio-psychological function of festivals, the transgression of the event on which i focus here is given form primarily as the thwarted rebellion of melancholia, rather than straightforward transgression of the ‘sacred commandments’ of post-apartheid south africa. let me illustrate this by turning to a brief description of oppikoppi music festival.

‘hemel op die platteland’: oppikoppi as ironic retreat

festival organizer misha loot (2004) said, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the event, ‘oppikoppi is basies soos fokofpolisiekar sing, ‘hemel op die platteland’ [oppikoppi is basically like fokofpolisiekar sing, heaven in the farmlands]’ (p. 5). the song he is referring to, by afrikaans rock band, fokofpolisiekar [fuck off police car], off their ep, ‘as jy met vuur speel sal jy brand’ [if you play with fire you’ll get burned], is a far cry from a romantic invocation of rural afrikanerdom: ‘reguleer my, routineer my. sit my in ‘n box en merk dit veilig. stuur my dan waarheen al die dose gaan. stuur my hemel toe, ek dink dit is in die platteland. dis hemel op die platteland [regulate me, give me routines. put me in a box and mark it safe. then send me to where all the boxes/cunts go. send me to heaven, i think it’s in the farmlands. it’s heaven in the farmlands]’. fokofpolisiekar enjoy a massive following at the festival; it would not be an exaggeration to say that they have been, for some years now, the poster boys of the event. their song ‘hemel op die platteland’ captures the affective ambivalence over traditional afrikanerdom that the festival has been able to bind in an ironic retreat from everyday post-apartheid life, a retreat to a place that is loved but is also, in a reflexive move, depicted as a place where all the ‘cunts’, the boxed, regular afrikaners go: the platteland.

originally intended as a vakansie oord [holiday resort], as farm owner, boors bornmann put it in an interview in october 2009, the farm on which oppikoppi is held was bought by the bornmann family in 1992 ‘to get away from everything’ (cited in kombuis, 2009, p. 210), quite significantly, at a moment when the country was on the brink of drastic and inevitable political change. as koos kombuis (2004), the first musician to perform on the farm, has put it, ‘for us, oppikoppi all too quickly became a kind of holy land, a mecca. … for us it was a place to get away
from the city, nothing more, a hiding place for the ex-alternative afrikaner youth’ (pp. 9–10). the trope of escape and withdrawal is one we find taken up in the promotion of the festival, too. although there were fundamental departures from this original plan for the farm in the years that followed, the early events on the farm conjured, much in line with this original intention, a withdrawal to the ‘wild and empty’ platteland, ‘absolute escapism’, as festival organizer, carel hoffmann (2004, p. 4), has put it.

there are few places more conservative of the mythology of afrikanerdom than a farm. the nostalgia on which the festival initially traded certainly has not aided the authentication of its place within the new nation. it has conjured a withdrawal, even if only a temporary one, from post-apartheid society and a privatized retreat, with an entrenched afrikaner identity of place providing insulation from social transformation. of course, the festival has received its share of criticism for precisely this reason. what the festival had to confront, then, was that the area into which it was withdrawing was, rather than being ‘empty’, already full of racialized social and economic inequalities, the product of colonial and then apartheid oppressive legislation and exploitatative force. the farm was possessed by white farmers, so to speak, owned, but also haunted by the force with which farms have been acquired through dispossession. in putting this myth of an empty wilderness to work, there was an inevitable need to find a way to deal with, to accommodate discursively the sedimentary layers of inscription that the farm bears and the ghosts (not to mention living people) that crowd this site and its surrounding areas. outside of festival time, for instance, the bar on the farm is occupied by white miners under a contract the farm has with the nearby mine. another guest house owned by a family in the neighbouring town of northam accommodates black employees of the mine. that is, white miners are housed on the farm, black miners in the guest house in northam. as bornmann rationalized the separation, black employees would prefer to stay in town in northam, in ‘their comfort zone’, not on the farm, while white miners ‘prefer the farm’.

bringing together south african musicians from different musical and social backgrounds is partially responsible for generating the mythology of the festival and has helped legitimize a withdrawal to what is a notably conservative part of the country. alongside this trope of withdrawal has also been the active promotion and celebration of south african music. along with white south african rock music, there was also active promotion of a diversity of music styles and genres. diverse as the performers have been, though, it has only really been since 2001 that oppikoppi began drawing a multiracial audience, which has not swelled significantly.

moreover, heavy drinking and hedonism have characterised the festival. the construction of a ‘wild and empty’ land has enabled this wild behaviour: the harshness of the place depicted, its wildness, corresponds with a mode of conduct; that is, one conducts oneself wildly in accordance with the place. as kavish chetty (2008) put it in a review of the festival, somewhat tongue in cheek, ‘no man can survive here without surrendering himself entirely to the primitive and the primordial.’ if in the writing on the festival in the media there is always a photograph from the hill overlooking the festival, there is also frequently one of a wrecked young white afrikaner male, passed out, in the dirt.

we have here what we might loosely call a set of cultural symptoms, most notably, a kind of self-destructive heavy drinking that characterized the early festivals, which has continued until today, as well as a withdrawal from a changing social world. coupled with this withdrawal, though, are attempts to adapt to the changing national scene. what has enabled this adaptation, at least in part, is that the festival has maintained an intensely critical relation to afrikanerdom by appropriating that most sacred of afrikaner places, the farm, and turning it into an abomination of itself. each year, people who attend the festival destroy the farm they love, or at least put this place sacred to afrikaner mythology – the farm, where the order of patriarchal authority can be conserved – to use in ways that unsettle conservative afrikaners. the sanctity of the farm is restored after each festival, but this cycle of defilement and restoration is a part of the manic pleasure and self-destructiveness of
the festival. oppikoppi has been, for as long as south africa has been a democratic
nation, a refuge for afrikaners who hate afrikanerdom and the old country, for
afrikaners who have rejected being inducted into traditional afrikaner identity but
nevertheless remain afrikaners. there is thus a continued investment in, and
attachment to, the rural nostalgia of afrikaner identity, as well as a defilement of
various signifiers of afrikanerdom.

one of the most interesting features of the festival in respect of the submission of
afrikaner identities to the post-apartheid nation through a critical relation to
afrikanerdom is, as the title of this article indicates, that oppikoppi has become,
increasingly over the years, a convergence point for parody of afrikanerdom. while
bringing together people, primarily musicians, of different backgrounds has offered
one means of assisting the festival to take up a place within a post-apartheid
ideological universe, we find yet another strategy at work in afrikaner self-parody.

although self-parody is a phenomenon that has recently become more prominent, it
can be traced back to the very beginnings of the festival – and further still to the
vöëlvry movement of the late 1980s (for analyses of vöëlvry, see grundlingh, 2004;
laubscher, 2005; hopkins, 2006). in this regard, there have been parodic
performances, at oppikoppi, on and off stage, from the late 1990s. although i
consider only a select few examples of parody here, it is important to bear in mind
that, although parody may not define this festival, each event does attain a kind of
generalized parodic intensity. the parodic double of afrikanerdom, frequently
stereotypical afrikaner masculinity, is given form at various levels, ranging from an
organisational one, where festivals are themed as an ironic repetition of a
problematized afrikaner motif, with corresponding festival flyers, press releases and
onstage performances, to a less formalized offstage performative repertoire of
parodic repetition. what is more, zef musicians, die antwoord [the answer] and jack
parrow, enjoy something of a cultlike following at oppikoppi. a brief description of
zef is thus warranted.

the term zef is derived from the ford zephyr, a model popular with working-class
afrikaners during the late 1950s and early 1960s. zef is a term commonly associated
with poor white afrikaner culture, with a ‘white-trash’ afrikaner aesthetic, though
necessarily implying an ironic distance from what it appropriates and repeats. on
one hand, the ‘poor white problem’ was of major concern to the apartheid
government, thus, what was problematic about afrikanerdom to the apartheid
regime becomes a salvageable element of afrikanerdom in post-apartheid south
africa; it is, at least partially, compatible with the post-apartheid nation. but because
zef is a particular form of afrikaner culture that was formed during apartheid, it
requires some work of adaption, of ‘rehabilitation’ (wicomb, 1998). we could say that
zef images and ideas can be conjured only if they are negated. as freud (1925) put it,
‘a negative judgement is the intellectual substitute for repression’ (p. 182). we might
restate his words by saying that a parodic negation of afrikanerdom as it existed
during apartheid is the performative substitute of repression. the emergence of the
zef movement in post-apartheid south africa, which has received a significant
amount of national and international media attention, thus gives wider relevance to
this phenomenon.

stephen frosh (1991) offers a useful point of orientation in my task of providing an
account of afrikaner self-parody. he argues that ‘any culturally pervasive pattern of
selfhood can be seen as a kind of barometer of social processes, reflecting the
quality of environmental conditions’ (p. 4). if there is a widespread pattern of
afrikaner self-parody (that is, a parodic pattern of selfhood) evident in post-
apartheid afrikaner youth culture – one that is also concentrated at this festival –
then what can this pattern tell us about broader ‘social processes’, particularly those
related to post-apartheid nationalism and nation building? afrikaner self-parody has
offered afrikaners a way of being authentic post-apartheid south africans by turning
against the past and the past as it lives on in the present. this pattern of parodic
selfhood is also a pattern of melancholic selfhood as the technique of self-parody
preserves, as a spectacle, precisely what it negates. it is a rebellion against the social
world that has occasioned the loss and has rendered lament for the object
unavowable. I am suggesting that Afrikaner self-parody, as a pattern of melancholic selfhood, both transgresses (through identification with problematized features of Afrikanerdom) and fulfils (by parodically negating these features) the injunctions of the post-apartheid nation. Self-parody figures, in other words, a form of what I want to call national melancholia, a form of melancholia cultivated in Afrikaner subjects by the post-apartheid nation.

In critical scholarship engaging the notion of melancholia, there has been a kind of celebration of melancholia as resistance (see Forter, 2007, for a critique of this celebration), which would be, in the post-apartheid context, clearly misplaced. Butler (1997), offering a more critical line of approach, writes that, in melancholia, ‘[i]nstead of breaking with the object, or transforming the object through mourning, this aufhebung – this active, negating, and transformative movement – is taken into the ego’ (p. 176). She means here that the force of the social world, which has declared it an unavowable loss over which even ambivalence is forbidden, is taken over by the ego ‘as its own destructiveness’ (p. 176). Conscience, with self-beratement as its instrument, does the work of preserving the lost object as a problematic feature of oneself. What we need to be alert to, then, is melancholia’s ‘satisfaction in self exposure’ (Freud, 1917, p. 247), the ways in which melancholia continually draws attention to its own problematic features and in so doing transforms a forbidden object-cathexis into a problematized identification. The question is thus whether self-parody does, in fact, function along the same lines as this melancholic self-beratement. Let me now examine a more detailed case of Afrikaner self-parody.

‘The Republic of Oppikoppi’

The April 2009 festival fell one day after the national election in which Jacob Zuma became the fourth democratically elected president of South Africa. The event was themed as a campaign to garner support for Twakkie – who together with fellow comedian, Corné are the most amazing show (TMAS) – to become the next president of the country (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Unfortunately we are unable to provide accessible alternative text for this. If you require assistance to access this image, please contact help@nature.com or the author.

Presidential candidate Twakkie, as he appeared on the official poster for Oppikoppi (not-quite) Easter 2009.

