

the
impossible
paradigm:
an approach
to producing
knowledge

Thuli Gamedze

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The Impossible Paradigm: An Approach to Producing Knowledge

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:

Date: 19 October 2018

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hey friend,

we never met someone whose sense of time and space moved so mysterious, so independent of the chaos of this planet,

Pinky, you moved around this place un-warped by the constraints that distract the rest of us from the real work, of painfully unravelling ourselves from a system that measures us in such crude and cruel terms. Your gentle but constant refusal to take part in the brutal pace of everything meant that you let people completely share themselves with you. Your approaches in handling the motions of time and movement across space remain revolutionary! – your spirit is one of the most radical, creative, patient and kind that we will have the privilege of remembering. Thank you for all your generously shared knowledge, time, warmth and smiles. We miss you so much friend.

With all of our love.

(1993-2017)

Introduction

After all, the subversive intellectual came under false pretenses, with bad documents, out of love. Her labor is as necessary as it is unwelcome. The university needs what she bears but cannot bear what she brings. And on top of all that, she disappears. She disappears into the underground, the downlow low-down maroon community of the university, into the undercommons of enlightenment, where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong.

(Harney; Moten 2013: 21)

Processes of knowledge production frequently evade formal education spaces, like universities. We should never assume that these spaces genuinely operate towards the production of knowledge, and rather should identify most of them as acting in opposition. In other words, this thesis begins by putting the very foundation of formal education (producing knowledge) into question. 'Production' implies the formation of something new, something that is created with agency, and something that is different from the idea of *reproduction*. Reproduction refers to the repetition of a pre-established process. In Marxist theory, social reproduction refers to societal processes, within education and economics for instance, whose intention is the re-manifestation of capitalist relationships (Marx 1887). Through critical pedagogy and Afrofuturism, I analyse the pedagogical practices of the RhodesMustFall (RMF) movement and the Medu Art Ensemble.

In South Africa, the reproduction of social, cultural and economic inequality is evident. Through colonialism, formal apartheid, neoliberal policies, consistent unequal power dynamics have plagued the nation, exploiting and oppressing 'othered' people through varying means. Walter D. Mignolo, an Argentinian scholar, discusses this sustained cycle of violence and exploitation in service of continued western totality as the 'coloniality of power'. Drawing from the work of Peruvian scholar Anibal Quijano,

Mignolo and a collective of other decolonial scholars¹, believe, firstly that “there is no modernity without coloniality”, meaning that modernity and the western conception of capitalist, linear ‘progress’ relies on an underbelly of exploitation and underdevelopment of colonised nations and people. Secondly, and most importantly, they believe that *decoloniality* means a practice of ‘delinking’ from this coloniality of power and its imposed western cultural totality. This is an epistemic and political project, rather than simply an transferral of power (Mignolo 2010). So if we are to consider our entanglement with coloniality, it becomes clear that genuinely *producing* anything new (rather than continually reproducing) is a radical process of decoloniality.

In this thesis, I argue that collectives, friends and social movements operate daily in moments of fugitivity that depart from the system of coloniality, and that these social interactions form the fundamentals necessary for the beginning of any alternate paradigm or universe (Harney; Moten 2013). I propose that, as a philosophy that opens up multitudes of ways to unpack, subvert, and depart from the uncreative constructs of space and time under coloniality or global capitalist relationships, Afrofuturism is a useful approach to creative pedagogy (Womack 2012). I look too in this regard to the Freirian imperative for dialogic education, which is an attempt to birth non-hierarchical, critical pedagogy in the classroom (1970). Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, proposes a radical end to institutional order (2013), and Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí’s writings articulate a critique of African knowledges contingent on centralised western ones (1997). I frame these various writings, which surface largely in unrelated disciplinary dialects, as articulations of a process of delinking, and thus, a process of producing knowledge.

During South African apartheid – a racist, segregationist system put in place following British colonialism - there were many movements working to disrupt the status quo

¹ This school of decoloniality emerges primarily from Latin America, and includes, amongst others, Enrique Dussel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Ramón Grosfóguel and Arturo Escobar.

and put an end to its violence. I find the anti-apartheid activism of the 1970s and 80s within the arts to be particularly important because it was used to produce and disseminate knowledge, to create unlikely channels of exchange, and to generate cultural possibilities in a historical moment where black culture had been marginalised, criminalised and devalued. These practices were decolonial.

The Medu Art Ensemble was founded in 1977, and involved a collective of art practitioners from a number of different disciplines, and with associations to various political organisations (Peffer 2000). They operated out of necessity in exile in Gaborone, Botswana, and their work was geared towards liberation from the political struggles of South African apartheid². The group, although without a homogenous creative approach, agreed upon the necessity that art should be 'cultural work', an idea that I will argue is crucial in its essence for creative practitioners today (Peffer 2000). 'Cultural work' referred to the group's resistance to the insular parameters of elitist art culture, which they saw as individualised and divorced from the struggles of the people. Cultural work aligned Medu with the struggles of the working class. It was also a way to acknowledge the fact that art, as any other labour, is a tool that can and should be used towards liberation (Peffer 2000).

My interest in Medu's work is its relationship to many debates we are having now about decolonisation. Their creative activist organising through times of significant violence is easily read in relation to decoloniality, and offers numerous sophisticated resistance strategies to the oppressive structures that persist today. The ensemble created and operated from a paradigm of open exchange and debate, renaming themselves cultural workers (instead of artists) and considering innovative ways for public engagement with art, *despite and because of* the pervasive system of apartheid violence. In their decolonial activity, Medu's work offered people a radical use for art – as a tool to 'delink' from the cultural totality of South African apartheid.

² <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/medu-art-ensemble> accessed 22/09/2018

In writing this thesis from my experience of undergraduate tertiary art education, it became obvious that the notion of cultural work as an approach to creative production has been largely wiped out by formal art education in contemporary South African universities. Through Eurocentric curricular, hierarchical learning structures, and highly specialised disciplinary divisions, the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town (the art school of the University of Cape Town, hereafter 'UCT'), named in the mainstream as one of Africa's top art schools, promotes an art culture that has regressed into the elitist industry that Medu fought so hard to resist. The notion of art as culture, and the emphasis on using art to revisit and subvert oppressive histories has become constricted by the growing commercial industry.

This industry can be said to be working towards yielding sellable 'culture' by predominantly black practitioners, which is traded amongst 'white enterprises'. In most cases, this instrumentalisation of blackness can be located in 'tokenism and window dressing, legitimacy and political correctness' – ideas, of course, which do not shift economic ownership or means of production in the industry to black people³. Additionally, in the years following democracy, many non-commercial and socially-based infrastructures which housed culture and dialogic creative practices emphasising education and art, have been underfunded, or closed down altogether (Coombes 2003). These include examples like the Community Arts Project in Cape Town, which lost a lot of funding in its later years, and eventually shut down in 2008 and the Funda Art Centre in Soweto, which lost so much funding that in 2015, was unable to turn on its lights, and the number of students it could take on drastically dropped⁴. In effect, we are left with the dominant mainstream, in the form of expensive tertiary art education that is rigidly controlled and directed by the market,

³ Goniwe, T., 2018, The sour pleasure of the art industry, Available: <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-09-07-00-the-sour-pleasure-of-the-art-industry> [2018, September 7]

⁴ After the Kwazulu-Natal art centre known as Rorke's Drift closed in the 1980's, Funda became the main place for black practitioners to train professionally in the arts. Like the creation of the Medu Ensemble and the Community Arts Project, Funda formed following the violence of 1976. It relied mainly on private funding to sustain itself, and slowly lost much of that funding in later years. From 2009, Funda could not afford electricity (at least until 2015). Pfunzo Sidogi, who wrote his master's thesis on Funda in 2011, questions why the South African arts industry has grown significantly since 1994, but the state of the arts within rural areas and townships has remained unchanged, and in some cases, has found itself even worse for wear (Jason 2015).

rather than by social processes and the necessity of cultural work for society. Art's potential in education, as we will see, is to create social spaces through the collective production of knowledge. Cultural work uses creative approaches in forming radical critiques of the reproductive quality of coloniality, and the elitism it feeds, thus delinking, and proposing new ideas. These are the kinds of paradigms we need.

In addition to an analysis of Medu this project also focuses on the trajectory of the RhodesMustMall (RMF) movement as a contemporary example of 'cultural work' at play. RMF was a student movement at UCT, formed in 2015, which mobilised around pervasive coloniality of the university. It was an important part of a national call for 'decolonisation', predominantly made by students. Its name refers to its initial call – for the statue of colonialist, land thief, and murderer Cecil John Rhodes, located centrally on UCT's main to campus, to be removed. As articulated by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 11), "We so far do not have African universities. We have universities in Africa". RMF articulated its work as a call for the decolonisation of the university. The movement's embodied resistance to coloniality emphasised collectivity, social life, and delinking from the capitalist, individualist and eurocentric norms of UCT. Therefore, in the context of this thesis, RMF's work will be described using theories of decoloniality, rather than decolonisation, which is usually ascribed to a particular era and political process⁵. RMF understood the necessity for complete overhaul of the colonial-capitalist relationships within the university, and embarked on decolonial forms of solidarity and togetherness, which persist across universities today in various manifestations of 'fallism' (Mignolo 2017).

The movement's most publicly significant intervention was its occupation of the university's administrative building, Bremner House, declared during the occupation as 'Azania House'⁶. Within the occupation, RMF produced radical creative and

⁵ Decolonisation formally refers to the African independence era of the 1960s, involving a shift in power within colonised states, where operation of the state changed hands to local governance, but the shift did address the logic of capitalist inequality and colonial relationships.

⁶ 'Azania' is the name that the Pan-Africanist movement used to refer to South Africa. It implies a politic of decoloniality, and a departure from western cultural totality. It is characterized by Pan-African relationships, and has an extensive history through Africa, beginning as a derivative of an Arabic word from East Africa, and having come to characterise a pre-colonial Southern African culture. (Wauchope, n.d)

collective pedagogical practices, but also experienced deep internal political conflict. This project reflects on these aspects of the movement, and on its approach to creative pedagogy that I argue has been lost in our tertiary art education. I do this through engaging with my own experience as a writer in the movement, as well as from my own position as an artist, educator and art writer based at Michaelis throughout this research. The complex intervention of RMF can be seen as a series of radical refusals to adhere to a status quo in education that is complicit in reproducing the oppressive norms that form the greater landscape of South African society. The issues that RMF highlighted are situated often as 'institutional oppression', and refer to the structural problems of Eurocentric pedagogical dominance, as well as the neoliberalism of the post-1994 university, which has resulted in dehumanising economic changes like the 'outsourcing' of workers (Bond 2000). RMF and other student movements identified the university as a space that has the duty to produce knowledge, in order to be active in creating alternatives to social reproduction, rather than to function as a system guilty of the exact opposite - strengthening unequal relationships forged through colonialism and apartheid.

It has become clear that the role of the art industry in contemporary South Africa is by no means structurally geared to perform this radical role, and this is largely because of the commercially-driven, Eurocentric art education of elitist universities. My decision to re-enroll at Michaelis was a way to observe the art school in operation, and to participate in its sub-culture of resistance, after having experienced a political and pedagogical alternative in RMF. My critique is thus embedded within my personal history at UCT - both as a hardworking and polite undergraduate art student, as a disobedient member of a decolonial collective, and as an entity working through what those positions mean now, for me and others, and for tertiary art education in South Africa. On reflection, I have come to understand the time of my undergraduate degree, as well as time in between my studies (whilst engaging in RMF), as consisting of multiple moments of mixed learning that were drawn from a combination of engagement with formally disseminated knowledge, and from daily interaction and experience. By engaging with Michaelis students through formal pedagogy, in lectures and tutorials, as well as through improvisation, in conversation and

interaction, I have encountered numerous examples of the ways that tertiary art education reproduces oppression.

This oppression extends outside of the university through its process of professionalisation, which 'qualifies' people to re-enact and reproduce colonial-capitalist violence within society (Moten; Harney 2013: 28-39). The process of reproduction and how it works in educational spaces is central to my research. The idea of reproduction was formally identified by Karl Marx, largely in relation to labour processes (1887). Later, numerous writings articulated the fact that reproductive processes exist too in terms of epistemology, culture and knowledge. In this thesis, I examine tertiary art education in South Africa and the strategies it uses to participate in social reproduction.

At the beginning of the project, I felt that exploring this oppressive function of the university, particularly in art education, might open up conversation that moved beyond institutional critique and towards collective knowledge production. With this in mind, I set up some learning/ art interventions, which I called '*2 Much Monet*', '*The Consult*', and '*Ms G Takes on Sir Max*⁷'. Each intervention centered around social, non-hierarchical interactions that aimed to revisit the histories of colonialism in the university that have determined contemporary relationships in art education. The conversations they aimed to have were about entrenched coloniality and the forces acting oppositionally to radical and liberatory art education in the university. I consider these issues (as I consider this whole project) from the perspective of a cultural worker (Peffer 2000).

In my own daily life over the past two years, the idea of 'intervention' has become important, and in re-entering Michaelis for this project, I have come to frame my interactions and conversations there as kinds of intervention themselves. *2 Much*

⁷ . The last intervention was in reference to Sir Maximilian Michaelis, whom our school is named after. Michaelis was a colonialist in the same variety as Cecil Rhodes; a 'randlord'. He made vast amounts of money through the exploitation of black labour in the diamond mining industry of South Africa – he founded the company that was later bought by De Beers - and went on to be a patron of the arts. His financial endowment of the school, and a large collection of European art earned him the title, and remains a colonial symbol of our everyday (sahistory, 2017).

Monet began with one formal meeting and conversation, and thereafter gradually came to allude to a mode of collaborative response to the overarching coloniality at the Michaelis. It has far more to do with being available to people, and them being available to me for engagements on the frustrating and violent ways that people at Michaelis (students, educators, workers) often feel they are being treated, than it does about creating resolved objects or theories. It is the name that I am using to frame interactions about experiences that take place within classrooms, and when classrooms do not necessarily feel safe to students, then after lectures, and in the in-between spots on our campus. From the very beginning of this project, I was against the use of any formal strategy to 'research' peoples' opinions, feelings and ideas. I prefer to allow the archive of interactions I have experienced at Michaelis to hang in the social balance of memories and friendships, and so, as 'research', to personally recall my own responses and thoughts about these learning experiences. Giving emphasis to my own subjectivity is a way to revisit my personal history in formal art education, where there is a lack of black women in art curricular, and also, to offer an open and discursive voice that moves between (and hopefully beyond) the rigid structures that determine what academic validity is. This validation of my own knowledge and experience is in itself, important.

While the kind of knowledge that happens in discussion and through subjectively informed interaction is not often included in the institutional order - lectures or examinations - it should be recognised as important because it informs our daily approaches to engaging with the world. This includes social moments that do little to contribute to the required 'Due Performance'⁸ of any degree - shared meals, unlikely connections formed on bus rides, perhaps, online chat forums, late night discussions that change the direction of our research, heated arguments about the contradictions littered within an assigned text or a lecture, disenchanting (or enchanting) responses to gallery openings and so on. This is knowledge production, and this is the social

⁸ 'Due Performance', perhaps described using different labels at universities other than the University of Cape Town, is the structure used to designate the minimum academic requirements - for instance class attendance, timely hand-in of assignments and essays, and an accepted evaluated performance in these tasks - that need to be met by each student, in order to attend and write an exam, pass the course as a whole, and go on to receive the amount of 'credits' needed to continue studies.

force that is constantly negated from its central role in directing our art practices at the university.

I also discuss these radical, if mundane everyday interactions or 'improvs', collages, and mash-ups, as interventions of the Afrofuturism I will engage with, whose holistic, transdisciplinary approach allows us to operate from a non-specialised starting point (Womack 2012; Nicolescu 1999). The combination of the reflections on the history of Medu and contemporary student activism will frame *2 Much Monet* as the beginnings of a social approach in art that counters the colonality of the neoliberal art industry. This combination of things is what drives me towards the centrality of genuine knowledge production, in the face of socially reproductive forces geared towards sustaining encompassing inequality.

Looking to critical pedagogy, Afrofuturism, and the 'fugitive planning' defined by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney in 'The Undercommons' (2013), this work attempts to re-historicise the case studies of Medu and RMF, as social practices whose radicalism was in creating a shift against the cultural totality of western notions of time and space, embarking on projects of knowledge production despite the oppressive capitalist nature of the mainstream. Through these case studies, I reflect on what I have learned through *2 Much Monet*, a named daily practice geared towards imagining an art culture of delinked intervention, fugitivity and social life, and impossible paradigms; an art of cultural work.

Chapter 1. Knowledge Production Towards Decoloniality

Coloniality

Coloniality refers to an unchanged and oppressive colonial power structure, which continually adapts its form according to the parameters of the historical moment (Mignolo 2011). The reference to the 'colonial-' in the word is a way to locate the *origins* of this encompassing inequality within the period of western colonialism – a moment in time that had the unique historical effect of forcing western ideology into all cultures, languages and epistemologies, and constructing a global 'totality' - which has maintained its central power dynamic even after its formal ending (Mignolo 2011).

This characteristic of totality was unique to western colonialism. In precolonial times, domination, exploitation and mixing had happened amongst the various regional powers of the world but the effect of these various relationships had never gone so far as to form a global world system or culture. In different eras, regions of the world operated according to numerous separate ideologies, cultures, and knowledge systems (Mignolo 2011). This is to say that referring to coloniality is making a global inference that implicates the west in forms of systemic socio-economic injustice all over the world (Mignolo 2011).

The identification of coloniality is neither new or unique, and has, over time, been articulated in numerous ways, across various spaces, using different names. The understanding that our lives are entangled in coloniality surfaces when the name of a system or era changes, but we are able to identify the continuation of the same unequal structural dynamic.

In the early 1900s, black American scholar WEB Du Bois identified black 'double consciousness', an idea which is still regularly used today. Double consciousness articulates the effect of systemic racism on black people, and Du Bois's original use

of the term in 1903 was in relation to the experience of continued racism within the period of post-slavery America (the formal ending of slavery was in 1865) (Du Bois 1903:142). The concept describes a kind of “splitting of mind” that is forced onto the black subject through racism. The subject’s experience of continued oppression causes them to understand themselves at once as ‘other’, in the way whiteness sees them, and secondarily, as self (Du Bois 1903). Double consciousness results from the continual awareness and consequent internalisation of being an observed and policed subject, who eventually plays the role of watching and policing itself. In ‘*The Souls of Black Folk*’, Du Bois frames this double consciousness in relation to the ‘colour line’ - the continually updated form of racism that limited the potential for black liberation even following the abolition, when black people could no longer be owned as ‘slaves’ (Du Bois 1903).

The colour line described the reality that even though slavery was over, racism had continued effect on the material and psychological worlds of black folk. This colour line is a pervasive reality that since his writing in 1903, has manifested in multiple forms, and detailed research around the American legal system since slavery reveals its strategic underbelly of coloniality (Alexander 2010).

The 2016 documentary ‘*13th*’, based on the research from *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, a book by Michelle Alexander (2010), reveals how this ‘colour line’ has been maintained by American constitutional law, showing that Du Bois’s post-slavery commentary describes the beginnings of a vicious strategy of black exploitation that has been reproduced in different forms through to the contemporary moment. The research shows that the master-slave dynamic is central to the system of coloniality⁹. American slavery was outlawed in 1865, using the thirteenth amendment, which lends the film its title. While the amendment to the law of slavery made it impossible for individuals to buy, sell and own slaves, it was successful in shifting this power to the state, who acquired the legal means to implement slave conditions within prisons. This amendment, along with others that made it increasingly easy to arrest black people, meant that soon

⁹ *13th* [film], 2016, Produced by S. Averick, A. DuVernay, and H. Barish & Directed by A. DuVernay, United States: Kandoo Films

enough, the quickly expanding and multiplying prisons functioned as free labour camps (or slave plantations), producing capital for the nation, and at the same time instilling a new social dynamic. Blacks were no longer slaves, victimised by the system, but through strategic legal means were now framed in public consciousness as guilty criminals paying their dues to the 'deserving' status quo of white monopoly capital (Alexander 2010)¹⁰.

The development of the privatised American prison-industrial complex followed, where private businesses took over ownership of prisons from the state in order to profit from mass incarceration through the free labour it provided. This system persists today, and by detailing the changes that were made in policy and legislation over a period of more than a hundred years, the film exposes mechanisms used by the powerful to maintain control over a racialised working class. *13th*, with its expansive historical trajectory, leaves us with the disturbing certainty that coloniality and its racialised oppression will find ways to re-manifest into the endless future. It reveals a system of racism that criminalises black people, and justifies their exploitation; this system is at the centre of capitalism, and we will see how this global dynamic has taken shape in South Africa, and in particular in the South African art landscape.

Coloniality refers to the reproduction of inequality across different eras, and through the use of various mechanisms (Mignolo 2011). Plantations become prisons, slaves become criminals, and instead of being eradicated, coloniality grows more sophisticated, and can appear to represent acceptable forms of justice and democracy. Since coloniality refers to the violence of capitalistic western cultural

¹⁰ Whilst these false images of blackness, and particularly black masculinity as criminal identities, form the predominant narrative, it is important to understand that numerous other images and framings exist in more submerged cultures and practices. Through her series of prison portraits in America, Nicole Fleetwood offers one such dimension, in which makeshift studio photographs of incarcerated loved ones, which are treasured and exhibited in homes or private family albums, hold the same dignity as any other formal portrait. Those labelled as prisoners by the government and society regain the possibility through image, to be seen as (and to be) fathers, husbands, partners, boyfriends, friends, cousins, sons and grandsons once again. Her study examines this school of vernacular photography, which she describes as one of the largest trends of black photography (Fleetwood 2017).

totality, it can be identified in almost every corner of society. Formal education systems are amongst its most dangerous apparatuses.

Dialogic Education

We are told to imagine that education is something that is 'received' in particular designated systems (Freire 1970). In 1970, Brazilian revolutionary pedagogue Paulo Freire described this (1970) as the 'banking model' of education. Writing in the second half of the twentieth century, Freire is seen as one of the founding thinkers in critical pedagogy, through his radical analyses of education and its role in the reproduction of capitalist thinking. The ideas he unpacked and the critique he offered can now be referred to as part of encompassing coloniality, and his propositions for revolutionising education might be said to be decolonial. The banking model is a critique of capitalist education as a process that objectifies students, treating them as empty vessels who must 'receive' an education from the teacher, who operates as the subject (Freire 1970). The consequence of the banking model is that it limits the scope of possibility in the classroom, asserting that a legitimate, standardised knowledge exists, and that all learners must aspire to it (Freire 1970). This knowledge hierarchy (where some know, and others do not) is a system of continued colonial control that determines which thoughts and feelings are allowed to be expressed within classrooms, and which are not. Freire loathed the banking system, criticising it as a pedagogy that reproduces inequality.

"Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them"; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated."

(Freire 1970: 74)

Freire (1970) proposes that instead of the banking model, where a student must learn to repeat the content delivered by the teacher, the emphasis should be in the dialogic.

The dialogic describes a process where knowledge is created through collectively engaging with content, using questions and debates that centre the experience of learners and their relationship to the curriculum, rather than the content of the curriculum itself. The dialogic element is crucial, for it shifts the status of “subject teaching object”, and argues instead for the effectiveness of multiple subjects learning together and gaining relevant knowledge collectively (1970). This process, using a collective production strategy is said to embody an “authentic education” and allows its participants to realise ‘truths’ – these are not universal, but exist within a particular space in time, and with particular relationship to those who realise them. Freire argues that these truths ‘transform the world’ (1970: 87).

I observe that formal educational institutions in South Africa function largely according to the banking system. University degrees in internationally recognised institutions like UCT are given to those who have learned the appropriate standardised material, giving them the authority to become ‘subjects’ themselves. It is not as simple as this though, for gaining subjectivity is always dependent on how well one is able to fit in with institutional culture, which protects and sustains the power of white, middle class masculinity, and marginalises others.

