

## Winter School in the Humanities, 8 – 11 August 2023

### On THE AFTER and a Reading Programme

#### Report on Winter School 2023

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#### Introduction

There was a wall. It did not look important... – Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*.

While we prepared for our first seminar at this year's annual Winter School, the terrestrial borders of the city shifted. A line of minivan taxis, strategically placed along the N2 artery, brought traffic to a standstill, severing the already fragile connection between the city and its adjacent working-class areas. In the city, the border appeared clearly as a genre of inscription, much as Eoin McNamee suggested when he crafted images of a divided Ireland. Opening our 2023 CHR Winter School, McNamee described the writing of the border as one of dystopia, dissolution, and wreckage.

*"You do not think of a border as a place. It isn't a map location. There are no co-ordinates."*

The description was close to home: the taxi strike left the borders of Cape Town shrouded in dust and smoke. Buses were set ablaze as we gathered in the city's Humanities Hub, with kids out of school and supermarkets, banks, small fisheries, and commerce shut their doors. Our first day of Winter School began as the city borders fell into silence. The strike ran its course and we continued to consider the after in political crossroads beside our own.



Day 2 of Winter School, driving to campus and back to the city.

Represented in this year's programme were several partners, including the University of Fort Hare through its National Research Foundation South African Research Chair for Social Change; the Interdisciplinary Centre for the Study of Global Change (ICGC), University of Minnesota (UMN);

scholars from the University of Virginia (UVA); and the Trinity Oscar Wilde Centre, Trinity College Dublin (TCD), Puppet Theatre Department of the National University of St Martin UNSAM, Argentina; Jackman Humanities Institute (JHI), University of Toronto (UofT); and University of the Witwatersrand (WITS).

During this year's winter school, speakers and guests discussed what it means to inhabit a "post-" when time itself serves as a border. Several critiques have pointed to the temporal break implied by the prefix "post" in terms like the "post-apartheid" and the "postcolonial". These critiques have parsed differences in understandings of the "post" by inserting a hyphen: "post-apartheid". But might there be a method that could help us think the unthought of the many "afters" we inhabit – the "afters" of slavery, apartheid, coloniality, or racial capital to think their aftermaths and afterlives? Is there a framework adequate to such a concept of "after"? Can the "after" itself be a method?

With the emergence of postcoloniality as a theory and strategy, the "after" of coloniality was raised as one that has yet to be exhausted. The 2023 Centre for Humanities Research (CHR) Winter School sought to investigate what is at stake in different and perhaps even competing conceptual framings of "the after"; doing so by reading into the different circuits of *afterness*: as a question of time, rupture and continuity, of path or direction, as a sense of textuality, a mode of subjectivity and subjectivation, and the connections between the political and the aesthetic, as well as the unconscious.

When Qadri Ismail argues, in his *Culture and Eurocentrism*, that postcoloniality must be "re-charged", he does not only suggest that the method of postcolonial theory needs to find a new energy in its critique; that it must gather itself. Nor does he mean in any simple way that it needs a new mandate, a new focus, or a re-focus. Instead, it seems to us, that what is being called for is a re-calibration of its method, a re-calibration at the level of reading. The "after" as a lens, the "after" as signalling a way, we suggest, to orient rather than limit our intervention.

This report considers each presentation as being both *about* the After and a meditation on the After as a method of thought. The attention to seeing and witnessing and using the border as genre of literary and visual inscription began with Eoin McNamee. Jack Chen considered the merits of the past as a technology of ghosting through a meditation on mediation. Nancy Luxon approached the conditions onto which the interpretation of the aftermath hinges on a prescription of authority over suturing and translating the sediments of the past that often manifest themselves as wounds. For Ajay Skaria, the abiding challenge in constituting the after along radical democratic contours necessitates collective individuality: that is, individuality embedded in relations of inherent equality, which, thinking through Arun Saldhana's eco-humanism, also amounts to a post-humanist ethic. Finally, working with the animated impulse of Tito Loreface's puppet dramaturgy, the after is neither meditation nor method of thought but, fundamentally, rehearsed, staged, but often also improvised daily performance of freedom.

### **An education in anticipation**

Eion Mcnamee introduced us to the aftermath of a partitioned Ireland, where the craft of border-making, a colonial writing etched onto the landscape, sought not only to seize, and encroach upon

land, he said, but also our imagination. Borders render people “unstoried”, leaving their “dreaming worthless, unilluminated.” The following talks approached our relationship with historical time and the facticity of a past that reveals itself to us in hindsight. We peered through the porous borders we inhabit and that make us feel “trapped in history” and to have history trapped in us, as James Baldwin put it, as well as the associated spectral forms of such entrapment.