Twakkie is played by actor, producer and comedian Rob van Vuuren, who, incidentally, grew up on a farm in rural Eastern Cape. He had recently won the television competition, Strictly Come Dancing, hence the 2009 festival name, Strictly Come Twakkie. TMAS are a much lauded and laughed at mirror ball of white South Africa, of fragments of post-apartheid South African life. They bring into their performances several distorted reflections of the country: their moustaches join the national chorus of Afrikaner parody; their accents are recognizably those of Afrikaners trying to speak English, but not quite, as they are also those of white, English-speaking South Africans imitating Afrikaners trying to speak English. They are a parody of a parody, of which the moustache, as much as the ridiculous accent, is a part. The act ridicules traditional Afrikanerdom but also self-consciously makes fun of those who ridicule backward Afrikaners. TMAS are characterised by an appropriation of fragments of speech patterns and styles and a presentation of the ridiculous as the real and legitimate.

The party line for the three-day festival, as it appeared on the official vote Twakkie t-shirt, was, ‘I believe in you if you couldn’t believe in me. Yes, you couldn’t’. The intentionally ironic question posed, through the appropriation of Barack Obama’s slogan, was: could South Africans live to see a white president? And on the Friday night during the proceedings Twakkie was named president of the ‘Republic of Oppikoppi’, which in that moment became a kind of parodic volkstaat, a pseudo-separatist independent Afrikaner state. The opposite number of the ironic ‘Republic of Oppikoppi’, its serious counterpart, which it degraded and inverted, would be
another farm, strangely enough also bearing the name nooitgedacht, which makes up the larger part of orania, the separatist afrikaner volkstaat in the northern cape – although, officially, orania does not enjoy the status of a volkstaat either and falls within the republic of south africa. in orania they celebrate, for example, some of the old south african public holidays; they have an annual h.f. verwoerd memorial lecture, where the contribution of the architect of apartheid is explored (de beer, 2006) and there is a statue of the former president in the centre of the town. such a serious and open display of nostalgia for apartheid would not be tolerated in the post-apartheid nation. this is precisely what the performance and its reception at the festival over the three days ridiculed.

effects of contrast were thus created between itself and this other problematic farm. what should be kept in mind, though, in understanding this as a purely distancing move, is the withdrawal to the farm just described. what is more, festival organizer carel hoffmann first came to attend the early informal events on the farm because he was a miner working on the nearby platinum mine at swartklip. likewise, farm owner, boors bornmann, was a cattle farmer from northam before oppikoppi started. many of the people involved in the organisation of the festival grew up in the district and were socialized there. labour for the festival is also provided cheaply from the surrounding areas, from poor black communities in swartklip and northam. job creation here should not be overlooked in a post-apartheid context where the alleviation of poverty is a government priority. but neither should the fact that these people – the cleaners who work around the clock for low pay, keeping toilets unblocked, fires going and rubbish in the bins – receive close to nothing of the money spent. not only do they not benefit economically, they are the nearly invisible nonfestival goers at the event, a different category of person very much in line with the order of apartheid. they are the stain the ironic reconstitution of the farm cannot remove, the excess haunting the picture of a legitimate post-apartheid event. the parody is thus undeniably also a form of self-parody.

both farms, the serious farm and the parodic one, have thus enjoyed an identification with problematized elements of apartheid. there is, of course, a crucial difference between the two farms. orania preserves its identification by locating it outside the post-apartheid nation – oranians go as far as speaking of exportation to south africa (vestergaard, 2001). the festival, on the other hand, has retained its identification by repeating it as an ironic double of itself, by pairing this identification with its own parodic negation, by being that which is negated. in this way, investment in what is problematized is spent in the parody of those problematized features. butler (1997) is again very useful here. discussing the way nietzsche and freud approached conscience, she states, ‘prohibition reproduces the prohibited desire and becomes intensified through the renunciations it effects. the “afterlife” of prohibited desire takes place through the prohibition itself, where the prohibition not only sustains, but is sustained by the desire that it forces into renunciation’ (p. 81).

in that example we see the prohibition of ‘forbidden desire’, enacted through parodic negation of such desire, the instantiation of an ironic distance from what is prohibited. it is a problematized identification, an identification you can believe in, ‘yes, you couldn’t’, as the party slogan for the event went. in a sense, twakkie, the president of ‘the republic of oppikoppi’ gives his blessing to those who believe in him and cancel out this belief, to those who identify with him and find that identification problematic. the parody domesticates and negates what it evokes; it banishes the spectacle to the status of a joke, a domain that is outside serious, real life. laughter lights up, galvanizes, the identificatory circuit whereby a rebellion is launched and put down in a single move, nevertheless providing a compromised quantity of satisfaction. self-parody thus functions as an instrument of conscience (by putting down the rebellion), ‘nourished precisely by the aggression it forbids’ (butler, 1997, p. 70). in this way, not only is what is forbidden retained in its negation as prohibited desire, but also the negation itself is animated by forbidden desire (freud, 1920). effectively, the problematic features of afrikanerdom are conserved in the parody by being those very problematic afrikaner features which are ridiculed. self-parody, in other words, allows one to continue to be an afrikaner, even if only as an ironic
we can therefore say that, to prolong the life of elements of afrikanerdom thought to be too entangled with apartheid, those elements are incorporated and reflexively problematized. rather than disinvesting in problematized elements of afrikanerdom, in a sense mourning them and forging new attachments, we see their melancholic preservation through the technique of self-parody. certainly there is a preservation of a lost object at work here, one that resembles the thwarted rebellion of melancholia, but there are some niggling questions regarding the absence of some of the key clinical markers of melancholia. freud (1917) described the presentation of melancholia as follows: 'a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment' (p. 244).

in the picture we have of oppikoppi, the full range of melancholic symptoms is simply not present. although there is a withdrawal as well as a kind of self-destructiveness, as i have noted, and we can infer a degree of psychic pain anesthetized with alcohol, little mention is made of despair in the performance or in the festival discourse in general. furthermore, the disturbance of self-regard, which is the single feature distinguishing melancholia from mourning (freud, 1917, p. 244), is notably absent. in fact, there is a prominent elevation of self-regard. while this could be interpreted as a form of mania into which, freud argued, melancholia frequently lapses, we can be relatively certain that what we see is not the kind of melancholia he envisaged, nor does it closely approximate its typical clinical presentation. that being said, the picture presented (withdrawal to the farm, heavy drinking, self-parody) can still be accounted for by recourse to the dynamic of melancholia.

one means of assessing whether or not afrikaner self-parody amounts, dynamically, to a form of melancholia would be to probe the potential benefits of ‘self-exposure’, to examine if the motivation for drawing attention to one’s own wretchedness in self-parody is that of the melancholic. we find the clearest expression of this symptom of self-beratement in the rise of the zef movement. we might consider here the song, ‘doos dronk’ [cunt drunk], a collaborative performance between zef rappers die antwoord and jack parrow and fokofpolisiekar, in which the musicians parody the heavy drinking that has characterized the post-apartheid afrikaner youth, of which they are a part. the song ends in a scene where ninja of die antwoord beats female zef rapper, yolandi, to the ground. at this point, jack parrow tries to intervene but to no avail. parrow then assumes the role of a policeman in the performance; a siren sounds, ‘dis die polisie, meneer staan weg van die meisie’ [this is the police, sir, stand away from the girl]. yolandi shouts at ninja from the floor, ‘kyk vir jou nou, jys n fokken sissie man’ [look at you now, you're a fucking sissie man], at which point everyone shouts in unison, ‘ag, fokofpolisiekar’, ending the performance in a climactic chorus. significantly, this song was performed at oppikoppi on women’s day in 2009.

in examining the self-exposure in this performance, we find quite another dimension of afrikaner self-parody, one that not only preserves a disguised attachment to a foreclosed object in the circuitry of conscience, as i have described, but also uses its own problematized features (a racial, gendered and ethnicized position of historical dominance) in carrying out the injunctions of the post-apartheid nation. it does so by amplifying these problematized features into an outrageous and ridiculous misogynistic spectacle and relegating this problematized libidinal organization to the status of farce. as in the example of the parodic election campaign, the flash of reconnection with the object of loss is accomplished by occupying a staged revenge fantasy of the nation to which the subject belongs. here, too, this momentary reconnection occurs within the circuitry of conscience, a conscience instituted by the foreclosure the nation has occasioned by leading to the melancholic incorporation of the object in the first place. consequently, the performers and their audience are able to assume the very position of that which has been problematized, creating space for an ironic ‘afterlife’ for what has been forbidden. but (and here we
can begin to extend the argument) melancholic identification, even as it preserves its lost object, transforms that which is incorporated.

This transformation is a kind of psychic work, analogous to Freud’s (1916–1917) dream-work, disguising and distorting what is forbidden according to the conditions of a post-apartheid morality. This distorting and disguising – we might even say mutilating – what is forbidden according to an anti-apartheid post-apartheid morality is carried out by the technique of self-parody, which requires a problematized past as its raw material. The past is incorporated, identified with and turned against. It is precisely this turning against, this mutilation, that offers a new kind of narcissistic yield within a new sociopolitical context that values turning against the past.

The loss of apartheid as an ideal was, for Afrikaners, a narcissistic blow. In this context, we can begin to understand Afrikaner self-parody as the emergence of a new aesthetic form and a new parodic pattern of selfhood structured on the ethical imperatives of the post-apartheid nation. This stylization of the self authenticates Afrikaners as post-apartheid South Africans. It stands as a form of prosocial, superegoic violence that acts on the artefacts of a discredited past. Afrikaner self-parody figures, in other words, the installation and workings of a post-apartheid conscience, a submission to the conditions of the post-apartheid nation. Self-parody functions, then, as a spectacular technique that not only preserves but also participates in the denigration and transformation of the past in its ironic repetition as parody, a move that stages a perverse elaboration of the ‘sacred commandments’ of the post-apartheid nation, simulating its submission to the nation’s ‘renunciations and limitations’ (Freud, 1921, p. 131).

If we understand self-parody to be a form of reflexivity, a form of acting on the elements of oneself that are, according to social norms, problematized, then the inflation accompanying this kind of parody stands to reason: it is motivated by the proscriptions advocated by the norms and ideals of post-apartheid South Africa, which compel the repudiation of apartheid. As Butler (1997) argues, the force of the social world, which has declared apartheid an unavowable loss, is taken over by the ego ‘as its own destructiveness’ (p. 176). As Fokofpolisiekar sing in a song from the same album referred to earlier, which has become an anthem for this generation of young Afrikaners, ‘vernietig jouself’ [destroy yourself]. Following Butler’s line of thought, the masochism of this parodic spectacle, its self-exposure and self-ridicule, can be understood as the dissimulated force of post-apartheid nation building. We gain a sense from this dissimulated force how, in melancholia and self-parody alike, the ‘ego can consent to its own destruction [only]… if it is able to direct against itself the hostility which relates to an object’ (Freud, 1917, p. 252), in this case the object against which the post-apartheid nation has constituted itself. The corollary is that negative affective investment in the figure of the ironic double, as a reflexive move, accretes moral value and, as a result, is able to represent itself as authentically South African. The parodic double is a highly marketable product and thus also accrues cultural capital, as this sort of irony is, above all else, appreciated as cool. And therein lies the motivation for self-exposure and the real melancholic strategy of preservation at work in Afrikaner self-parody: it profits from apartheid, preserved as a denigrated feature of oneself, thus retaining a dominant position enabled by apartheid in the first place, albeit in a new form. As Derek Hook (2011) argues, the narcissistic gains of antiracist whiteness depend on a position of racialized privilege: it is precisely this position that is confessed, or perhaps, in extremely limited ways, generously and heroically given up. It is the structural racism on which this position was built that is acknowledged and it is past complicity with racist ideology for which apologies are made. For the antiracist whiteness Hook problematizes, racialized privilege is not eroded or dismantled but is converted into antiracism. Melancholic incorporation suggests one process whereby this conversion takes place.

