

Repair

September 2022

Johannesburg

The tyranny of time, the tyranny of place... The muck, the smell of it, the fever and the fight, the cycles of decay and survival... And 'the sounds begin again'. I want daytime, I want place, I want a sense of history. Even though this place will never be the sense of history. Even though place will never be the same again for me, because its lights and shadows may change, I want to be there when it happens.¹

Early in 2021, Wits students set about the business of protests concerning historical debt and 'the missing middle' as it relates to fees. This 'usual' business refers to fees protests being a central feature of the South African university landscape since the end of apartheid, as well as the eventualisation of "Fees Must Fall", and "Rhodes Must Fall" which took shape in 2015 when students at historically white universities entered this historical time, or place. By 'event', my intention is to think about these protests as sites of intensity from which we might read the present; but also, as a spatial/temporal intensity, as something that is looped both in and outside of the normative of progressive time.

The tyranny of time in Es'kia Mphahlele's lament offers another account of the relationship between space, time, but also the national question. Mphahlele's protests against the introduction of 'Bantu Education', led to his banning from teaching and to a life in exile. The attachment to space, and his sense of history offers us a lens that undoes this 'event' as out of time with the present, our social and political categories, the presumption of democracy, citizenship or belonging and a reading of history as the past which has already passed. This tyrannical relationship to space/time disrupts our sensibilities around a 'socio-historical, or political context' where Reason, in a Kantian sense, and how it operates through a Cartesian split of mind/body operate as universal as it relates to the question of the present and its pastness. This is time the repeats itself, operates with a sense of rhythm, is occasionally also linear, but is also a time foundationally forceful (tyrannical) for those subjected to the status being of coloniality itself. And this might then be a clue as to why, or how a protest aimed at

the monument of Cecil John Rhodes intensified a time/space as it relates to the very question of freedom in these national movements.

I start in March 2021, because the university, which had by this point introduced biometric tools for access and an ever-intensifying militarized force, attempted to displace its location at the heart of Johannesburg's inner city. What started as a fairly small protest escalated when the university, in an effort to retain its own 'security, asserted its spatial distance from its students through its internal skin of private paramilitary forces, and an external skin supported by public forces like the police. Students were forced to the streets. I was in a WhatsApp group where strategies on how to coordinate movement in and around the city, but also towards the university were negotiated. A small argument ensued, when a group of students attempted to tear the Miners Monument in Johannesburg down. The nearly successful attempt was framed as one in response to a colonial statue. Comrades interjected, stating that this was not a colonial statue, but instead was erected to represent the contributions of gold miners to building the city. This monument as tribute locates an origin story to the city, and the discovery of the Main Reef in 1886, and is erected to represent miners in the ways that an underground team might have appeared in 1936. The question was asked: is this a colonial statue; and later: does it represent white miners? Comrades said that even if it was intended to include black miners, the statue looked nothing like their fathers and grandfathers. The action seemed to operate from an affective sense of walking past the size and force of the monument, something latched on to the everyday where in this precise moment directed the forces of power that sit on and through our bodies, as less mundane and now pivotal to this tyranny of time and place in Mphahlele's words.

As I read this moment, and the frames of the debate, what is made apparent was that in the present, this monument - 'colonial' or not - and its very form, represented the conditions of coloniality in the everyday. The difference here being that colonialism refers to an understanding of historical time, where it is a period that ended at the time of independence. It is the past. Coloniality is a frame that defers Reason's singular and universal sense of progressive time, referring us to the conditions from which all of what and how we see is centred from the position of the

“Human”, in Sylvia Wynter’sⁱⁱ terms, one whose economic, juridical, and political sovereignty centres our view not only as always already from Man, (white, cis-gendered, heteronormative, propertied, secular, monolingual, individual), but also normalizes continuities of dispossession. The subject of freedom in this juridical configuration can offer one sense of freedom, placing the event of democracy at the heart of other representational and political forms like the ‘admission’ to new spaces, but fails in foundationally reconciling with the epistemological, methodological and ontological statuses we consciously and subconsciously experience in our bodies as we move through space. The sublimation of these conscious and unconscious practices of being in space formed this event at the monument but is also a process present in art practices and their relationship to repair that frames this specific intervention.