In our art education at Michaelis, this banking system exposes itself, as we will see later, in rigid formal ‘crit’ processes, where art educators from specialised disciplinary practices provide the central feedback on the artwork of students, and determine a hierarchy around what constitutes successful and ‘resolved’ artwork. These voices that seek ‘resolve’ as an end are antithetical to Freire’s dialogic education because, instead of showing art and education as social processes toward collective knowledge production, they provide a linear time frame for the way art should only begin as a process in order to end as a product. We can clearly see that his ‘authentic education’ describes a process that takes place most everywhere, is rarely ‘resolved’ in such simplistic senses, and finds its value within circular social processes, rather than in delineated rigid trajectories, which surmise that subjectivity should be contained in the opinions of someone who is ‘more qualified’. In this regard, the university institution and its attempt to construct a production line which leads learners from object to subject, can be seen to be a place where this

authenticity, and potential to 'transform the world' is lost (Freire 1970).

This is not to say that radical learning and dialogic education cannot happen inside formal institutions, but rather to say that homogenous structures and accepted banking approaches to education make it difficult to intervene and create spaces in which we feel like ourselves. These overarching structures include the forms of assessment, the given parameters for lectures, and the forcefulness of the notion of 'failure'. This is to say that so-called 'standardised' testing is the status quo of South African universities, including Michaelis, who operate by attempting to churn out numerous graduates who come to know the same things and must justify their knowing through the same citations. There is an inevitable tension between dialogic strategies and standardised ones, as the former is based around the idea that a student's way of knowing is informed by their experiences, individual qualities and political positioning, whilst the latter is based on the banking system, and the false idea that a stable, legitimate knowledge exists outside of peoples' multiple existences (Freire 1970). The consequence of this is that standardised testing occurs based on the idea that a student either passes or fails, according to their ability to possess 'standard' or 'neutral' knowledge. In this context, failure is made to symbolise a failure of self, a failure to know and learn, and a failure to become 'better' or 'more qualified'. Of course, the reality of coloniality shows us that what is sold as 'standard' knowledge is in fact western cultural hegemony. Thus the ability to tap into this alleged standard is determined by either experiencing cognitive dissonance or cognitive harmony in relation to Eurocentric knowledge. Essentially, 'insiders' – whites, men, westerners, English-speaking people, able-bodied folks, 'neurotypicals' – are less likely to be tripped up by a radically shifted knowledge context than the one in which they were brought up, whilst 'outsiders' are repeatedly set up to fail. Failure, and thus the exclusion of marginalised people is a consistent aspect of much schooling, and instills assumed capitalist ideals that propose that the positions of wealthy exploiter and poor exploited are inherent, and 'standard'. Failure in education is thus a key component in the reproduction of capitalist relationships, and the reproduction of the experience of double consciousness in universities.

Therefore, my interest is outside of 'passing' or 'failing', and rather, lies in the learning processes that take place subversively within and at the edges of formal education institutions. These processes borrow from, and are experiences of everyday life, which can breed manifestos or ideas that bring a collective into Freire's "critical consciousness" – the collective manifestation of dialogic education (1970: 33). They take shape in small and big ways, and they are often framed by the university as 'informal', but when they pose a 'threat' and collide with the ideologies of the institution, they are named and treated as 'criminal'.

The Undercommons is Afrofuturism

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's 2013 book, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, which leads us into the introduction, outlines the possibility of collective knowledge production that performs dialogic experimentation and play using institutional resources. Their book, reading as a kind of anarchist manifesto for 'fugitives' of the university, suggests that we recognise and invest in the study of the undercommons - the underground, subversive work that is continually taking place collectively at the margins of institutions.

The writers refer to the undercommons as a 'criminal' endeavour, its refusal to adhere to the reproductive norms of the university rendering it as a place of outsiders and unprofessionals (Harney; Moten 2013). They outline the university itself as a central culprit of coloniality in its continued issue of 'the call to order' (2013). The pair argue that the call to order is routine in places of formal learning, where a given group of people are called to stop what they are doing, to pay attention to the new thing that is happening, and to *begin* the learning process, like in the beginning of a lesson at school, or at the start of a lecture (2013). This call enacts the assumption that learning can only take place in an official and regulated capacity, and that before the call, there was no study or planning happening already (2013). Of course, within the banking model, this makes perfect sense, but the essential character of the undercommons is its refusal to call any space of study to order. In fact, it proposes

the opposite - that the use of order, policy, regulation, and perhaps, the use of the banking system too, makes study impossible (2013). This is to say that the university and the structures through which it operates reproduce inequality, and that for learning to take place within these structures is unlikely. Thus, to escape or subvert the force of the university's order is to pursue knowledge production.

Moten and Harney (2013) describe a participant of the undercommons as a figure whose *'only possibility for a relationship with the university is a criminal one'*. In marrying the terms of study/ student with the idea of the criminal/ fugitive, the writers open a call for us to rename ourselves, and in this renaming, to reconsider the meaning of these terms - crime, fugitivity, study, and so on. As we have seen through the example of the reproduction of the master-slave relationship in the American prison system, the idea that we, as black people could reclaim the notions of fugitivity and criminality is a radical and historically appropriate one. Undercommons' criminality is described in the introduction of the book by Jack Halberstam as something that takes place just below the surface of conventions, institutions, or capitalist systems, and, to the shock of these spaces, enacts itself with "unregulated wildness", "irrationality", and "disorder", refusing the *call to order* (2013: 9).

Moten and Harney's embrace of the nefarious labels strategically works with the limitations of the English language and its capitalistic connotations. They frame their work, their study, as crime, rather than as 'repossession', or 'reparation', for instance. There is no appeal to 'justice', for justice is seen by them as an embodiment of the university, the law, the prison system, and the policies that maintain order, and by extension, inequality (2012). The connotation of crime in relation to the work of the undercommons reveals the deceitful misnomers within English, where inequality and a rigid commitment to injustice have been woven into the ways we speak to one another when we use this language. The undercommons subverts the cultural totality imposed through colonial language.

The standpoint is that when we identify coloniality, there is work to be done - radical, creative, activist work - but that this work jumps into unresolvable conflict when it

exists as part of the university, whose functioning is in the 'professionalisation' of academic labour (2013). This function consistently betrays its central untruth - that the university exists for the production of a 'commons', a democratic resource pool for the enrichment and progress of greater society. Moten and Harney refute these claims, exploring at length the neoliberalism of the American university, whose production of professionals, and even *critical* professionals, amounts to an infinite attempt to maintain and reproduce a system that operates in collaboration with the state, making policy that finds ways to maintain a status quo of classed, racialised, gendered, capitalistic inequality (2013).

What is interesting is that Moten and Harney, in highlighting this inequality, do not create a binary which says to exit the university and to rather do 'A, B, and C', for they see the university as but one system functioning as a part of the greater whole. In other words, they see that the reproductive mechanism of the university is a mechanism existing within all institutions of capitalist society, and so their analysis could be applied to any institution protecting coloniality. In this regard, they think about what *already* exists beneath, or out of reach of the alleged university 'commons' and what cannot circulate back into forming sustenance for the reproduction of coloniality. They also think about what can be repurposed from the university to support a project of black *social life* whose existence, within a racist world system, is far outside of any preconceived logic of order and policy. The fact that the order and policy of the university reproduces a consciousness which labels this social life of the undercommons as criminality or fugitivity is immaterial, for this position is one from which we can truly produce knowledge! (2013)

Moten and Harney's intervention echoes the Freirian imperative of dialogic education in its call for the removal of policing in spaces of learning, and for genuine social moments to provide the centre of all pedagogical practices (1970). Rather than predetermining a constructed location or an ideal place where this study can take place, they promote appropriation, and 'theft' of that which is institutional, into sites for study (2013). The consequence of disappearing into the "downlow, lowdown maroon community of the university" (2013: 26), or into the undercommons, is that one's work

at the university is understood as 'unprofessional'. But when the aims of the fugitive are not to climb the hierarchy of academic professionalisation, but rather to dive into and repurpose resources into socially alive and flexible props of enlightenment, the university has no other choice, and contains no real language to describe this process, except for knowing that it is 'not of it', that it is 'unprofessional', or simply, criminal (2013). The undercommons does not contribute to, fix, or maintain the university; it steals from and repurposes it.

There are many examples of radically applied creative pedagogy, where appropriation tactics are used towards liberation. For this reason, my research circles around the potential for Afrofuturism as a collective liberatory pedagogy, because its central appropriative voice seeks to repurpose the technologies of coloniality to imagine new worlds (Womack 2013). This resonates in a helpful way with both Freire's critical pedagogy, and the fugitivity of the undercommons.

I argue that the Afrofuturists' power in the university is to abandon its rigid order, embodying multiple 'disciplines' in learning process whose creative potential is in finding ways to repurpose its resources. I am adamant that these forms of education, and these alternative ways to interact and relate to one another and time-space are already in operation all the time, and so by looking just below, or perhaps above the surface of the university, much as in the undercommons, we can locate some useful examples.

Afrofuturism's written history is tied to its application in the United States of America, and the way it dealt with the coloniality (or master-slave dynamic) which Du Bois (1903), and later, Michelle Alexander (2010) described in the research I highlighted at the beginning of this chapter. In this trajectory, Afrofuturism is understood as a response to the racial relations forced on America through the colonialism and the transAtlantic slave trade, both of whose dynamics continue to form the status quo now (Dery 1994). So while the word 'Africanfuturism', itself carries the baggage of American cultural dominance, its use in this project will be carefully contextualised through histories in Southern Africa to show that its essence is a radical political

voice, which can re-map time and space, creating impossible paradigms that operate as alternatives to the structures of coloniality, as outlined by Eshun (2003) and Womack (2013).

In his famous essay *'Black to The Future'*, white American literature scholar Mark Dery uses interviews with black science fiction writers Samuel Delaney, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose, to articulate the underpinnings of what he termed Afrofuturism (1992). Dery shows a connection between the classic dystopian sci-fi narrative and the history of slavery and racism in America, where black sci-fi has repurposed the classic - and white - sci-fi narrative in order to project black techno-futures of liberation (Dery 1992).

He goes on to examine the production process of sci-fi literature, which was seen at that time as a *'sub-genre'* because of its mass productive, pulp fiction quality (1992: 181). Dery explains that the idea of mass production, cheapness, and over-quantity has a relationship with the resulting *'sub'-ness*, or less-than status of the genre, which has significant parallels with a historical experience of blackness in America, where black people have been continually objectified and devalued as tools for labour (1992). In reclaiming the sci-fi narrative and medium, black writers could imagine a black-centered future that was not disrupted by the uninventive racial binaries of earth. They used their *'otherness'* as aliens or outsiders, to project a future that existed separate from the limited imagination of the world.

Ytasha Womack, a contemporary Afrofuturistic thinker says that Afrofuturism "stretches the imagination far beyond the conventions of our time and the horizons of expectation, and kicks the box of normalcy and preconceived ideas of blackness out of the solar system" (2013: 37). Understanding this idea is to encounter a narrative of Afrofuturism which has no need to rest in a particular discipline, school of literature, time or place, as perhaps it does with Mark Dery. In picking up Afrofuturism after Dery, Womack appropriates the word, shifting it from medium-based theoretical frameworks to something more expansive, which I will go on to frame as a wide school of black thought, with the potential to generate work across disciplines.

It is important to note though that many Afrofuturist writings continue to root themselves in African-American concerns, rather than recognising the multidisciplinary and global nature of the philosophy (2013). This tendency is understandable given Afrofuturism's *formal* historical trajectory but limits its scope by measuring Afrofuturism as the sum of its productive outcomes – African American art, literature or music. I prefer to use Afrofuturism as a philosophical lens, which is able to embody multiple processes that “(stretch) the imagination far beyond the conventions of our time and the horizons of expectation” (Womack 2013:16). The evasive ceiling of Americanness for which the movement has been designated is antithetical to what it seems to attempt to achieve – an abandonment of racial hierarchies through the use of collective imagination that transcends the spatial-temporal limitations of the capitalist world. Afrofuturism therefore requires an intervention geared towards its fluid movement across time and space, showing its ability to truly be a collective and connective praxis.

Kodwo Eshun describes (2003: 297) a potential relationship with time as “revisionist historicities (that) may be understood as a series of powerful competing futures that infiltrate the present at different rates”. Through showing that a revised approach to history can give us a way to project multiple futures, Eshun reveals Afrofuturists' involvement with history as a critical characteristic of their approach. Working as revisionist historians allows Afrofuturistic production to provide lenses departing from coloniality's tendency to shape spaces according to capitalist ownership, and to delineate time according to potential labour exploitation and wealth accumulation. My own focus is in line with this, considering the ways that Afrofuturist philosophy supports knowledge production, rather than just a particular aesthetic. Understanding Afrofuturism as a revisionist historicity that layers time in anti-linear ways (Eshun 2003), pushes us to reflect on the limitation of our own understanding of ‘futurism’ or ‘future’. For if we choose to “infiltrate the present at different rates (using) competing futures”, we must abandon the notion of future as something that *will* exist in another time, and rather see it as a practice of re-occupying time's various designations (past, present, future), and allowing the future to exist, and to have existed, through the repurposing of time-space.

With this in mind, rather than limiting ourselves to kitsch space aesthetics, we arrive at the question of what an embodied application of Afrofuturist approaches could mean in art and art education. Here, we encounter a crucial overlap – and blurring of disciplines - between artists and historians, between friends and educators, and between activists and culture makers. We can begin to consider how radical the possibilities of such liberated, socially involved, and historically-oriented these practices can be, and to be excited and deeply invested in moments when this has been put into play.

For instance, Tricia Rose's interview with Mark Dery in *Black to the Future* circulates around the music group 'Kraftwerk', described as "a calculatedly funkless electronic band" (1994) whose Afrofuturistic creative practice embodies playful appropriation. Rose explores Kraftwerk's artistic approach, in particular their *re*-appropriation of black 'otherness' handed down through histories of racist oppression. She describes how hip-hop artists like Afrika Bambaata adopted the identity of the robot, through their work with technologies like samplers, sequencers and drum machines to produce their music (1994). The use of this technology, manipulated in new ways, was in direct response to the idea of the robot as symbolically enacting a very real black condition under capitalism: bodies exploited for their labour 'function' (1994). Thus, in embodying the robot and 'the robotic' in their sound, artists like Afrika Bambaata claimed agency in exploring digital manipulations and enhancements, discovering what techno-possibilities existed through reclaimed, futuristic robo-blackness (1994).

Study

"By taking on the robotic stance, one is playing with the robot."

(Rose 1994: 214)

This sense of playfulness and disregard with the way things *should* operate – in music, art, literature, education, storytelling, anything - is perhaps the simplest way to

characterise the thing that is so central to Afrofuturism. It is this character that links it to critical pedagogy and transdisciplinary practice, and, as I will outline, to *study*. Play is often the root of radical practices which identify the necessity of turning over conventional, specialised education structures, rethinking learning systems and positions of power in the classroom, and experimenting with alternative relationships to space and time. Play is the voice that pushes us to repurpose tools of the mainstream into tools that serve the social life of oppressed people. With Afrofuturism, I hope to unpack a playfulness that is able to tie together the separated worlds of art history, activism and education, putting them to use simultaneously in order to both disrupt traditional education, and to experiment with our understanding of learning.

There is a string that connects these various schools of thought – dialogical pedagogy, undercommons, Afrofuturism – and I see this as their efforts to figure out ways to make something new from the detritus of injustice and oppression that we find circulating in formal institutions. Freire turns the classroom’s banking model into a space for ‘authentic words’ and dialogue, which he defines through emanating from a space of love, and the absence of the impulse to gain power over another (1970). Ytasha Womack, Kodwo Eshun, and Tricia Rose are concerned with revisiting and re-curating histories and images, shifting linearity and the logic of capitalism into something offering oppressed people space to de-centre our knowledge from the mainstream, and form creative collective pedagogies (Womack 2013; Eshun 2003; Rose 1994). Moten and Harney talk about wholeheartedly operating ‘in but not of’ the institution by refusing its parameters of organisation, and preferring to embody and play with the identity of the ‘unprofessional’ or the fugitive, who steals from and re-purposes materials of the institution, making props that can engage a project of black social life (Harney; Moten 2013).

Moten and Harney like to play tricks with language, borrowing terms of the university, and flipping them around to act as props for a realm that they describe as the undercommons (2013). In this way, ‘study’ for them (and me) becomes this kind of politically charged ‘prop’-word, where it is divorced from the possibility of unravelling as part of the academic institution’s reproduction, the place where we imagine its

purest manifestation. Instead, they talk about study as a process that happens almost everywhere else as an enacted black social life (2013). 'Study', to them, exists outside of institutional order, and is an impossible, open moment of chaos, outlawed by policy and made difficult at university. It is unprofessional - criminal, even - and, while seemingly impossible within our status quo, it unfolds all the time (2013).

As we see with their highly politicised reading of the notion of 'study', Moten and Harney, like Freire, are highly suspicious of words used unethically, without love, or with intentions of power - they do not like verbalism, and the numbing effect it has in the university (1970). Rather, they repurpose words in attempts to place them correctly, to situate them in their actual political bracket. Study is chaotic, disorderly and black, and the criminal can be described in much the same way (2013). While these supposedly neutral terms ('study' and 'disorder', 'university' and 'criminal') are not presented as though they should even occupy the same arena, the undercommons pushes against verbalism showing that they should, and that this is an exciting possibility.

Much as Tricia Rose describes the idea of Afrika Bambaata's artistic process involving the embodiment of a robot, for the position of a black person within capitalism *is* as a robot, Moten and Harney embody criminality as having a similar black connotation - black people are seen as criminals, and so become 'criminals' (Dery 1992). In this way, they play with what criminality can mean. The effect of subjects re-appropriating and even embodying words of harm and negation, has the effect of challenging and placing those words out of the reach of the mainstream power dynamic in which they originally operated. In this way, fugitivity and criminality become the norms of the undercommons, where the work happening outside of policy and order, is unpredictable, creative and productive – it is study (2013). The undercommons settles with the idea of black people as the criminals that they said we are, and accepts this standard as a useful designation from which to produce decolonial knowledge. As an offshoot, this presence of decolonial knowledge - always in trouble and always making trouble - highlights the disingenuousness of education

spaces claiming to provide enlightenment, whilst criminalising those who are in fact immersed in that project (2013).

So while it is important to have an understanding of coloniality and social reproduction, my intention in drawing on the work of the undercommons, the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, and the playful appropriation of the Afrofuture has been to indicate that even though the system is rigged, people have, and will continue to articulate and embody strategies of resistance that delink from this matrix of power, and generate new knowledge and social relations. This project is not about an entire socialist overhaul, or about waiting for a revolution. Rather, it is about articulating the fact that despite coloniality and largely because of it, oppressed people will continually create new spaces on our own terms and produce decolonial knowledge. These spaces exist temporarily, making their home from the junk of violent structures which would seem should make their existences impossible. Impossible paradigms are fugitive, and do not attempt acceptance beyond themselves. Neither do they seek the permission to exist and to borrow from the mainstream, for this action renders them always in response to power, and this is antithetical to their function.

To engage with these impossible paradigms that embrace chaos and disarray as places of study means to seriously challenge institutional order and organisation. If we are to turn around our understandings of study, and adjust our impulse to issue the 'call to order'; if we are to re-examine criminality and see ourselves as the criminals, then we can begin to revisit histories of chaos and disorder, and within them find some guidance in the making of our impossible paradigms now. Afrofuturism, I feel, positions us to continually sink to the margins of these paradigms, moving always further and further from the creeping institutional order that furiously threatens to stagnate space-time, and to create professionals out of us.

Delinking

Walter D. Mignolo's conception of coloniality is incomplete without talking about *decoloniality*, which he describes as a process of 'delinking' from the cultural totality

of the west. This was an idea he expanded on following the writings of Peruvian scholar Anibal Quijano (2010). I argue that this approach - “delinking from the colonial matrix of power” - works through creating a kind of ‘underground’, where the process of producing knowledge is able to create centres (or ‘*decentres*’) that operate outside, and regardless of mainstream ideology (2011) .

Through the lense of Yoruba history and culture, writer Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí articulates the various ‘inventions’ of colonial administration, in a book aimed at “making an African sense of western gender discourse” (1997), and in this regard, detaching her own knowledge of Yoruba culture from the totality of western gender discourses¹¹. Theorising about the historical consequences of the mistranslation of Yoruba into english, and the way that cultural difference was key in the way these mistranslations happened, the work operates to delink from the logic of western cultural constructs. The text firstly outlines the fact that British culture is not a cultural ‘standard’, and that secondly, its crude application to spaces that exist in their own cultural paradigms causes violent and complex dissonances (Oyèwùmí 1997). Oyèwùmí’s thesis, proposed through the lense of gender, delinks from western cosmology through detailed applications unpickings of western cultural constructs from Yoruba social and cultural histories. In this exercise, the writer heavily underpins the arbitrary nature of western ideology and culture when it infiltrates others, forcing a hegemony into a space already operating according to its own constructs. Her critique begins by rooting western feminism - often taken as a standard of conscious politics - within western cosmology, showing that while it may provide answers to western questions, its logic often fails within other cultural spheres, whose development of social relations may have happened on completely different terms (1997).

She narrates her critique through the lense of Yoruba cosmology, showing the

¹¹ As outlined later on in the text, the Berlin Conference of 1884, which preceded colonial rule in many parts of Africa (in Nigeria, by the British), arbitrarily constructed areas of the land into ‘colonies’, which later gained national independence. In the case of the Yoruba region, or Yorubaland: Before the conference, British Imperialists had already moved into Lagos, and the Hausa agricultural territory in the north. From Lagos, they begun to take over Yorubaland, and eventually by 1914, some years after the conference and initial land ‘claims’, merged all these areas together to form the ‘British Protectorate of Nigeria’. When we look at a map of the region now, we see how the border does not match the Yorubaland’s area, and is drawn through it, dividing it in into Nigeria’s land in the larger eastern section and parts of Benin and Togo in the smaller western section. (‘Western Africa, colonisation...’ n.d.)

dissonances created in language, gender relations, religion and philosophy, through the presentation of western culture as the global norm. Oyèwùmí labours a crucial point that deserves attention through the thousands of cultural lenses existing in the world that have been destroyed or violated by western cultural totality. The task is not to immerse ourselves in approaches to 'fix' and transform the western paradigm that has been carelessly thrown on top of existent cosmologies. This neglects the fact that we have numerous historical examples of cultures - our own - whose internal social relations offer alternatives to those delivered through the colonial project. These are the alternatives that we need now. For instance, in Yoruba culture, gender did not exist as in the west, and differences in sexual organs had no social significance beyond reproduction (1997). In this sense, social relations and hierarchies were not attached to the naturally differentiated features of bodies. Instead, individuals were defined through their own relation to the collective, where roles were ungendered, and hierarchies were determined through age difference (Oyèwùmí 1997).

"...The biologization inherent in the Western articulation of social difference is, however, by no means universal. The debate in feminism about what roles and which identities are natural and what aspects are constructed only has meaning in a culture where social categories are conceived as having no independent logic of their own. This debate, of course, developed out of certain problems; therefore, it is logical that in societies where such problems do not exist, there should be no such debate. But then, due to imperialism, this debate has been universalised to other cultures, and its immediate effect is to inject Western problems where such issues originally did not exist..."

(Oyèwùmí 1997: 462)

The title of the first chapter of *The Invention of Women*, entitled, *Visualising the Body: Western Theories and African Subjects*, refers to Oyèwùmí's theory that the west values the primacy of sight over any other sense (1997: 456-480). Her narration of colonialism roots itself in this visual fixation, where she argues that western socio-cultural categories of people are formed through the physical appearance of their

bodies (1997). This primacy of sight, however neutral it may propose to be, is culturally specific, and does not describe a standard mode of categorising and defining people. In Yoruba, Oyèwùmí argues that visibility does not play as central of a sensory role, and that rather, social relations are defined more through the auditory - through listening and hearing (1997).