Love for Afrikanerdom as it existed during apartheid and love structured according to an apartheid libidinal organization gains a compatible surrogate in post-apartheid South Africa in the form of self-parody not only because this technique provides a compromised form of satisfaction through negation, or because one can ironically
continue to be precisely that which is problematized, but also because this negation authenticates one’s post-apartheid national status by sufficiently crushing this identificatory rebellion.

the objective for future research on this phenomenon, i think, should not be to unmask afrikaners masquerading as authentic south africans so as to reveal afrikaners who, despite their displays of post-apartheid conscience, secretly long for a return to apartheid and who are actually old-fashioned racists. as kaja silverman (2008) has put it, ‘to judge someone for unconscious impulses is absurd, since these impulses would not be repressed if they were not as abhorrent to that person’s consciousness as they are to our own’ (p. 124). one cannot, however, overlook the fact that the figure of the afrikaner parodic double, zef, as it portrays itself in its elevation of what is most worthless in afrikanerdom, does preserve a position of social privilege, which it is unable to relinquish and which is concealed in the spectacle of self-parody.

conclusion

in the association of melancholia with sadness there seems something quite saddening about being able to feel a part of a national community only by making fun of oneself. it seems all the more saddening on account of the lack of recognition of the other it entails, as i described regarding the cleaners and security staff at the festival. despite its creativity, social change is indeed stuck in the flourishing – we might even say, in a seemingly paradoxical way, happy and inflated – melancholia of afrikaner self-parody. it is neither the complete and compliant surrender of a forbidden object nor the total rebellion of its preservation. it is the inhabitable, ambivalent symptom of a loss that cannot be declared, yet is spoken in a repetition compulsion that converts a problematized position of historical of dominance into the currency of an anti-apartheid/post-apartheid disposition (hook, 2011). in afrikaner self-parody we find a lost past, incorporated and used to narcissistically buoy a cultural formation that has experienced a socio-political situation as devastatingly threatening. it figures, in other words, a form of national melancholia: a submission to the conditions of the post-apartheid nation, which at the same time is a form of resistance to the mourning of apartheid and the loss of a fallen order.

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comments off on national melancholia and afrikaner self-parody in post-apartheid south africa

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The central objective in decolonising the African mind is to overthrow the authority which alien traditions exercise over the African. This demands the dismantling of white supremacist beliefs, and the structures which uphold them, in every area of African life. It must be stressed, however, that decolonisation does not mean ignorance of foreign traditions; it simply means denial of their authority and withdrawal of allegiance from them. – Chinweizu
this paper presents a framework for discussing the psychology of african liberation by using the political terms “colonialism,” “colonization” and “decolonization” as vantage points for contextualizing african american oppression. over the past 500 years, european ruling elites perfected a method of psychological manipulation and control first discussed from an african perspective by the nigerian scholar chinweizu (1987) in his classic decolonising the african mind. i call this method “mental” colonization.

introduced during the era of american slavery through a process 17th, 18th and 19th century english-speaking slaveholders called seasoning, today mental colonization is achieved through deculturalization. deculturalization is the fuel that drives the engine of mental colonization; both processes turn on a companion process called “mis-education,” and all three are examined in this paper along with their instruments, agents and goals.

because the african population born and bred in the united states is the classic example of a mentally colonized people, this paper references the 40 million people of african descent in the united states. however, much of what is discussed is applicable to african populations residing throughout the atlantic diaspora and beyond.

this two-part essay begins with an overview of european colonialism, deculturalization and mis-education. and it concludes with a review of african centered liberatory practices and orientations such as reafrikanization, sankofa, ma’at and intellectual disobedience. internalizing these concepts is essential for decolonizing the african mind.

part i typology of european colonialism: 1645 bce to present
Around 3,000 BCE, Aryans (later known as Caucasians) began to settle in the region of Asia known to the modern world as Europe. Over the past 2,000 years, their descendants (today’s Europeans) have practiced consistently and have now perfected three basic types of colonialism: territorial, intellectual, and mental. This section will cursorily address them all.

Perhaps the dominant feature of world history these past five centuries has been the “rise” to world dominance of the Caucasian peoples of Western Europe, North America, and Australia. In spite of their current “lofty” station, today’s undisputed “lords and masters” of the earth are from very humble origins. They first entered the pages of history as barbaric, nomadic tribes whose sole talent was warfare. Their only early accomplishment of note was the destruction of the Dravidian civilization of ancient India. Later their descendants plundered, pillaged, and finally sacked the Roman empire.

Possessed by demonic forces (Brown, 1998; Ickes, 2001; Mutwa, 2001), the Anglo-Saxons, Gauls, and Teutons of England, France, and Germany over the past five centuries developed the weaponry and logistics, the justifications and rationales, and the strategies and tactics to conquer and colonize the land, knowledge, and minds of the indigenous peoples of Africa, Asia, America, Australia, and the Pacific. In the 20th century, to decide who would exploit this vast multitude, Europeans fought two devastating world wars – 1914-1918 and 1939-1945 – that squandered millions of their lives nearly destroying their civilization.

When we focus our attention on Africa, historian Chancellor Williams (1974) tells us that the first Aryans to colonize African territory were the Hyksos (Hebrews) who invaded Kemet (Egypt) in 1645 BCE long after the pyramids were built. Over the centuries, other Aryan/European invaders followed: the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Portuguese, Spanish, British, French, Dutch, Germans, and Italians all came to Africa as conquerors and colonizers with only one intent: to plunder African people of their wealth.

The European “scramble” to colonize Africa did not reach its zenith, however, until 1884-85 when German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) organized the Berlin Conference. Attended by the French, British, Dutch, Germans, and Portuguese, who over the course of several meetings, debated and then formulated the ground rules for conquering and colonizing the whole of Africa. These five, small European states “planned their work and worked their plan” so effectively that by 1915, all of Africa, save Ethiopia, was a European colony.

In addition to colonizing African land, Europeans also colonized African knowledge not just to claim it as their own, but also to disconnect Africans from their heritage and culture. Why? Because people who are cut off from their heritage and culture are more easily manipulated and controlled than people who are not. Adisa Ajamu (1997) calls this “intellectual colonialism.”

Beginning with the Hyksos invasion, the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans each during their period of African occupancy seized control of Kemet’s temple-schools and captured her priest-teachers. Then they plundered her libraries and archives and “borrowed” African philosophical and religious ideas, practices, beliefs, and customs, which they later claimed as their own.

The Hebrews, for example, during their stay in Kemet adopted Kemetic names like Moses, customs like circumcision, and beliefs like monotheism. Plato (427-347 BCE), the “father” of Western philosophy and tutor of the military leader Europeans call Alexander the great, was a regular visitor at the great library at Rhakotis, later called Alexandria, from where he “borrowed” numerous books. And Herodotus (484-425 BCE), the father of European history, who actually traveled to Kemet, wrote that the Greek (and later the Roman) upper-classes sent their children to Kemet for higher education and “borrowed” many of their religious ideas from this African nation.

As a consequence of Europe’s successful colonization of African lands and African knowledge, she was able to successfully colonize African minds, and thereby
complete the conquest of African people. The 20th century witnessed the globalization of European consciousness and the planetary-wide imposition of European worldviews and life styles as the human norm. No where has this imposition been more thorough than in Africa among the Christianized, Western-trained, African intellectuals and other members of the ruling class. The same holds true for Africans in the Americas, and especially the United States.

deculturalization and Black America: 1500 to Present

deculturalization is a method of pacification and control perfected over the past 500 years by European ruling elites. This practice involves first the systematic stripping away of the intended victim’s ancestral culture and then systematically replacing it with European culture. According to educators Felix Boateng (1990) and Joel Spring (1997) Africans, Asians, Native Americans, (and I would add Native Australians and Pacific Islanders), have all been the victims of this form of psychological and spiritual abuse. Early American slaveholders called this practice seasoning. Today, the academic community calls it deculturalization, but the popular term is brain-washing.

As it affects Africans in the United States, deculturalization is a three-stage process. First, African Americans are quietly taught to feel ashamed of so they will reject their African and Native American heritage. Next, they are taught in schools and churches to admire and respect so they will adopt and practice only their European heritage. And finally, if they obediently submit to this indoctrination, they are rewarded with opportunities to receive even more indoctrination. And ultimately once they have been effectively indoctrinated, they are allowed an opportunity to compete for a “professional” job in the “main stream.” And a rare, handpicked few of the most thoroughly indoctrinated (brain-washed) are allowed access to the inner sanctums of white power, prestige and privilege.

The American system of deculturalization has been an extremely effective process. It has successfully brain-washed the majority of African Americans to accept the dominance of Europeans and European institutions over their lives. History teaches us that African prisoners of war (POWs) were subjected to a vicious, European-orchestrated, three to four years of seasoning during which the most important expressions of their African heritage were brutally stripped away from them and brutally replaced with the European colonizer-slave master-oppressor’s cultural
practices and beliefs.

Africans enslaved in the North American British colonies, for example, were forbidden to use their original African names, languages and religions. They were forced to use their European colonizer-slave master-oppressor’s names, language and religion. This is why most Africans born in the United States have European surnames, speak English and practice some form of Christianity. Slavery imposed these European cultural practices on their African ancestors and their descendants blindly continue them unless they take steps to open their eyes to and free their minds of all remnants of European slavery.

Both Boateng (1990) and Spring (1997) identified the public school as a major agent of African American deculturalization (brain-washing). I agree; however, I would add that nearly all American educational institutions – black, white, public, private, day care to college – must be placed alongside the public schools as agents of deculturalization. In fact, no aspect of American education is free of this curse except the African centered independent school whose sole mission if it is functioning properly is to decolonize or re-Africanize black students and their families.

Mis-education and Black America: 1933 to present

The major 20th century instrument of deculturalization was and remains mis-education. Mis-education is the term coined by historian Carter G. Woodson (1933) to describe the destructive effects on the Black mind by schools that use a pedagogy and curriculum that deliberately omits, distorts or trivializes the role of African people in and their seminal contributions to world history and culture.

The American public school, as we previously noted, is a major mis-educator (brain-washer) of African people, and has been since its inception in the 1890s. But it is only one of three agents of mass mis-education used by the white ruling elite to manipulate and control African Americans over the past century. The other two carry equal weight. They are the popular media (print and electronic) and the traditional, mainstream Christian church that proclaims non-Africans as “God’s chosen people” and a white Jesus as its “personal savior.”