The task of the postcolonial university, as Premesh Lalu asked, is to consider such entrapments. In this sense, Premesh asked, what might the figure of the puppet do in the domain of theory, if we understand theory as an act of beholding and witnessing and, consequently, making sense of the world? After all, puppets afford us the examples for experimentation; they stand as an invitation to rehearse and explain – perhaps through creative and imaginative figuration – our theories and concepts. Ultimately, and to borrow from Skaria (see below), “conscience is nothing but the body: conscience means putting the body on the line through action.” If so, thinking of ourselves as engaged in high-stakes puppet dramaturgy is to always put our bodies on the line through meaningful practice and action; consciously enlisting ourselves as creative agents engaged in world-making and constituting the after.

For Premesh, race relies on an institutionalised grid of intelligibility that also informs the interpretive frame of perception and of ‘experience.’ The call for a form of aesthetic education is the call to bring forth and to overcome the ways in which race has coded our conception of educational and political crisis. Apartheid, as a model constructed on a bifurcation of grand and petty apartheid, trapped us in a circular causality in which petty apartheid, rather than serving as a ground for exciting political tempers, drew the subject into a cycle of perpetual violence. The education of/for race produced forms of docile labour and disciplinary existence coterminous with the needs of a society of technological control. This mechanism reduced education to a training of the senses, modelled on the two-fold project of *Volkerpsychologie* and psychotechnics.

The current post-apartheid predicament is the debris of this project of race. The current racial distributions of literacy reproduce the modernisation of the project of race at the institutional site of the university. As a figure that configured the techno-genesis of race through the so-called poor white and native question, Verwoerd sought to produce a modern concept of race that would not only give intelligibility to apartheid but also forge a biopolitics of the future.

### **Seeking refuge, writing After**

It follows then that the questions of the after relies on technological forms of inscription.

When Eoin McNamee started his writing workshop, which began after the Winter School, he suggested he could not teach us how to write, only how to *see*. This was not a suggestion as much as an indictment: we cannot even begin to write about the borders into which we are deeply implicated without learning how to see them or turn them legible in ways that move beyond their own political terms. Hence border is not “the backdrop against which [human] morality was acted out”, as much as the abyss, a land that has been emptied.

This position resonates with the evocative “meditation on alienation and claiming home”, the piece extended the Winter School’s deliberations beyond the human and the temporalities that define human time. Kitso Lelliott’s *To Dream a More Livable Place* attempts to confront past and ongoing systems through which black bodies are dislodged from “space, time, and History”: a conscious “contestation against negation”. In invoking early twentieth century land dispossession in Southern Africa, Lelliott’s piece insisted that there is always a landing on some piece of earth, notwithstanding the patches from which many have historically been violently and irrecoverably wrenched.

Nevertheless, and as Arun Saldanha reminded us in his talk titled “After man: earth, capital, race”, to think the After is also to imagine and transcend the co-constitution of racial capitalist exploitation and environmental devastating. For Saldanha, transcending (and perhaps even undoing) Enlightenment and Modernity’s conceptions of “man” holds the promise to reconstruct relations between plant, economy, and humanity along more just lines.

The piece of earth on which safe landing will happen, its texture and condition, as the touchpoint after dispossession or in the wake of the rising threat of fluvial deluge, Saldanha argued, depends on a reworking of the earth, race, and capital triad. Thus, it is not just relations between and among humans – in the past, present, and future of humanity – that is important. Crucially, Saldanha underscored, a reworking of the relation between the planet and humans must necessarily undo past and present stratifications that racialised some populations and environments since structural racism and its effects permeate the global ecological crisis and the asymmetry in its geographic distribution and material consequences.



Berni Searle, *Enfold* from the ‘Seeking Refuge’ series, 2008. At the Norval Foundation

## How the After comes Before

In his talk Jack Chen mobilised a constellation of images where past and present merge, creating an aesthetic realm of the “necropolitical” after. Chen centres his talk on the pivotal figure of ghosts, binding us to current and reminiscent images of the past by their ‘spectral potentiality’ and whose presence-absence forge a dynamic tension between representation and mediation. Chen different movements lead us through a dizzying but captivating waltz, oscillating between medieval literary tropes and the approach to modern electronic media as precursors to our historical imagination and its ghostly possibilities.