I want to return to 1936 because it is another site of intensity that decentres 1948 and 1994 as central events in the course of South African history. The Native Land and Trust Act was passed that year which permitted single men to enter the city from what were then framed as reserves for the purposes of building an African, male and migrant labour force. Permission for admission to the city was first managed under ‘Zoology’, then ‘Sanitation’ as the landscape of the city took shape through various movements intended its idealized landscape.ⁱⁱⁱ Notwithstanding that protests to protect white miners from competition with Black mineworkers were central to the establishment of a racist colour bar that kept Black people out of higher level jobs, which we might also conceive of as somewhat foundational to the political subjectivity of the ‘worker’, or a labour movement – the worker, and the mineworker have taken up a lot of space as it relates to the origins of the city, as well as its centrality as it configures the ‘proper’ subject of politics. Again, notwithstanding this refrain, attempts at sustaining labour unions had been squashed in the 1920s, but between 1932 and 1936, the number of Black people in mining and other commercial employment doubled, as industrialization took its shapes around the world. This was ten years prior to the 1946 Miner’s Strike that makes the African miner, and in turn, the worker such a prolific political subject particularly in Johannesburg. This endurance forms a wide range of the political vocabulary of student-worker collective movements, for instance in 2015 where stenciled images of Mgcineni “Mambush” Noki covered the walls of the inner city, as a reminder of the Marikana Massacre of. 2012.^{iv} Prishani Naidoo looks

to repetitions within protests across the country, and formation of social movements while also arguing that this massacre inaugurated “a new cycle of struggles in the post-apartheid period.”^v There is something ephemeral in Naidoo’s claims, and in what forms of performance and practice emerge from this set of events. And yet, newness always triggers my suspicion, to follow Homi K. Bhabha for a moment:

“The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The past-present becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, or living.”^{vi}

‘Newness can enter the work in ways that trouble our relations to the present and the past, and in their repetition, play with mimetic forms that interrupt notions of the original, the modern or problems of representation. However, newness, also implies the work of translation, where one operates to make its language transparent or legible within the cultural significations of Man^{vii}, and their monolingualism that forces us to engage with art practice from this central location.

Sticking with ‘newness’ in this double valence, it is important to note that 1936 was also the year of Johannesburg’s Empire Exhibition, where the city staged its modernity, globality and perhaps even its continued status as an Afropolis. The intensity of Johannesburg in the present is perhaps also connected to this presentation of a ‘metropolitan’ city, outside the metropole itself, with a range of symbolic registers represented in monuments, architecture and artefacts related to empire building that substantively normalized anthropological and sociological categories of difference, in line with the city’s progressive turn towards segregation, culminating in the Slums Act 1935-1939. In this heady mix of managing Black populations and presenting Black people in a range of performative practices inscribing natural forms of difference, with an awkward coeval condition of living together in this global city – there were also a range of intense efforts to engage with Johannesburg’s centre as a city that continues to resonate with its status as one that gathers multiple formations of ‘newness’, or even its sense of modernity. Conflicts concerning the sense of a progressive time filled

the public sphere, for instance a white women's conference contesting the rights of liberal feminism; as well as the polemics within a well-established Black press whose reach towards the Empire reflected a sense of the political that still anticipated some form of freedom that might not have anticipated 1948.

