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Writing the World from an African Metropolis

Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall

There is a manner about Johannesburg, it makes the impression of a metropolis.
Sarah G. Millin, *The South Africans*

This special issue of *Public Culture* is, and is not, about Africa. It is, and is not, about Johannesburg. It is an exercise in writing the worldliness—or the being-in-the-world—of contemporary African life forms.

Carol Breckenridge, the former editor of the journal, first suggested that *Public Culture* run a special issue on Africa. The current editor and executive editor, Beth Povinelli and Dilip Gaonkar, not only vigorously endorsed the project but also helped in shaping it intellectually. In particular, ongoing discussions with Beth Povinelli in Johannesburg and New York enriched the issue's rationale. These discussions also prompted a wider conversation about writing the world from the global South that extended beyond the ambit of this particular issue. *Public Culture*'s editorial committee provided challenging comments on, and constructive criticisms of, each of the essays. Kaylin Goldstein has been a superb interlocutor and manager of the production process. We have benefited greatly from James Rizzo's copyediting skills. The Witwatersrand Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) has been an extraordinarily conducive environment from which to produce this issue. We owe a great intellectual debt to all of our colleagues, specifically Deborah Posel, Jon Hyslop, Liz Walker, Ivor Chipkin, Graeme Reid, Irma Duplessis, Tom Odhiambo, and Robert Muponde. We would also like to thank Arjun Appadurai, Carol Breckenridge, Paul Gilroy, Dominique Malaquais, Vyjayanthi Rao, and Vron Ware for their intellectual companionship during a semester spent at Yale University. Isabel Hofmeyr, Jon Hyslop, and Lindsay Bremner all commented on the introduction. Funding for the images in this issue has come from a grant from AIRE-Développement, a French institute for research on development based in Paris.

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Life in Motion

To write, said Maurice Blanchot, is the same thing as to form. To a large extent, to write is to bring to the surface something that is not yet there or that is there only as latent, as potential. Following Jean-Luc Nancy, we take the world to be "the infinite resolution of sense into fact and fact into sense"—the ongoing negotiation, that is, between what is and what could be.[1] To write the world from Africa or to write Africa into the world, or as a fragment thereof, is a compelling and perplexing task. When we were asked to edit a special issue of *Public Culture* on Africa, it quickly became clear to us that producing such an issue without a profound reinterrogation of Africa as a sign in modern formations of knowledge would have little value, both for *Public Culture*'s readers and for us as editors.

Why? Because *Africa* as a name, as an idea, and as an object of academic and public discourse has been, and remains, fraught. It is fraught in ways that go beyond even the paradigm of orientalism first introduced by Edward Said to speak to the staging of the difference of the non-West from the West. Indeed, Africa is not only perpetually caught and imagined within a web of difference and absolute otherness.[2] More radically, the sign is fraught because Africa so often ends up epitomizing the intractable, the mute, the abject, or the other-worldly.[3] So overdetermined is the nature of this sign that it sometimes seems almost impossible to crack, to throw it open to the full spectrum of meanings and implications that other places and other human experiences enjoy, provoke, and inhabit.[4] The obstinacy with which scholars in particular (including African scholars) continue to describe Africa as an object *apart from the world*, or as a failed and incomplete example of something else, perpetually underplays the embeddedness in multiple elsewheres of which the continent actually speaks.

There are many explanations for the failure of contemporary scholarship to describe the novelty and originality of this continent in all its complexity, to pay sufficient attention to that which is unknown about it, or to find order in the apparent mess of its past and the chaos of its present. It suffices to mention a few. First is the fact that the ways in which societies compose and invent themselves in the present (the *creativity of practice*) is always ahead of the knowledge produced

1. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 9.
2. V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
3. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1–4.
4. Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 239–73.

about them. In addition, these compositional acts always move in multiple and unforeseen directions. What binds societies, made up of multiple assemblages and disjunctive syntheses, is some kind of artifice they come to believe in.[5] They have, thus, the capacity to continually produce something new and singular, as yet unthought, which cannot always be accommodated within established conceptual systems and languages.