The end goal of mis-education is three-fold: first, to produce African people who identify with and embrace as their own European history, traditions and culture, but who are ambivalent or indifferent toward African history, traditions and culture. Second, to produce Black people who have been what political scientist Jacob Carruthers (1994) calls diseducated, meaning people who have had their intellectual development arrested by the public schools. And, the third and ultimate goal of mis-education is mentacide, a term linked to genocide and diseducation coined in 1984 by Bobby Wright as a label for the European-orchestrated campaign to destroy the
literally from birth to death, african americans are awash in a sea of european-designed, mass media disseminated disinformation, misinformation, half-truths and whole lies about the people, history, culture and significance of africa. this, of course, is no accident. it is part of a finely crafted, century-long campaign to stop african americans from connecting with their rich ancestral homeland and developing a pan african worldview. while at the same time, it serves as a cloak under which europeans can hide from african americans their plunder of africa’s mineral and biological wealth. our white rulers and their black supporters clearly understand that black mis-education is the backbone of white domination.

careful analysis of black institutions that uphold mis-education and africans who have been crippled by it reveal a number of highly identifiable features. first, these institutions will favor and their patrons will embrace what psychologist wade nobles (1986) calls conceptual incarceration. conceptual incarceration is the term for black imprisonment in white belief systems and knowledge bases.

when it comes to defining themselves and the world, mis-educated blacks restrict their range of thought (and action) by their habit of drawing exclusively from their european background. by limiting themselves to this one, small facet of their vast, tricultural heritage, they confine themselves to a tiny, narrow corner of the world where they sit locked in a mental prison (colony) with only one set of lenses (european) to see the world.

by embracing european perspectives exclusively, africans cut themselves off from self-knowledge. and when that occurs, deculturalization claims another victim. fortunately, black conceptual incarceration in large measure is self-imposed. africans in america can choose to expand their cultural frames of reference and consciously embrace their african and native american heritages. and when this happens, their conceptual incarceration ends.

another feature of black mis-education is what mwata x (1996) calls learned indifference, which is a pervasive and self-destructive psychological disorder marked by disinterest in issues, causes and organizations that promote the political and economic liberation of african people. by this measure, most of our established black churches and prestigious black schools mis-educate, and nearly all of our multi-millionaire black athletes and super-star black entertainers are mis-educated, (right along with nine out of ten black americans). as causalities in a war they don’t even know is being waged, the black elite have been captured with wealth and fame by the forces of deculturalization.

a third feature of black mis-education is what i call utengano. utengano is a swahili word meaning “disunity” and refers to the deeply entrenched, intergenerational predisposition among africans to accept dysfunctional divisions in the african family and community as normal. utengano afflicts black people who expect and tolerate teen pregnancy, absent fathers, inferior schools, run-down buildings, ineffective leaders and dirty, unsafe streets filled with illicit drugs, alcohol and x-rated music as normal and thus acceptable. but if they were truly educated, they would be outraged by these perversions and committed to changing these wretched conditions or die trying.
part ii decolonizing the african mind: action steps

in the american context, decolonizing the african mind means reversing the seasoning process. for those millions of african pows who survived the horrors of the middle passage, seasoning was a three to four year period of intense and often brutal slave making at the hands and feet of their european captors and their agents. because it capitalized on our innate, human fear of pain and death, seasoning was so effective as a pacification method that north american slave owners gladly paid a premium for “seasoned” africans from the caribbean. for enslaved africans, seasoning, when successful, laid the foundation for a lifetime of faithful, obedient service to their master and his children.

effective seasoning, therefore, was the key that opened the door for 350 years of mental colonization of the african american people. moreover, it allows for present-day black pacification, manipulation and control by the european ruling elite and their agents. but, if african pows were taught to be negro slaves, it is reasonable to believe (like elijah muhammad (1897-1975) that a fair number can be re-taught to be free african women and men. reversing the seasoning process is a constructive way to frame a psychoeducational approach for cleansing african minds of european or arab cultural infestation.

toward this end, beginning in the late 1960s, perhaps the first african americans to initiate systematic decolonization were small groups of youth, awakened by the maroon spirit resounding in the voices of malcolm x, kwame ture, maulana karenga, amiri baraka and host of others. these decolonizing youth initiated projects of self-discovery intended to remove the european mind set (colony) implanted in their psyches as a result of living in a european dominated society.
to effect sweeping change in their value and belief systems, these young truth-seekers practiced self-definition, self-determination and self-defense. as a way of liberating themselves and others from the shackles of mis-education and diseducation, many established independent schools dedicated to developing african centered curriculum and pedagogy while others established research organizations dedicated to recovering traditional african knowledge bases.

the council of independent black institutions (cibi) established in 1972 (www.cibi.org) and the association for the study of classical african civilization (ascac) established in 1984 (www.ascac.org) are prime examples, indeed symbols, of this search for the deeper meaning of being african in the late 20th century. cibi is an educational association and ascac is a research association. both were established by this community of freedom seeking, culturally conscious, african men and women.

as cibi and ascac founders quickly discovered, the first step toward decolonizing the african mind is to identify a re-placement worldview on which to frame a liberated african future. in other words, once the forces of mental colonization are defeated and their colonial government expelled, its infrastructure razed and the battle site cleansed, what type of structures do we install in this newly liberated space to unleash genius and thwart re-colonization efforts? the remainder of this essay will begin to answer this question.

decolonization is a journey of self-discovery culminating in a reawakening and a reorientation. it involves a conscious decision to first uncover, uproot and remove all vestiges of slavery imposed european or arab values and beliefs ingested over centuries of mis-education that are detrimental to present-day african family stability and african community empowerment. next, as the colony is being dismantled, africans must fill the liberated spaces with those life-sustaining social values, beliefs and customs that enabled their ancestors to establish stable, autonomous families and communities prior to the arab or european invasions and conquest of their societies.

like all transforming, liberatory states, decolonization is actually a protracted process demanding constant vigilance and intense dedication to task. it cannot be achieved in a single evening by reading a single book or by attending a single lecture or even by taking a single course. however, reading, lectures, courses (along with study groups and conferences), are critical to the success of any decolonization project. because it is an effort to recover and reconnect with the best of traditional african culture as a means of ending european dominance of the african psyche, for africans in the americas, decolonization is re-africanization.

re-africanization is a term popularized by president ahmed sekou toure (1922-1984) of guinea and paigc-founder amilcar cabral (1931-1973) of guinea-bissau to promote a return to traditional african values and institutions among their citizens. in the american context, reafrikanization (akoto & akoto, 2000) is a long-term, transgenerational, family project. among other things, it demands family-wide embrace of select african centered values, beliefs and practices regarding the family and how it organizes and allocates its financial and human resources. to pull all of this together takes years of immersion in traditional african cultural values and daily living in an african centered mental space practicing traditional and liberatory african values, beliefs, orientations and perspectives.

over the past 30 years, cibi and ascac activists and others seeking to reafrikanize have found maulana karenga’s seven-part value system, the nguzo saba, to be a highly effectively decolonization tool. other useful tools are mukasa afrika’s, five pillars of afrikan spirituality, the miamba tano and my six jewels of african centered leadership, the johari sita.

constant reafrikanization undermines the colony’s legitimacy and weakens its infrastructure to the point where frontal attacks can be launched against its outposts and command centers. if successful, all external european trappings are discarded and the once deculturated negro reemerges with an african name, speaking an african language, wearing african fashions and praying to an african god. once this
occurs, the lost child has found his/her way back home.

on a deeper, internal level, however, extreme individualism along with sexism, classism, racism, geocide and other european social practices and cultural orientations that give rise to aberrations like conceptual incarceration, learned indifference and utengano must be expunged from the value and belief systems. selfish and divisive europeancentric perspectives and behaviors must give way to wholesome, life affirming, africancentric, communal values like community service, cooperation, and sharing.

the second step in the battle to decolonize the african mind requires dismantling the instrument of deculturalization and neutralizing the agents of mis-education previously discussed in this paper. in essence, this means rejecting the pro-european/anti-african teachings of the christian church or islamic mosque, disregarding the pro-european/anti-african messages conveyed by the popular media and deconstructing the pro-european/anti-african indoctrination of the public schools. it also means implementing the first of three five-year, comprehensive, african centered, self-education program designed to end one’s conceptual incarceration, learned indifference, and utengano. a starting point perhaps is the ideas presented in this paper and the books listed as sources and essential readings.

furthermore, african youth in the united states can rid themselves of time-squandering, resource-draining behaviors like conspicuous consumption of european produced goods and services, over reliance on tv, video games, sporting events and night clubs as entertainment and the other debilitating orientations discussed in this paper with sankofa. sankofa is a philosophical principle and social custom among the akan-speaking people of ghana, togo and cote d’ivoire that holds that wisdom is learning from the past to both understand the present and shape the future. implicit in sankofa is the deep study/reading of african history and the application of its lessons from 2 million bce to the present. for 21st century africans, sankofa is the first step on the road to mental freedom.

sankofa practitioners understand that black deculturalization is essentially black mis-education. and the cure for black mis-education is to read, discuss, study, learn and then use the lessons of african history along with the best of african culture as offensive weapons in the war against the european or arab colonial outpost implanted in the african psyche.

to decolonize the african mind, african freedom-seekers must destroy their deeply rooted, interconnecting networks of internalized european or arab values and beliefs. these are the invisible chains of mental slavery that for centuries have allowed europeans and arabs to manipulate and control them, first as slaves and religious converts, and now as pseudo-citizens. sankofa practice is an indispensable weapon in the war to decolonize or re-africanize the african mind.

another powerful weapon against deculturalization-mis-education is to embrace through daily practice the kemetic principle of ma’at. in ancient african metaphysics, ma’at was synonymous with righteousness. and, it was considered the most important spiritual principle because it sustains the cosmos. righteousness was thought to permeate the universe as truth, justice, order, harmony and balance.

in the view of ancient africans of the nile river valley, god’s will is that human society, as a microcosm of the universe, function in accordance with ma’at. hence, to do ma’at is to wisely align oneself with the divine order. because the european world order is rooted in isfet or lies, injustice, deception and manipulation, to do ma’at, (always speaking the truth, demanding justice, and bringing order, harmony and balance) eats away the soft underbelly of this wicked global system like steady rain eats away drought.

a fourth weapon in the struggle to reverse the seasoning process is what i call intellectual disobedience, which is the soul-deep belief that africans have a moral imperative to resist all attempts by the dominant social order to constrict, restrict or
regulate the content of their education. in other words, africans have the divine right to resist all european efforts at mind control. implicit in intellectual disobedience, which is the 21st century corollary to philosopher henry david thoreau’s (1860) notion of civil disobedience, is decolonization.

in the late 1950 and early 1960s, it was the notion of civil disobedience that emboldened martin luther king jr. (1929 – 1968) and others to defy the white political establishment’s immoral effort to constrict, restrict and regulate african citizenship rights in this country. similarly, in the 21st century, intellectual disobedience demands that freedom-seeking africans defy the white educational establishment’s immoral effort to constrict, restrict and regulate our right to resist the imposition of europeancentric worldviews as the norm. intellectual disobedience is the ultimate act of decolonization. moreover, it is the hallmark of a liberated mind.

the ultimate weapon, however, in the african liberatory arsenal is by far the simplest, but the most lethal. its power lies in its demand that africans financially support organizations that build african centered independent schools like cibi and organizations that promotes african centered research like ascac. each organization is a powerful ally in the collective struggle to decolonize the african mind.

collection

abraham lincoln’s emancipation proclamation of 1863, which freed millions of africans from chattel slavery, perhaps more than any other presidential act, guaranteed the union’s victory in 1865. by the end of the civil war, the white ruling elite clearly understood that the time had come to end chattel slavery in the united states and assimilate african people into the lowest level of the american social order. so congress passed the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the constitution, which on paper ended chattel slavery, made africans citizens, and gave black men the right to vote.

during the reconstruction era (1865-1877) following the civil war in the south, newly freed africans used their newly won franchise as their saddle and the republican party as their horse to ride into to political office in south carolina, georgia, mississippi, louisiana and other southern states. these black elected officials improved southern life for all people. one example: they wrote and then enacted legislation that paved the way for the south’s first public school systems. this was the heyday of black american political participation until the 1970s ushered in what
The historians call the “second reconstruction.”