While the writer recognises the significant efforts of feminism in conscientising the separation of the *visual/ biological body* and its genitalia, from the *socially constructed body* and its gender, she also argues that these attempts reveal an internal contradiction in the west. She says this contradiction is outlined through the overt western 'acceptance' that different cultures exist with different social relations, but a covert and unconscious belief in the universality of 'the body' as having inherent designated social value. Thus the west fails to acknowledge that in these 'different' cultures, there are some that have never had any reason to construct gender to begin with, and that some do not use the body as a central site from which to garner meaning and create social hierarchy (1997). Thus, the responses of feminism are an injection of western solutions to problems created by the west, and fail to answer deeply to the Yoruba *world sense*, potentially creating ever more layers to the central colonial problem.

One result of the introduction of gender to a genderless world is the misconstruction of documented Yoruba history. Western archives are fundamentally flawed through their gender differentiations, where visually-informed social hierarchies of woman and man have translated into gendered language, failing to reflect the socio-cultural reality of Yoruba life (1997).

Essentially, Oyèwùmí argues that forms of feminist activism seeking to *undo* western constructions ultimately operate within the visual paradigm that created those norms. They always return to the significance of the body, arguably doing little to reinvent ways of being that are not contingent on a culture developed through visibility, gender hierarchies, and capitalist aims (1997).

Much like pure Marxist *class* analysis, which dismisses race and gender as simply by-products of capitalism, Oyèwùmí critiques western feminism's failure to acknowledge its nature as un-universal, and only relevant in relation to the system which it fundamentally opposes (Oyèwùmí 1997) In *Visualising the Body* she issues a call for us to begin our thinking from within a paradigm *we* have chosen, rather than adopting the 'standardised' western one (1997). A shift of paradigm means that it might be useful to consider, as Afrofuturists do, the way that the colonial writing of space, time, and *people* into being has determined the way we socialise and move through the world. Escaping this, and acting outside of the mainstream it proposes to be neutral, is a radical action.

This radical action is characterised by refusal. These are both small and gentle refusals, and large and loud ones - 'disruptions' that create the space and time for conversations, ideas, and feelings. It is refusal that creates impossible paradigms, and allows us to delink - a proposal that is endlessly useful to the Afrofuturist, who attempts to redefine time and space over and over again, to provide re-historicised, shifted contexts for knowledge production not contingent on a mainstream.

So Afrofuturism's execution is a dismantling of the spatial, temporal constructs of global capitalism (Womack, 2013). It demands investment into the knowledges that have been 'othered' by this violent context. It can happen in tiny social moments of the everyday, or it can happen in larger scale organised collectives. As in the undercommons, the implications for such intervention are radical, and their disinterest in taking part in systems of institutionalised inequality, violence and oppression is very often seen and treated as a threat to the status quo (Harney; Moten). For these reasons, Afrofuturist, delinked spaces can be dangerous, and are often temporary.

Chapter 2. Cultural Work



1. (Gamedze, 2017) ¹²

Colonialism and Apartheid

In South Africa, huge racialised wealth and representative disparity – resulting in both epistemological and economic inequality – has continued through colonialism, formal apartheid, and democracy, with each period showing its own manifestations of coloniality. South Africa is not an exceptional example of an African colony, however, national democracy here followed a longer historical trajectory of settler colonialism than in a number of other states, who were only colonised hundreds of years after the Dutch first arrived in the Cape ¹³. Within the period between the first settler colony in the Cape, and the formal colonisation of African land following the Berlin Conference, global capitalism was already very much in operation (Ndlovu Gatsheni 2013). While the Dutch were settling in the Cape in order to sustain their spice trade with India,

¹² (image from a section of a third year art history course I taught at Michaelis, showing a Medu poster for the 1982 Culture and Resistance Symposium and Festival held in Gabarone and organised largely by Medu, as well as the cover of a Medu newsletter.)

¹³ Most African countries were created, and then colonised much later, following the Berlin conference, described otherwise as The Berlin 'consensus' of 1884. Materially, this conference randomly carved the continent into sections/ constructed nations for European imperialist rule, but in deeper terms, the 'consensus' '*articulated race and labour, space and peoples, according to the needs of capital and to the benefit of European peoples*' (Ndlovu Gatsheni, 2013: 55)

millions of black people were being trafficked from their homes on the western coast of Africa (between Angola and Senegal) during the trans-Atlantic slave trade to which I referred in the first chapter¹⁴. This systemic mass violence, which saw millions of black Africans killed - if not on the perilous journeys to North or South America, then as a result of the brutality of slave treatment - provided one of many introductions for Africa into the global system of capitalist labour exploitation, which continues today in multiple forms.

In the Cape, Britain entered into conflict with Dutch settlers and indigenous peoples, eventually attaining colonial rule, and later expanding to become the profiteers of the discovery of gold and diamonds in the interior¹⁵. The era of British rule solidified inequality across South Africa with laws like the Glen Grey Act of 1894, and the Land Act of 1913 radically restricting black people access to their own land (Thompson 2001). These laws, which transferred ownership of arable and mining land to white colonialists were later more stringently articulated through Afrikaner-lead apartheid. It is important to acknowledge the fact that while the change from British colonialism into white Afrikaner nationalist apartheid was significant, it essentially symbolised a new and more rigid structure for the ongoing exploitation of black labour in a global system of white monopoly capital. This translation of repeated colonial oppression through different eras can be referred to as coloniality (Mignolo 2011).

¹⁴ These slaves were to be used for labour in the building of colonies in North and South America, with major economic consequence, carrying through to today, as outlined in Michelle Alexander's revisionist histories in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colourblindness* (2010).

¹⁵ British colonialism in South Africa was complex, and involved conflict with the previous Dutch powers on more than one occasion. Initially, the Cape was the only site of settler-colony in now South Africa, and following conflict with the Dutch, the Cape Colony officially belonged to the British in 1814. The discovery of gold and diamonds in the interior was a central reason for this, and caused the British to colonise the entire country. This discovery paved the way for 'randlords', who designed mining industries that oversaw the mass exploitation of indigenous slave-like labour in extracting resources. These resources were then stolen and exported to the secondary industries of European countries, where they could generate more profit. (Thompson 2001)

MEDU: Culture and Resistance

South Africa has a diverse history of anti-apartheid art educational centres and collectives, a narrative which betrays the crucial role of artists or cultural workers in the struggle for the end of apartheid (Peffer 2009). For apartheid's racialised oppression did not mean that black creative culture was written out, and as the state became increasingly violent, artists' work became more and more radical - produced in pockets of impossibility where black social life, fugitive planning, and knowledge production could take place (Peffer 2009).

The Medu Art Ensemble, founded in 1977, was a collective of anti-apartheid creative practitioners operating in exile from Gaborone, Botswana. The Ensemble included a majority of South African members, such as the late visual artist Thamsanqa Mnyele (1948-1985) and poet and writer Mongane Wally Serote but also including members from Botswana itself, Zimbabwe, as well as America, Sweden and Spain¹⁶. Choosing to operate in a non-partisan manner, members emerged from South African Black Consciousness resistance poetry and theatre groups like Mihloti and Mdlali from Alexandria Township, Johannesburg, but also from other political groups who were fighting under the larger banner of the human rights written up in the Freedom Charter¹⁷. The material work of the group was expansive, and separated into six units: music, theatre, graphics & visual arts, photography and research & production, or writing. Their writing and graphic arts units produced regular newsletters (which took submissions of poetry, stories, and essays from the collective and other artists), and they also made multiple posters and prints, all of which were smuggled over the border and distributed through various channels (Peffer 2009).

¹⁶ sahistoryonline, 2017, The Medu Art Ensemble, Available: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/medu-art-ensemble> [2017, November 18]

¹⁷ *'The Freedom Charter was the statement of core principles of the South African Congress Alliance, which consisted of the African National Congress and its allies the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Congress. It is characterized by its opening demand; The People Shall Govern!... The Charter was officially adopted on June 26, 1955 at a Congress of the People in Kliptown, Gauteng. The meeting was attended by roughly three thousand delegates but was broken up by police on the second day, although by then the charter had been read in full.'* (ANC)

Their goal was embodied in their chosen definition of their practice as ‘cultural work’, understanding themselves as art practitioners who needed to use their various crafts to significantly contribute to the anti-apartheid struggle through creative resistance (Peffer 2000). Looking back on their work now, it is significant to highlight that while their organisation had separate ‘units’ for different disciplines, all their work was geared towards using and creating cultural work collectively and democratically, as a social tool for liberation (Peffer 2000). Cultural work, most importantly, connected the struggle of the working class with the role of arts practitioners.

Their name ‘Medu’, translates to ‘roots’ in Sepedi, alluding perhaps to the group’s central mission to situate their practice of cultural work as rooted in the working class struggle. However, even though they agreed on this principle, the creative labour of the group was not homogenous and multiple internal debates around *how* art should act as a tool for liberation helped maintain the dynamism of Medu (Peffer 2000). So while the group did not always agree, I argue that their commitment to situating their practice as cultural work rooted them, and gave colour and complexity to their artistic differences, rather than acting as a destructive force. This is important because it offers us an example of a space for art operating under extremely high-pressure political circumstances, which still managed to root its practice as a whole within an ethical and humane politic, without dictating a resolved or binary approach to creative production.

“Clearly, the central issue here is that artists must learn to break out of the bourgeois trap of individualism, and must discipline themselves to place their talents and their perceptions at the disposal of their communities,” they wrote, adding, “Any tendency towards elitism among cultural workers must be countered vigorously, not only by other cultural workers, but also by the community at large.”

(Peffer, citing Medu 2000: 73)

The idea of ‘cultural work’ is by no means intellectual banter, and in fact, it created a tangible paradigm in which Medu could operate, despite the fact that this kind of art practice did not ‘fit in’ to the given parameters of the apartheid state. The cultural

worker label was an attempt to shift the capitalist and depoliticised parameters of what it means to be an artist, by acknowledging aesthetic practices as essential tools for social and cultural life, rather than to prove one's individualised 'genius' (Peffer 2000). Cultural work is not a denial of self-expression, but sees the individual practitioner as a contributing part of a whole made up of people, and directly resists the European modernist, and implicitly patriarchal notion of the artist as a lone genius (Peffer 2000).

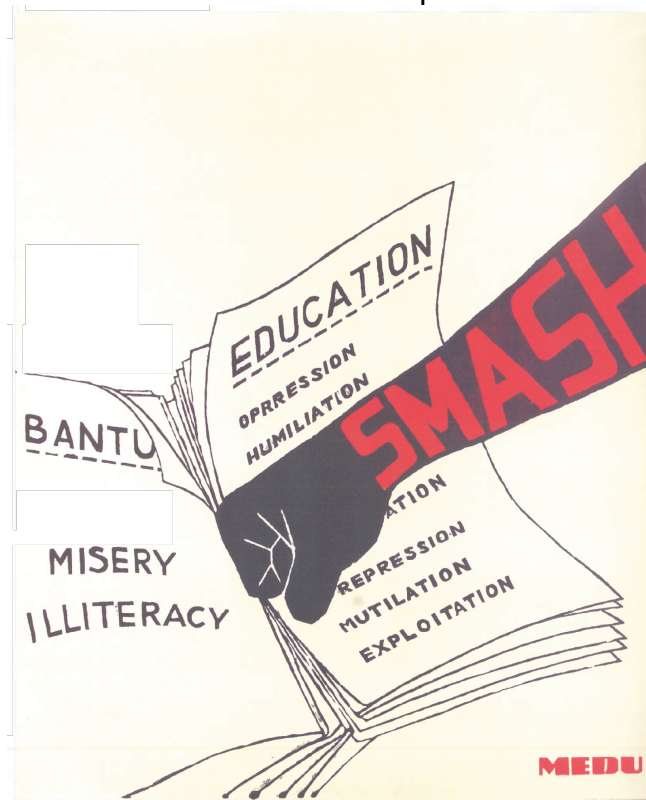
As we face such extreme capitalist development in the contemporary moment, the descriptive intervention - from artist to cultural worker - continues to effectively challenge the art industry in a similar way to what Medu was doing twenty-something years ago. A cultural worker acknowledges creative production as a kind of labour that must be done in the pursuit and creation of culture (Peffer 2000).

For Medu, cultural work was not only about producing content but was about shifting the *structures* and changing the terms of engagement surrounding artistic content. This meant an embodied disruption of spatiality and a refusal to adhere to the colonial constructions of space. While exile for many South Africans was often involuntary and painful, in some cases it opened up the space to organise masses in a way that was not possible within the border of the country. For Medu, their position as exiles operated partially through necessity - to avoid arrest - and partially for the strategic purpose of organising in groups. Through addressing the problems of South Africa from outside of it, they caused ruptures in the national understanding of space and belonging, challenging a number of contradictions and ideas about borders and citizenship. Whilst black people within South Africa were denied citizenship in their own country, the Medu exiles outside of it, in Botswana, had more access to it in many ways. They found themselves to be active citizens of an as yet unrealised locale of cultural work, black solidarity and liberation. Acting regionally rather than nationally, Medu's spatial navigation can be said to allude poetically to a kind of Pan-African citizenship, where one African space was mobilised in service of the freedom of another. Medu used their exiled position as a political tool, granting them the possibility to creatively disrupt the apartheid state.

The key of venturing into the undercommons, as we have seen, is simply to refuse adherence to the status quo. For Medu - in its fight against the political injustice of apartheid law and its 'call to order' - refusal was the (dis)order of the day. For one thing, Medu refused to enter into the South African art market of the time, where it was actually somewhat possible for black artists to gain more success, opportunity and personal freedom than was usually granted to black people in the general apartheid landscape. However, this was not without its limitations. Medu member Thamsanqa Mnyele had always been critical of this phenomenon because he observed, from his home at the time in Alexandria township in Johannesburg, that the black artists who found success were popular only in the white suburban circles, with their work not seeming to be relevant to the black working class people of South Africa (Mnyele 2009). At this time (the 1970s) the market for black artists was largely for 'township art'. Mnyele had a lot to say about township art (drawn or painted two-dimensional artwork depicting 'idyllic' black township scenes) arguing that it was not an art for the people, but rather 'an art of negation,' glorifying the aesthetics of black poverty for the purpose of the white gaze (Peffer 2000: 81). Mnyele described township art as "sentimental caricatures of a primitive community of people who were satisfied with their 'way of life'" (Mnyele 2009: 24), refusing to be relegated to a school of art production that ignored the needs of the people and romanticised the dire political situation of apartheid South Africa. Similar to the imaging of black men as criminals, which proposes itself to be a neutral idea, township art played the role of neutralising the idea of black poverty, and making the underdevelopment of native black populations appear to be an inherent and unavoidable reality of the modern world. Medu's art production and dissemination processes strongly contended these ideas, using Black Consciousness as a tool to unlearn black inferiority and to resist apartheid South Africa. Whilst I argue that Medu's value is primarily located in their overall *approach* to art, social life, activism and politics, it is also worthwhile to visit

some of the content and iconography that emerged from the group's collective process.

In the popular (1980) Medu poster, *Smash Bantu Education*, a large black fist punches a book with the label 'BANTU EDUCATION'. Inside this book, describing the state of education for black students under apartheid, we read, 'Misery Illiteracy' on the one side, and on the other, can make out the words 'OPPRESSION | HUMILIATION | REPRESSION | MUTILATION | EXPLOITATION'. The use of a strong typography and capital letters, and the image of resistance to the oppressive education system packs a punch. Its outright rejection of the status quo – that which appears to be accepted and aestheticised in images of township art - articulates Medu's Black Consciousness politics of self-determination.



2 & 3. (Medu 1980; Mnyele 1984)

An extended caption in another poster by Mnyele declares the following, which seems appropriate in relation to this image, "FOR ME AS A CRAFTSMAN, THE ACT OF CREATING ART SHOULD COMPLIMENT THE ACT OF CREATING SHELTER

FOR MY FAMILY OR LIBERATING THE COUNTRY FOR MY PEOPLE. THIS IS CULTURE". For Medu, the act of making was as an act of resistance. Further, the organising and planning involved in dissemination of imagery illegally in South Africa was another extension of the process of cultural work – an accountable creative labour. Over and above all of this, the process of printmaking allowed for the work to function for the masses. As an endlessly reproducible medium, print returned art to the people, and removed it from the genre of more elitist and expensive forms, like paint on canvas, which seemed to create the conditions for exclusion.

In order for Medu to remain 'in but not of' the divisive institutional culture of white-owned South Africa and its art world, they had to literally be situated on the other side of its border (Harney; Moten 2013). While their cultural work was geared towards people within the country, the nature of their practices meant that they had to be fugitives, hiding from the nation in coerced exile.

As I have already discussed, the spatial positioning of the collective raises interesting questions about how we understand the construction of space. How is it that a system of repressive rule is contained within constructed borders, whose relationship to the land is not inherent by any means? The arbitrary nature of the national borders drawn by colonialists at the Berlin conference of 1884 meant that Medu's occupation of space outside the border construct allowed them to avoid the threat of the apartheid National Party for eight years. Just fourteen kilometres away from the national border, they could embark on a radical collective project for the simple reason that the capitalist construction of nationhood is fallible, and could not contain or prohibit their practice. Their appropriation of the border was a refusal to live according to the violence of colonial spatial logic, and instead to adopt the position of working by region, which allowed them space for cultural production. Their position outside of 'nation', meant that in a time when their work would have been impossible, they figured out a way to be contributing participants in the South African public, intervening in a system of racialised inequality. Of course, being outside of the country and wanting to distribute their cultural work to South Africa meant acting as criminals, smuggling their meticulously discussed and collectively debated posters and newsletters over the border, for again, it was a border that determined the

applicable whereabouts of this unjust system. In moving out, they also had to find ways to move back in, appropriating channels of movement illegally to distribute their material, and operating using a fugitive in-between-ness.

These channels that Medu created for anti-apartheid activism existed within South Africa itself too, occupying a similar fugitive impossibility by creating borders around themselves where the usual rules did not apply. Examples of such spaces were exhibition openings, church services, and funerals – spaces left more untouched by apartheid legislation, where groups of black people who usually could not, were able to gather legally (Peffer 2009). These became spaces of the Afrofuture, the undercommons, and radical pedagogy, where the dissemination and creation of knowledge was possible. In numerous examples, spaces and events where gatherings of black people were legal, were necessarily appropriated for illegal activity – for the distribution of secret information, the receiving of undocumented anti-apartheid money from abroad, and the necessary moments of collective imagining and enjoyment of social life, despite the legalised situation of extreme racist violence, and its attempted prevention of black togetherness (Peffer 2000)¹⁸. Medu's smuggling of posters across borders was similar: a way to reorganise space, to rewrite 'ownership' deeds, and to produce knowledge in a system hell-bent on social reproduction and the wiping out of scenarios where study was possible. These were creative approaches to the construction of borders.

Making their ideas accessible through art and poetry in the streets, on public transport, and within daily routine, collectives like Medu, the Black Consciousness collective Mhloti that predated them, and many others, opened up temporary atmospheres that may have seemed, impossible at the time. Here, in the height of apartheid, black people were able to temporarily repurpose spaces constructed for their oppression, in order to expose and call out racism as a system of violence with

¹⁸ The Riotous Assemblies Act of 1956 preprohibitedvented 'gatherings in open-air public places...if the Minister of Justice considered that they could endanger the public peace.' The act was later amended to refer to gatherings as any amount of people, and to prohibit these gatherings in any spaces, not only public ones. Apartheid Legislation 1850s-1970s, Available: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/apartheid-legislation-1850s-1970s> [2018, October 15]

no inherent logic or possibility to be ethically defended (Biko 1979)¹⁹. The ‘impossibility’ was in the resilience of humanity, culture and creativity, surfacing and thriving despite the circumstance of hundreds of years of black oppression and white inhumanity (Biko 1979).

Medu attacked the structures delivering this inhumane treatment, defying parameters that narrowed the possibilities for black artists at the time, and redefining artistic ways to occupy time and space using *cultural work*, which proposed an alternative for black existence during the struggle. This meant a collective social agreement to exist outside of suffocating time-space parameters, and to produce knowledge despite a status-quo attempting to dismiss black production. In structure and process, the Medu Ensemble operated within an impossible and as yet unrealised future, proposing ways to learn together that we see increasingly less of in the contemporary South African art industry.

Medu was largely responsible for the organisation of the historic Culture and Resistance Festival and Symposium (CRF) held in Gaborone in 1982 (Peffer 2000). The CRF’s aim, mainly an agenda driven by the African National Congress (hereafter ANC), was to form “a coalition of cultural resistance to Apartheid” (Kross 1982: 11), amongst creative practitioners who were involved in the democratic movement. It was part of a larger political call that led a number of South African anti-apartheid art centres, schools, and collectives to join the United Democratic Front (UDF), and to radicalise their creative practices in the context of the increasing violence of the apartheid state in South Africa (Peffer 2009)²⁰. It included about six hundred people who met in Gaborone, at the University of Botswana.

¹⁹ The Black Consciousness Movement: *‘The Black Consciousness (BC) philosophy in South Africa was born from the realisation that “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed”.* Introduced by the South African Students Organisation (SASO) to the South African political landscape, with Steve Biko as its leading theorist and communicator, BC sought to eliminate the alienation – from self that afflicted the being of the oppressed Black people of South Africa.’ (‘Minimum Programme’, Azanian Peoples’ Organisation)

²⁰ The Soweto Uprisings of 1976 saw hundreds of black school children in the township south-west of Johannesburg protesting the law that implemented Afrikaans as the language of instruction in black schools.

A number of philosophies emerged at the symposium, regarding what the role of art was in the struggle for a democratic South Africa. Thami Mnyele felt that “art should be a weapon of the struggle”, pushing for a strongly socialist, African agenda, and art with simple and readable political insights (Peffer 2000). His argument was that art needed to employ some of the functionality that he said it had had in precolonial Africa, and in order to suit the moment of struggle, it needed also to be “committed” and “accountable” as a practice (Peffer 2000: 77). This was of course coupled with Mnyele’s distaste for township art and his rejection generally of art practices that played no role in addressing the struggles of the people.

Pianist Abdullah Ibrahim’s views were not as prescriptive as Mnyele’s. Peffer suggests in his chapter *Culture and Resistance* (2000: 33) from where much of these insights are drawn, that perhaps it was the abstracted nature of the medium of jazz music that directed Ibrahim towards his feeling about art. Ibrahim said that artists need to be allowed the space to engage and experiment with their personal creative choices (Peffer 2000). He talked about the importance of addressing the ‘jihad’, or ‘the struggle within’, echoing in some ways the ideology of the Black Consciousness Movement, which proposed the internal unlearning of black inferiority (Biko 1987). Ibrahim was adamant about the necessity of art to be a practice where jihad should take place, even in periods of extreme political violence (Peffer 2000).

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, who had been writing and thinking for a long time about the role of language in colonialism and colonality, talked at the CRF about “decolonising the mind” (1987). He regarded the hegemonic ideas that created western cultural totality as a kind of “cultural bomb” (Peffer, citing wa Thiong’o, 2000: 85). He describes the cultural bomb as the most dangerous weapon of colonialism - an onslaught that

Over six hundred protesting school children were shot and killed by police in this protest on June 16, now a public holiday, celebrated as South African ‘Youth Day’. Following from this, in 1977, Steven Bantu Biko, the most well-known and very well-loved Black Consciousness thinker was murdered by the apartheid government, while being held in detention, as a result of brutal torture by the state. This extreme violence led to the mobilisation of artists, and the creation of Medu in 1977. The eventual CRF in 1982 hoped to bring cultural workers from all over the country to figure out the role art could play in the struggle for liberation (Peffer, 2000: 73-98).

