**Winter School Reflective Report 2022**

**By Emma Minkley and Kiasha Naidoo**

The Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape hosted its annual Winter School from 17 to 20 October 2022 at the District Six Homecoming Centre in Cape Town. The Winter School is a chance for fellows, staff, affiliates, and partners to meet and think together on a theme. In addition to fellows and researchers from the CHR-UWC, colleagues from, the Jackman Humanities Institute at the University of Toronto, the Trinity Long Room Hub at Trinity College Dublin, The Käte Hamburger Research Centre Global dis:connect at Ludwig Maximilians University, Munich and the Instituto Mauricio Kagel, Universidad Nacional de San Martin, all joined in Cape Town. This iteration of the Winter School drew its topic from work by Ajay Skaria, specifically his lecture at the 2021 CHR Winter School, bringing the question of *The Minor* to the fore. Skaria’s departure marks the minor as distinct from the *subaltern*. He draws on Mufti in understanding the minor as a site of disruption. As per the Winter School concept note, a central consideration for theorists is to hold subalternity and minor in tension.

A number of thematic elements in relation to minority were addressed over the four days of presentations and performances in the programme. These themes emerge from the interdisciplinarity and various modes of encounter which were convened under the auspices of the CHR, specifically its Winter School. Following minor tracks and traces allowed for the production of a range of alternative and unrealised readings and interpretations which may have otherwise been “thrown out of history”, the minor “deprived of the ability to *make* history”. These seemed to follow two threads; body and location, and dealt with questions of what it might mean to be a minor body within minor spaces - the “peripheral” university, South Africa and Africa, the global South - what the minor might have to offer as a meaning-making subject, indeed, what it means to be *minor* to be begin with. As Heidi Grunebaum put it, the “disruptive potentialities that the minor might yield” within the striated space of supremacism. Although this turned out to be a highly productive space, it seemed to also give interlocutors a sense of being “without ground”, or to put it in converse terms, “at sea”, at a kind of aporia or impasse, having lost the route across a body of water. So there was a sense of residing in a place without certainty and without finite, hard answers – a place that produced more questions, but somehow allowed us to be at ease with this state of *not* having answers. This was described as a sense of “not yet”, finding centre within displacement and removal, further highlighted by the location of the Winter School itself – the District Six Homecoming Centre. This imagined moment of the “not yet” requires a “becoming minor”, an “in-fancy”, as Nancy Luxon showed us, a playfulness that breaks the connection between past and present. This was further a call to regenerate the capacity to imagine and think symbolically. Following desire, being seduced – that is, to be led astray, or to follow astray – the minor has led us astray in reading, we have followed it astray to an “ungrounded” place. Here we were reminded by Ross Truscott and Maurits van Bever Donker that readers are “unruly bodies”, undisciplined, they do not necessarily do what the author, or perhaps, the ”major” wants them to do.

In thinking the subaltern in relation to the notion of the minor, Truscott offered a presentation in which he outlined the stakes of an upcoming special issue in Social Dynamics in which contributors attend to various ideas in J.M. Coetzee’s paper, *The mind of apartheid: Geoffrey Cronje*. Truscott considers the minor as infant, arguing that infant care is always lodged in the coagulations of power. In thinking these coagulations, van Bever Donker considers minority as produced through reified difference. He poses the question, through a reading of Coetzee, of how we might go about undoing race without reproducing it. In his lecture, John Mowitt also attended to what he refers to as the effects of immanent alterity. Mowitt conducted his talk in musical terms to think the minor in relation to the subaltern. In light of Gayatri Spivak’s question and paper: *Can the subaltern speak?,* Mowitt asks whether the minor speaks and if so, in what voicing does it do so?

The minor came up in many guises – the child, the subaltern, the other, the biopolitical body, the body as prosthesis, tool or commodity – and the human body seemed to exist in a shifting and difficult to define location or terrain, which also appeared as a kind of skin or membrane with lived ontological experience, for example in a discussion of race as both a concept *and* a lived experience. Heidi Grunebaum addressed this theme in her presentation in which she spoke of partition, lines, and zones. Grunebaum spoke not only of partition but also of its splinters - how difference and race are created and transgressed in moments of lived experience. This kind of liminal body is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the form of the puppet, a body explicitly present in both metaphorical and physical form at the winter school. For Aja Marneweck, puppetry’s power lies in its “potential for intermediality and interdisciplinarity”, in its existence on thresholds which allow for a kind of “biopoetics”, in that “in the act of crossing a border we find temporary emancipation”. Emma Minkley looked to the practice of drawing in its relation to puppetry as a migrant and place-making practice capable of locating and reassessing the marginal, fugitive, dispossessed or dislocated subject. This investigation of surfaces through a “tactile unconscious”, marks of the hand consciously and unconsciously made present a definition of the subject that is blurred, transient and processual - a means of moving between subject and object, work and play, stillness and mobility that comes about through tactility. How do we, as Rui Assubuji has asked, escape the categorisation and classification of disciplines? In this regard he asks if the act of documentary filmmaking can be spontaneous. Could it shift out of the rigid confines of its discipline and start to become more watery, more liquid; and indeed, this is something to be asked of all disciplines. Can we bleed them further together, merge theory and practice – can we become more unruly with them? There is a resonance, both in the form of sound, and in the form of touch – touching and being touched – that reverberates through the panels and lectures, and through the three designated “minor arts” of puppetry, sound and documentary film; that is, of subject and object, being and unbeing, self and other, that never quite settles at one certainty. And it is this space which holds both anxiety and productivity. As van Bever Donker puts it, this terrain produces both subjects and leeways to interact with those subjects, while simultaneously, reading a subject can allow you to shift the terrain. Reading through the minor thus allowed a shifting of both subjects and terrains.