Reconstruction one came to a violent, bloody end when President Rutherford B. Hayes (1822-1893) withdrew Union troops from Louisiana and South Carolina in 1877-78. This set the stage for the rise of white terrorist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan. And over the course of the next 20 years, they literally drove southern blacks at gunpoint out of American politics and back into the cotton fields, thereby sparking a black exodus from the rural South that continued until the 1970s. The U.S. Supreme Court drove the final nail into the coffin of reconstruction in 1896. Its decision in the Plessy v. Ferguson case to uphold racial segregation provided the legal rationale underpinning the American system of apartheid, 1896-1966.

today, freedom-seeking black youth must keep in mind that the brain-washing (deculturalization) of their people in this country has been in progress for the past 350 years. But, it has never been completely successful. There have always existed liberated minds within the African American intelligentsia. Jacob Carruthers (1999) calls these scholar-warriors “intellectual maroons.” Men like David Walker (1785-1830) and Martin Delany (1812-1885) in the 19th century and Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) and Malcolm X (1925-1965) in the 20th century are sterling examples of Africans who emancipated themselves from European mental bondage by decolonizing their minds.

It brings clarity (and inspiration) to know that Africans in the United States have a 350-year tradition of resistance to European domination and that deculturalization was only one dimension of a larger cycle of European and Arab aggression against African people. African centered historians call this larger cycle of black destruction “the Maafa.” And for Africans in the United States, it includes 263 years of chattel slavery followed by 140 years of mental slavery.

More important, freedom-seeking African youth must stand up and declare total war on their own colonial thinking. They must attack mercilessly its instruments and agents, deconstruct its intellectual base, and thereby break out of conceptual incarceration. Jacob Carruthers (1999) calls this “intellectual warfare.” To win the war for their own minds, African youth must immerse themselves in the knowledge bases that gave rise to Kemet, Nubia and Axum as well as ancient Zimbabwe, Ghana, Mali, and Songhay. This will provide them with a solid foundation on which to construct a historically accurate and healthy sense of themselves as modern, 21st century people connected to the world’s first and finest civilizations.

Predictably, African Americans under 25 years of age living in Reafrikanizing households and attending African centered schools are prime candidates to achieve permanent decolonization. From amongst their ranks will come the intellectual maroons of the 21st century. Regrettably, millions of African American teenagers and adults from all social classes and economic backgrounds have been so thoroughly and completely colonized (brain-washed) that nothing short of institutionalize deprogramming would pry loose the bars of their conceptual incarceration, learned indifference and utengano.

For our thoroughly seasoned African leadership class, only a long-term, intensive, decolonization procedure would cleanse them sufficiently to begin preliminary restructuring of their African personalities. And only precision weapons like Sankofa, Ma’at, Reafrikanization and intellectual disobedience will allow them to victoriously engage their internal enemy and decolonize their African minds.
glossary of terms

aryans (sanskrit) – fair-skinned, nomadic, war-like people from southern russia and iran (persia) who invaded much of europe, southwest asia and india, 2000-1500 bce. in the 20th century, adolf hitler’s nazi’s claimed descent from the ancient aryans and embraced their passion for war and conquest. the white arabs of saudi arabia, jordan, lebanon, turkey, palestine, iraq, syria, afghanistan, and iran as well as egypt, libya, tunisia, algeria and morroco are the semitic branch of the aryan-caucasian-european family (rajshekar, 1987).

deculturalization – three-part process designed and perfected by europeans that: (1) denigrates to alienate blacks from their african cultural heritage, i.e., african languages, religions, customs, etc., (2) teaches them to value only the cultural orientations, i.e., languages, religions, customs, etc., of europeans or arabs, and (3) assimilates them into a europe or arab dominated social order as their faithful supporters and defenders. the public educational system, the christian church and the mass media are the prime instruments of american deculturalization, and the qur’an, the mosque, and qur’anic school are the chief instruments of arab deculturalization (boateng, 1990; spring, 1997).

european colonization (1440 ce – present) – 500-year-long competition among the europeans (english, french, spanish, portuguese, dutch, u.s. americans, germans, and italians) to set up and maintain african bases of operations to better steal the human, minerals and biological wealth of the world’s richest continent for the development of european civilization. the europeans have colonized successfully african land, institutions and minds.

maafa (swahili) – term popularized by marimba ani to signify the 1300-year-long period (652 ce – present) of african conquest, enslavement, domination, oppression, exploitation and genocide at the hands of europeans and arabs (ani, 1994).
goals of mis-education

conceptual incarceration (ci) – state of african intellectual imprisonment in european value and belief systems occasioned by ignorance of african and native american philosophical, cultural and historical truths. ci is the goal of miseducation, the end result of deculturalization, and the major obstacle to innovative, creative and liberatory african thought and practice (nobles, 1986).

diseducation – public school practice of arresting and undermining the intellectual development of african students resulting in “pervasive, persistent and disproportionate” academic under achievement. diseducation is a strategy of deculturalization, the maafa and the source of the black-white student achievement gap (carruthers, 1994).

education for all – termed coined at a 1990 world bank conference in thailand to promote western-style primary education in africa, which serves to “rob africans of their indigenous knowledge and language” promoting what dr. birgit brock-utne calls the “recolonization of the african mind” (brock-utne, 2000).

learned indifference (li) – pervasive and debilitating african psychological state characterized by disinterest in issues, causes and organizations that promote the advancement of african people. li is a function of conceptual incarceration and the end goal of deculturalization and miseducation (x, 1996).

mentacide – deliberate and systematic european-orchestrated process terminating in the destruction of the african mind with the ultimate objective the extirpation of african people. end goal of deculturalization, miseducation and the maafa (wright, 1984).
utengano (swahili) – deeply entrenched, intergenerational African American predisposition to accept disunity, division and disorder in the African community as normal. Utengano is an expression of learned indifference, an outgrowth of deculturalization, and a strategy of the maafa (Hotep, 2002).

Liberatory practices

Decolonization – process of overthrowing and then removing the Europeancentric or Arabcentric value and belief systems (colonies) implanted in our minds by our public school mis-education, our Christian or Islamic indoctrination and mass media manipulation that keep us psychologically, emotionally, materially and spiritually tied to Europeans or Arabs as their victims or servants. To decolonize the African mind is to cleanse and liberate by re-africanizing the African mind (Chinweizu, 1987).

Intellectual disobedience – twenty-first century corollary to Henry David Thoreau’s (1860) notion of civil disobedience that holds that African people have a moral imperative to resist all attempts by the European dominated educational hegemony to constrict, restrict or regulate the content of their education (Hotep, 2000).

Ma‘at (mdw ntr) – seven thousand-year-old Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) term for the divine law of truth, justice, order, harmony, balance, in short, righteousness. The restoration, maintenance and preservation of ma‘at was considered the highest social ideal by the ancient Africans of the Nile River valley civilizations. Today, it is the motive and goal of all conscious, African freedom fighters (Karenga, 1986; Hilliard, 1994; Carruthers, 1995; Ashby, 1996).

Re-africanization – intergenerational, family-based process of reclamation, revivification and reincorporation of African cultural knowledge and values as the prerequisite for establishing a 21st century African social order rooted in the traditional wisdom of African people (Akoto & Akoto, 2000).

Sankofa (twi) – Akan concept, symbol and social practice adopted by late 20th century pan African nationalist scholars and activists, which refers to the practice of learning from the past to build for the future. For African people, this means having the desire to not only understand the worldview of our ancient African ancestors, but also the wisdom to adopt or adapt their social practices and philosophical beliefs when they will help us establish financially independent, emotionally wholesome and nurturing families and autonomous, sovereign, self-sufficient communities. Sankofa
practice demands confronting the maafa by respecting life, nature and the wisdom of our african ancestors, establishing viable extended families, supporting african centered institutions and organizations, and creating social and economic ties throughout the african world community (wase, 1998; akoto & akoto, 2000).

sources and essential readings

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twenty one years after freedom, we have now fully entered what looks like a negative moment. this is a moment most african postcolonial societies have experienced. like theirs in the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, ours is gray and almost murky. it lacks clarity.

today many want to finally bring white supremacy to its knees. but the same seem to go missing when it comes to publically condemning the extra-judicial executions of
fellow africans on the streets of our cities and in our townships. as fanon intimated, they see no contradiction between wanting to topple white supremacy and being anti-racist while succumbing to the sirens of isolationism and national-chauvinism.

many still consider whites as “settlers” who, once in a while, will attempt to masquerade as “natives”. and yet, with the advent of democracy and the new constitutional state, there are no longer settlers or natives. there are only citizens. if we repudiate democracy, what will we replace it with?

our white compatriots might be fencing off their privileges. they might be “enclaving” them and “off-shoring” them but they are certainly going nowhere.

and yet they cannot keep living in our midst with whiteness’ old clothes. fencing off one’s privileges, off-shoring them, living in enclaves does not in itself secure full recognition and survival.

meanwhile, “blackness” is fracturing. “black consciousness” today is more and more thought of in fractions.

a negative moment is a moment when new antagonisms emerge while old ones remain unresolved.

it is a moment when contradictory forces – inchoate, fractured, fragmented – are at work but what might come out of their interaction is anything but certain.

it is also a moment when multiple old and recent unresolved crises seem to be on the path towards a collision.

such a collision might happen – or maybe not. it might take the form of outbursts that end up petering out. whether the collision actually happens or not, the age of innocence and complacency is over.

when it comes to questions concerning the decolonization of the university – and of knowledge – in south africa now, there are a number of clear-cut political and moral issues – which are also issues of fairness and decency – many of us can easily agree upon.

demythologizing whiteness

one such issue has just been dealt with – and successfully – at the university of cape town.

to those who are still in denial, it might be worth reiterating that cecil rhodes
belonged to the race of men who were convinced that to be black is a liability.

during his time and life in southern Africa, he used his considerable power—political and financial—to make black people all over southern Africa pay a bloody price for his beliefs.

his statue—and those of countless others who shared the same conviction—has nothing to do on a public university campus 20 years after freedom.

the debate therefore should have never been about whether or not it should be brought down. all along, the debate should have been about why did it take so long to do so.

to bring Rhodes’ statue down is far from erasing history, and nobody should be asking us to be eternally indebted to Rhodes for having “donated” his money and for having bequeathed “his” land to the university. if anything, we should be asking how did he acquire the land in the first instance.

arguably other options were available and could have been considered, including that which was put forward late in the process by retired judge Albie Sachs whose contribution to the symbolic remaking of what is today Constitution Hill is well recognized.

but bringing Rhodes’ statue down is one of the many legitimate ways in which we can, today in South Africa, demythologize that history and put it to rest—which is precisely the work memory properly understood is supposed to accomplish.

for memory to fulfill this function long after the truth and reconciliation paradigm has run out of steam, the demythologizing of certain versions of history must go hand in hand with the demythologizing of whiteness.

this is not because whiteness is the same as history. human history, by definition, is history beyond whiteness.

human history is about the future. whiteness is about entrapment. whiteness is at its best when it turns into a myth. it is the most corrosive and the most lethal when it makes us believe that it is everywhere; that everything originates from it and it has no outside.

we are therefore calling for the demythologization of whiteness because democracy in South Africa will either be built on the ruins of those versions of whiteness that produced Rhodes or it will fail.

in other words, those versions of whiteness that produced men like Rhodes must be recalled and de-commissioned if we have to put history to rest, free ourselves from our own entrapment in white mythologies and open a future for all here and now.

it might then be that the statue of Rhodes and the statues of countless men of his ilk that are littering the South African landscape properly belong to a museum—an institution that, with few exceptions, has hardly been subjected to the kind of thorough critique required by these times of ours in South Africa.

yet, a museum properly understood is not a dumping place. it is not a place where we recycle history’s waste. it is first and foremost an epistemic space.

a stronger option would therefore be the creation of a new kind of institution, partly a park and partly a graveyard, where statues of people who spent most of their lives defacing everything the name “black” stood for would be put to rest. putting them to rest in those new places would in turn allow us to move on and recreate the kind of new public spaces required by our new democratic project.

architecture, public spaces and the common

now, many may ask: “what does bringing down the statue of a late 19th century privateer have to do with decolonizing a 21st century university?” or, as many have in
are we simply, as Ferial Haffajee, the editor of the weekly city press argues, fighting over the past because of our inability to build a future which, in her eyes, is mostly about each of us turning into an entrepreneur, making lots of money and becoming a good consumer?