Chen’s persuasive argument lies in the ability of ghosts to navigate the tensions withing history and its lingering After by anchoring it in the past, a tension he does not attempt to resolve. Instead, he inflects this tension with Hegel’s philosophical notion of historical sublation (*Aufhebung*): a dynamic interplay of preservation and transcendence upon which dialectical change and historical continuity rely.

Similarly, Chen approaches the historical present as emerging through the continuity and sublation of the dead, drawing inspiration from Derrida’s hauntology. He employs this concept to interpret two medieval poems, the memento mori from the Anglo-Normal De Lisle Psalter and an anecdote about Tang Emperor Taizong, articulating sovereignty, death, and temporality. Here, the “After” emerges as a poetic condition, merging different forms of historical consciousness to form to convey “pastness”. Chen explores the entanglement of the dead and of death as co-constitutive of our political imagination, following Hans Ruin, by capturing the ontological quality of death.

Chen’s interpretation characterises poetry as a technology of historical mediation and of sublation, akin to modern electronic media. He draws aesthetic parallels between the phonographic and cinematic as technologies of inscription by emphasising their reliance on mediating between the living and the dead. In this, sublation appears as a “necropolitical foundation” of history, one in which the ghost does not point us to the facticity of death, but the continuity of the dead as a form of historical consciousness materialised in “the construction of monuments, memorial spaces, and heritage sites.”

He concludes by suggesting that electronic media, in its analog form, represents the twentieth-century inheritance of the ghost poem. This resonates more closely in films where images of the terrifying and the mundane converge in ghostly form. Chen suggested the film *Ringu* by Nakata hideo (1998) where the character Sadako materialises out of television to terrorise the living.



Still of Ringo (Nakata Hideo, 1998)

Chen suggest that the character Sadako's detachment of the videotape and her bodily intrusion into life through the medium of the television constitutes a form of analog transmission. In this, the techno-Dasein of the ghost not only defies the physics of our reality, but gives sublation a new ghostly form, drawing as much inspiration from the past than potential future forms of mediation.

Jack Chen's seminar was the perfect segue to Kitso Lelliott's exhibition opening and artist talk, 'To dream a more livable place...a performance in anticipation'. A former postdoctoral fellow and artist in residence at the Centre for Humanities Research at the UWC and currently a senior lecturer at Wits University, Lelliott offered a multi-layered, audio-visual installation which explored "how one might be in space and be in time after a rupture".

### **Trauma history and trauma *as* history**

Nancy Luxon prompts us to reconsider how modern notions of "trauma" hinge the intricate connection between historical events and their aftermath, which informs a language with which to translate experience of physical and mental injury. These experiences are often not readily available to the senses, and require acts of translation that rely on authoritative modes of inscription. Not only do writing or speaking constitute the historical experience of trauma, but a consideration of blanking out or silencing which echoes of Trouillot's philosophy of history. Here the ghostly forms Jack Cheng alludes to also appear: in Nancy's words, "the after is a different kind of story or account. Maybe it gains its force through a contrast to the Before times, times that we are not yet done with but still in the process of undoing."

Luxon invites us to think that what has congealed historically as "trauma" relies on variously connecting historical event and senses of injury, regardless of how the historical reconstructions of these events themselves participate in yielding injury. For this reason, she does not offer us a pivotal image of what a way out of trauma would look like. Instead, she offers us what Benjamin called a *denkbild*, or thought-image, of a buffer-zone that is however not a border, in the sense offered by Eoin or a space of analogue transmission as Chen suggested. Instead, what we offered is a spatial materialisation of the method of moving in obliquely, inspired by the intervention proposed by Frantz Fanon: that of a waystation.

*“As a buffer zone, the hospital intervenes in that dehiscence that opens up from the non-coincidence of colonial phantasmatic and their own materiality.”*

To look at trauma in the archives is not only to bear witness to violence post-facto, but to engage in a process of collective world-making: taking the past to task as binding and the future as shared horizon to new modes of sociality, obligation, and representation.

It was possible to consider one response to Luxon’s concluding observation that we need new modes of sociality, obligation, and representation, in Ajay Skaria’s contribution titled *Conscience and [Radical] democracy: Thinking with Ambedkar*. Skaria outlined two ways the Indian legal scholar, economist, and social and political leader, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar’s concept of conscience carries the potentiality for a radical democracy. Firstly, in the process of conscience formation, dominant traditions in political philosophy “configure the person in terms of individualism” where the who is a unique subject, catapulted out of universalism.