Mphahlele was a novelist, teacher and author of two biographies where he continued to explore this tyranny of space and tyranny of time. He moved across cities in his exile, yet remained attached to Marabastad where he was born, and life at the level of the street and its affective intensity. This attachment perhaps relates to the spectrality of Johannesburg, its layers of urban, peri-urban and rural landscapes as well as its relation to spaces conditioned to contain a Black labour force within the region we now refer to as Gauteng. Every city carried the force of the street. Mphahlele is later also an editor of *Drum* magazine. Connecting the use of narrative, connecting to the commitments and forms of the Black press, and considering the range of forms in Mphahlele's work, that include popular culture, we gain another view or sensibility of the spectral operations of Johannesburg's force. This spectral force in Bhekizizwe Peterson's^{viii} terms refer to the inter-generation gaps in how the present and its politics are narrated, the range of creative imaginaries we have to draw on, the ways that 'newness' operates and in principle, how it often functions in restoring a recuperative sensibility to cultural production as it relates to our time, space and the questions of the political. Where 'admission', as one frame of fees protests, or the engagement with a structural and affective space that forms a sense of being out of place, of exclusion forms something that bears a sense of continuity with the spatial geographies of the city's past, and creative interventions related to it – Peterson offers other routes of narrative strategy rooted in cultural production where history is read allegorically, with political impulses prior to and beyond the nation and national time and in formations that ameliorate the conditions of black cultural life – the gaps between experience and its representation. Following Peterson's provocation, when thinking 'repair', as ameliorative, to recuperate what is lost in our histories, our archives in the sense that it might restore something that is lost to us.

I was a quiet territory, walking.

I was a delicious border, inconveniently occupied,
terra nullius but cuter, brown

and boundaried by reservation.^{ix}

I open with this monument's tensions, with the ways that art practice has developed, evolved and taken shape in our city. Monuments, even when and if they are facing their own ruination trigger, simply by their form^x. Their stature and representation brings things up in the body that might reflect the poverty of history education, the contradictions between the present as it is understood in relation to the past, as well as the use of site of memory as heritage and tourist sites. For young people to grow up seeing themselves at sites of memory deeply connected to the conditions of their present, but also authoritatively absenting their presence, agency and action – no less within forms that develop an almost casual nostalgia to sites embedded with unresolved horrors are a part of the memory-strategy of reconciliation that defies the logic of whether this monument is 'good' for us.. And perhaps there are other monumental modalities by and through which walking, or even running (from the police for instance) in the inner city might also imply. I consider here, the 'die in' performed by black lesbians during the Gay Pride March in 2012 in Johannesburg to highlight the racism, classism and consumerism of the march, particularly under political conditions where black lesbians experience hate crimes.^{xi} This activation led up to the formation of Joburg People's Pride^{xii}, that took a different route in the city leading up to Simon Nkoli Corner, which are about this relation to the political subject, freedom and space. I also recall walking during People's Pride, singing songs drawn from the traditions of workers protest song, also borrowing from the gospel traditions – for instance "my mother was a kitchen girl, my father was a garden boy, and that's why I'm a stabane". This collects another political register, process of occupation, but also even at the monumental site of Simon's corner, people living in Hillbrow looked on as we passed in the most unaffected ways. At least in that moment. Other time/spaces and events might make the affective, political and material event look different at another time.

The frame, 'repair', is in one frame a way to think about the work that artists and collectives have operated in and through in awareness of the layers of conscious and unconscious attachments to repairing a relation to the city and what has been made and unmade in its cultural life. In the 1930s, a vibrant black middle, or middle class engaged with multiple formations of Black and African modernities that operated

from a proximity to the historical present of imperial rule, the ongoing dispossession and enforcements into the status of laboring, racialized and gendered bodies. These modernities precede that later spatial, sociological and anthropological time/space or an urban that is in a dichotomy with the 'rural'. The forms of practice, especially in their play between expectations of form, and the multiplicities of meaning depending on the positionality of the audience also then have a temporal interruption that presents what Keguro Macharia refers to as a 'belatedness':

For the African-as-Negro, black and blackened by a belated entry into intimate modernity — the practices, the identities, the postidentities, the erotics, the theories, the methods, the archives — intimate disorganization names a kind of inevitable doing and undoing: however one engages with intimate modernity, one will do it wrong. One needs capacity building. One needs training. One needs a kind of modernity that one will not — cannot — access.^{xiii}