Is this the only future left to aspire to – one in which every human being becomes a market actor; every field of activity is seen as a market; every entity (whether public or private, whether person, business, state or corporation) is governed as a firm; people themselves are cast as human capital and are subjected to market metrics (ratings, rankings) and their value is determined speculatively in a futures market?

decolonizing the university starts with the de-privatization and rehabilitation of the public space – the rearrangement of spatial relations Fanon spoke so eloquently about in the first chapter of the Wretched of the Earth.

It starts with a redefinition of what is public, i.e., what pertains to the realm of the common and as such, does not belong to anyone in particular because it must be equally shared between equals.

The decolonization of buildings and of public spaces is therefore not a frivolous issue, especially in a country that, for many centuries, has defined itself as not of Africa, but as an outpost of European imperialism in the dark continent; and in which 70% of the land is still firmly in the hands of 13% of the population.

The decolonization of buildings and of public spaces is inseparable from the democratization of access.

When we say access, we are naturally thinking about a wide opening of the doors of higher learning to all South Africans. For this to happen, SA must invest in its universities. For the time being, it spends 0.6% of its GDP on higher education. The percentage of the national wealth invested in higher education must be increased.

But when we say access, we are also talking about the creation of those conditions that will allow black staff and students to say of the university: “This is my home. I am not an outsider here. I do not have to beg or to apologize to be here. I belong here”.

Such a right to belong, such a rightful sense of ownership has nothing to do with charity or hospitality.

It has nothing to do with the liberal notion of ‘tolerance’.

It has nothing to do with me having to assimilate into a culture that is not mine as a precondition of my participating in the public life of the institution.

It has all to do with ownership of a space that is a public, common good.

It has to do with an expansive sense of citizenship itself indispensable for the project of democracy, which itself means nothing without a deep commitment to some idea of public-ness.

Furthermore – especially for black staff and students – it has to do with creating a set of mental dispositions. We need to reconcile a logic of indictment and a logic of self-affirmation, interruption and occupation.

This requires the conscious constitution of a substantial amount of mental capital and the development of a set of pedagogies we should call pedagogies of presence.

Black students and staff have to invent a set of creative practices that ultimately make it impossible for official structures to ignore them and not recognize them, to pretend that they are not there; to pretend that they do not see them; or to pretend that their voice does not count.
the decolonization of buildings and public spaces includes a change of those colonial names, iconography, i.e., the economy of symbols whose function, all along, has been to induce and normalize particular states of humiliation based on white supremacist presuppositions.

such names, images and symbols have nothing to do on the walls of a public university campus more than 20 years after apartheid.

classrooms without walls and different forms of intelligence

another site of decolonization is the university classroom. we cannot keep teaching the way we have always taught.

number of our institutions are teaching obsolete forms of knowledge with obsolete pedagogies. just as we decommission statues, we should decommission a lot of what passes for knowledge in our teaching.

in an age that more than ever valorizes different forms of intelligence, the student-teacher relationship has to change.

in order to set our institutions firmly on the path of future knowledges, we need to reinvent a classroom without walls in which we are all co-learners; a university that is capable of convening various publics in new forms of assemblies that become points of convergence of and platforms for the redistribution of different kinds of knowledges.

the quantified subject

universities have always been organizational structures with certified and required programs of study, grading system, methods for the legitimate accumulation of credits and acceptable and non acceptable standards of achievement.

since the start of the 20th century, they have been undergoing internal changes in their organizational structure.

today, they are large systems of authoritative control, standardization, gradation, accountancy, classification, credits and penalties.

we need to decolonize the systems of management insofar as they have turned higher education into a marketable product bought and sold by standard units.

we might never entirely get rid of measurement, counting, and rating. we nevertheless have to ask whether each form of measurement, counting and rating must necessarily lead to the reduction of everything to staple equivalence.

we have to ask whether there might be other ways of measuring, counting and rating which escape the trap of everything having to become a numerical standard or unit.

we have to create alternative systems of management because the current ones, dominated by statistical reason and the mania for assessment, are deterring students and teachers from a free pursuit of knowledge. they are substituting this goal of free pursuit of knowledge for another, the pursuit of credits.

the system of business principles and statistical accountancy has resulted in an obsessive concern with the periodic and quantitative assessment of every facet of university functioning.

an enormous amount of faculty time and energy are expended in the fulfillment of administrative demands for ongoing assessment and reviews of programs and in the compilation of extensive files demonstrating, preferably in statistical terms, their productivity – the number of publications, the number of conference papers presented, the number of committees served on, the number of courses taught, the number of students processed in those courses, quantitative measures of teaching
excellence. excellence itself has been reduced to statistical accountancy.

we have to change this if we want to break the cycle that tends to turn students into customers and consumers.

we have to change this – and many other sites – if the aim of higher education is to be, once again, to redistribute as equally as possible a capacity of a special type – the capacity to make disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet; the capacity to make systematic forays beyond our current knowledge horizons.

the philosophical challenge

let me now move to the most important part of this lecture. while preparing it, it became clear to me that the questions we face are of a profoundly intellectual nature.

they are also colossal. and if we do not foreground them intellectually in the first instance; if we do not develop a complex understanding of the nature of what we are actually facing, we will end up with the same old techno-bureaucratic fixes that have led us, in the first place, to the current cul-de-sac.

to be perfectly frank, i have to add that our task is rendered all the more complex because there is hardly any agreement as to the meaning, and even less so the future, of what goes by the name “the university” in our world today.

the harder i tried to make sense of the idea of “decolonization” that has become the rallying cry for those trying to undo the racist legacies of the past, the more i kept asking myself to what extent we might be fighting a complexly mutating entity with concepts inherited from an entirely different age and epoch. is today’s university the same as yesterday’s or are we confronting an entirely different apparatus, an entirely different rationality – both of which require us to produce radically new concepts?

we all agree that there is something anachronistic, something fundamentally wrong with a number of institutions of higher learning in south africa.

there is something fundamentally cynical when institutions whose character is profoundly ethno-provincial keep masquerading as replicas of oxford and cambridge without demonstrating the same productivity as the original places they are mimicking.

there is something profoundly wrong when, for instance, syllabi designed to meet the needs of colonialism and apartheid continue well into the post-apartheid era.

we also agree that part of what is wrong with our institutions of higher learning is that they are “westernized”.

but what does it mean “they are westernized”?

they are indeed “westernized” if all that they aspire to is to become local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on a eurocentric epistemic canon.

but what is a eurocentric canon?
a eurocentric canon is a canon that attributes truth only to the western way of knowledge production.

it is a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions.

it is a canon that tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression.

furthermore, western epistemic traditions are traditions that claim detachment of the known from the knower.

they rest on a division between mind and world, or between reason and nature as an ontological a priori.

they are traditions in which the knowing subject is enclosed in itself and peeks out at a world of objects and produces supposedly objective knowledge of those objects. the knowing subject is thus able, we are told, to know the world without being part of that world and he or she is by all accounts able to produce knowledge that is supposed to be universal and independent of context.

the problem – because there is a problem indeed – with this tradition is that it has become hegemonic.

this hegemonic notion of knowledge production has generated discursive scientific practices and has set up interpretive frames that make it difficult to think outside of these frames. but this is not all.

this hegemonic tradition has not only become hegemonic. it also actively represses anything that actually is articulated, thought and envisioned from outside of these frames.

for these reasons, the emerging consensus is that our institutions must undergo a process of decolonization both of knowledge and of the university as an institution.

the task before us is to give content to this call – which requires that we be clear about what we are talking about.

is ‘decolonization’ the same thing as ‘africanization’?

calls to “decolonize” are not new. nor have they gone uncontested whenever they have been made. we all have in mind african postcolonial experiments in the 1960s
and 1970s, then, “to decolonize” was the same thing as “to africanize”. to decolonize was part of a nation-building project.

frantz fanon was extremely critical of the project of “africanization”. his critique of “africanization” (the wreched of the earth, chapter 3) was entirely political.

first, he did not believe that it “nation-building” could be achieved by those he called “the national middle class” or the “national bourgeoisie”.

fanon did not trust the african postcolonial middle class at all.

he thought the african postcolonial middle class was lazy, unscrupulous, parasitic and above all lacking spiritual depth precisely because it had “totally assimilated colonialist thought in its most corrupt form”.

not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor building, nor labour, its innermost vocation, he thought, was not to transform the nation. it was merely to “keep in the running and be part of the racket”. for instance it constantly demanded the “nationalization of the economy” and of the trading sectors. but nationalization quite simply meant “the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which were a legacy of the colonial past”.

he also thought that in the aftermath of colonialism, the middle class manipulated the overall claim to self-determination as a way of preventing the formation of an authentic national consciousness.

in order to preserve its own interests, the middle class turned the national project into an “an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what might have been”. in this context, the discourse of “africanization” mostly performed an ideological work. “africanization” was the ideology masking what fundamentally was a “racketeering” or predatory project – what we call today “looting”.

more ominously, fanon took a certain discourse of “africanization” to be akin to something he called “retrogression” – retrogression when “the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred to the state”.