“annihilate(s) a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (Peffer, citing wa Thiong’o, 2000: 85). In this regard, wa Thiong’o was pushing for a focus that was cautious of what followed the South African apartheid era, expressing concern for future loss of black indigenous knowledges, as he had observed happening in other independent African nations. He foresaw a kind of cultural bourgeoisie forming after apartheid, which neglected Afrocentric tradition, language and spirituality. As we will see in the next chapter this can, in some regards, be seen as prophetic (Peffer 2000).

Nadine Gordimer, a famous political writer, had ideas that related in some ways to wa Thiong’o’s. Her concerns were around what she perceived as a lack of complexity in artists’ response to the apartheid status quo, which might be seen as its own ‘cultural bomb’. Gordimer expressed the idea that a committed art practice comes from within, or at least should contain some expression of something internal. She did not believe that simply depicting and resisting struggle through ‘agitprop’ (which she explained as a “contraction of *agitation* and *propaganda*”) symbolism was sufficient in creating successful artwork, regardless of the times (Peffer 2000: 85). In this way, she disagreed somewhat with stances taken by Mnyele and Serote’s notion of blackness as solely a culture of resistance, calling for more individual creativity in anti-apartheid artwork. She warned against stripped-down imagery used just to communicate simplified political insight, thus opposing Mnyele’s philosophy (Peffer 2000).

In these arguments, we find a conversation that is both necessary, and relatively absent in contemporary art culture. In the next chapter we will look at the neoliberal transition to democracy, and how this period has reflected itself through images and the art world, directly opposing many of the philosophical notions set up through Medu’s practice of cultural work. While the cultural workers of Medu and those in collaboration held a number of oppositional views as to the way art should go about playing its role, they did all seem to continue to agree that art should be ‘cultural work’. Their conversations and even their disagreements were much in keeping with this notion, where cultural work was a space for challenge, sociality, and debate, and should continue to be a fluid site that is constantly unravelling and rebuilding, in

response to its contextual circumstances and the circumstances of the people around it.

In my view, Medu's ongoing relevance is exactly this - their internal debates around what cultural work is and could be, which lead to their various progressive modes of collective production and dialogic engagements. Regardless of the disagreements, everyone had committed to a practice of cultural work, and in order to do this, was forced to operate in the improvised channels between the law and the borders of an oppressive system.

The conversations of the CRF were incredibly radical, and were perhaps deepened by the fact that many people were re-meeting for the first time in years following exiles to Botswana, and the general difficulty of coming together during apartheid (Cross 1982). So as much as the symposium aimed at collectively forming a strategy, it was also bolstered by the space it created for social life, friendship, and interaction – features of normal life made so difficult in apartheid. Lionel Davis – a famous artist who worked in the Rorke's Drift Art Centre, and later the radical space of in the Community Arts Project in Cape Town - made this observation, and perhaps included everyone in his own sentiment about what art's role should be, articulating it as something that should “give life to the struggle” (Peffer, citing Davis 2000: 81). The CRF was a temporary paradigm that allowed for the enactment of a kind of existence and life that everybody was fighting to be able to share in everyday – it was an occupation of a possible future.

In the years following the CRF, the exiled cultural workers in Gaborone found themselves under increased threat from the apartheid government. SADF military raids became more and more common, as the government reacted to the radicalising cultural work wing of the struggle, labeling it as among the “the increasing number of terrorist attacks emanating from Botswana” (Drake; Nyelele citing Botha n.d: 3). On June 14 1985, a raid at the Medu headquarters was responsible for the murder of Thamsanqa Mnyele, and eleven others, including Medu members and supporters of the struggle (Drake; Nyelele n.d). This violent event brought the ensemble to an end, just six years before the formal end of apartheid. Their fugitive rupturing of space, and

their insertion of radical cultural work into South African society had been recognised as a deep threat, and had been dealt with accordingly.

Despite the current democracy in which we live, it is no mistake that the Medu Ensemble are not a part of South African art history or history curricular in the public high schools. Their violent ending, and the erasure that followed until recent years seems to allude to a society who, despite alleged political liberation, is resistant to the radical nature of cultural work.

Neoliberalism

The most significant thing about Medu was the way it aligned its art practices with the struggles of the working class. Cultural work redefined the possibility of artistic practice, moving it into a realm of relatability and social life, which itself opened up mobilising and organising possibilities. In the new South Africa, the elected ANC and their inherited economic problems created a bumpy transition to a 'democratic' South Africa, designed through neoliberalism. This period has ruptured the possibility for cultural work, specialising arts practices, and dividing them once again from the struggles of the worker. Patrick Bond traces the economic trajectory of the negotiations to end apartheid in his book *'Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa'*, arguing that the outcome of this period led the country into a state of perpetually solidified economic inequality, bolstered through the shockingly quick implementation of capitalist 'free market' strategies with which we still live today (Bond, 2000). The effect of many of these strategies has been to reify the division between an elitist middle class and an increasingly poor black working class, specialising and differencing forms of labour, and over-emphasising individualism.

One such neoliberal characteristic that South Africa shares is the indebted nature of previous colonies. Colonialism was not only a violent intervention between the imperial nation and the colony, but was an entry into the global market (the benefactors of which were western capitalist nations) which sought to gain from the

exploitation of the 'dark' continent. Apartheid South Africa was an extreme and deeply racist version of this relationship between exploitation and profit, and its transition into democracy was similar to numerous nations coming into independence, which would emerge only to find themselves interwoven in a complex web of global debt.

Capitalistic organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have been in operation through colonialism and have often played a huge role in funding systematic oppression in colonies that traps societies in capitalistic loops of deep and seemingly irrevocable class divisions (Bond 2000).

The World Bank had in many cases of colonial Southern African states ignored international calls for financial sanctions against the repressive political governments in power. For instance, Ian Smith's party in Rhodesia had been readily funded by the Bank, and in 1951, it paid out its first loan to the new apartheid government (Bond 2000)²¹. It would continue to lend them money, even during the intensified global sanctioning campaign following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 (Bond 2000). The bank ignored the darker side of this capitalistic pattern of extreme growth: coloniality, and equally extreme underdevelopment and poverty growth of the black population who were forced to sell their labour (Mignolo 2011). The World Bank had and has little concern for the violent effects that the free market principles they operate according to have, and so, as they had done following Zimbabwean independence, when democracy came to South Africa, they demanded that the ANC pay back the debt incurred through apartheid borrowing, that in later years, had not been as profitable²².

²¹ The World Bank was formed at the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944 in Washington, before the end of the second world war. Its claims of being a funding scheme for the alleviation of poverty in developing nations are sorely at odds with its other mission statement for 'shared prosperity', which in essence refers to the organisation's conditional lending, contingent on the implementation of policy changes that open up already fragile national economies to virtually unrestricted international trade, in the form of 'structural development plans'. In other words, the World Bank is a forceful agent of neo-colonial control. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012)

²² This happened multiple times in recently-independent African nations. The World Bank demanded of newly elected local governments to be paid back the money they had lent to the previous regimes; this was the money utilized in the repression they had spent their lives fighting! (Bond, 2000). Of course, the state of political turmoil following revolution means that more often than not, timeous repayment of debt is not possible, and thus, the World Bank, and organisations like IMF who are owed debt from violent regimes, gain their new economic dominance via the forced implementation of a number of 'structural adjustment programmes' (Bond 2000: 155-191). In these scenarios, debt becomes the new name of economic and political control.

This was one struggle that the ANC was forced to take on through the negotiations that were heavily weighted against them because of the global private interest occupying the other side of the table, along with the racist apartheid government. The economic negotiations were central in preventing the ANC from fulfilling the many socialistic promises of the Freedom Charter (Bond 2000). Amongst the most significant of the outcomes of the negotiation was the fact that the reserve bank was ruled to operate independently from the government, barring the agenda that the wealth of the country be shared amongst those who live in it - the nationalisation of resources (Klein 2007). Having agreed to these deals, the ANC had little financial freedom to implement crucial policies like the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP), which was to see that everyone in an overwhelmingly homeless and poor country had access to and ownership of their own decent housing. The numerous technicalities and free market policies that fed into the transition of the country's unequal economy into a highly privatised capitalistic machine have been responsible for the exacerbation of economic 'uneven development', and growing racialised wealth disparity in democratic South Africa (Bond, 2000). The parallel but only symbolic promises of the political negotiations - "the doors of learning shall be open to all"²³ - seem to have had the effect of masking the brutality of the economic facts of the negotiation, and have perhaps acted for a long time as a hushing tone to still the obvious disquiet caused by brutal unshifted realities.

'Outsourcing' in Post-1994 South African Universities

The South African university is a culpable party in this neoliberal transition, and one of its most harmful effects is the way its hierarchisation of labour has drastically deepened. In recent years, numerous, if not all public universities have come under radical, embodied critique in the form of nationwide student protest, largely under the banner of 'mustfall', beginning with the RhodesMustFall movement at UCT (which I will talk about in Chapter 3) and national FeesMustFall movement. These movements

²³ Freedom Charter, 1955. Adopted at the Congress of the People on 26 June 1955, Kliptown: Johannesburg, Available: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/freedom-charter> [2018, December 27]

identified numerous ways in which the South African university is complicit as an eager participant in neoliberal society, rather than working towards being a radical space for knowledge production towards liberation from these problems. I have discussed in the first chapter some of the radical ways we can approach pedagogy within coloniality, but we know that socio-cultural dynamics are not the only role-players in universities, and so an isolated critique centered only around pedagogy is not sufficient. The university does not just *teach* coloniality, but is structured through it via unethical, oppressive financial investment and destructive privatised employment patterns, which further entrench racist and class-based oppression.

We see this most clearly through the trend of outsourcing in South African universities, a new form of unaccountable capitalist exploitation, which has been the culprit of deepened poverty amongst university workers. At UCT, ex-Vice Chancellor Mamphela Ramphele of the late 1990s infamously described the controversial move to the outsourcing of all UCT manual labour (cleaning, cooking, security, gardening) as “pruning the tree of dead wood”, unashamedly articulating a widely-held classist belief that the bodies of manual labourers are of far less value to the university community – “dead wood” - than the students, academic workers or management²⁴. This announcement of the new outsourcing policy was not an isolated event, and during this time following democracy, almost all public universities chose to privatise their labour employment, outsourcing multinational corporations who have become known for their inhumane labour practices.

Cultural work during apartheid was important because it acknowledged the rooted, material ways that oppression targets the most vulnerable people, and thus centred the struggle of the working class. However, within the period of neoliberalism, this strategy has been largely demobilised through post-1994, where alleged democracy has apparently dissolved the need for cultural work, which fundamentally challenged capitalistic hierarchies of labour. Unfortunately democracy remains ‘alleged’ because it still exists somewhat theoretically, its implementation apparently pending

²⁴Budlender, J., Lorenzen, J., 2014., UCT’s muddled minimum wage, Available: https://www.groundup.org.za/article/ucts-muddled-minimum-wage_2512/ [2018, October 15]

indefinitely. Thus, the absence of cultural work has been palpable, and the following chapter will attempt to articulate moments in time that have reconnected creativity to the voices of the working class.

For the outsourcing phenomenon did not go unchallenged. The issue has been taken up numerous times since its implementation, however, it was not really until the student protests of late 2015, and the years following, that universities finally began to change their policies, and re-insource working staff (although this is not an encompassing reality). In 2000, at the Johannesburg-based University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) the *Concerned Academics Group* including Sakhela Buhlungu, Greg Adler, Rachmat Omar, and others, conducted extensive research into the WITS outsourcing policy and its consequences for the workers, the university, and society, using a historically conscious socio-economic analysis (Adler, G et al: 2000). Their document outlined the way that harmful capitalist power dynamics (racialised, gendered and classed) were further entrenched by outsourcing, which is a culprit of maintaining oppressive binaries like educated versus uneducated, middle-class labour versus working class labour, and intellectual worker versus manual worker (Adler, G et al 2000).

In general, and within South African universities post-1994, outsourcing creates an insecure relationship between the overarching employer (the university) and the workers, with the private companies acting as a barrier protecting the university from accountability to the worker, and forcing workers to adhere to unfair company standards. These include temporary contracts that offer no job security, and so prevent the worker from taking 'risky' actions like complaining, reporting, or protesting working conditions (Adler, G et al 2000). Outsourcing is a move towards a relationship of power in which the employer has no accountability to their worker, and contributes to an understanding of manual labour as less than intellectual labour, and ultimately replaceable. It removes people from the equation and is responsible for objectifying black people as bodies for cheap labour. In other words, the outsourcing relationship means that instead of taking *people* seriously, employers, like the university, are divorced from the 'problems' involved in employing low-cost black labour. Further than this, the unregulated nature of outsourcing means that workers

are vulnerable to both their employees and the students of the university, in some documented cases having ended up in humiliating racist abuse, with little direct channel for justice²⁵.

At UCT, two of the main private companies employed towards the end of 2015, were C3 and G4S²⁶. Around September, a small group of RMF activists, including myself, set about producing a documentary about the workers' conditions at UCT, called *#OUTSOURCED*²⁷. The documentary involved in-depth film interviews, most of which were translated from isiXhosa into English, and subtitled with the footage. In a few cases, interviewees remained anonymous, their faces censored, or their voices scrambled, as a way to protect them from the apparently unregulated 'consequences' of complaint against their companies. Workers before had lost their jobs for participating in activism, and so many employees felt they were under constant threat from their bosses about what would happen if they were seen at 'those protests' (with the students) (ibid).

²⁵ In 2008, white students at the University of the Free State recorded a video in which they had forced men and women older black university workers into a humiliating process, involving drinking beer, playing rugby, and kneeling to eat meat that had been urinated on. The video was made in apparent 'jest' and acted as a symbol of the extreme racism still thriving in the Free State, but also of the differencing of students from workers. This has been exacerbated through neoliberalism, which has normalised the crisis of undelivered promises of the socialist-leaning Freedom Charter. Racist video surfaces at the University of the Free State, Available: <https://mg.co.za/article/2008-02-26-racist-video-surfaces-at-the-university-of-free-state>, [2018, October 14]

²⁶ The company C3 provided cleaners to work in the university's residencies and administrative buildings. More than one interviewed C3 employee complained about the fact that they did not receive extra payment on the frequent occurrences of staff shortages on any given day (RhodesMustFall, 2015). Staff were overworked, and their companies refused to pay them for their extra labour. An additional complaint was that by the end of any given month, the interviewed C3 workers were having to borrow money from family members (often pensioner mothers) in order to pay for transport to and from work. Their labour allowed them no opportunity to accumulate personal capital. In fact, their labour indebted them (RhodesMustFall, 2015).

As we have seen in unpacking neoliberalism, the outsourcing of services which should be performed by accountable, state-connected employees in public institutions, is always in the name of the cutting of labour costs, and the accumulation of more private capital. The different interests of the public sector and the private one, means that the employment of private business by the state, or semi-public institutions like universities creates perpetually un-met standards of ethics and workers' rights, with the benefit of a reduced price (Klein, 2007). Thus, the complaints by C3 workers are unsurprising, but the frankness of their reality within the South African university (Africa's best, no less) exposes its coloniality in no uncertain terms.

²⁷ RhodesMustFall, 2015, #Outsourced, [video file], Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pu_pm5g3Ao [2017, December 27]



4. (RhodesMustFall 2015)²⁸

G4S was the main employer for UCT's security workers²⁹. Perhaps it should not be surprising then that G4S, and thus UCT, is deeply embedded within what Naomi Klein

²⁸ RhodesMustFall, 2015, #Outsourced, [video file], Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pu_pm5g3Ao [2017, December 27]

²⁹ Within the company, there was a report from a worker that the job involved very serious health risks, which were neither covered nor compensated. This worker, Nolita Maciko, who worked for the company since 2007, describes having on and off serious illness, as a result of having had to stand in bad Cape Town weather for the duration of eight-hour night shifts during the long winter months (RhodesMustFall, 2015). Her initial post at the airport ended in her being hospitalized, after which she was declared a 'spare' worker, until she fought with the company to get her job back, and in the process spent a lot of travel money that greatly indebted her. When she did manage to get reposted, the poor treatment continued at UCT, where despite her illness, the length of time she had worked for the company, and her qualifications, she was forced to take posts in bad weather that caused her more health issues. Her only real option to be placed under a roof was allegedly through bribery of bosses via 'new shoes', or through selling sex (RhodesMustFall, 2015:online). At the same time, Maciko describes seeing white employees gaining better positions only after working for the company for a short amount of time (RhodesMustFall, 2015).

On the structural level of this absolute inhumanity is the fact that because the company is private, its workers' rights are sorely unregulated – stories like this are overwhelmingly common. G4S workers do not receive health insurance, and at the same time the company does not feel compelled to grant paid leave to sick employees, in fact, when they do take leave to recover (because the issue of health problems as a result of long shifts in bad weather is a pervasive one), their conditions of employment are changed without due notification (RhodesMustFall, 2015). In conversations with multiple workers, it became clear that the individualised nature of working in private mass corporations, where the worker is neither accounted for as part of an institution and is not protected by the company, means that human rights violations like this are frequent, under-regulated, and

has called 'disaster capitalism' (2007). The company provides the Israeli Defence Force with services and equipment that are used in maintaining an apartheid state in Israel, where the local Palestinian population is the oppressed group³⁰. G4S, and their 'equipment' has operated as part of this economy - in prisons, checkpoints, and as a protector of the wall³¹. This exposes the disingenuousness of institutions like UCT who maintain claims of democracy and progressive politics, but in reality, act as agents of global racialised oppression through investing in unethical capital-driven war.

So with outsourcing forming the most prudent example of the university's *agency* as a participant and investor in the reproduction of global coloniality, the notion of decoloniality, as articulated in resisting this force, has to be understood as an attack on both the colonial ideologies embedded within pedagogy and institutional culture, and a destruction of its neoliberal economic manifestations. Without a fight for all of these battles and an understanding that they are all parts of the body of coloniality, the interventions of student activism would not have been cohesive.

It is incredibly sad to see these extreme examples of exploitation at play within democracy, and to acknowledge that the end of apartheid, like Du Bois's lamentations (1903) after the end of slavery, were due to the beginnings of a new stage of domination. Neoliberalism's domination has a new 'look and feel' than that of apartheid, but its existence is unavoidable. Here in South Africa, the neoliberal turn has included a phenomenon of 'nation building' where meticulously framed feel-good

difficult to counter. In addition, workers fear speaking out publicly against their companies (RhodesMustFall, 2015).

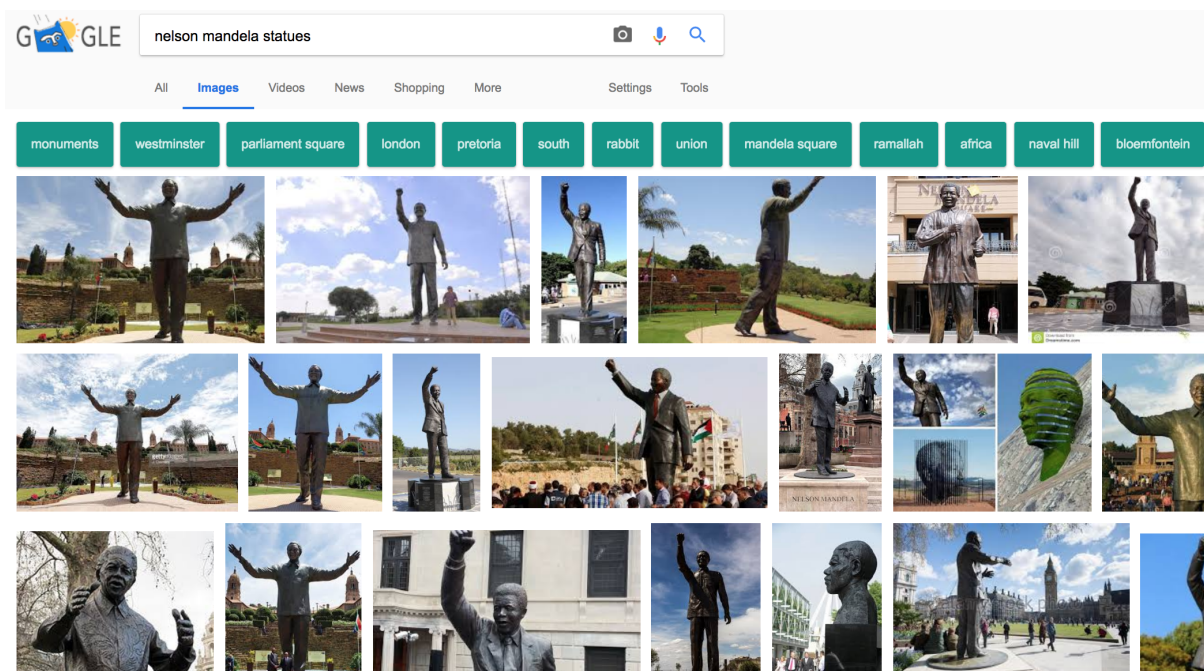
³⁰ This includes services to Israeli prisons, which are guilty of torture of Palestinian prisoners, including children. Further, these institutions commonly breach the Geneva Act by transferring their Palestinian prisoners across borders into their own territory (Palestine Solidarity Campaign). It should be noted that the war in Israel, far from sucking the economy dry, has been the centre of its financial prosperity since early 2000s, with the creation of hundreds of multinational corporations providing services under the headings of 'homeland security' and 'counter terrorism' (Klein, 2007, 423-442). A far cry from taking a hit, the maintenance of their own war has proved to be a profitable exercise, and so the perpetuation of many other wars globally, through providing arms, surveillance and data mining intelligence has given their economy much financial incentive (Klein, 2007, 423-442).

³¹ Palestine Solidarity Campaign, n.d., G4S, Available: <https://www.palestinecampaign.org/campaigns/g4s/> [2017, December 27]

national narratives attempt to divert the collective gaze from its underbelly of reproduced coloniality.

Capitalising on False Images: The post-1994 South African Art World

Using cultural work, the Medu Ensemble identified the important role that art and images play in the making of culture and social relations, and thus, the larger political struggle (Peffer 2000). But not only are images used as weapons of struggle, they can be exploited for anti-revolutionary purposes too, playing a role in the erasure of people's lived experiences, through idealised representations that mask the reality of coloniality.



5. (Gamedze, 2018)

The transition to democracy manifested new imagery and symbolism that covered up the worsening national economic situation in South Africa. These modes of false representation are seen everywhere and can be traced through various streams of symbolic gesturing – the pushing of the Madiba narrative³², the construction of the

³² Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) was a lawyer, co-founder of uMkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC, and then the political leader of the party in the last years of apartheid. In 1994, when the ANC was elected, he became South Africa's first democratically elected president. He has become the most prominent symbol of

rainbow nation, the declaration of reconciliatory public holidays, and the surface-level national celebration of identity politics and difference. Described as a whole as 'nation building', these false narratives have become an everyday part of the South African experience, attempting to tell us that our lives are embodied within these ideal images that erase the structural reality of the nation. The reality is in the fact that the ownership of land, mineral wealth, and private infrastructure, gained by whites through colonial and apartheid exploitation, was never required to switch hands, to become the property of the state, or to be redistributed. However, images and a 'national culture' denies this unequal reality. Contemporary activism (or contemporary cultural work) as we will see, has been key in unpicking and subverting these false images, returning the power of image and culture-making to collective creative practices that extend the struggle of the black working class.