To be placed as always already prior to modernity's time and configured into existing and enduring relations to the condition of 'tradition' that continue to operate in objectifying objects, persons and practices in many [recent curatorial practices.] But also, another view, of the sound, sounding practice of the city – which reveals this complicatedness. And yet, we see in many forms, the interruptions Macharia also conjures. For instance, Xavier Livermon's view of creative and cultural intensity in Johannesburg locates it in the sonic, which "encompasses a kaleidoscope of secular and religious expressive practices involving music, oratory, poetry, drama and dance. Music is a form of urban social memory."^{xiv} Livermon looks to kwaito as assembling a range of forms as a post/apartheid popular form, inclusive of iscamtho as linguistic register, which like house music, and more recently, amapiano as borrowing from gospel, maskandi, mpaqanga for instance. This plurality of forms, their usefulness, in the sense that the ways they are mobile, apparent, useable and sensible to ritual, everyday practice, even pleasures make them operate within different preoccupations related to authority and value, even while they also offer the kinds of resonance with inhabiting this city. This is indicative of the plurality of forms within the modernities of our space – as well as a critical role of popular forms, that include pamphlets, magazines, music and performance. The duo FAKA that move between the music video, and the gallery space give room for this, but also connect the how live art practice has taken shape in the city.

This work of repair works within the frames that it may not achieve justice. This laboring body connects to the feeling of being in the city, making mobility both a question of this prior admittance, and the ongoing force of staying present within its spatial heritage. We see this in the embodied performance of Senzeni Marasela, what Mary Sibande places in the public space – which reveal the conditions by which a sexual division of space and labour produced in and through the laboring bodies of black women, along with a lack of legal admittance to this space. There are less impressive examples of this, for instance the strange heritage monument for amawasha women, at the recently developed Rand Steam shopping Centre - a referent to 'migrant' women working in this period of time, placed in conditions of their absence, and also their archival presence which we can only usually capture in the archives when we trace figures such as the 'travelling native prostitute'. This leads also to the ways that art practice have also become one means through which public histories and memory are negotiated from authoritative and less authoritative spaces. But also, the ways that different forms either attach to public history in its sentimental attachment to the progress of the present/ future; or as it has been suggested, in some forms, moving against the assumptions of authoritative historiography, memory might bring up, or out things that locate us in multiple and occasionally contradictory temporal spaces and modes of action. Memory can also be less open, to refer also to the ways that memory as a device, or narrative apparatus in its sentimental use simply allows us to experience something sentimentally 'good', without foundationally shifting the lived and unequal conditions of our present. The use of memory, and its relationship to art practice at the event of democracy and reconciliation seemed to mediate this process as well. On Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman's terms;

Things that may happen include disaffection, depression, immobility, resignation, or the suicidal fantasmatics of ontological repair."^{xv}

The desire for archives, is attached not only to how the political subject of the 'worker' takes such precedence within the kinds of work in and around our city, but also to the role of social history as a field as it has developed here and how that makes a particular relation both to what kind of work artists are producing and what can be recuperated both about the past, rooted in an implied absence – or the absence of the tools to account for our presence. So, this means that while we can trace the histories of major art institutions and their establishments as well as their resolute affective

powers – what operates in, around and through them takes shape in a range of recuperative formations and efforts. I would take the transformations and attachments to restoring spaces, for instance the Johannesburg Art Gallery. This is an aspect to genealogy, and intimacy that shapes one aspect of repair – that the private life comes to bear on what it means to operate within the public. And this might also be why we have seen a flourishing not only of collectives moving through the city in art practice, but this is echoed in the flourishing of poetry^{xvi} – which allows something critical to become more present in the connections between experience and its representation that is rooted often in the practice of repair. This is something that Grace Musila^{xvii} refers to as the *fictive/fictive*, and is a grounded way to think about the intimate that shows up in the work, and what different forms of practice create the conditions to engage with interior life in non-objectifying ways. This is also allows a lens to see how forms like the portrait, or photography in general operates across ranges of the iconographic and indexical, precisely in the ways that aspects of our reading allow some viewers in, but not all in its failed and mode or even or monolingual translation. This is also the promise of genealogies of live art, and performance that in ritual time, and in the play of an animist imaginaries^{xviii}, other cosmologies outside (but also unfortunately still inside or complicit with the logics of the Human) can form part of shifting admission to occupation.