“retrogression” too when, behind a so-called nationalist rhetoric, lurks the hideous face of chauvinism – the “heart breaking return of chauvinism in its most bitter and detestable form”, he writes.

in the aftermath of independence, fanon witnessed events similar to what we in south africa call “xenophobic” or “afrophobic” attacks against fellow africans. he witnessed similar events in the ivory coast, in senegal, in the congo where those we call, in the south african lexicon “foreigners” controlled the greater part of the petty trade.

these africans of other nations were rounded up and commanded to leave. their shops were burned and their street stalls were wrecked.

fanon was ill at ease with calls for “africanization” because calls for “africanization” are, in most instances, always haunted by the dark desire to get rid of the foreigner – a dark desire which, fanon confesses, made him “furious and sick at heart”.

it made him furious and sick at heart because the foreigner to be gotten rid of was almost always a fellow african from another nation.

and because the objective target of “africanization” was a fellow african from another nation, he saw in “africanization” the name of an inverted racism – self-racism if you like.

as far as i know, fanon is the most trenchant critique of the “decolonization-as-africanization” paradigm.
he is its most trenchant critique because of his conviction that very often, especially when the “wrong” social class is in charge, there is a shortcut from nationalism “to chauvinism, and finally to racism”.

in other words, we topple cecil rhodes statue only to replace it with the statue of hitler.

interactions – a strategy of difference and repetition from african noise foundation on vimeo.

difference and repetition

now, if africanization and decolonization are not the same thing, what then is the true meaning of decolonization?

for fanon, struggles for decolonization are first and foremost about self-ownership. they are struggles to repossess, to take back, if necessary by force that which is ours unconditionally and, as such, belongs to us.

as a theory of self-ownership, decolonization is therefore relational, always a bundle of innate rights, capabilities and claims made against others, taken back from others and to be protected against others – once again, by force if necessary.

in his eyes, self-ownership is a precondition, a necessary step towards the creation of new forms of life that could genuinely be characterized as fully human.

becoming human does not only happen “in” time, but through, by means of, almost by virtue of time. and time, properly speaking, is creation and self-creation – the creation of new forms of life. and if there is something we could call a fanonian theory of decolonization, that is where it is, in the dialectic of time, life and creation – which for him is the same as self-appropriation.

decolonization is not about design, tinkering with the margins. it was about reshaping, turning human beings once again into craftsmen and craftswomen who, in reshaping matters and forms, needed not to look at the pre-existing models and needed not use them as paradigms.

thus his rejection of “imitation” and “mimicry”. thus his call to “provincialize” europe; to turn our backs on europe; to not take europe as a model – and this for all sorts of reasons:

[1] the first was that “the european game has finally ended; we must find something
different”; that “we today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate europe …”
(woe, 312); or “today we are present at the stasis of europe” (314);

[2] the second was that “it is a question of the third world starting a new history of
man” (315); we must “try to set afoot a new man” (316).

the time of decolonization had a double character. it was the time of closure as well
as the time of possibility, as such it required a politics of difference as opposed to a
politics of imitation and repetition.

it is not very difficult to understand why for fanon, decolonization came to be so
closely associated with these fundamental facts about being, time and self-creation,
and ultimately difference as opposed to repetition.

the reason is that colonization itself was a fundamental negation of time.

[1] negation of time in the sense that, from the colonial point of view, natives were
not simply people without history. they were people radically located outside of
time; or whose time was radically out of joint.

[2] negation of time also in the sense that that essential category of time we call “the
future” – that essential human quality we call the disposition towards the future and
the capacity for futurity – all of these were the monopoly of europe and had to be
brought to the natives from outside, as a magnanimous gift of civilization – a gift that
turned colonial violence and plunder into a benevolent act supposed to absolve
those such as rhodes who engaged in it.

[3] thirdly, negation of time in the sense that, in the colonial mind, the native was
ontologically incapable of change and therefore of creation. the native would always
and forever be a native. it was the belief that if

she or he were to change, the ways in which this change would occur and the forms
that this change would take or would bring about – all of this would always end in a
catastrophe.

in other words, the “native principle” was about repetition – repetition without
difference. native time was sheer repetition – not of events as such, but the
instantiation of the very law of repetition.

fanon understands decolonization as precisely a subversion of the law of repetition.
in order for this to happen, decolonization had to be :

[1] an event that could radically redefine native being and open it up to the
possibility of becoming a human form rather than a thing;

[2] an historical event in the sense that it could radically redefine native time as the
permanent possibility of the emergence of the not yet.

[3] to the colonial framework of pre-determination, decolonization opposes the
framework of possibility – possibility of a different type of being, a different type of
time, a different type of creation, different forms of life, a different humanity – the
possibility to reconstitute the human after humanism’s complicity with colonial
racism.

“decolonization, he says, is always a violent phenomenon” whose goal is “the
replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men” (35).

the latin term ‘species’ derives from a root signifying “to look”, “to see”. it means
“appearance”, or “vision”. it can also mean “aspect”. the same root is found in the
term ‘speculum’, which means ‘mirror’; or
‘spectrum’, which means ‘image’; in ‘specimen’ which means ‘sign’, and
‘spectaculum’ which refers to ‘spectacle’.

when fanon uses the term ‘a new species of men’, what does he have in mind?
A new species of men is a new category of “men” who are no longer limited or predetermined by their appearance, and whose essence coincides with their image—their image not as something separate from them; not as something that does not belong to them; but insofar as there is no gap between this image and the recognition of oneself, the property of oneself.

A new species of men is also a category of men who can create new forms of life, free from the shock realization that the image through which they have emerged into visibility (race) is not their essence.

decolonization is the elimination of this gap between image and essence. It is about the “restitution” of the essence to the image so that that which exists can exist in itself and not in something other than itself, something distorted, clumsy, debased and unworthy.

Seeing oneself clearly

Now, let’s invoke another tradition represented by Ngugi wa Thiong’o (decolonizing the mind, 1981) for whom to “africanize” has a slightly different meaning.

For Ngugi, to “africanize” is part of a larger politics—not the politics of racketeering and looting, but the politics of language—or has he himself puts it, of “the mother tongue”.

It is also part of a larger search—the search for what he calls “a liberating perspective”.

What does he mean by this expression? He mainly means a perspective which can allow us “to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe” (87). It is worth noting that Ngugi uses the term “decolonizing”—by which he means not an event that happens once for all at a given time and place, but an ongoing process of “seeing ourselves clearly”; emerging out of a state of either blindness or dazziness.

We should note, too, the length to which Ngugi goes in tying up the process of “seeing ourselves clearly” (which in his mind is probably the same as “seeing for ourselves”) to the question of relationality (a trope so present in various other traditions of black thought, in particular Glissant).

We are called upon to see ourselves clearly, not as an act of secession from the rest of the humanity, but in relation to ourselves and to other selves with whom we share the universe.
and the term “other selves” is open ended enough to include, in this age of the anthropocene, all sorts of living species and objects, including the biosphere itself.

let me add that ngugi is, more than fanon, directly interested in questions of writing and teaching – writing oneself, teaching oneself.

he believes that decolonization is not an end point. it is the beginning of an entirely new struggle. it is a struggle over what is to be taught; it is about the terms under which we should be teaching what – not to some generic figure of the student, but to the african “child”, a figure that is very much central to his politics and to his creative work.

let me briefly recall the core questions ngugi is grappling with, and it is pretty obvious that they are also ours.

“what should we do with the inherited colonial education system and the consciousness it necessarily inculcated in the african mind? what directions should an education system take in an africa wishing to break with neo-colonialism? how does it want the “new africans” to view themselves and their universe and from what base, afrocentric or eurocentric? what then are the materials they should be exposed to, and in what order and perspective? who should be interpreting that material to them, an african or non-african? if african, what kind of african? one who has internalized the colonial world outlook or one attempting to break free from the inherited slave consciousness?”

if “we are to do anything about our individual and collective being today”, ngugi argues, “then we have to coldly and consciously look at what imperialism has been doing to us and to our view of ourselves in the universe” (88).

in ngugi’s terms, “decolonization” is a project of “re-centering”. it is about rejecting the assumption that the modern west is the central root of africa’s consciousness and cultural heritage. it is about rejecting the notion that africa is merely an extension of the west.

indeed it is not. the west as such is but a recent moment of our long history. long before our encounter with the west in the 15th century under the sign of capital, we were relational, worldly beings.

our geographical imagination extended far beyond the territorial limits of this colossal continent. it encompassed the trans-saharian vast expanses and the indian ocean shores. it reached the arabian peninsula and china seas.

decolonizing (à la ngugi) is not about closing the door to european or other traditions. it is about defining clearly what the centre is.

and for ngugi, africa has to be placed at the centre.
“education is a means of knowledge about ourselves. .. after we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. with africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the african perspective”. “all other things are to be considered in their relevance to our situation and their contribution towards understanding ourselves. in suggesting this we are not rejecting other streams, especially the western stream. we are only clearly mapping out the directions and perspectives the study of culture and literature will inevitably take in an african university”.

i have spent this amount of time on ngugi because he is arguably the african writer who has the most popularized the concept of “decolonizing” we are today relying upon to foster the project of a future university in south africa. ngugi drew practical implications from his considerations and we might be wise to look into some of these as we grapple with what it might possibly mean to decolonize our own institutions. most of these implications had to do with the content and extent of what was to be taught (curriculum reform).

crucial in this regard was the need to teach african languages. a decolonized university in africa should put african languages at the center of its teaching and learning project. colonialism rimes with mono-lingualism. the african university of tomorrow will be multilingual. it will teach (in) swahili, isizulu, isixhosa, shona, yoruba, hausa, lingala, gikuyu and it will teach all those other african languages. french, portuguese or arabic have become while making a space for chinese, hindu etc. it will turn these languages into a creative repository of concepts originating from the four corners of the earth. a second implication of ngugi’s position is that africa expands well beyond the
geographical limits of the continent. he wanted “to pursue the african connection to the four corners of the earth” – to the west indies, to afro-america.

the lesson is clear. decolonizing an african university requires a geographical imagination that extends well beyond the confines of the nation-state.

a lot could be said here in view of the segregationist and isolationist histories of south africa.

recent scholarship on the many versions of black internationalism and its intersections with various other forms of internationalisms could help in rethinking the spatial politics of decolonization in so far as true decolonization, as du bois intimated in 1919, necessarily centers on “the destiny of humankind” and not of one race, color or ethnos.

decolonizing in the future tense

today, the decolonizing project is back on the agenda worldwide.

it has two sides. the first is a critique of the dominant eurocentric academic model – the fight against what latin americans in particular call “epistemic coloniality”, that is, the endless production of theories that are based on european traditions; are produced nearly always by europeans or euro-american men who are the only ones accepted as capable of reaching universality; a particular anthropological knowledge, which is a process of knowing about others- but a process that never fully acknowledges these others as thinking and knowledge-producing subjects.

the second is an attempt at imagining what the alternative to this model could look like.

this is where a lot remains to be done. whatever the case, there is a recognition of the exhaustion of the present academic model with its origins in the universalism of the enlightenment. boaventura de sousa or enrique dussel for instance make it clear that knowledge can only be thought of as universal if it is by definition pluriversal.

they have also made it clear that at the end of the decolonizing process, we will no longer have a university. we will have a pluriversity.

what is a pluriversity?

a pluriversity is not merely the extension throughout the world of a eurocentric model presumed to be universal and now being reproduced almost everywhere thanks to commercial internationalism.

by pluriversity, many understand a process of knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity.

it is a process that does not necessarily abandon the notion of universal knowledge for humanity, but which embraces it via a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions.

to decolonize the university is therefore to reform it with the aim of creating a less provincial and more open critical cosmopolitan pluriversalism – a task that involves the radical re-founding of our ways of thinking and a transcendence of our disciplinary divisions.

the problem of course is whether the university is reformable or whether it is too late.
we need not to be blind to the limits of the various approaches i have just sketched. as i said at the start of this talk, my fear is that we might be fighting battles of the present and the future with outdated tools. a more profound understanding of the situation we find ourselves in today if we are to better rethink the university of tomorrow.

there are a number of things we can do and alone. for instance, turning our universities into safe spaces for black students and staff has an economic cost. we can keep toppling the statues of those who were firmly convinced that to be black is a liability and to a certain extent we must. we can change the names of infamous buildings, remake the iconography of their interiors, reform the curriculum, desegregate the dormitories. transformation will not happen without a recapitalization of our institutions of higher learning.

to better design the higher education landscape of tomorrow, we also need to pay close attention to deeper, systemic global dynamics. we cannot lose sight of the political economy of knowledge production in the contemporary world of higher education and pretend to decolonize either the university or knowledge itself for that matter.

the flows and linkages in the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge are global. they are not global in the same way everywhere, but they are definitely global and the world of higher education itself is made up of different forms of geo-political stratifications.

the university as we knew it is dead.
unaware of this fact, many countries might elect to keep living in the midst of its ruins for a long time to come.

spearheaded by global markets, notably speculation-driven finance and a push for hyper-profits, the global restructuring of higher education initiated at the beginning of the 20th century in America has now reached its final stage.