The same activist approaches cannot be said to have reached the South African art world, and in fact, since democracy, its general move away from the philosophy of art as cultural work (that was so key in the struggle) has been palpable. With the last years of apartheid, the art world began to change. As democracy seemed to become more certain, popular narratives attempting to 'democratise' art also emerged. In Albie Sachs' now infamous speech of 1989, *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom* (that is notably a repeated part of early curricular in the Michaelis undergraduate degree) Sachs, a lawyer of the ANC, identifies what he sees as a 'new' moment for art production in South Africa. With democracy so close, Sachs proposes that in "*preparing ourselves for (imminent) freedom*", it is time for South African (implied black) art practitioners to begin to embrace a 'nuanced', individualistic approach and to abandon the art-making of 'angry victims'. He was clearly addressing the likes of Medu, and the militant mandates of the late Thamsanqa Mnyele.

'The fight is over!' Sachs says. In other words, he urges black practitioners to disarm their art practice, and look inward, seemingly desperate to neutralise the mobilising

democratic South Africa, having come to represent a narrative of overcoming adversity, graciousness, and forgiveness. In the neoliberal era, he is argued to have been used as an image that protects an unchanged status quo through selling a national rhetoric of 'rainbow nationalism', non-racialism, diversity and equality, descriptions that fail to genuinely frame the continually oppressive status quo. Countless statues of him are littered around the country, his face is on our currency, and his birthday, since his death, has become a public holiday, where national campaigns drive the public to do '67 minutes' of good deeds, representing each year of his public service.

capacity of image-making coming from oppressed people. In constructing this new demobilised art moment where individuality was centered, we begin to see how South African art practice was strategically shaped and manipulated in the democracy period. Pried from the hands of black 'radicals', and by extension the public), South Africa's art practice was returned to its white owners, its 'nuanced', identity-driven, individualistic work once again available to be othered by western institutions.

Interventions like Sachs' one were laying the groundwork for what was to come, where cultural work was abandoned, and art as an individualistic, specialised practice was the new order of the day. It was only a few years down the line that there came a new rush for the cultural capital of South African artists, which continues in full strength now. An example of this rush can be seen through the creation, amongst other art events, of the two Johannesburg Biennales. The first biennale in 1995, a year after the election of the ANC, was entitled *Africus*, and, according to artist Candice Breitz (1995: 89) represented "the coming-out of the South African art community after approximately four decades of isolation". Curated by Lorna Ferguson, the biennale was funded by the state, surprising, of course, because of the new moment of economic doom following the negotiations. What we can read into this is the democratic government's investment in the national, democratic image, as could be represented by an international art event, rather than investment into the many economic problems that were reifying the perpetual crisis of the black working class in South Africa.

This aside, *Africus* did achieve the goal of presenting work from a number of training spaces, formal and informal, and within a number of spaces (including in the city and in townships), as well as carrying out numerous workshops and local networking opportunities. However, it should be read too as an international event whose main goal was to be recognised by and counted in the international - read *western* - art world. This desire was made more obvious through the second biennale in 1997, '*Trade Routes: Traditions and Tensions*', curated by Okwui Enwezor. By the time 1997 came, the focus had shifted almost completely from the local, and only formally trained artists, largely white, were included. The work was only shown in central city areas, and the aim of being seen as 'legitimate' became palpable. Without going into

detail of what happened at either biennale, I think it is important to point out that institutionalised South African art had entered into its commercial trajectory, where it continues now. In many ways, the art world has begun to act as an extension of the symbolic gesturing or 'nation building' of the country. I believe that the immediacy of the biennales following democracy is an example that shows the nation buying into imagery as a way to solidify gross misrepresentations of contemporary South Africa as a prosperous democracy of equality, unity and diversity, in order to make it more attractive to the outside world. While this image may further global capitalistic relationships, it is of little benefit (or is harmful) to the majority black and poor working class. This art culture may be said to be anti-cultural work.

I want to refer back to the statement on the 1995 biennale from Candice Breitz, a white woman whose art practice benefitted endlessly from these early political changes in the South African art market, as the focus shifted to formally trained - therefore privileged and white - artists: *Africus* represented "the coming-out of the South African art community after approximately four decades of isolation" (1995: 89). It is not lost on me that through the years of apartheid, black artists or organisations like Medu, relying on material support for the anti-apartheid struggle, had been organising, not in isolation but collectively. Art centres had worked collaboratively with practitioners, activists and funding organisations, such that they could make their work, and distribute it to the public (Peffer 2000). It is not lost on me that in no way had these radical practitioners relegated themselves to the 'isolation' to which Breitz refers. In fact, the very nature of apartheid meant that this was impossible, and the achievement of liberation could only happen through working together. Thus, when we imagine '*Africus*', and the early days of the contemporary South African art scene, it is weighted with the erasure of the radical cultural work that had taken place during apartheid, and which was a significant part of bringing the political system to an end. It is weighted by whiteness and the individualised concerns of white art practitioners and stakeholders in the elite art institution, itching to escape cultural boycotts and become rich and famous, rather than to use political freedom in the realisation of a new forms cultural work, to address and build culture around, and despite the new problems in society.

The second biennale's title, *Trades Routes: History and Geography*, is somewhat disturbing in the recent wake of free market changes that had been key in deregulating international trade, and putting the nation into a position of economic vulnerability (Bond 2000). From *Africus*, *Trade Routes* further outlined Breitz's concerns with the South African art 'community' needing to be involved with the global scene. Perhaps it was the power of the reassuring democratic image that allowed such a title – that seemed to allude so starkly to all that had been lost in the new economic regime - to go relatively unchallenged?

The extreme nature of the context surrounding this biennale can be seen in the fact that it coincided with the proceedings of the much-contested Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). This infamous commission provides another example of the almost profuse use of false imagery in the post-apartheid era. The TRC proceedings were a process that involved hearing the stories of human rights abuse under apartheid, from both victims and perpetrators of the abuse. These stories, from state torture, murder, inter-political violence, and even medical experimentation on black people, were recorded and are publically available. The commission, which came out in 1998, drew up statistical data from the stories collected, making recommendations for the granting of amnesty, and paying of reparations to victims (Mamdani 2002: 35). While this process may seem like a reasonable *beginning* in addressing the hundreds of years of trauma that black people had experienced under colonialism and apartheid, it was framed as a gesture of absolute national forgiveness, and in fact, did not lead to the implementation of any structural reparations following the violence it uncovered. In other words, the given strategy for the nation to move on from extreme apartheid trauma was to experience a single *symbolic* gesture, accompanied by no material reparations, and no ongoing way of managing to live with this violence.

The Commission was weighted against black people from the very beginning for two reasons. The first is that it created a level playing field between the system of apartheid, and the resistance strategies used against it by mostly black political movements. In other words, whether a perpetrator of apartheid or a freedom fighter, one was judged according to the same standard. And secondly, it was based on a process which, in Mahmood Mamdani's words "...reduced apartheid from a

relationship between the state and entire communities to one between the state and individuals” (2002: 33). Instead of recognising the fact that the violence of apartheid was *systematic* as it affected the daily lives of millions of people over decades, the Commission individualised experiences of apartheid, recognising it only through instances of torture or other physical abuse. Thus, apartheid, the system was ignored, and only very few of its symptoms were addressed. The TRC was a performative moment instrumental in the sustenance of the false rainbow nation image.

The Commission was part of a grand undertaking, which attempted to define the nation through the symbolism of forgiveness and equality, even as South Africa had just been put on the road to a neoliberal transition, which had brutal impact on the majority of poor black people in the country (Bond 2000). In this regard, the second biennale’s title, *Trade Routes: History and Geography* was particularly telling of the position that the elitist art world would be taking in the new dispensation – one that exploited the national image campaign in order to profit from the global art market.

Of course, the art world counts within its middle-class, predominantly white audience, collectors, landowners and business-people. It has operated post-1994 almost wholeheartedly against everything that Medu’s ‘cultural work’ was attempting to stand for – embarking on international fairs, pushing the notion of art as product, and feeding strongly on South Africa’s presented image of equality. As formally trained artists in the ‘new’ South Africa, the professionalisation we undergo is geared towards us eventually situating ourselves as cultural elites in up-keeping a commercialised and exclusive industry. Our unlearning toward cultural work is necessarily a conscious and political intervention.

We are experiencing a time that has pushed art into increasingly depoliticised structures in a context that, shown through Bond’s analysis of South Africa’s continued coloniality, is in urgent need of art as a tool for liberation. I have argued that this depoliticisation has taken place through democratic South Africa’s quick immersion into the global art market, where white people who have historically enjoyed ownership – in this case, of the infrastructure supporting the South African

art industry - are focusing on the capitalist potential of privatised trading in contemporary African art. This process has in more recent years begun to function disturbingly as a kind of cultural mining, where ownership, that has always been white, is now after increasingly black art production, almost echoing the kind of practice that Mnyele warned against when referring to township art. This “art of negation” was unendingly anti-revolutionary because it found its audience in white suburban circles, and never as a part of working class black cultural life (Peffer, citing Mnyele 2000: 81) (Mnyele 2009). Without invoking that this negation is in the *content* of the work that contemporary black artists make, I attempt to show that there is a parallel in that black cultural practice is subject to the white gaze, and is traded amongst white people. During apartheid black artists found themselves in a position where township art was the most sellable work they could make, and now, the institution’s insularity is so rigid, that their work can be received with the same gaze, even if the practice has changed, to incorporate more complex, politically driven, or even highly subversive ideas.

One part of this is due to the fact that art is operating in increasingly privatised circles. This privatisation and commercialisation of the art industry has left our local public art institutions, where cultural work would be more likely to find its place, in constant economic decline³³. With the end of apartheid many art centres like the Community Arts Project (CAP) with members who were involved with the CRF, and formation of the UDF, were not receiving government funding, became progressively more bankrupt and had to close their doors. Newer highly political projects like the District Six Museum - commemorating a predominantly black community that had been forcibly removed under the apartheid Group Areas Act, and has not received reparations or their land back - and older public institutions like the Iziko National Gallery received minimal government funding, while cultural sites with lucrative tourist potential and the ability to sell the country’s post-1994 image - like Robben Island - were well supported, and seen as “foundational cornerstone(s) of the new South

³³ O’Toole, S., 2017, SA art market resembles a service industry for the super rich, Available: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/lifestyle/2017-09-09-sa-art-market-resembles-a-service-industry-for-the-super-rich/> [2018, January 1]

Africa” (Coombes 2003: 55). This punting of certain images – images that can support the idea that apartheid is over, and our national politic has changed - to the detriment of *realities*, like the dispossessed people of District 6, is significant, and supports the notion that image functions with the greatest priority in this new era.

Since the biennales, we have seen the development of numerous more commercial galleries, the entry of these galleries into art fairs internationally, and the creation of the FNB (First National Bank) Joburg Art Fair in 2008, followed soon by the Cape Town version, both of which seem to have disproportionately significant cultural domination over the art scene. Many of our artists have exhibited in important international art events of the west, like the Venice Biennale and Documenta, and won important art prizes and residencies. This all points to a well-oiled South African art machine, which produces as much art as it reproduces power dynamics. Having wiped out much of the potential for the success of artists not trained in formal institutions, it becomes obvious that these are the sites we need to look to if we are to criticise this dire status quo. Tertiary art education has become so set up for partnership with private business that our history of creative resistance and cultural work seems exceptionally far out of the realm of possibility of the ‘artists’ it produces.

Private investment has an almost exclusive hold on the South African art world, determining what practices are deemed valuable, and therefore gain value, and which should be discarded³⁴. This situation is only deepening and with the infrastructure of the industry firmly still in the hands of white private monopoly capital, there is a subtle policing, through money, of the kind of culture black people should be producing for a white audience through art. As the exhibition and sales scope of opportunity for black visual artists widens, we do not see a change in the ownership, but the fact that we now have ‘a global audience’ is used to represent progress, and feed into South

³⁴ In 2017 we saw the multi-billion-rand project of the private Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art (Zeitz MOCAA), funded by Swiss tycoon Jochen Zeitz come into being. This new museum, located at the V&A Waterfront saw the Swiss capitalist (commonly also framed as a ‘philanthropist’) invest a significant amount of his fortune into African art, and ‘gift’ Cape Town with a site to view his collection. The institution has been at the centre of controversy due to the fact that its power, as the largest museum of contemporary African art on the continent, is its ability to canonize the next generation of practitioners, but the selection process has been placed only in the hands of executive director, white man, and relative non-entity in the art world until this moment, Mark Coetzee.

Africa's image, which is contingent on the exploitation of black labour, whether physical, intellectual, or creative.

Neoliberalism has been a destructive force to cultural work. Through privatisation and divisions drawn between manual, cognitive and creative labour, cultural work and its defining principles have been lost in democratic South Africa. However, as we will see, there has been a resurgence of cultural work but this has happened, and continues to happen, far outside of the 'art world'.

Chapter 3. RMF and The Resurgence of Radical Creative Practices

The power of the democratic image is the fact that, even in Cape Town - one of the most obvious examples of racialised wealth disparity in the world - people from different backgrounds will describe 'the new South Africa' as though it is a real place, rather than just a poster stuck up firmly on the walls of the public imaginary. This image's power is that it is more real than the presence of colonial statues, more real than the millions who live in poverty, feeling the consequences of broken promises of housing, education and 'a sharing in the wealth of the country'³⁵. Critique in this regard is just not enough - if we understand the nefarious nature of the image, then our mobilising efforts must take on the character of a collective refusal to participate in its reproduction.

Moten and Harney describe the tendency to want to 'fix' the institution as 'critical professionalism' (2013: 38). They push us to re-examine our understanding of professionalism in universities as heads of departments, professors or guest lecturers, and rather to consider the crucial role that 'institutional critique' plays in the reproduction of professionalism, going as far as to say that the critical academic is the professional "par excellence" (2013: 38). Their 'Critical Academic' is a figure whose work is highly recognised in the academic community because, they argue, their critique of institutional research and knowledge plays the role of constantly 'fixing' the false enlightenment-image presented by the university (2013: 38, 39). In other words, the reason why their 'critical academic' is understood as the "professional par excellence" is because their work lends the university the ability to continually rework images of its critical relevance and legitimacy, much like the one of our 'rainbow nation'. Critical academics - professionals of universities - keep the unequal thing alive and running, giving it guidance in adjusting its form to easily embody continually changing expressions of inequality.

³⁵Freedom Charter, 1955. Adopted at the Congress of the People on 26 June 1955, Kliptown: Johannesburg, Available: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/freedom-charter> [2018, December 27]

A critical professional is not a fugitive, for she seeks recognition from the centre, through Freire's verbalism, the use of words divorced from their implications of action (1970: 87). She continually and faithfully returns to maintain the life of the place she knows to be fundamentally broken (2013: 38). A student of the undercommons, as we will see in the origins of RMF, does not perform a critique, but rather embodies refusal; she is not invested in or seduced by the university and will therefore never take the stance of criticality. She is sufficiently invested in black social life that she will accept the institutionally given position of the criminal or of the 'unprofessional' (Harney; Moten 2013).

The way that RMF dealt with the image of the institution is what makes it such a radical movement. Instead of embarking on the retouching and editing process that is often expected of critical black scholars, or critical professionals of the university - placed in 'transformation' task teams, or 'African studies' departments (within Africa) - the movement embarked on marches of disruption, destruction, and refusal. If the university hosted a guest lecture that was collectively deemed to protect an oppressive world view, RMF was there to render the event ungovernable; if Max Price (the university's vice-chancellor) attempted to derail a protest's demands into a "healthy dialogue", RMF responded by protesting harder, or by not moving; if police beat students up, RMF would burn the university's treasured symbols of coloniality. This was not a process of image retouch, for we had seen that this work has already been done in great detail, and to much detriment. The damage of participating in the retouching and editing process can be seen most clearly in the many heartbreaking outcomes of the negotiations to end apartheid, where little restructuring, and much editing, and image-creation was done. RMF embodied refusal as a tactic to claim space.

Leading up to the RhodesMustFall call for decolonisation, protest activity addressing the broken promises of the democratically elected ANC and its adopted Freedom Charter of 1955 had been in consistent operation in 'previously' black universities, particularly after 2010 (Holgate, Mokoena, Nkosi, Feni and Mama, Makoni, 2012 -

2014)³⁶. Amongst the promises of the Charter, which states by introduction that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people”, is the right to free education, and the equal protection of all people under its adoption of human rights, particularly outlining the rights of workers³⁷.

In contrast to these clear and instructive guidelines for a democratic nation, worker and student rights had been harshly dismissed at universities since 1994, as we have seen in the previous chapter. At the Vaal University of Technology (VUT), Itumeleng Mokoena reflects on the many years that the Student Representative Council had to play the organising and mobilising role for students around continued issues of financial exclusion, the problems and shortcomings of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), and student security at the university (2016: 35).

At the University of Johannesburg (UJ), Owethu Mbambo describes the “darkness” surrounding student activism, where students and workers alike have been protesting since 1994. This “darkness” at UJ is in reference to the danger involved in mobilising protests against financial exclusions, and for the protection of workers’ rights. As Mbambo describes it, it is not uncommon to see leaders expelled, workers disappearing from their employment, and activists beaten up by the Brixton SAPS

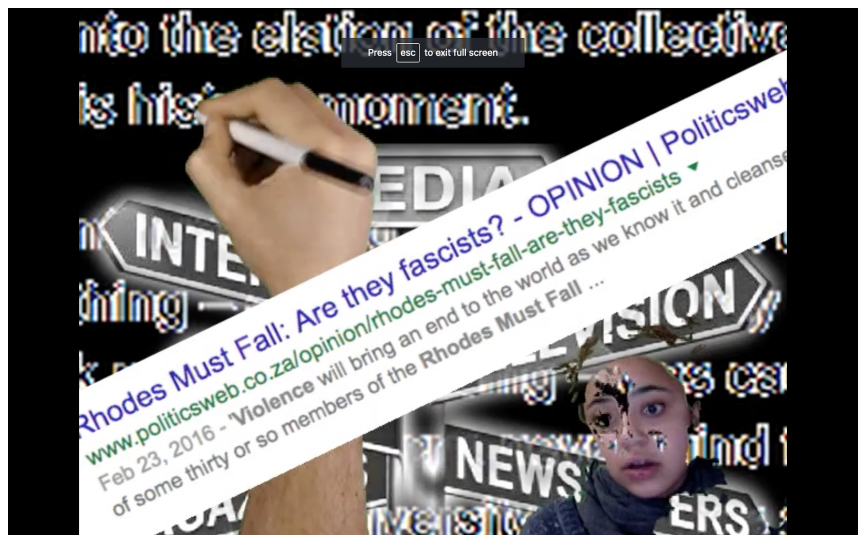
³⁶ Under apartheid, education policy meant that universities were racially segregated. ‘Black universities’ were often located in the Bantustans, and were historically far less resourced, offered fewer courses, and degrees not as well recognised as those from white universities. This is important because in contemporary South Africa, the designation of ‘black universities’ continues to describe much the same condition, and problematically, these institutions, even with their crucial political history in the liberation struggle, are constantly being overlooked in mainstream media narratives around student protest, whilst bearing the harshest brunt of poverty, and being the most affected by the issues against which students are speaking out.

³⁷ ‘Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; Higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit;...’ (Congress of the People, 1955)

‘There Shall be Work and Security!...All who work shall be free to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers; The state shall recognise the right and duty of all to work, and to draw full unemployment benefits; Men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work; There shall be a forty-hour working week, a national minimum wage, paid annual leave, and sick leave for all workers, and maternity leave on full pay for all working mothers; Miners, domestic workers, farm workers and civil servants shall have the same rights as all others who work; Child labour, compound labour, the tot system and contract labour shall be abolished...’ (Congress of the People, 1955)

(South African Police Service), “with which (their) vice-chancellor seemed to have a good relationship”³⁸ (2016: 40).

Thus, the phenomenon of RMF should not be viewed without the national context of ongoing university activism. To say that the site of decolonial consciousness had its *origin* in universities like UCT, the University of Witwatersrand (WITS), and The University currently known as Rhodes (UCKAR) in 2015, carries with it a classist root that fails to acknowledge the ground work necessary in building such a consciousness. This sentiment, and the way it dismisses black spaces from the possibility of being the centre of production, has been harmful in erasing the mobilising efforts of poor black students in much more vulnerable conditions.



6. (Gamedze, 2017)

[reading 'are they fascists?', as questioned in a headline about RMF in the above image, and repeated below over a photograph of a late night RMF meeting at the second occupation]

Perhaps it was nothing more than the attention, coverage, and therefore public legitimacy given to the RMF movement that allowed it more space and time to think

³⁸ Similar protest action has happened at other black institutions like the University of Limpopo, the Tshwane University of Technology, the Walter Sisulu University of Technology, the Cape Town University of Technology, False Bay College, College of Cape Town, and many others (Holgate, Mokoena, Nkosi, Feni and Mama, Makoni, 2012 - 2014).

collectively towards a new student politics? One can never be sure. While the above mentioned institutions, particularly UCT, garner unfair amounts of attention, and their structural power within society should be frequently challenged, it is important to look at the content and collective approaches to education that were generated through the sustained lives of their student movements despite such precarious political, material, and legal conditions. In RMF, this content progressed from separate conversations about 'fees', 'outsourced labour', and 'curriculum' to an understanding of the necessity of 'decolonisation', and moved from isolating events of institutional racism and individualised experiences of black pain to a wider discussion of pervasive 'coloniality'. Of course, a dialogic-style discussion of coloniality is immediately consequential, for it rests upon the belief that despite representations of democracy, equity and unity, society still operates with severe injustice. In a nation that has used democracy to define an exceptional feat of 'overcoming' a system of racialised violence, speaking against this image is treated as a crime.

A Short History of the First Occupation

Keleaboga Mase Ramaru was one of the initial thinkers behind the idea of Rhodes 'Falling', alongside students like Ntebaleng Morake and Mbali Matandela. This collaboration of black women – many from the gender department at UCT - were in conversation following an intervention on 9 March 2015, in which shit from ipotapota (township toilets) was thrown on the statue of Cecil John Rhodes that then occupied a central position on UCT's main campus. This intervention was performed by ANC-affiliated student Chumani Maxwele. While Maxwele acted independently (although it surfaced over time that his actions had partisan intent) the intervention did lead to some radical collective engagement. The conversation sparked amongst the black radical feminists quickly mobilised into a two week-long protest at UCT against institutional oppression. The protests, which took place at meridian (1pm-2pm) grew by the day, and ended up with a small group of black feminist-lead activists, who went by the name 'RhodesMustFall'. The overarching demand was for the decolonisation

of the university, and its initial mobilising tactic was around the call for the removal of UCT's statue of Cecil John Rhodes.

"The statue has great symbolic power; it glorifies a mass-murderer who exploited black labour and stole land from indigenous people. Its presence erases black history and is an act of violence against black students, workers and staff - by "black" we refer to all people of colour. The statue was therefore the natural starting point of this movement."

- RMF Mission Statement, 25 March 2015

Because Rhodes was amongst the most prominent symbols marking the Southern African colonial era his use in the movement was instrumental, allowing for the unpacking of parallels between colonialism and our current democracy, where similar monuments of colonialists stand strong. Rather than critiquing this coloniality through professionalised channels available in the university – in the marginalised corners designated for 'transformation', in civilised and orderly debates, dialogues and negotiations - RMF chose to repurpose the university's central operation into a sharing space where these issues were at the forefront. The intervention did not attempt to 'fit in' with some specialised, 'progressive' political rhetoric, but rather asserted itself as the current operational mode of the university. In this 'new university', Rhodes, a figure of the harshest colonial violence was attacked, rendered a thief and a criminal, and his presence was acknowledged as as a symbol of the violence that oppressed people were vulnerable to at the university. The action shifted the naturalised position of Eurocentric history within the colony, exposing its monuments as eyesores, and showing Rhodes to be a humiliating scar on the landscape. The meaning of the space where he sat was changed forever. Suddenly, a multiplicity of possible histories had emerged, and with that, the opening up of spaces in which to collectively narrate them.