Introducing the cinema panel, Francois Verster explained that in his practice, and the practice of multiple other documentary film makers, making film itself becomes a site for producing knowledge and questions. For Kara Dell this is a process of “unseeing”, where stories “come alive”, become “unruly”, the minor subjects taking on new life within the context of a film. However, Khalid Shamis has pointed out that documentary film, as a minor discipline itself, relies heavily on the minor subject in a kind of “visual gentrificiation”, in alignment with the commonly cited dictum of “giving voice to the voiceless”. He says, “the commodification of the minor as an image becomes another profitable tool in our visual repertoire.” Similarly, Fernanda Pinto De Almeida has referred to how aesthetic forms are utilised to create and sustain racial categories, in this case in the public ordering of film viewership in apartheid-era South Africa – both in the film itself, and the spaces or places of projection. She looks to how this divides racially and thus eliminates the potential for collective cinematic experience.

A discussion of the “everyday”, particularly in relation to apartheid, allowed an opening into this fraught terrain and its relation to passion, desire, and the rational use of the irrational. Truscott brought up the seemingly banal, symbolic exchanges of apartheid – the tactile, the nonverbal, particularly within the “tactile signs” in the labour of caring and cleaning in empirical mothercraft – while Grunebaum drew attention to “residues” as the truest proof of a thing’s existence, highlighting the significance of duration and memory in defining the present. What is kept and carried along, and what is cut, discarded, and left behind for good? The seemingly arbitrarily or coincidentally constituted relationship of the “neighbour”, brought into conversation in different instances by Ajay Skaria and Siba Grovogui, questioned how we define the other, how we choose to deal with the other – with love, friendship, sympathy? Who do we *allow* to be our neighbour? Grovogui says of sympathy, that “I give of myself in order to get what I want from others”. Here Grovogui has pointed to how “disciplines shape our sentiment”, and it is perhaps through crossing, sorting, cutting the disciplines we can also reshape our sentiments, to “give of ourselves” differently, in order to receive differently, or perhaps, not to receive – to not respond in the way we are trained to do. Here the puppet, as a figure of commotion and co-motion, presents a means of touching without taking, a figure which is integral to a discussion of race.

Puppetry, according to van Bever Donker, “troubles concepts of object, body, stasis, kinetics, skin, and all the major discourses that hinge on these in the forms of race, gender, class through a system of marks.” As a means of rethinking the human, puppetry questions how we might conceive of the kinetic object and puppetry as sites to read and comprehend the dynamics of change. Tito Lorifice explored puppetry through a greater integration of the puppet with the puppeteer through the shadow, a transient form which is simultaneously subject and not subject, and through the puppet that is inherent in the human form itself. Lorefice says that the puppet has always existed with the human being, in examples such as the ritual instrument, projections to other dimensions, communications, and games. Kass Banning further spoke to notions of “marked” and shadowed bodies in relation to race and representation in her reflections on Isaac Julien’s evocative film *Once Again… (Statues Never Die)*, which juxtaposes the human body with classical sculpture.

Within the lectures and panels there are also myriad suggestions and provocations for modes of minor practice or doing – readings, methods, practices - across disciplines which, being more than just techniques, *produce* something and further present a focus on “methods that are not in line with how things ought to be done.” This is also to ask what does art *do* as a way of knowing? How do resistance and change come about through art? The surprise of improvisational music practice – what might be found, dug up – was suggested as a mode of “failing better”, a rehearsal in real life, and it was noted that living in exile is a kind of constant improvisation. Here we could look to Neo Muyanga’s notion of the “tear”, or perhaps the filmic “rough cut”, as Khalid Shamis poses, as opposed to aspiring towards the pristine composition or image. How do we create our own “rough cuts” or unruly readings? Shamis suggests the metaphor of the “market” as a place to find and cultivate minor activities which include hustling, handling and sorting. So it is perhaps to focus on what are deemed “minor activities” or methods that could start to move us between disciplines, but perhaps also time or duration which can be utilised as a method – through, for example, the “urgencies” or “immediacies” of trying to capture the spontaneous moment in documentary film. Similarly, those working in sound act, as Aidan Erasmus, pointed out, as “workers in frequencies and intensities”, where sound and voice become a technology for thinking and listening. Muyanga looks to “uprisings”, songs made in protest, while Reza Khota turns to “minor” tonalities in music practice as scholarship.