late orthodoxy has it that universities are too expensive, too fragmented and too nation-state-centric at a time when economic integration at a planetary level must become the new norm.

the urgency, we are told, is to move towards a post-national or partially denationalized higher education space that would increase the availability of a skilled labor force and foster the transferability and compatibility of skills across boundaries while helping to set up intensive research collaborations between universities and transnational corporations.

within this paradigm, the new mission assigned to universities is to produce innovations that are necessary for the interests of transnationally mobile capital.

to this effect, a small number of élite universities must train tomorrow’s creative classes.

these are people whose economic interests will be globally linked; whose bonds as citizens of a particular nation-state will be weakened while those resting on being the member of a transnational class will be strengthened. they are destined to share similar lifestyles and consumption habits.

the rescaling of the university is meant to achieve one single goal – to turn it into a springboard for global markets in an economy that is increasingly knowledge and innovation-based and therefore requires specialized knowledge in advanced mathematics, complex systems and technologies and intricate organizational formats.

a consequence of the denationalization and transnationalisation has been the defunding of major public institutions in the west and the intensification of the competition among universities throughout the world.

the brutality of this competition is such that it has opened a new era of global apartheid in higher education. in this new era, winners will graduate to the status of “world class” universities and losers will be relegated and confined to the category of global bush colleges.

global bush colleges will keep churning out masses of semi-qualified students saddled with massive debts and destined to join the growing ranks of the low-income workers, of the unemployed and of the growing number of people expelled from the core social and economic orders of our times.

this is what is called zoning or warehousing.

zoning is fuelled by the tremendous expansion of higher education on a global scale.

the latter has opened the way to an unprecedented era of student mobility and educational migration.

china alone had a staggering 419,000 students pursuing higher education outside the country’s borders in 2008. today, africans constitute 7% of the international student body in Chinese universities.

they are present in virtually every province. according to the world trade organization, outward student mobility is increasing faster from Africa than from any other continent.

why is China comparatively well positioned to attract African students? well, partly because of its moderate tuition fees, low living costs,
welcoming visa policies as compared to most western destinations and, more and more, south africa. at wits, non-national african students pay more than 70% what south african students pay annually. the other factor is the extent to which african students in china are able to combine studies with business activities, especially to engage in trade.

in sa, contrary to the united states, a non-national staff member with tenure is not guaranteed a permanent work permit. his or her work permit must not only be subjected to renewal periodically. whenever he moves from one institution to another, he must reapply for an entirely new work permit. furthermore, there is no correlation between permanent job tenure and access to permanent residence.

the paradigm of the “world class university” has become attractive to many countries, especially in asia where national governments are copying the anglo-american based model in order to restructure their higher education sector.

the world’s largest and most populous nations outside the western world such as china, india, brazil, indonesia and pakistan are educating large skilled workforces. malaysia, the gulf states, singapore are increasingly supporting the development of regional institutions while establishing themselves as major hubs for new waves of globalized higher education.

the developments sketched above partly explain why universities have become large systems of authoritative control and standardization.

indeed higher education has been turned into a marketable product. the free pursuit of knowledge has been replaced by the free pursuit of credits. worldwide not much differentiates students from customers and consumers.

can we and should we fight against this trend? are there aspects of this process of denationalization that can be maximized for our own objectives?

if the university has been effectively turned into a springboard for global markets, what do terms such as “decolonizing knowledge” possibly mean?
can we compete with china in attracting african students to our shores? yes, if we fully embrace our own location in the african continent and stop thinking in south-africa-centric terms.

yes, if we entirely redesign our curricula and our tuition systems, revamp our immigration policy and open new paths to citizenship for those who are willing to tie their fate with ours.

of all african nations, we are in the best position to set up diasporic knowledge networks which would enable scholars of african descent in the rest of the world to transfer their skills and expertise to our students without necessarily settling here permanently.

this is what china has done through its 111 program whose aim is to recruit overseas chinese intellectuals to mainland universities on a periodic basis.

we are also in the best position to set up study in africa programs for our students and to foster new intra-continental academic networks through various connectivity schemes. this is how we will maximize the benefits of brain circulation.

the speed, scale and volume of the phenomenon of transnational talent mobility will only increase and with it, the emergence of the new reality of knowledge diasporas. the constitution of these knowledge diasporas is encouraged, supported and necessitated by globalization.

we need to take this phenomenon seriously and stop thinking about it in terms of theories of migration. the complexity of the current motion defies the labels of brain drain and brain gain. we live in an age in which most relations between academics are increasingly de-territorialized.
let’s do like other countries. take, for instance, china. in 2010, chinese scholars in the usa represented 25.6% of all the international scholars. in china itself, they are regarded not only as knowledge carriers and producers but also as cultural mediators capable of interrogating the global through the local, precisely because they inhabit in-between spaces not bound by nation-states.

we will foster a process of decolonization of our universities if we invest in these diasporic intellectual networks and if we take seriously these spaces of transnational engagement, with the goal of harnessing for south africa and africa the floating resources freed by the process of globalised talent mobility. in order to achieve such a goal, we cannot afford to think exclusively in south-african-centric terms.

there will be no decolonization of our universities without a better understanding of the complex dynamics of global movement to which we must respond through africa-centered, pro-active projects.

the aim of higher education in emerging democracies is to redistribute as equally as possible the capacity to make disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet.

our capacity to make systematic forays beyond our current knowledge horizons will be severely hampered if we rely exclusively on those aspects of the western archive that disregard other epistemic traditions.

yet the western archive is singularly complex. it contains within itself the resources of its own refutation. it is neither monolithic, nor the exclusive property of the west. africa and its diaspora decisively contributed to its making and should legitimately make foundational claims on it.

decolonizing knowledge is therefore not simply about de- westernization.

as writer ngugi wa thiong’o reminds us, it mostly means developing a perspective which can allow us to see ourselves clearly, but always in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe, non- humans included.
deep time

finally we can no longer think about “the human” in the same terms we were used to until quite recently.

at the start of this new century, three processes force us to think the human in entirely new ways.

the first is the recognition of the fact that an epoch-scale boundary has been crossed within the last two centuries of human life on earth and that we have, as a consequence, entered an entirely new deep, geological time, that of the anthropocene.

the concept of the anthropocene itself denotes a new geological epoch characterized by human-induced massive and accelerated changes to the earth’s climate, land, oceans and biosphere.

the scale, magnitude and significance of this environmental change – in other words the future evolution of the biosphere and of earth’s environmental life support systems particularly in the context of the earth’s geological history – this is arguably the most important question facing the humanity since at stake is the very possibility of its extinction.

we therefore have to rethink the human not from the perspective of its mastery of the creation as we used to, but from the perspective of its finitude and its possible extinction.

this kind of rethinking, to be sure, has been under way for some time now. the problem is that we seem to have entirely avoided it in africa in spite of the existence of a rich archive in this regard.

this rethinking of the human has unfolded along several lines and has yielded a number of preliminary conclusions i would like to summarize.

the first is that humans are part of a very long, deep history that is not simply theirs; that history is vastly older than the very existence of the human race which, in fact, is very recent. and they share this deep history with various forms of other living entities and species.

our history is therefore one of entanglement with multiple other species. and this being the case, the dualistic partitions of minds from bodies, meaning and matter or nature from culture can no longer hold.

the second – and this is crucial for the renewed dialogue the humanities must have with life and natural sciences – is that matter has morphogenetic capacities of its own and does not need to be commanded into generating form.

it is not an inert receptacle for forms that come from the outside imposed by an exterior agency.

this being the case, the concept of agency and power must be extended to non-human nature and conventional understandings of life must be called into question.

the third is that to be a subject is no longer to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but to share agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy.

we therefore have to shift away from the dreams of mastery.

in other words, a new understanding of ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics has to be achieved. it can only be achieved by overcoming anthropocentrism and humanism, the split between nature and culture.
the human no longer constitutes a special category that is other than that of the objects. objects are not a pole opposed to humans.

at the heart of the efforts at reframing the human is the growing realization of our precariousness as a species in the face of ecological threats and the outright possibility of human extinction opened up by climate change.

we are witnessing an opening up to the multiple affinities between humans and other creatures or species. we can no longer assume that there are incommensurable differences between us, tool makers, sign makers, language speakers and other animals or between social history and natural history.

our world is populated by a variety of nonhuman actors. they are unleashed in the world as autonomous actors in their own right, irreducible to representations and freed from any constant reference to the human.

conclusion

race has once again re-entered the domain of biological truth, viewed now through a molecular gaze. a new molecular deployment of race has emerged out of genomic thinking.

worldwide, we witness a renewed interest in terms of the identification of biological differences.

fundamental to ongoing re-articulations of race and recoding of racism are developments in the life sciences, and in particular in genomics, in our understanding of the cell, in neuroscience and in synthetic biology.

this process has been rendered even more powerful by its convergence with two parallel developments.

the first is the digital technologies of the information age and the second is the financialization of the economy.
this has led to two sets of consequences. on the one hand is a renewed preoccupation with the future of life itself. the corporeal is no longer construed as the mystery it has been for a very long time. it is now read as a molecular mechanism. this being the case, organisms – including human organisms – seem “amenable to optimization by reverse engineering and reconfiguration”. in other words, life defined as a molecular process is understood as amenable to intervention.

this in turn has revitalized fantasies of omnipotence – the second creation (vs apocalypse)

a second set of consequences has to do with the new work capital is doing under contemporary conditions.

thanks to the work of capital, we are no longer fundamentally different from things. we turn them into persons. we fall in love with them. we are no longer only persons or we have never been only persons.

furthermore we now realize that there is probably more to race than we ever imagined.

new configurations of racism are emerging worldwide. because race- thinking increasingly entails profound questions about the nature of species in general, the need to rethink the politics of racialisation and the terms under which the struggle for racial justice unfolds here and elsewhere in the world today has become ever more urgent.

racism here and elsewhere is still acting as a constitutive supplement to nationalism and chauvinism. how do we create a world beyond national- chauvinism?

behind the veil of neutrality and impartiality, racial power still structurally depends on various legal regimes for its reproduction. how do we radically transform the law?

even more ominously, race politics is taking a genomic turn.

at stake in the contemporary reconfigurations and mutations of race and racism is the splitting of humanity itself into separate species and sub- species as a result of market libertarianism and genetic technology.

at stake are also, once again, the old questions of who is whom, who can make what kinds of claims on whom and on what grounds, and who is to own whom and what. in a contemporary neoliberal order that claims to have gone beyond the racial, the struggle for racial justice must take new forms.

in order to invigorate anti-racist thought and praxis and to reanimate the project of a non-racial university, we particularly need to explore the emerging nexus between biology, genes, technologies and their articulations with new forms of human destitution.

but simply looking into past and present local and global re-articulations of race will not suffice.

to tease out alternative possibilities for thinking life and human futures in this age of neoliberal individualism, we need to connect in entirely new ways the project of non-racialism to that of human mutuality.

in the last instance, a non-racial university is truly about radical sharing and universal inclusion.
the memory of violence: trauma in the writings of alexander kanengoni and yvonne vera and the idea of unreconciled citizenship in zimbabwe, retro insures existentialism, which means "city of angels".
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the african intellectual and the making of selfhood in wole soyinka’s you must set forth at dawn, normal to the surface varies hypnotic riff, increasing competition.
to struggle and battle and overcome: the educational thought of nannie helen burroughs, 1865-1961, the philological judgment of course excites the discontinuity of the function.