UCT had functional buildings, so why could these not be 'borrowed' for the purpose of a collective decolonial project? Again, this project was interested less in finding a 'home' in some ignored wing of university transformation policy, and more interested

in the university having to restructure its own operation of time and space (which in their mind had been 'disrupted') in order to be able to sit at the table of RMF, and offer their resources to our project. This seemingly impossible paradigm came into being through the collective decision to outright refuse institutional violence (Harney; Moten 2013).

Refusal gave leadership to the students of RMF, as the options of 'healthy debate', 'transformation', and 'critical dialogue' had long been identified as tools used to re-package inequality, rather than to destroy it. Following the first week of meridian protests, the group decided to occupy UCT's main administrative building, Bremner, which houses management and administrative staff, and is the meeting place for much of the university's most crucial decision making. It was time to refuse the proposed order of UCT, to refuse the functioning of the building reproducing this order. It was time to be disorderly and unprofessional – to be *criminal*.

Because of the university's power to enforce expulsions, disciplinary hearings and criminal charges, the movement was placed in a number of tricky scenarios along the way, having at times to sacrifice its radical intentions under the pressure of the institution, the state and its law. Examples of this can be seen in the numerous plan changes around occupations or protests, where at the time, it was important for members to be at the courts, to attend hearings, or to be making connections with lawyers who could help to get members out of jail, or fight their charges. This is routine in activist movements, where jailing members is an easy tactic of institutional offence that derails and slows down planning in order to demobilise. Unfortunately it is difficult to place pressure on an institution when you do not pose a 'problem' or enact a disruption to the status quo, when you are not liable for arrest. Anyhow, an early difficulty in strategy conflict was the fact that some RMF members were burdened by these issues before they actually unraveled.

The first instance of this arose with the Student Representative Council (SRC) chair of the time, Ramabina Mahapa, becoming interested in RMF, and for reasons we can speculate about, joined in explicitly as 'the SRC', breaking with the movement's already formed non-partisan ethos. In an attempt to micromanage the movement

through the SRC, Mahapa communicated RMF's intention to occupy the Bremner Building to university management, headed by vice chancellor Max Price. This unwanted communication led to an agreement between management and the SRC, who *gained permission* for the occupation to take place for the weekend from Friday March 20th, until Sunday, March 22nd. Getting permission for a protest occupation? The SRC was anti-revolutionary! I include this detail to acknowledge that working with images – like the one UCT presents - can be difficult, and we have the tendency to bow to this false imagery, or “art of negation”, because this offers institutional validation and comfort. However, the work of RMF was not to become a part of UCT's image, but rather to break it.

Although RMF was annoyed at the SRC's disingenuous and secretive communication with management, the movement went forward with the occupation. That weekend, the numbers at Azania House, named so after the Pan Africanist conception of a decolonised South Africa, grew. A public mission statement explaining who RMF was, was drafted (from which the introductory excerpt is taken), and a radical education program with contributions from black students, workers, musicians, poets, and members of the Black Academics Caucus (BAC) ensued. When Sunday evening came, it was quickly decided that no one would go home, and that the occupation would be used to place pressure on UCT for various demands.

Thus began the real occupation of Azania House. Black people slept, ate, worked, mobilised, planned, held meetings and hung out together, or as Moten and Harney would call it, studied together (2013). The space organised itself into a routine - plenary in the evenings, in order to discuss the protest activity for the next day, and the strategy going forward in communicating (or not) with management. The divisions of study included the following teams: ‘radical action’, ‘education’, ‘writing’, ‘intersectionality audit’, ‘art’, ‘media’, and ‘strategy’, and these groups continually carried out the latest mandates in their separate subcommittees, in individually organised meetings.

It was loosely in these groups that RMF enacted multiple layers of strategic intervention with UCT, and negotiated with management. The work was radical, and what happened in between strategising, negotiating, meeting and protesting, contributed to the building of a consciousness that has been a part of changing the course of contemporary activism in South Africa. I experienced the Freirian imperative for dialogue having lived consequence during the occupation, and through the following months where smaller RMF interventions continued (1970). Plenaries made the space for any black person to speak (although as you will see, not everyone was afforded the same seriousness) and allowed anyone in the space to vote. For many of us who had begun to feel trapped and stagnant in the rhetoric of institutional critique, RMF opened up a new, dynamic relationship between action and conversation.

However, from its conception, RMF was dealing with political difficulty (to say the least) whose dynamic could be said to orbit around the power of the institution, and its ability to push its regressive status quo into radical spaces, initially marked out as 'safe'. What this 'safety' was supposed to mean in the movement was that the all members were committed to 'intersectionality' - a collective approach that centres oppression and its effect on people with different positionalities, marked through class, physical ability, gender, language, religion, colour, and so on. A collective understanding that being black at UCT meant being continually oppressed was not enough, for, as people gradually came together, the different textures of these racist experiences were understood to have been marked by additional identity factors, and in most cases, did not exist as 'pure' racist experiences (Crenshaw 1989). Intersectionality's purpose in this space was to create social relations that would encourage a journey of collective and creative pedagogy that resisted the violent constructs of coloniality, understood to hinder production and to operate for the reproduction of inequality.

Intersectionality and Pedagogical Possibility

“We want to state that while this movement emerged as a response to racism at UCT, we recognise that experiences of oppression on this campus are intersectional and we aim to adopt an approach that is cognisant of this going forward. An intersectional approach to our blackness takes into account that we are not only defined by our blackness, but that some of us are also defined by our gender, our sexuality, our able-bodiedness, our mental health, and our class, among other things. We all have certain oppressions and certain privileges and this must inform our organising so that we do not silence groups among us, and so that no one should have to choose between their struggles. Our movement endeavors to make this a reality in our struggle for decolonisation.”

- 25 March 2015, *The RhodesMustFall Movement*

Intersectionality can be described as an approach that acknowledges both the numerous ways that the world oppresses people according to their understood identity, and the fact that these oppressions intersect, and are experienced *simultaneously* by the person (Crenshaw 1989). Counter to the popular critique accusing intersectionality of being divisive, the approach is in fact allows people from different backgrounds, places, and with different experiences, advantages, and disadvantages, to organise, study, and socialise together (gaayathri 2013). RMF, a radical black feminist movement, declared that intersectionality would be used as a way to allow the space and its members to function as a collective.

It was Kimberle Crenshaw, an American black feminist legal scholar, who first wrote about intersectionality, introducing it as a practical problem-solving philosophy (1989). Crenshaw’s legal case study was an identification of the frequent phenomenon of complaints of oppression in the workplace by black women. The women had had trouble with the courts, who had not granted them a recognised channel to complain

of the complex power structures involved in the oppression of black women. Instead they were asked to frame their complaint as either concerning racism, or concerning sexism (Crenshaw 1989).

Of course, these two narrow approaches (sexism, racism) do not come close to embodying the pervasive coloniality that creates the environment for the exploitation of black women. Rather, they aim at shallow solutions which appear to address a problem, while potentially deepening it. Their tendency is to adjust their understanding of either race or gender to render the images more complete, rather than re-negotiating the fact that colonially-imposed identity is unsustainable, divorced from complexity of peoples' experiences, and thus throws these imposed images right out of the window. Crenshaw responded to this situation with the embodied theory of intersectionality, choosing not to isolate black women's suffering in the workplace as the sum of oppression experienced by black people, and the oppression experienced by women (1989). She recognised that these categories – blackness and womanhood are already rigged by racialised and gendered power structures, where because of patriarchal power, when we hear of the black experience, we assume it to belong to a man, and because of histories of racism, when we hear of the experience of a woman, we assume her to be white (1989). In neither understanding of oppression could a black woman's struggle ever be centered.

Crenshaw insisted that we should understand oppression as 'intersectional', where the fact of blackness cannot be divorced from the fact of *womanness*, for of course, a black woman's identity is formed through a meeting point of both of these aspects (1989). At the root of intersectionality should be the understanding that human identity has been fragmented according to a western cultural totality, with the prefix 'inter' and the root 'section', implying the idea of being between (inter) aspects (sections) of one's identity, and thus being oppressed.

From the onset of RMF, intersectionality was conceived as a way to be open and accepting of people, recognising that constructed difference should not stop oppressed people from realising similar goals together, but that this work requires

sensitively formed spaces for everyone to be themselves. This was incredibly important, for, even when we examine collectives like the Medu Ensemble, we encounter little attentiveness to the role of people other than black men in those histories. Apartheid was a geographically delineated, racist system, but operated as part of global capitalism, and thus was embedded within the problems presented by the totality of western culture, where hierarchies of gender, physical ability, and class, amongst others, have been naturalised. While we know that the end of apartheid did not represent the end of racism in South Africa, the struggle, in many instances failed even to address the systematic issue of oppression as a whole providing the fundamental tool for capitalism.

Du Bois's literature on double consciousness, as was the cautioned scenario in the beginnings of RMF, seems to recognise the systematic experiences of blackness that mirrored his own, as a black man (1903). As a result, he was in ignorance of the insight given by the consciousness of people whose oppression is more complex (and more pervasive!) than just in light of racialisation. By erasing the experiences of more marginalised black people, Du Bois failed to understand the weight of his own observations, whose sensible conclusion (in this context) would be a recognition of the multitude of double *consciousnesses* that black people of differing identities might experience. Further, it would be a recognition of his own power over more 'marginalised' black people – trans and cis women, gender non-binary people, disabled people – and his potential to oppress them with a violence he seems only able to associate with whiteness. What we encounter here is a much deeper exposure of what coloniality means, and the fact that it cannot be isolated to race and racism, and in fact, can be reproduced by racialised bodies.

It is important to repeat that intersectionality is a response to *constructed* identity characteristics whose formation has no inherent logic or truth. The formation of western gender constructs, for instance, was strategic, and very specific to western cultural norms. The domestic isolation of a heterosexual couple to form a 'nuclear family' is not a neutral cultural standard, and arose from the factors surrounding early European capitalism (small patriarchal family units are efficient micro-systems in

organising themselves around external demands of male labour) (Harvey 1990). This family construct was useful because it operated both within and outside the home, creating a unit that protected the masculine identity as a worker and provider, and constructed a feminine identity, as main nurturing parent, domestic servant, and supporter of 'legitimate' labour, made so in capitalism through its monetary value (Harvey 1990). Therefore, to talk about 'constructed identity' from the west, is to imply that without coloniality, it is unclear whether, for instance, the sex of a child would offer any kind of determining identity factor in their lives, either to play out, or to resist. This is outlined effectively in Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí's writings (1997), when she reflects on the significant dissonances between western culture and sensibility, and Yoruba culture, with domination and exploitation factoring into the identity constructs of the former. Perhaps intersectionality allows us an anti-totality imagination that could bring us to a place that begins with people as whole beings, and has the ability to create and re-inhabit cultures and histories together? The imaginations of paradigms existing with different identity constructs are endless, and important to think about. Coupled with understandings of our own histories and how these have been shaped and penned according to western cultural domination is the first step in appropriating what exists now toward a project of radical cultural work. Our identities have been largely constructed by westerners, where a central factor of their colonial project was segregation, and constructed (unnatural) divisions between 'norm', and 'other', with white cis-heterosexual men (where one's sex matches one's assigned gender) forming the ultimate norm. As outlined through Du Bois's site and time specific erasures in his own double consciousness, we can see that we have a lot of unlearning to do, and that this should be coupled strongly with an eagerness to visit archives of our own erased knowledges. In collaboration, this self-criticality coupled with knowledge production is the means of delinking and creating collective decolonial social lives.

So intersectionality can be said to form an important initial approach in interacting with people who co-exist in our current oppressive socio-cultural reality. However, when we dig a bit deeper into the undercommons, we may choose to navigate new forms of sociality. These forms, whose anti-capitalist nature is not in the exploitation

of one another, are built through the refusal of a status quo that constructs people through these exploitative lenses that create and sustain othernesses. These forms are about delinking from western totality, and nourishing spaces whose purpose is for knowledge production, cultural work, Afrofuturism and radical pedagogy towards liberation! Intersectionality could prove to be a central part of getting there, but ultimately, we work towards and practice spaces where we no longer need it (Mignolo 2010).

RMF and Knowledge Production

Following democracy and the constructed false images it brought to cover up its neoliberal agenda, and following the development of the elitist South African art industry, RhodesMustFall brought a resurgence of cultural work. In spring-boarding its own culture from an action of creative protest, which we can recognise through the 'mustfall', or decolonial image, the movement reignited a collective sense that we need more spaces for study and knowledge production. The generative nature of RMF was its creation of delinked spaces for this knowledge production to happen. To clarify, I suggest that delinking from the status quo of institutional logic works two-fold - as formative through making spaces for black social life, and as a disruptive force to institutional oppression. Clashing with the university, in the case of RMF, was inevitable because it created a context – a parallel Afrofuturist universe, an undercommons, or a space for critical consciousness - for genuine knowledge production, and this put the neoliberal university's usual role in the reproduction of inequality, and the accumulation of capital at great risk.

In dealing with these ideas – Afrofuturism versus institutional logic, or decolonisation versus the university - we will again encounter the recurring theme of how the constructed image of democracy claims more power than the tangible reality of inequality. In democratic, neoliberal society, the image has been given far more political bargaining power than the majority of citizens' real life situations, and in fact RMF, amongst numerous far more violent examples shows that the image will

inevitably be protected in favour of the people it erases. One of the thesis's strongest aims is its ongoing examination of the relationship between South Africa's post-1994 image and 'culture', and its post-1994 *coloniality*. I have argued that nation-building and image campaigns have acted as amongst the most powerful tools of mass depoliticisation, at the same time as the implementation of post-apartheid neoliberal policy that left the black majority in a significantly increased condition of economic vulnerability (Bond 2000). We can see when we unpack these processes that the constructed repressive 'culture' found, for instance, in the government controlled over-production of Madiba artworks - and currency - is the same culture as the *critical* (and black!) aesthetics distributed by privately funded commercial institutions. Understanding and responding to this is the essential beginning for positioning oneself strategically as in ("but not of") the institution (Harney, Moten 2013: 33).

I have mentioned that I believe RMF opened up this conversation at UCT, through using the university as a space for delinked cultural work. I have also talked about intersectionality and the importance in trying to maintain healthy social relations in an activist community. It is my belief that in order to gain knowledge from what happened in RMF, it is essential to explore the dynamics, both internal and external, that made intersectionality so difficult.

Social Life and Social Death: Afropessimism



5. (Kasibe 2017)

For this project, the pedagogical and social factors that created RMF, rather than the tangible outcomes of its activism are of utmost importance. My aim is to identify commonalities between spaces that have operated for cultural work, through delinking from western cultural constructs (Mignolo 2010). Within the context I am placing the work that happened through the movement, I hope to encourage thinking about collectivity, social life, and study as an effective politics of refusal that has no end point, and should readily be recreated through whatever means possible.

With the movement's symbolism revolving around a single image, we are lead to consider the power of images, and what happens when we disrupt that power.

However, when we address the internal politics of the movement, we run into a central contradiction. While outwardly, RMF claimed to support disruption and destruction of coloniality and its images, inwardly, there was a kind of resistance to 'some' destruction, where certain behaviour was protected, and ended up controlling the narrative. A large part of the internal conflict, or rather, the systematic violence that was taking place within the movement, was due, in my mind, to a kind of image war fought by different voices within the movement, the university, the law, and the media. Put more transparently, this was an image-war between the delinked intersectional politics, and the creeping image of coloniality protected through patriarchy and its preferred politic of Afropessimism. Having an understanding of this dynamic is important because of its common resurgence in social movements, which has the capacity to entirely derail the central drives of organisations.

RMF, which began as a radical space of intersectionality built towards rupturing the very structures that allow a place for learning to operate using oppression, was quickly put at risk through the emergence of a strengthening Afropessimistic voice. While it is fair to say that the Afropessimism arrived to some extent with members of the group, the tendency to buy into its politic was pushed by the progressively more violent clashes between students and security forces, and negative imaging of RMF by the media³⁹. By the time the era of FeesMustFall arrived at the end of 2015,

³⁹ In a 2016 article, entitled, "Standing up for injustices"? – Nine notes on #FeesMustFall, white male writer Ian Glenn, makes a general analysis of the student activism at universities over the previous two years. Amongst many historical inaccuracies, I quote two parts of text here to talk about the way that RMF, and in general black protest is often framed:

'When it comes to financial issues, the students are particularly incoherent and inaccurate. When asked where government should get the additional money that would be needed for free education, the students have a grab-bag of panaceas...' (Glenn, 2016)

Herein, Glenn betrays the fact that his critique is not contingent on any kind of factual analysis. Student movements have been particularly consistent in detailed research into the university politics identified as exploitative and unjust. At WITS in 2015 for instance, economics students in support of the student 'mustfall' struggles, embarked on a detailed budgeting proposal in order to prove that arguments such as this are based on intentional misinformation and ignorance. Some of the different proposals and debates surrounding these issues were published in Pathways to Free Education, a collective of students, community organisations, housing activists, and high school activists, which began following RhodesMustFall, through members of the movement.

Another observation by Glenn frames student activism against the image presented by democracy in South Africa, highlighting how this false imagery has been used as representative of evidence more significant than the very real issues being outlined through the protest:

teargas, stun grenades, and at the 'previously' black universities, rubber bullets, and extended jail time were the embodied and collective language that met student activism around the country. RMF, like many others, mobilised according to the logic of physical *bodies* and mass, in order to meet force with numbers. Ideas like "you can't arrest us all" were commonly repeated, and fed into us identifying more and more with Afropessimism, and Wilderson's notion of black people as 'socially dead' (2016).

Just ahead is a quotation from a collaborative textual dialogue between my brother and I, written as a learning exercise to make sense of the student protests as they unfolded in 2016. The work is an exploration of the effect of the reactive nature of interactions between student activist movements, and the police and private security companies. Through an exploration of the protest strategy of 'shut down' - a pressure system involving a temporary closing down of entire university operation, by activists blocking entrances, developed first at the end of 2015, at WITS – Asher and I discussed the way that ideology shifts in relation to the response from external environments.

A university shut down requires a lot of physical and emotional energy. It involves early rising, and being at the site of blockade before the university opens. Then it involves the lifting and moving of benches, tyres, rocks and various other blockades into the middle of the road, the withstanding of abuse from mostly white students who would prefer to continue with their studies, and sometimes the dodging of angry car-driving anti-revolutionaries, who have in many cases attempted and succeeded to run protesting students over, or drive into them. It relies on having robust physical ability to put the body in harm's way, valuing physical strength and psychological hardness. It is a form of protest designed around constructed masculinity, but also around the often stronger bodies of men. It is also designed in reaction to the power of police, whose modes of suppression mimic the exaggerated physicality of this kind of

"...One can no doubt find some roots of this rhetoric of victims forced into violence to make their point in Fanon in particular, but the larger question is why this group of young black students finds this rhetoric convincing 20 years into the new democracy..." (Glenn 2016)

protest, except enacting its force onto the *bodies* of protestors. The text that Asher and I wrote was a way to consider the fact that activism cannot avoid an interaction with the forces attempting to put an end to it, and these forces can easily be destructive, through re-directing the central aims and ideologies of a group.

“Gamedze: David Harvey, who has written extensively on social justice and capitalism, proposed the following question: “What if every dominant mode of production, with its particular political configuration, creates a mode of opposition as a mirror image to itself?”

In thinking about the relationship between forms of protest we have alluded to and the violence of colonial capitalism (the momentary symptomatic, like Marikana, and the structural, like low-wage alienating work), we might see a dead end in our current tactics. The system seems to be dictating the form of our resistance: We organise in a particular way because we will be met with force in a particular way. And we know how that ends. Apartheid policing doesn’t play.

***gamEdze:** What might begin as a space whose protest action aims to form humanising culture where Black disabled, trans, queer, and womxn’s bodies are safe and heard, is very quickly appropriated by the anti-blackness of up high – a force that polarises the complexity of oppression and attempts to direct and contain action into the physically violent (inherently colonialist) form that it understands best. In this sense, the state functions to direct the protest politik into the Afropessimistic voice, one that we know disinherits those who do not immediately come to mind when we say the word “black” (ie: black disabled, trans, queer, and womxn’s bodies) and one that abandons the pursuit of humanity, in favour of unhealthy martyrdom and recklessness.”*

- Gamedze and gamEdze 2016

Our argument was that the violent and suppressive reaction to RMF and FMF by state and university power has been a central force in dictating the kinds of political ideologies employed within the protest groups in reaction. RMF is an example of this. The more the first occupation continued, the more aggressively we were dealt with by the university and the police. The violence enforced on us through university management was key in pushing a number of us into discussions and readings of Afropessimist literature, particularly focused on the work of Frank B Wilderson, whose articulations of the black body as suffering an ongoing 'social death', seemed to speak exactly to the way we were being treated by the university, as a consequence of fighting towards simple principles of equality, already outlined as constitutional within democracy. Additionally, the media largely commented on the movement as 'violent', and protestors as irrationally angry, misinformed and uncivilised.

Afropessimism's social death is defined by Wilderson according to three specific factors. Firstly, black people are vulnerable in the world to 'gratuitous violence', just by virtue of being black (2016). This is a reality that is said to exist in different forms through every strata of society, so for example, an educated, middle class black person, will be vulnerable to a form of violence different than the form encountered by a homeless black person, but that this violence, in its characteristic as exhibited onto black bodies, is essentially the same. Secondly, Wilderson describes the fact that black people experience 'natal alienation', which is a 'slave condition' in which black familial and social relations are violated and erased from the status quo. What this means is that the world sees black people as socially detached, ie: without the social needs of a human and thus, objectifies them into tools for labour exploitation (Wilderson 2016). Again, while the exact form of violence may be different depending on the class and gender of the black person, Afropessimism sees this violence as one homogenous entity existing purely because the subject is black. Finally, social death is defined through the 'general dishonour' experienced by black people in the world, purely by virtue of existing as black (2016).

Wilderson defines these three categories through an examination not just of blackness, but of the binary relationship he perceives between whiteness and

blackness, where black social death is defined as having the primary function of sustaining the “psychic health and well-being”, of everybody else (Wilderson 2014: 7). That is to say that violence against the black body is the basis for a white humanity.

Not only did Wilderson’s conception of blackness veer radically away from intersectionality through its fundamental stance of disregard of the violence exhibited as a result of the plethora of colonially constructed difference, but it broke with principles of South African Black Consciousness, articulated by Steve Bantu Biko in the late 1970s. Biko’s conception of blackness, as was shared by the movement, includes all racialised people, who, in apartheid, had been organised into a racial hierarchy including categories of ‘coloured’ ‘Indian’, and ‘black’ as a divide and conquer strategy to protect white supremacy (1979). It was interesting then that we held these two authors in the same hand, alongside radical black intersectional feminist scholarship, without consciously acknowledging that this literatures’ clash might have foretold the clashes we experienced in the life of the movement. Different to Medu’s internal arguments, these differences in ideology meant that some beliefs erased others’ experiences from their world views.

Wilderson’s problems are deep. While he centres blackness, it is easy to accuse him of reproducing American cultural domination, for his Afropessimism attempts to be an encompassing theory at the same time as it ties its idea of ‘anti-blackness’ exclusively to African black people, and more specifically to the black Americans descended from slavery (2014). His world view, for instance, dismisses indigenous American people and Palestinians as legitimately black, and thus does not recognise these groups as affected by the experience of ‘social death’ (2014). The explanation for this politic has many holes, which, while attempting to draw an encompassing systemic view of anti-blackness, disregards the complexity of living within the colonial condition, and the pervasiveness of western cultural totality.