The practice of “arranging” was brought up by Sinazo Mtshemla in relation to the “not yet” ordered, and in this case is an archival practice of ordering and making sense, but is also a practice in music – arranging notes, arranging voices, sounds. So this minor activity could, similarly to cutting, handling, sorting, lead us somewhere new. Here there is an element of surprise, opening a container onto a disorganised assortment of items within an archive which cannot be touched, and the expectations of what it might contain. Thozama April has noted that the female subject often remains “locked” in the archive, for example in the histories and lives of female ANC members, and it is only through minor references *across disciplines* that these frameworks can be pieced back together. These micro-histories could not or would not exist in only one discipline, and it is through these minor articulations of the archive that they are brought back to life. This interdisciplinary thinking is further expanded in April’s collaborative work with Itumuleng Wa Lehulere and Luyanda Nogodlwana, Siphokazi Mpofu and Sipho Ngxola of Ukwanda Puppetry Collective, who are currently working on a puppetry production based on April’s Doctoral thesis on the life of Charlotte Maxeke. Wa Lehulere has posited this play as a means of “reimagining and unmuting” Maxeke through puppetry, an interesting mix of image and sound, giving voice to an inanimate archive through the act of writing (thesis) into material aesthetic form, which is then given voice through the human form of the puppet. Ukwanda’s current focus was on Maxeke’s role in the Jubilee choir, the collective choir becoming a single puppet character manipulated by one puppeteer, blurring the sense of self and other, a kind of “being singular plural”.

Amir Mufti’s writings have served as an entry point to thinking *the minor as disruption*. In his text, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, Mufti, states that his understanding of minority experience is “as a site for the critique of dominant conceptions and narratives of collective life.” Lebogang Mokwena’s talk on Ubuhle beadwork echoed this notion, by challenging the view of beadwork as a minor art - as so-called ‘mere craft.’ Mokwena posited instead that beadwork constitutes a site of collective aesthetic practice which offers a space for socio-political commentary, rooted in rural-based livelihoods. Mokwena noted the collective doing of beadwork as a moment in which the individualism of the prevailing neoliberal order is halted, along with the suspension of economic objectives. The function of economic principles in the constellations of power was a recurring theme in the presentations at the Winter School. This is a theme which relates closely with the interest many had in negotiating between individual and collective, considering various sorts of individualistic and collectivist prescriptions and practices.

Rosetta Sifa Vuninga’s consideration of the relation between criminal networks and NGO’s in Bukavu, the Democratic Republic of Congo offers us a practical case in which we can wrestle with the difficulty of the individualised subject, told that it is through individual action that change must be made, who is confronted at every turn with organisations that reify difference and abet criminal engagement rather than preventing it, or offering a way out. Here, we are called upon to reckon with the difficulty of navigating a landscape in which available collectives fail to undo neoliberalism. We are confronted with an idea of the individual as minor – a minority which we can also see as constructed in the wake of widely proliferated neoliberal responsibilisation. Not only does this make the lone individual responsible for the massive failures of economic failure (such as recessions), but it also, as Luxon addressed in her lecture, brings our attention to the alienation (or *alienasso*) which comes about in the wake of this radical individualisation.

Samuel Sadian presented parts of an intellectual history of neoliberalism which aids in better understanding the emergence of this individualistic and economy-driven decision making. As Suren Pillay discussed, Sadian attended to the question of the minor in a slightly different way, by enquiring into the large role (perhaps the overrepresentation) of South Africans in international neoliberal thought collectives. That is, the minor not as relegated, but as exercising power. In thinking the answer to such a question, presentations by Eve Patten and Patricia Hayes were instructive. Through the approach of visual history Hayes considers the question of a colonial oppressive minority, asking of us whether colonial subjects are minor or subaltern. This is a question which Hayes addresses by conceiving of the minor as produced through a kind of assimilation. That is, not only in the production of difference, but through the folding of this difference. As Hayes puts it, in this we can see the falling out of history of the minor. Patten discusses the other side of the colonial as minor through the question of how majority and minority operate together. Through the analysis of British and Irish literature, Patten remarks on the paradox of minor literature as that which offers coded ideological positions but in which authors self-identify as minor. This other side is of *self-minoritisation*, with specific regard to the English aspiration to minority status which Patten remarks is an anthropological retreat, a self-decolonisation, and an instantiation of enclavism.

Director of the Centre for Humanities Research, Heidi Grunebaum closed the 2022 Winter School by thanking and appreciating the presenters and organisers.