The frame of our intervention explores the practices of repair without justice, or non-recuperative forms with ambiguous attachments to amelioration in the ways that they slip in and out of the order of art practice in this city across time – in recent practice – but also as a means of inhabiting forms and relations outside the vernaculars described in the terms of Denise Ferreira da Silva in conversation with Rizvana Bradley^{xix} as infinity, re/de/composition, seriality and generativity.

ⁱ Es'kia Mphahlele. 1984. *Afrika My Music: An Autobiography 1957-1983*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, p. 12.

ⁱⁱ Sylvia Wynter. 2003. Unsettling. The Coloniality of Being/ Power/ Truth/ Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument. *CR: Centennial Review* 3(3), pp. 257-337.

ⁱⁱⁱ For instance, the garden city movement across the Empire that gives us the shape of an inner city surrounded by suburban spaces imagined with reference to European villages, and perhaps critically, remainders of European migrations to South Africa, which are often not registered when the question of the 'migrant' as a subject, or their difference emerges. That is, that the centrality of an institutionalized whiteness makes European migration a status on its own, unlike the varying statuses of belonging and non-belonging of African migrants, whether citizens or not that are conventionally referred to through the term 'xenophobia', and in other approximations as 'Afrophobia'.

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- ^{iv} See Danai S Mupotsa. 2018. A Question of Power, pp. 21-41 in Elina Oinas, Henri Onodera, and Leena Suurpää, ed. *What Politics? Youth and Political Engagement in Africa*, pp. 21-41. Leiden: Brill; and Prishani Naidoo. 2015. Between Old and New: Contemporary Struggles in South Africa. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 114(2), pp. 436-455.
- ^v Naidoo 2015, p. 441.
- ^{vi} Homi K. Bhabha. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, p. 7
- ^{vii} In Wynter's (2003) terms.
- ^{viii} Bhekizizwe Peterson. 2019. Spectrality and Inter-generational Black narratives in South Africa, *Social Dynamics*, 45(3), pp. 345-364,
- ^{ix} Mano Mohale. 2019. *Everything is a Deathly Flower*. Cape Town: uHlanga Press. p. 40.
- ^x See Khwezi Gule. 2019. To Heal a Nation: Performance and Memorialisation in the Zone of Non-being, pp. 267-285 in Jay Pather and Catherine Boule. *Acts of Transgression: Contemporary Live Art in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, who thinks of the mistrust Black people have of monuments, or the architecture, or heritage sites that not only memorialise the colonial period within that sense of time, but more specifically resonate with coloniality as a broad frame from and through which we might approximate the past/present.
- ^{xi} Zethu Matebeni. 2018. Ihlazo: Pride and the Politics of Race and Space in Johannesburg and Cape Town. *Critical African Studies* 10(3), pp. 315-328.
- ^{xii} <http://peoplespride.blogspot.com/p/our-background.html>
- ^{xiii} Keguro Macharia. 2020 Belated: Interruption. *GLQ* 26(3), p. 569.
- ^{xiv} Xavier Livermon. 2008. Sounds in the City, pp. 271-284 in Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, ed. *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 271.
- ^{xv} Laruen Berlant and Lee Edelman. 2014. *Sex, or the Unbearable*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. p.19
- ^{xvi} See Makhosazana Xaba. 2019. *Our Words, Our Worlds: Writing on Black South African Women Poets, 2000-2018*. Scottsville: UKZN Press.
- ^{xvii} Grace Musila. 2015. *A Death Told in Truth and Rumour: Kenya, Britain and the Julie Ward Murder*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer.
- ^{xviii} Harry Garuba. 2012. On Animism, Modernity/ Colonialism, and the African Order of Knowledge: Provisional Reflections. *e-flux journal* 38, pp. 1-9.
- ^{xix} Rizvana Bradley and Denise Ferreira da Silva. 2021. Four Theses on Aesthetics. *e-flux journal* 120, pp. 1-5.