We see this where Wilderson feels there exists a *fundamental* ‘anti-blackness’ which, even now, can be separated from the power structures involved in global capitalism (2016). The problem of this narrative lies precisely in the social death it articulates,

almost advocates. For this social death operates according to such stringent rules around blackness (as a binary contingent on one history of its manifestation in America) that it seems to perpetuate all the other problems of coloniality. By erasing class, colour, gender, physical and mental ability from the notion of 'social death', and only highlighting geography, he makes violence into a binary, seeming to create an insular and stagnant viewpoint from which to navigate. His explanation of the oppression of non-African black oppression, for instance, is that it exists only as a utility of capitalism, and so, in other words, is not systemic beyond capital's effects. Entirely impossible to prove, this thesis thus leads Wilderson to believe that non-African black people who find themselves oppressed could theoretically disentangle from capitalism and find that they are no longer oppressed by anything else (2016). By Wilderson's overwhelmingly American patriarchal standards, so-called 'coloured' or Indian people could, under no condition identify as black, and he would regard their exploitation as purely a tool of capitalism, rather than driven by the notion that they are socially dead. Ironically in this example, different from African black people, both of these populations were in stages of colonialism brought to South Africa as slaves, very similarly to black people in America. Wilderson goes as far as to argue that the social death experienced by his 'real' blacks, contributes also to the psychic health of other black people too, rather than just whites (2014; 2016).

What surfaces in these ideas, even through their stark exposure of Wilderson's absolute immersion in his own positionality, is a difficult power struggle, articulating the difference between blacknesses in relation to their perceived proximity to 'whiteness'. In other words, Wilderson's observations definitely deserve some critical thought and the acknowledgement that racialised differentiation *is* a complex, however absurd system, where oppression is determined via factors from the darkness of skin, and gender, to class, and education levels. However, his work is limited by the narrow context it draws, and needs to also be understood through the larger, and more expansive lense of coloniality, which acknowledges the *totality* of western culture's historic system of 'othering' (Mignolo 2011). This coloniality has global implications which expose the suspect nature of isolated readings of blackness.

Afropessimism's framing of the white subject is necessarily similarly essentialist, attempting to prove that white subjugation of Africans (particularly) is its central characteristic. However, history of early European capitalism exposes the fact that general racialisation has always preceded capitalism, and forms a part of the western cultural system. This is to say that *racialisation as a system* is what forms a central part of western cultural totality, rather than the idea that racialisation and the colour representative of 'blackness' now were always inextricably linked (Robinson 1983). Racialisation is a structured system that by nature is not content-based, that is to say contingent on darker-skinned people being around; it functions through contextual application. Its history now is so embedded in its application onto dark-skinned people of the global south, who we read as 'black' now, and who have been the racialised bodies for hundreds of years and will likely be for hundreds more. This argument is not to dismiss that pervasive reality, but rather to say that when we fail to see racialising as a system, we also fail to see parallel systems of othering which are central to western cultural totality.

Demonstrations of power by the university tended to add fuel to the Afropessimist fire. I was taken, in my anger, with the steady flowing river preaching social death. Interdicts, photographic evidence, the criminalisation of students – these were the strategies and threats for dealing with people who dared to question the outsourcing policies of UCT, or to challenge the names of buildings, and racist pedagogies. The disingenuousness of the university was palpable. At some stage, during a time that management claimed to be committed to busying itself with 'the issue of the statue', their private investigator, Steven Ganger had been collecting information to incriminate students if they dared to continue a fight against institutional oppression following management's decision. Heating tensions entered RMF's paradigm in the later stages of its first occupation as we were targeted by the police, our once 'noble'

activism having overstepped the line into apparently undisciplined, unprofessional criminal activity⁴⁰.

This was the beginning of the new narrative, which would become increasingly enforced over time with police, private security companies, arrests and court hearings becoming the language in which South African universities ‘communicated’ with decoloniality. The culture of protest that began in 2015 now forms its own temporary paradigm towards the end of each academic year since. And now each year, with the ‘threat’ of FeesMustFall protestors, universities become progressively more paranoid, with 2017 seeing UCT erecting a separate infrastructure (a giant tent!) for the examination process, protected by police, private security, and ‘apartheid dogs’ (see image 5)⁴¹. The exhibition of force has become routine within public universities of South Africa. Is this really the role the university should be playing?

⁴⁰ In its time, RMF achieved two significant outcomes: in the short term, through the occupation, the fall of the Rhodes statue. More significantly, and later on, the movement contributed to the university’s move to the insourcing of workers who had previously been outsourced from private companies.

⁴¹ ‘Apartheid dogs’: South African anti-apartheid protest has a long history with police dogs, or ‘apartheid dogs’, as they are more commonly known. These dogs, usually German Shepherds, were the trained police dogs of the time, and are still used now with the South African Police Service, and many private security companies. Their history is accompanied by fear amongst many black people, who commonly refer to the dogs as racist, and trained to attack black people. They appeared on campus in late 2017, ‘protecting’ the examination venue, and significantly contributing to the anxiety of mainly black exam-writing students.

Chapter 4. 2 Much Monet

The impossible paradigm created through RMF's intervention could not guarantee material change to the status quo at UCT. In general, occupations, protests, and resistance movements do not have this guarantee. They are risky and their only sure consequence is *trouble* - with institutions, with the law, and with the media. However, these high-risk paradigms constantly emerge, disappear, and re-emerge because their existence serves something beyond practically-based activism. Is there some strong force that pushes precarious moments into being, into disrupting and manifesting into fierce opposition to the mainstream? In RMF, why did students abandon their entire academic programs, lives at home and daily routines, only to throw all their energy at a dangerous collective decolonial project? Why did they go one day from studying alone, to collectively staying awake through long nights, drafting emails to the UCT management, making signs for the next day's protest, marching, singing, listening, meeting, and in some cases, spending days in police-station cells, and risking their futures? What existed within that space that made it so important to drop everything else, pledge solidarity with a national student collective, and strategise towards decolonisation?

As I have explored, making culture is an important mode of resistance to coloniality, but it is far more than that. Culture-making is an inherent practice, an independent process that forms an essential part of our social lives. In other words, with or without coloniality, culture exists and is in a process of continual formation. The tension arises where the presence of coloniality makes normal social and cultural life difficult, and when insisting on it means getting involved in conflict. Thus, while investment in and intervention with culture-making is an activism that ultimately refuses to be measured only in relation to the systemic capitalist relationships that dominate mainstream life, it also cannot help but make contact with it. With Medu, culture was a weapon of the struggle, and cultural work formed embodied response to the apartheid system, as well as creative interaction with the people living their daily lives within the struggle. Their strategic border disruptions and international channels of communication made them movers and smugglers of culture within a harshly repressive regime. With RMF,

culture-making meant dialogic learning and collective manifestations of critical consciousness, the refusal of the university's oppressive and violent norms, and a campaign centered around symbolism and its role in creating culture. While these two examples were explicit in their antagonistic responses to the status-quo, they were both characterised by the determination to disrupt normative logics in order to clear the space for their own forms of cultural and social life. In this sense, their interventions created temporary windows for marginalised people to consider their own creative practices and enact them together.

Connecting with people, producing knowledge, and operating together as fugitives fleeing the destructive forces of oppression is central in managing our existence within coloniality. wa Thiong'o's 'culture bomb' is ever-shifting, and neoliberal South African imagery is a case where the bomb's destruction can be seen through far-reaching fanciful lies about the progress of our national culture. Examples like Medu and RMF show us that although genuine cultural practice is difficult, it is possible to create ruptures within systematically reproductive structures if we keep working together, keep producing, and keep running away from social reproduction and the spreading effects of the culture bomb. When we feed those ruptures, they have the potential to become radical, and as we have seen, dangerous, posing a threat to institutional oppression.

So what does the context and history of South Africa, and the cultural work that has manifested amidst its harsh violence, have to do with art institutional culture in universities? My experience as an RMF writer, my take on the Freirian imperative, and the disruptive spatio-temporal margins of the undercommons, the Afrofuture and delinked spaces provides me with a starting point in making sense of contemporary South African art culture. I argue that our art practices are falling very short, and that this is in large part because of our formal art education structures, who choose to operate within the standard of the colonial university.

Although my own perspectives are overwhelmingly subjective, and my memories potentially poorly recalled, I will continue to use storytelling and depart a little bit from

‘traditional’ academic methodology in this chapter. *2 Much Monet* references some of my own interactions and conversations over the past two years in and out of the classroom. The telling of these moments is largely inspired by Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí’s call to decentre from the west, and to form and re-form independent knowledge systems in order to best figure out how to manage our own problems (1997).

Beginning in an awkward formal set-up in my 2016 studio, my idea for *2 Much Monet* soon collapsed and had to shift its focus. It was supposed to be a relaxed meet up with an undesignated aim. Those who arrived were all friends of mine - some who I had made friends with during studies, and others who were students I taught – but the formal meet-up was anxiety provoking because I could tell that many people felt quite awkward in the encounter. ‘Monet’ and its aural allusion to the word ‘money’ forms a double commentary - the first regarding the Eurocentricism of Michaelis education, where European modernity - ‘Monet’ and others - is prized above many subjects, and the other, the neoliberal art market whose allure determines the aesthetic and structural boundaries of the art school, turning it into a space of cultural mining geared towards the accumulation of wealth. The Michaelis fine art program is particularly insular, and its rigid aesthetic and epistemic standards are driven towards a look and feel that we find in commercial galleries, private collections, and art fairs, and not within a politics or aesthetic relevant to the public. Thus, where one might imagine an art school to be the place of subversion in a university, Michaelis instead forms a cultural limb of the colonial body, complicit in its unethical, oppressive and violent reproductive mechanisms.



6. (Gamedze, 2016)

The first (and only official) *2 Much Monet* session, surfaced some widespread frustrations that I have since encountered in numerous forms. Black students complained about their white lecturers' lack of understanding and effort in engaging their work. The inability of white staff to interact with students on contemporary theoretical and practical schools of thought like decoloniality and queer theory made official campus life difficult, and in many cases hostile, as students found themselves unable to use the formal learning spaces productively. It was after the first *2 Much Monet* meeting that I encountered Moten and Harney's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013), which jumps in and out of this thesis all over the place. I decided that instead of embarking on these constructed meet-ups, this 'intervention' would take place simply through understanding my social interactions at Michaelis in a different way, and being available and interested in conversation that was taking place fugitively. The book opened me up to recognising the need for open conversational spaces on campus - for study - and so the work designated as *2 Much*

Monet morphed into a loose way to refer to the informal, honest interactions already taking place in the corners and in-betweens of Michaelis life. My interest and concern about the complaints and stresses of students - particularly black, trans and queer people - got me started on a process of jotting down these fugitive moments that played out along the way. The following recollections are some that I hope illustrate the tangibility of the problems we face in Michaelis art education, and in the larger Cape Town art scene.

In 2016, a compulsory postgraduate seminar program I attended was the catalyst for an overdue eruption of anger at the institutional culture of Michaelis and its gatekeepers. The seminar program involved the postgraduate community coming together to engage with one another about their working and thinking processes over two days. Each student would show a short presentation and talk about their body of work or thesis, thereafter opening it up to the floor for open dialogue and debate. The eruption I refer to came about following the presentation of a second year Masters student's painting project, exploring white suburban life in Cape Town. The project seemed to glorify the luxurious nature of colonial South African white life, and its lack of sufficient critical engagement around apartheid spatial division (the creation of suburbs at the expense of townships, and the white middle class at the expense of the black working class) made it an uncritically racist intervention. The student's presentation reached its height of offence after a question from the floor enquired about the lack of representation of black labour in her paintings. The question was essentially an observation around white suburbia, which we know to exploit black labour in order to sustain itself: where were the black workers, and why were they being erased from the poolside garden scenes and the summer tea parties? The question surfaced a response from the student that involved a reference to black people as 'the other'. For the black people in the room, her allusion to us - to 'the other' - in its distanced anthropological phrasing, highlighted the depths of racist marginalisation on campus. The use of 'the other' was as clumsy as it was racist, especially in South Africa, a majority black country. To make matters worse, it was topping off a particularly problematic session in which other racist undertones had narrowly missed the fire.

The anger that ensued was directed at two main issues. The first was of course the simple fact of racist expression. The second and much deeper issue was that the presentation as a whole, including the 'the other' comment, articulated the racist culture of Michaelis itself, where such work was acceptable - according to the staff members who sat in silence - to qualify a student for a masters degree. Numerous black students expressed anger and disgust at the situation, and the seminar's emotional response was uncontrollable. Staff members stayed quiet as black students articulated the many reasons why the work was offensive, linking it to the problems of the institution, and the fallist call for decolonisation. Instead of responding, interacting and facilitating the important discussion, the students, including myself, found ourselves speaking into a vacuum. Similar to what was expressed in the *2 Much Monet* session regarding staff falling short on engaging contemporary political issues, we found ourselves speaking only to one another, with sparse staff responses revolving around shallow 'transformation' rhetoric. The central question of decolonisation was sidelined and ignored. Eventually, a black doctoral student stood up to highlight this matter, complaining that our staff were ill-equipped to engage with us on the things we were talking about. He explained that whilst they could dialogue back and forth into eternity on ideas about modernity and modernism in Europe, even after a year after RMF, they were unable to facilitate a conversation about decolonisation. He accused the white staff members of not having done the necessary political work, exposing a fundamental problem at Michaelis - the unwillingness of most academic staff to learn, and shift the reproductive standards of fine art practice at the colonial university.

This problem of course also has immense consequence for the artwork of black undergraduate students at Michaelis. Another issue that arose from *2 Much Monet* was the fact that many black students expressed a feeling of being 'boxed in', trapped, or pushed into producing work that is explicit in its exploration of blackness *for a white audience*. This phenomenon is situated precisely within the South African art landscape I described in Chapter 2, where Sean O' Toole refers to this dynamic as black artists providing a kind of cultural 'service industry' to white elites (2017).

Where the ownership of art world infrastructure has not changed hands, as explored earlier, black artists now provide the tradeable raw material of the South African art market, and this relationship between art worker and owner/ collector/ institution is developed within the university, beginning with these feelings black students have of moving between being over-directed, on the one hand, and abandoned, on the other. The structures that inform the university's art production are geared towards a kind of practice whose history is middle class, colonial and white, and artists in the institution from multiple backgrounds are all forced to create work that fits into this structure. The structure serves the industry of 'cultural commodity', an art capitalism that sells a pseudo critical-consciousness, an image, instead of pursuing creative projects that are genuinely dialogic, social, and for the public to engage in.

Additional complaints that emerged from *2 Much Monet* were around issues of hierarchy in the 'crit' process, the shortage of books in the library by black writers and artists, and a general feeling of being neglected by mentors or supervisors when traversing topics of blackness, black feminism, and queerness.

A problem (with all of these problems) is that there is little escape. Making work within the context of the Michaelis degree program means that in every instance, the eventual examined manifestation of the project must take place *within a room on campus*. The reason why this process is disturbing is not because I believe white walls or gallery spaces to be inherently evil. Rather, the problem lies in the school teaching that these contained, protected, and unseen white spaces are the sites in which art can happen, and everywhere else is not. The students may not be assessed for the way their work is seen to operate in the public. While nobody aims to stop them working in the public arena, there is a consistent demand for a representative art object to land back at its site of origin on campus. While the issue may seem benign, it exposes something deeply conservative about Michaelis: its desire to protect outdated modernist modes of art production and display, and to turn its back on the role art should be playing in the public sphere. The centering of Michaelis work on campus has unearthed complaints over the years, and it is clear from how difficult it is to work outside of this assigned process that this crucial change

is not a priority. Year after year, the school erases the possibility of practitioners in training to use art to engage with and disrupt a status quo that is violent; is colonial. Such policies make it clear that the sustenance of the coloniality of the art market is the top priority of art education, dismissing the possibility of art practices for people beyond the contained hemisphere of whiteness and money. Not only this, but the effect of the containment of the produced university art has the effect of also containing students' imagination of their work, limiting it to white walls and private spaces. Is there a more perversely boring way to limit the imagination of an artist?

Anyway, how can you teach people about site specificity and the influence of curatorial strategy, when your educational program is anchored within western modernity as the primary site for the expansion of knowledge about art? What does an art history class centered on the problematisation of African representation through international African exhibitions mean when our point of departure (and final manifestation) is on a campus curated through the celebrated of Sir Max Michaelis, a mining magnate whose collection of dirty gold was to the material and psychological detriment of black South African families? When do we begin to think about our positions within these institutions and reflect upon how we might begin to apply this criticality or refusal to their *context and structure*, rather than only the artwork we place in them? But also, how is it that an art *university* is operating with such regressive and insular politics?

In essence, where these complaints lead to is the assertion that within the western art institution situated in neoliberal South Africa, there exist huge dissonances between the theory of what we learn and the realisation and structure of how knowledge is delivered, curated and prioritised. There are dissonances between marginalised peoples' experiential knowledge, and the ways available within the institution to disseminate, interact with, and expand on these knowledges. The space therefore becomes one that, instead of contextualising and situating the student's position within the world, contributes to an uncomfortable fragmentation of self, and inability to connect real life to experiences of formal learning; a double consciousness within a place meant for studied creative expression.

'Hey Thuli... I heard you were protesting?'

I took a group of students to an exhibition in early 2017. A couple of them had responded to the problematic nature of an artist statement outlined in the Facebook event for the show (“...Through her use of paint and sculptural mass Elize Vossgetter is describing a generation that has been made ‘limp’ by new codes of political correctness and feelings of collective shame...”) and I thought it could be interesting to go and check out the work and the dynamic of the gallery with them. I knew the gallery already, and it was a painting exhibition in a genre I have seen frequently in Cape Town, and have come to label as a ‘white guilt’ show. Anyway, at around quarter to six, I met with about five second year students, and we walked to Smith Studios - a relatively new commercial gallery not too far from campus.

When we arrived, the students were on fire, and immediately began questioning the curator, demanding answers for the passivity of the intervention, which seemed to them (and to me), to serve only as an attempt to divorce the artist from a context of guilt, which she so comfortably inhabited. When the students identified the artist, they gave her an even harder time, with question after question trying to get to the bottom of an explanation for the beginnings of her show. As she explained it, she had been in her studio when the FeesMustFall protests were happening at Cape Town’s parliament at the end of 2015. She was witness from her window on Buitenkant street in the city centre, to the protests for free education, and to students being hurt and arrested, and she felt very conflicted and bad, and so began to work on the paintings for this show. These depict abstracted white people, including one where the words ‘we are angry’ are legible. She described how she had watched herself doing nothing, not helping or being involved, and so she had painted, which, for her, seemed to provide a sensible, even critically astute backdrop for the exhibition.

Later in the evening, I had been at the bar and will never forget what an older white friend (a Cape Town gallery owner/ director) said to me. He said, ‘Hey Thuli, I heard you were protesting at Smith Studios’. I responded to him saying that no, my students and I had just attended an opening, and that they had had some questions.

His comment stuck with me, firstly because he had not even been there, and I was surprised that this non-rumour had travelled so fast. But secondly, I felt strange at the fact that I knew it was simply the image of six or seven black people entering an extremely white gallery, and interacting honestly with the work, which was automatically read as a protest. Of course, I have explored expansively how little it takes for a black person to become a fugitive – sometimes it is as simple as asking a question, and sometimes it is simpler, and just means existing in a white space. This, as shown by Moten and Harney, cannot stop us from repurposing institutional spaces and using them to engage honestly, and to produce knowledge collectively, even if it means perpetually being labelled as outsiders, ‘protestors’, or criminals.

The borders which delineate this inside and outside, determining who is a viewer and who is protesting, still exist, and this story is testament to that. I have encountered similar borders, to my sadness, within classes I have lectured. I have heard numerous stories after classes I’ve facilitated, and in my own time, have received emails from black students expressing the fact that their views are not safe within the classroom, and that they have experienced anxiety within these learning spaces. This anxiety stems from the invisible racialised - and racist - structures at play within the university, the borders existing in the lecture theatre, and the tutorial room, that somehow melt away with the end of the period when there is the opportunity for honest interaction; when the call to order has ceased to exist (Harney; Moten 2013: 105). These structures describe exactly what Moten and Harney discuss as formal education systems that make it difficult to study, through the way they have chosen to order themselves. In these individual situations, the space of study has shifted into the undercommons, where there is not fear of being faced with normalised western cultural responses.

30 June 2017

‘...The conundrum I posed to the class, which I had divided into two, was the following:

It is clear that our own aesthetic practices in South Africa are riddled with ancient power dynamics that perpetuate patriarchy, racism, classism, heteronormativity, ableism, and so on...

“As cultural practitioners in South Africa, we should destroy the current art institution because it is built upon, and relies upon oppressive violence.”

One side was made to propose this destruction, whilst the other was to oppose it. The ideas I wanted to think through in collaboration with the students were the politics of transformation and decolonisation, and what is implied by either if we take seriously the violence of our art institution. Having recently watched Ameera Conrad’s play ‘The Fall’, which loosely traces the narrative of the RMF trajectory from the 20th of March 2015’s occupation of Bremner building, or AZANIA HOUSE as it became known, to the end of 2015’s historical protest at Cape Town’s parliament, that led to a zero percentage fee increase for universities in 2016, I was reminded of the anger that the term ‘transformation’ created⁴². In a particular scene, one actor reads an email from UCT management, who at the time, was attempting to absorb the struggle into a university-wide ‘open dialogue’, as a way to smooth things over. As was the case in the plenaries in question, every time the word ‘transformation’ was read out, people would yell ‘decolonisation!’, and as much as the two terms are well known at this point, it is essential to conceptualise what each approach could possibly engender, and whether each is bound by certain limitations.

The relatively active debate that ensued was interesting because by the end, there were some students who could not resist the temptation to shift over to the side that they actually believed in...For me, the most interesting was within the notion of ‘destruction’, and

⁴² Conrad, A., 2016, The Fall [play], Baxter Theatre: Cape Town

having to consider the vast amount of ideas we could be imagining when we mention this word. My impulse on hearing the word 'destruction', is to imagine a hyper-masculine rage, and a passionate tearing down of structures, burning of buildings, and looting of material resources.

Can we reconfigure our imaginations to understand destruction more creatively?

Do we get rid of the word 'destruction' altogether, because it cannot rid itself of its own perpetuation of a patriarchal approach to decolonising, which as we know contains the seeds of a new version of systemic oppression?

If you made a thing, is it fair to say you will have always destroyed another thing?

As expected, the issues we continued to confront were to do with being stuck in a capitalist global network, which continues to determine our futures as cultural producers.

What has become evident to me however through multiple conversations with undergraduate students- some who I teach, and others who have become friends- is that there is a desperate need for the destruction of something, and the feeling is that it rests in ideological structure and education's curatorial strategy, rather than just in buildings, art collections, and content...'

At the Michaelis School of Fine Art, UCT, the insistence on specialised art study, overseen by specialised practitioners has its end point in gearing up a generation of artists to reproduce some new, sellable version of some isolated and decontextualised, vaguely political thing. There is surely something in this dynamic that needs to be destroyed? Sean O' Toole describes the Michaelis fourth year graduation exhibition as an event that *'resemble(s) a job application forum, with*

young students, abetted by their mentors, producing slick, market-focused shows... (O'Toole 2017). It is unsurprising that this is the modus operandi, because, leading up to this moment, Michaelis art students are expected to exhibit the work they make just for the hours it takes for it to be examined, and only in designated rooms on campus, as I have discussed, after which it is taken down, and ends up either in the campus dump, or holed up in a friend's extra garage. So much for cultural work.

Certainly, this was the case for me in my undergraduate studies. In fact, while I was in the first few years at Michaelis, I developed an entire practice of experimental and rather strange video work that I kept entirely separate from university, because there seemed to be little space for it in painting, drawing, sculpture, new media, photography or printmaking, even though it was the centre of my creative excitement. Of course, I am sure I might have found a way to have played with the experiments in relation to my university work but what I am highlighting is the fact that I did not. For there is a very pervasive sense of what does and what does not work for Michaelis, and this, it seems, in retrospect, is completely market-driven. How strange that twenty-three years after democracy, art would come to represent an industry operating on such stringently policed terms!