By contrast, Ambedkar held a position resolutely opposed to individualism. Instead, according to Skaria, Ambedkar’s understanding of conscience formation entailed crafting *individuality* as “a foundational aspect that education should cultivate” where individuality personifies conscience. Accordingly, having and exercising one’s conscience is about assuming “personal responsibility for a law we freely choose and by which we freely abide – enacting it freely.” Skaria argued that Ambedkar’s opposition to religious dogma, in his case Hinduism, was based on its upholding of the caste system, which binds adherents to an ascribed rather than freely chosen belief system and social position. Thus, the problem with religion is that “it creates rules, which does not demand conscience and principled action on the part of its adherents.”

If, as Luxon explained, we need to find new foundations for and modes of social relation in the aftermath of colonial trauma – and this might include radical democracy – then, to borrow from Skaria’s reading of Ambedkar, we have to formulate the core principles – rather than rules – out of which conscience-based, free action institutes distributed people’s collective power; that is, “a sociality of individuality.” And in the context of a sociality of individuals (rather than say castes or races or ethnicities), Skaria further elaborated, there is the possibility of establishing relations of fraternity and friendship, both of which presuppose and operate from a place of fundamental equality.

## **AFTERWORD**

We conclude by considering the after in terms of Tito Lorefice’s Winter School contribution on puppet dramaturgy. Rather than a contribution on “The After in Dramaturgy”, his invitation might well be how to deploy dramaturgy, and specifically puppet dramaturgy, to practice, perform, and embody the imagined and desired, liberated afters. The act of imagining, embodying, experimenting with, and playing out alternative creative postscripts amid coloniality’s ruins. After all, and as Lorefice reminded us, “puppet dramaturgy is imaginary improvisation; creating an entire universe”: an ideational and material worldmaking. This requires us to see ourselves as a trinity of playwright, puppet, and

puppeteer: the conjecturers, the physical manipulators, and the performative puppets we animate through our manipulations; not of others' designs and scripts but of our own radical imaginations.



Kitso Lelliot, 'To dream a more livable place...a performance in anticipation'.

Who, how, and why would we be if we fully imagined and understood ourselves as free and unencumbered by coloniality's designs of and for us. To paraphrase the title to Irving Goffman's seminal text, how and why would we present ourselves in everyday life. We might turn to puppet dramaturgy to sate the hunger of which Luxon spoke, which hunger expresses itself as the archival quests we embark on and the empty spaces we encounter where no coherent – if any – archival slivers exist. If, as Luxon posits, this is ultimately a hunger for imagination, then the explicit, unself-conscious, and daring worldmaking of dramaturgy with its central figure of the puppet might facilitate a reanimation of the project to remake the world, based, as Luxon insists we must, “on new modes of sociality, obligation, and representation.”

Although concerned with following Ambedkar in crafting radical democratic futures, Ajay Skaria's starting point on consciousness is useful for thinking about the relational transformation in response to contemporary socio-ecological crises. As he pointed out, rather than formulating and sticking to a series of rules by which to live, Ambedkar's work, emphasising the principles that ought to guide social action founded on equality, encourages us to formulate principles that inform conscious rather than mechanical, habitual action. Acting on – and indeed being conscious – of foundational principles encompasses a capacity to assume individual responsibility. As he noted in the question-and-answer segment of his talk, we should approach democracy in non-statist terms, recognising it, to follow Kierkegaard, as a distributed tremor felt by every *one* and every *thing*. Consequently, this “enables practicing democracy in relation to the non-human ... rendering the envisioned “after” possible.” To practice freedom, then, in the after, is to do so with intra- and inter-species sociality and care.

With the emergence of postcoloniality as a theory and strategy, the question of the “after” of coloniality was raised as one that has yet to be exhausted. In our reading programme and Winter School we want to investigate what is at stake in different and differing conceptual framings of “the after”. A number of critiques have pointed to the temporal break implied by the prefix “post” in terms like the “postapartheid” and the “postcolonial”. Sometimes the critiques have parsed



differences in understandings of the “post” through inserting a hyphen: “post-apartheid”. In the Winter School and through our reading programme, we wish to read into the different itineraries of afterness: as a question of time, rupture and continuity, of path or direction, as a sense of textuality, a mode of subjectivity and subjectivation, and of the connections between the political and the aesthetic, as well as the unconscious.