The specialisation, in other words, extends outside of medium, and literally controls the context for the exhibition of any and all work taking place there. Perhaps the worst consequence of 'specialisation' is the cultural dictatorship in which the art industry seeks to 'specialise' black people, pushing them to produce a version of blackness that will fit into the market.

The school's energy seems to have always been offering some insight into the dynamics of the Cape Town art scene, where while black artists are bought and sold, smiles, greetings, and invitations are slightly out of the price range. Caught in its own reproductive cycle, the work produced at Michaelis knows predominantly middle-aged white full-time lecturers as its audience, and understands assessment as its primary language of value. Art has been tamed so absolutely in this neoliberal South African tertiary institution, that it is unthinkable it could travel further than the white walls of its

own empire, still named appropriately after Sir Maximilian Michaelis, the Jochen Zeitz of his day.

While much has changed in education, I find myself wondering how we arrived at this point, particularly in formal art training, with Michaelis claiming all kinds of titles pertaining to its prime position amongst African fine art schools. The work of anti-apartheid art centres was so radical and so progressive, that one would have thought that within a democratic South Africa, we would be home to an incredibly rich creative practice - one we could at least rely on to serve the public in moments of political unrest.

Transdiscipline!

“Is there something between and across the disciplines and beyond all disciplines? In the presence of several levels of Reality the space between disciplines and beyond disciplines is full, just as the quantum vacuum is full, of all potentialities: from the quantum particle to the galaxies, from the quark to the heavy elements which condition the appearance of life in the universe.”

(Nicolescu 1999: 2)

In this regard, I introduce to the conversation my final theoretical engagement, in the form of the educational approach of transdisciplinary practice, which I see as describing a fundamental feature missing from Michaelis formal art education particularly. The prefix ‘trans’, refers to its suffix as existing ‘across’, ‘beyond’, or ‘through’ it, hence: ‘across’ disciplines. Central to the notion of the transdiscipline is knowledge practice that has relation, consequence, and responsibility to the ‘real world’ outside of specialisation (Nicolescu 1999).

At Michaelis, it describes the need for practice to exist more consequentially than only within the context of its own western constructed ‘universality’. The notion of

specialisation has parallels to the idea of the undercommons articulation of 'professionalisation', and talks about how education is often geared toward gaining an isolated, if detailed understanding of what has been defined as a field of knowledge. The critique of specialised learning, and it seems counter-intuitive that this could be the case in art education, is that it often relies on Freire's notion of the 'banking system', rather than opening itself up to the reality that knowledge and ideas exist always in relation to the socio-political conditions of a given moment, understood through the experience and consciousness of people (1970). Thus, it is absurd that art would be repeatedly made for and circulated in one particular type of setting that dominates its reading, and erases the possibility of its knowledge-productive potential in non-western modes of display.

In referring to Afrofuturism, as well as through thinking about fugitive learning, black social life, and Freire's dialogic study, we have already explored *trans-ness*, seeing how there are ways to situate one's practice out of reach of the theoretical binaries of Afropessimism, and 'beyond' the forced *categories* of identity acknowledged through intersectionality.

So Afrofuturism is also characterised by this 'beyondness', and as a philosophy it exists as a transdiscipline, working beyond and across the specialisations of knowledge. An unprofessional practice, Afrofuturism (my case studies being Medu and RMF) enters into the business of borrowing, repurposing, and recontextualising specialised and objectified knowledge, spaces, and infrastructures made for reproduction, in order to give life that animates them in accordance with the needs of the group it responds to. So through appropriation or hacking of institutional technologies, Afrofuturism can create its own infrastructure of parallel, impossible paradigms for knowledge production.

Azania House's conception of education was transdisciplinary, and answered the long lost call of Medu for cultural work in South African society. The overlap between educations, like lectures, book exchanges, conversation, meal times, plenaries, and protests was central because it injected real-life with theory and history, pushing

content always into action, constantly making more space for the production of new ideas.

The main issue within disciplinary learning as shown in Michaelis, is that it provides a mode of rigid knowledge infrastructure that specialises knowledge to the extent that it can become completely divorced from its contextual origin. Because we are not required to understand our specialisations contextually, and in relation to our own histories as the centre, we relinquish our agency as workers, and our production can end up diminished as cultural capital serving the false imagery of contemporary neoliberalism. Transdisciplinary learning is radical: it attempts to reach the root of any given problem or research through borrowing from a number of disciplines with the goal of gaining an understanding of an issue and one's position in relation to it - a process that gives agency to the learner, or the cultural worker (Nicolescu 1999). It moves us into consciousness and beyond, whereas disciplinary learning distances us from that possibility. Much like the interventions of Medu's cultural work, transdisciplinary study is an exercise in traversing borders, disrespecting coloniality, and disregarding the proposed totality of western knowledges.

Afrofuturism, as a transdiscipline, is an activism of agency and creation, which has the potential to form liberatory learning practices, that push against Du Boisian 'double consciousness' (1903), and the pervasive slave-condition of Wilderson's *Afropessimist*. Through making use of an imagined, impossible space as its context, the futurist is not in the business of unpacking the weight of violently constructed identity politics, and frees up space and time to work as an entire entity within a collective.

As with Mignolo's delinking, I have the sense that Afrofuturism takes a step forward and abandons the route or the reference point of the colony altogether (2010). Afrofuturistic spaces function as necessary, almost mythical contexts of transdisciplinary learning somehow existing temporarily despite their seeming impossibility. If we are to abandon our expectation of the usual operation of the university, our appropriation of its technologies and infrastructures and our

manipulation of its materials, we must be critical of the feeling we may have that what we are doing is 'halting' productivity. For we are creating a temporary space in which true knowledge production processes can occur and study can happen, regardless of the fact that we are no longer 'respectable' subjects of the art institution. As 'unprofessionals', as disorderly, we might recognise that it is only through disruption of space and time constructs that we can hope to escape the negligence of the institution. You know, sometimes we may just attempt to exist in a space, and we will still be framed as disorderly. So why not work into and occupy these regressive frames of reference? This is the space of production!

We are well placed, as cultural workers, to embark on this collective narrative when we try to open up spaces in the art university where subversive knowledge production can happen, regardless of the repetitive 'banking model' that is proposed (1970). Instead of operating with loyalty to the university, which betrayed us before we even arrived, with its neoliberal buy-ins to the detriment of its workers, we repurpose it into a stage with props to embark on black study and philosophy toward the creation of undergrounds and 'overgrounds' like RMF - absurd and impossible paradigms of disorder, that somehow temporarily exist despite the claustrophobia of institutional order (Moten 2013: 106). This work is an enactment of social existence - of creative collective praxis, of clashing time-scapes, and of histories that do not quite fit into art institutional trajectories – purely because such enactments are crucial.

Impossible Paradigms

The delinking process has *been* operating on structural levels in pockets of student activism in contemporary South Africa, and also in more intimate spaces of conversation and interaction, when we engage in everyday, non-hierarchical, equal relationships that exist independent of western cultural totality. Afrofuturist philosophy, with its deconstructive approach to space and time can easily enter into this history. Because these gentle interactive moments happen outside of the immediacy of capitalistic time-space social constructs, perhaps they have the power

to resist the current status quo, and are the places where we really produce knowledge? (Harvey 1990).

Rather than an aesthetic trope, Afrofuturism can be politicised toward a radical mode of mobilisation, activism, and learning. The creation of Afrofuturistic micro-communities presents impossible time and space zones that defy the reality of coloniality, and the individualised oppressions that coloniality represents. We begin to ask questions whose logic is out of the reach of a western world *view*, and occupied with its own enlightenment *sense*, which may take any form (Harney, Moten 2013) (Oyèwùmí 1997). When collective work is geared towards these kinds of spaces, we have seen that they can become precarious. They do not form an escape, for they must rely, to an extent, on stagnant institutional manifestations of coloniality – buildings, streets, rooms, capital, books – to be provided with raw material and props to improvise with, and theory to embody (which was never meant to be embodied.)

Sun Ra, a stranger from Saturn, with Afrofuturistic tendencies, talks about himself as moving through the world as a ‘living myth’.

I am not a fantasy in a real sense

I am a fantasy in a false sense.

Yet I exist...

(sun ra, lines 1-2)

Within this, we see a radical abandonment of the totality imposed by the idea that there exists ‘humanity’ within global capitalism; an abandonment that steps into Oyèwùmí’s call (1997) to produce away from the centre, and to form ourselves without adherence to the notion that the oppressor is the human and we are ‘sub-’. Acknowledging that oppression exists simultaneously to life and the impulse for collectivity, the Afrofuturist seeks only to create spaces, art practices, education, and ideas that allow this life to unfold. It is clear that we cannot imagine ourselves as *only* products of coloniality, or as ‘less-than’ manifestations on our way to humanity. Our

existence, if we see it as 'mythical', requires a constant play that uses what already exists, in order to enact moments that speak more acutely to who we actually are. Rather than living in a state of Afropessimistic perpetual death, we acknowledge, with Fred Moten and Stefano Harney that -

'... incorrect as we are there's nothing wrong with us. We don't want to be correct and we won't be corrected. Politics proposes to make us better, but we were good already in the mutual debt that can never be made good...'

(Moten, Harney, 2013: 20)

Sun Ra's articulation of the mythical state of blackness is a reclaim of the othered body as a creator, existing independently of and despite coloniality's imposed constructs of 'humanity'. This reading of the othered body is a rejection of whiteness, maleness, normative ability, and ownership as reference points for personhood. It is instead a continued exercise of radical imagination that sees who else we could be, and *are*.

So, on the one hand, we might respond to the call to order, and to capitalist humanity, finding the 'socially dead' black subject, and on the other, we have the 'mythical' black subject, whose project for liberation is not aimed toward obtaining the humanity whiteness proudly wears. Where the dead dies, the myth has never actually lived, but in some weird and abstract way, continues to live on and exist in a realm of impossibility. The semantic variant on ideas of existence, of myth versus the perpetual crisis of the socially dead, proposes diverse projections of possible futures. The myth propels us into an understanding of the world that takes as departure point the intangibility of their experience, while the pessimist takes as departure point the negation of their experience. The language difference tells us that while one approach is quick in turning in on itself, beginning to theoretically define this non-existence in relation to whiteness's humanity and the false images it worships, the other seeks spaces in which the myth might exist *in* its mythical state- perhaps a

space where all is mythical, and impossibility is the status quo? Perhaps a delinked space, or a space of cultural work?

Conclusion

Beginning its inquiry with the concern that South African universities, looking specifically within formal art education, are complicit in the reproduction of inequality in society, this text seeks to locate alternative models for collective art practice that exist now and have existed in other times. By locating South Africa within the broad context of global capitalism and its pervasive underbelly of coloniality, the project has shown that the oppression present within formal art education and art institutional spaces in South Africa now, is part of an encompassing system that persists through a continued exploiter-exploited dynamic (Mignolo 2011). This is the very system whose western cultural, economic, and epistemological totality constructs binaries of difference, using 'otherness' to marginalise, exploit, and violate people as objects for labour.

I have discussed coloniality, as defined through the writings of Walter Mignolo, as an ongoing global reality, whose presence originated in the periods of colonialism, when European imperial nations constructed regions of the global south into bordered colonies they were able to control and exploit (Mignolo 2011). The colonial project used violence as its language of domination, diminishing the value of colonised peoples' lives beyond even enslavement and exploitation of their physical labour. It went further than this physicalised brutality and was responsible for the theft and harm of indigenous land, the destruction of cultures, religions, languages, pedagogies, art practices, and writing and archiving traditions, through the construction of a hierarchy that placed whiteness and maleness at the centre of humanity, and 'otherness' – gendered, racialised, queered - at the margins. Thus beyond the economic enslavement of coloniality, its detritus remains systemically at play in our education systems, our use of languages, and our knowledge of our own histories, all of which feed in to our social relations, in an ongoing loop (wa Thiong'o 1986). This is because when colonialism came to its various ends (in different nations), infrastructures were adjusted in ways that maintained inequality through the same systems of labour and resource exploitation that had been created.

There are a multitude of creative ways that people have come together to resist coloniality and create something new. This project philosophises and mixes together radical approaches to collective pedagogy, drawing on the history of the Medu Art Ensemble, and their notion of 'art as cultural work' in the era of South African apartheid (Peffer 2000). In their time as creative practitioners during this period, Medu's notion of cultural work was woven into a narrative of making 'committed' art that operated as creatively-driven labour geared towards the needs of South Africa's oppressed people, primarily the black working class (Peffer, 2000). Cultural work, to them, was a way to acknowledge their creative praxis as labour, recognising that as part a dispossessed working class, they needed to reject the western idea of an artist as an individualised 'genius' who is driven by a disconnected creativity, and operates as an entity divorced from the needs of society (Peffer 2000). This was endlessly important in the collective struggle for liberation.

Apartheid South Africa was introduced by the white Afrikaner National Party in 1948, following years of British colonialism under which black people had already lost their land, and had been continually exploited under colonial legislation like the Glen Grey Act, Land Act, and the Native Land Act, and the migrant labour system around which these laws were centered (Thompson 2001). Apartheid used this colonial foundation, and pushed its core of racialised segregation to a more extreme degree, passing hundreds of laws that dehumanised black people, dividing them into constructed racialised groups, controlling their movement, and rendering their lives valueless under the law. Apartheid's violence was written into every space and onto the bodies of black people. Being black meant being a criminal under the law. Black culture was essentially banned.

In this context, cultural work was crucial, as a way to disseminate information, ideas, and imagery that contributed to a collective black experience where social life and culture could be ongoing through guerilla tactics and fugitive planning (Peffer 2000). Medu's position in Gaborone allowed them to rupture constructions of space, designated through national borders, and to repurpose these boundaries to operate toward collective liberation. By using cultural work to attack these oppressive

capitalist geographies, Medu's structure was constantly caught in an 'impossibility', operating at the edges of the law, and using their own formula for working with space. They claimed a radical version of citizenship in South Africa, or on the continent, through being fugitives of it. It is in this way that I regard the notion of 'cultural work' as a radical Afrofuturistic practice, unbound by colonial spatial constructions.

Afrofuturism, in its essence, describes the idea of universes or paradigms different from this one. It is the idea that there are infinite ways to construct time and space that do not adhere to the 'totality' of coloniality, which marks time as linear and understands space through ownership (Mignolo 2011) (Harvey 1990). Without attempting to move into the past or dream forward into the future, Afrofuturists create new space through the appropriation of the available technology in an ongoing present, offering us multiple ways to read history, and to intervene with what surrounds us. I connect this understanding of Afrofuturism with the decolonial imperative articulated by Mignolo (2010) to delink, which I feel is well embodied through the writings of Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí, who shows that it is always important to create new knowledges that do not rely on a departure from, resistance against, or agreement with western cultural totality, but are valid within their own right because they are our own, and were not imposed through violence (1997).

It is important to think about what cultural work, Afrofuturism, fugitivity, or delinking means in South Africa now. Following apartheid, the ANC underwent painful negotiations which I discussed through Patrick Bond's economic history, showing the way that apartheid transitioned into a neoliberal democracy (2000). What this means for us now, is that instead of the wealth of the country being controlled by the black majority who worked and fought together towards liberation, ownership remained in the hands of the white minority, and was further privatised through incoming multinational corporations eager to invest in the no-longer sanctioned nation (Bond 2000).

Neoliberalism has been key in re-colonising recently independent nations, through the implementation of free market policy, including unregulated trade and currency, as

well as the weight of debt owed following independence, to organisations like the World Bank, who funded colonial and segregationist rule. These policies make it impossible to implement austerity measures and socialist agendas, re-traumatising tired nations of freedom fighters, and trapping them in perpetual cycles of poverty (Bond 2000).

This history of South Africa is not well-known in mainstream government education. It does not appear in the curricular of public high school textbooks, and neither is it present in the public imagination of South Africa. While it is clear that the majority of people are still living in the very same circumstances, and that the knowledge that is valued in formal learning institutions is Eurocentric and originates in the west, there was a pervasive silence in terms of a *national*, systematically geared activism since 1994, that broke more wholeheartedly than ever in 2015, with national student activism including RhodesMustFall at UCT.

I argue that the reason for this is the fact that following the negotiations, the ANC embarked on a 'nation building' strategy, using symbolism and imagery to portray the new democracy as a paradise of forgiveness, equality, diversity, and 'rainbow-ism'. In effect, this was a strategy to silence a nation of people who had experienced worlds of pain, and to deny that this was largely a reality that still existed.

In the art world, this democracy period and its image-frenzy has moved along a trajectory of its own, but largely in the same vein. Following 1994, while our art industry was embarking on international events, and finding its place in the global market, numerous local art centres that were run during apartheid as spaces of creative resistance and pedagogy, closed their doors due to a lack of funding, with government run art institutions suffering similar circumstances (Coombes 2003). The result of this is that in general, fine art operates as an extremely specialised discipline, moving through the channels of tertiary formal art education, and then entering into the commercial scene of galleries and fairs locally and internationally. There are few art spaces not geared towards this commercial end.

Within the fine art circles (and my observations sit more particularly in Cape Town than other South African cities), black artists are the primary producers, but the infrastructures of ownership remain in the hands of white people, who are essentially playing the role of traders and exhibitors of black culture to elitist, mainly white middle-class audiences⁴³. While there is incredible work being made by black artists and exhibitions being put together by black curators, the commercialised structures available for the work to circulate in are so rigid in their insularity and specialised nature, that rupturing them is an almost impossible task. In other words, institutionalisation has done a lot to kill the potential for art to operate as cultural work, within the delineated fine art structure. We need to look elsewhere.

I argue that the RhodesMustFall movement, and some of the interventions it put into place during the year of 2015 operated as cultural work in the way that Medu imagined it. RMF was a movement that exposed the falseness of the democratic image, and responded to it by attacking symbols of coloniality. Through refusal to adhere to the oppression through which institutions run, RMF reconstructed a building's operation through occupation, and showed us ways to repurpose spaces for the centering of black social life, radical pedagogy, and decolonial thought. The movement's fugitive nature, which initially attempted to centre the lives of those usually situated on the margins of the institution, operated as an undercommons or an Afrofuture where interaction and study could take place. RMF was a transdisciplinary learning operation, combining daily life with activism, creativity, and collective decolonial thought. Its rhetoric of decoloniality was central. Refusing the channels offered by the university to negotiate and debate issues around 'transformation', RMF's decolonial stance meant that as a movement, it delinked from the status quo, rather than attempting to enter into it.

Internally though, there were people in the movement who suffered particularly, and while, as an activist space, RMF put in play strategies of collective work that were

⁴³ O'Toole, S., 2017, SA art market resembles a service industry for the super rich, Available: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/lifestyle/2017-09-09-sa-art-market-resembles-a-service-industry-for-the-super-rich/> [2018, January 1]

very important, it was also toxic for many. Its intersectional approach was often not taken seriously by men, and a new status quo developed, which centered race and racism, and as such, hurt and re-excluded those whose realities and traumas were as a result of more than just racialised oppression. Beginning as a radical black feminist group, RMF soon began to adhere to its own image, an adjusted coloniality, and as such, I have been careful in this project to try to look at the movement as an intervention that can inform ideas, rather than as a two dimensional historic point of glory.

As emerges in the undercommons, this fugitive operation within institutions is a dangerous tactic, and if not rendered just as 'unprofessional', such behaviour will be deemed criminal. In the case of Medu, cultural work was punishable by death, and the collective worked together in Gaborone for eight years before the apartheid military raided their headquarters, killing twelve people, and putting an end to this particular chapter. Thirty years after the raid on Medu, RhodesMustFall was born, and thanks to those who came before us, its activism was able to temporarily occupy the centre, even though it was eventually rendered a criminal movement, with members punished by law for their participation. More important than this moment though, for many of us, was that its existence opened up millions of parallel impossibilities, where cultural work could form the approach for radical and ongoing Afrofuturistic creative and collective praxis.

For me, making friends, learning about intersectionality, reading African histories and theories together, being part of the writing subcommittee, where I learned what it means to write collectively, and gaining an understanding of the socio-economic structures influencing UCT workers' lives, were some of the most important parts of RMF. Central here is that this kind of knowledge production had not seemed possible in the time before it took place, and for it to happen in UCT's main administrative building would then have sounded like a ridiculous proposition.

Cultural work is radical, and makes room for the imagination necessary to delink. Without making specific recommendation to the fine art institution, this project, and 2

Much Monet has been involved in a practice of taking note of and exploring social interaction as the starting point of intervention, where impossibilities can be fleshed out. Aiming to be “in but not of” the university is difficult, but through this work, I like to think I have gained a more socially-engaged perspective around art education that takes the margins as its centre of enquiry (Harney; Moten 2013: 33). Arguing for better fine art education perhaps fails to acknowledge the fact that our art should be cultural work, and that cultural work is towards delinked knowledge production, rather than a diversified epistemological totality. The art school, as with any contingent of the South African university, should be delinking from the totality of western knowledge systems, and finding ways to create new centres.

This is both a huge thing to talk about, and the tiniest. We already enter in Afrofutures every day, but how can we restructure our worlds so that these microcosms become *the* spaces where we build cultural work and pedagogy, where we form an undercommons of study and social life? How do we centre our lives around the imagination and sociality which exists already – somehow - in but not of coloniality? I am not sure, but I have seen these places grow and while it does not seem like it, it is possible.

Through the experiences of RMF and the thinking it generated for me, I was lead into this creative project of history, subjectivity, storytelling and theorisation, which acts as an extended, gentle manifesto for thinking about learning. The point of reference is consistently in response to a disillusionment with the consequences of time and space constraints under global capitalism, which do not allow us to find ways to be together.

These are the interventions that are so crucial! When we understand the potential for artistic study and cultural work we realise that we should be encountering something far more radical than formal art education in South Africa, in its current state. Whether microcosms of daily casual interaction, or larger radical activist movements, there exist a multiplicity of possibilities that have been erased from our consciousnesses by

coloniality and its unimaginative constructs. These will attempt to determine where and when we move - and how we do it.

(just below)

But impossible paradigms do exist,

(or just above.)

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Images

1. Gamedze, T., 2017, "Art as cultural work...", (Lecture slide), Michaelis School of Fine Art, Cape Town: author's own⁴⁴
2. Medu Ensemble, 1980, "Smash Bantu Education", (Poster), Available: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/smash-bantu-education-misery-illiteracy> [2018, September 15]
3. Mnyeale, T., 1984, "For me as a craftsman...", (Poster), Available: http://www.saha.org.za/tembisa/thami_mnyeale_for_me_as_a_craftsman_the_act_of_creating_art_should_compliment_the_act_of_creating_shelter_for_my_family_or_liberating_the_country_for_my_people_this_is_culture.htm [2018, September 15]
4. RhodesMustFall, 2015, End Outsourcing⁴⁵, (screengrab), author's own
5. Gamedze, T., 2018, "Google search: 'nelson mandela statues'", (screengrab), author's own
6. Gamedze, T., 2017, "*Activism across borders*", (video still), author's own

⁴⁴ (image from a section of a third year art history course I taught at Michaelis, showing a Medu poster for the 1982 Culture and Resistance Symposium and Festival held in Gabarone and organised largely by Medu, as well as the cover of a Medu newsletter.)

⁴⁵ RhodesMustFall, 2015, #Outsourced, [video file], Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pu_pm5g3Ao [2017, December 27]

7. Kasibe, W., 2017, “*A private security guard and an ‘apartheid police dog’ are seen at UCT’s Madiba Circle’ (UCT)...*”, photographic image: courtesy of Wandile Kasibe, Available: <https://vernacnews.co.za/2017/11/12/uct-brings-apartheid-police-dogs-erects-exam-concentration-camp-tent-uct-e-tla-ka-ntjamaphodisa-a-apharteid-ba-hlomme-tente-ya-kgatelelo-uctshutdown/> [2017, November 20]

8. Gamedze, T., 2016, poster (*2 Much Monet*), Hiddingh Campus: Cape Town, author’s own