Is there something like a method that could help us to think the unthought of the many “afters” we inhabit – the “afters” of slavery, of apartheid, coloniality, or racial capital to think their aftermaths and afterlives? From within the humanities, what does it mean to “come after” apartheid, coloniality? Can thinking the difficulty of this question – the humanities are not outside of these, they share an episteme – allow us to more adequately “learn to learn”? To invent while in the “climate” of afterness, the weather, (in reference to Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake*) in which we find ourselves. Disaster *and* Possibility. The “after” also holds a different itinerary along which we think and read in the manner of; or following along; pursuing, and tracking. After Fanon, so to speak, we may “apprehend” the “morbid universe,” the “network of complexes,” as he puts it, that colonialism left in its wake. The psychoanalytic is one method with which the problem of the “after” in postrepressive societies has been approached evoking a quality of time, and a psychic state in a complex and uncanny relation with the past, one of repetition, *Nachträglichkeit*, or afterwardsness, where a “memory trace [*Erinnerungsspur*] of a scene”, in Freud’s terms, can always be “activated”, or, in Fanon’s, detonated “too early... or too late.”

Is there a method adequate to such a concept of “after”? Can the “after” be a method? When Qadri Ismail argues, in his *Culture and Eurocentrism* that postcoloniality must be “re-charged”, he does not only suggest that the method of postcolonial theory needs to find a new energy in its critique, that it must, in a sense, gather itself; nor does he mean in any simple way that it needs a new mandate, a new focus, or re-focus. Rather, it seems to us, that what is being called for is a re-calibration of its method, a re-calibration at the level of reading. The “after” as method, the “after” as signalling a way in which we suggest, should orient our intervention.

## **On THE AFTER**

### **Reading Programme Schedule:**

6 April	Christina Sharpe, <i>In the Wake</i>
1 June	Qadri Ismail, “Exiting Europe, Exciting Postcoloniality” Spivak et al “Debate on Postmodernism” ( <a href="#">youtube link</a> )
8 June	Eduard Glissant, <i>Poetics of Relation</i> (selections)

	Blanchot, "In the instant of my Death"
13 July	Ama Ata Aidoo, <i>Our Sister Killjoy</i> Stuart Hall, "When was the postcolonial? Thinking at the limit"
27 July	Ama Ata Aidoo, <i>Our Sister Killjoy</i> Marriott, "Whither Fanon"

### Winter School Programme 2023 -- 'After'

**Dates: 8th -11th August**

**Venue: Greatmore Humanities Hub, 66 Greatmore Street, Woodstock**

#### Represented institutions

- Centre for Humanities Research (CHR), University of the Western Cape (UWC)
- NRF SARChI Chair for Social Change, University of Fort Hare
- Interdisciplinary Centre for the study of Global Change (ICGC), University of Minnesota (UMN)
- University of Virginia (UVA)
- Trinity Oscar Wilde Centre, Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
- Puppet Theatre Department of the National University of St Martin UNSAM, Argentina.
- Jackman Humanities Institute (JHI), University of Toronto (UofT)
- University of the Witwatersrand (WITS)

#### Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> August 2023

10:00 - 11:30 Seminar: ***The Problem of the Problematization of Race***, Prof Premesh Lalu

11:30 - 12:00 Coffee/Tea break

12:00 - 13:30 Break-away session for fellows and faculty

13:30 - 14:30 Lunch

14:30 - 16:30 Lecture: ***The after, in puppet dramaturgy***, Prof Tito Lorefice

17:00 - 18:00 Walk on the Promenade

18:00 Welcome dinner

#### Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> August

10:00 - 12:00 Viewing of Bernie Searle's retrospective exhibition with Norval curator and former CHR fellow, Dr Phokeng Setai

12:00 - 13:00 Artist talk tbc

14:00 - 15:00 Lunch at Greatmore

15:30 - 17:00 Public Lecture of the Charlotte Maxeke-Mary Robinson Research Chair: ***Sequins, Pearls and Amobarbital: the Border in Ireland as unconcluded space***, Prof Eoin McNamee

#### Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2023

10:00-12:30 Seminar: ***The Archives of Colonial Trauma: Politics and Psychiatry in North Africa*** with Prof Nancy Luxon

12:30 - 14:00 Lunch

14:00 - 15:30 Keynote: ***The Ghost as After***, Prof Jack Chen

15:30 - 16:00 Coffee/Tea Break

16:00 - 17:30 Kitso Lelliot's exhibition opening and artist talk

**Friday 11th August 2023**

09:00 - 09:30 Arrival coffee and tea

10:00 - 11:30 Lecture: *Conscience and Democracy: Thinking with Ambedkar*, Prof Ajay Skaria

11:00 - 11:30 Coffee/Tea Break

11:30- 13:00 Break-away session for fellows and faculty

13:00 - 14:00 Lunch

14:15 - 15:45 Lecture: *After man: earth, capital, race*, Prof Arun Saldanha

15:45 - 16:00 Words in closing Prof Karen Brown

18:30 Closing Reception at Greatmore