When it comes to scholarship on Africa, the encounter with what we cannot yet "determine" because it has not yet become or will never be definite—an encounter with indeterminacy, provisionality, and the contingent—assumes the proportions of an epistemological abyss. It is not simply that life changes rapidly and vast domains of human struggle and achievement are hardly the object of documentation, archiving, or empirical description—and even less so of satisfactory narrative or interpretive understanding. It is also that uncertainty and turbulence, instability and unpredictability, and rapid, chronic, and multidirectional shifts are the social forms taken, in many instances, by daily experience.[6]

Yet the conceptual categories with which to account for social velocity, the power of the unforeseen and of the *unfolding*, are in need of refinement. So too is the language with which to describe people's relentless determination to negotiate conditions of turbulence and to introduce order and predictability into their lives. There have been limits to the capacity of the epistemological imagination to pose questions about how we know what we know and what that knowledge is grounded upon; to draw on multiple models of time so as to avoid one-way causal models; to open a space for broader comparative undertakings; and to account for the multiplicity of the pathways and trajectories of change. Where empirical work and local studies are carried out, generally they are poorly informed theoretically. As fresh questions emerge and new dramas take shape, the social sciences manifest a surprising lack of openness toward the humanities. Historical and political scholarship is not combined with fundamental philosophical inquiry, and this has led to a dramatic "thinning" of "the social." The latter is still understood as a matter of *order* and *contract* rather than as the locus of *experiment* and *artifice*.

5. Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

6. In such contexts, as Jane I. Guyer argues, "people's decisions have to be deeply and intelligently reasonable without, however, benefiting from the luxury of being based on calculation of discrete and stable variables (as per rational choice theories). Temporal horizons may have to shift suddenly as new configurations of power, price, and plausible social action form and reform." Introduction to *Money Struggles and City Life: Devaluation in Ibadan and Other Urban Centers in Southern Nigeria, 1986–1996*, ed. Jane Guyer, La Ray Denzer, and Adigun A. B. Agbaye (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2002), xi.

A second reason for the failure of contemporary scholarship to describe Africa's complexity is the relegation of the continent to the twin provinces of anthropology and development studies. To a large extent, in the division of intellectual labor inherited from the nineteenth century, both disciplines constitute sciences of alterity and difference. If one of anthropology's many tasks is to understand forms of originality, development studies are mainly concerned with the pragmatics of prescription and the taxonomies of social engineering, state building, and good governance. In spite of recent efforts in anthropology, in particular, to use concepts that allow for a creative tension between subject and object (the reflexive turn), these two disciplines' foundational assumptions are still the unconscious belief that particular modes of describing reality are appropriate to "modern" societies, on the one hand, and to nonliterate, underdeveloped, and "residual" worlds, on the other hand. In this view, there can be no authentic description of Africa that does not touch on witchcraft, kinship, poverty, or chieftaincy. This compartmentalization of knowledge undergirds the obsession with Africa's uniqueness, and it feeds the overwhelming neglect of *how* the meanings of Africanness are made.

Third are the effects of the crisis of representation affecting the human sciences in general. In Europe and North America, this crisis arose principally from postmodern challenges to the disciplines' ability to describe an objective world and to understand meaningfully any lived experience.[7] Paradoxically, in Africa the origins of the crisis can be said to originate in the fact that the postmodern challenge has always been weak and the *archives* scholars rely on always too thin. As far as the nature of theory and the nature of Africa are concerned, functionalism and instrumentalism have always been the order of the day. At no time have the analytical and normative strands of functionalist, neoliberal, and Marxist political economy been eclipsed by cultural studies, postcolonial, or postmodern criticism.[8] As the African predicament becomes ever more complex, the manifestations of the crisis are to be found in a loss of the virtues of curiosity and astonishment at what the (African) world might be. The refusal to recognize that

7. See Joan W. Scott, "After History?" and William H. Sewell Jr., "Whatever Happened to the 'Social' in Social History?" in *Schools of Thought: Twenty-five Years of Interpretive Social Science*, ed. Joan W. Scott and Debra Keates (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

8. On the nature of these debates in other area studies, see Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang, eds., *Postmodernism and China* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000); Alberto Moreiras, *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); and Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa, eds., *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).

all knowledge is contingent on other knowledges has left the continent at the mercy of stolid analyses on the one hand and rapid surveys, off-the-cuff remarks, and anecdotes with sensational value on the other. This translates into an implicit view of Africa as a residual entity, the study of which does not contribute anything to the knowledge of the world or of the human condition in general.

How best to overturn these perpetual and predominant imaginings of Africa? One strategy is to constitute an argument that relies less on difference—or even originality—than on a fundamental connection to an elsewhere. Though the work of difference has performed important functions in the scholarly practice that sought to undercut imperial paradigms, it is clearly time, in the case of Africa, to revisit the frontiers of commonality and the potential of *sameness-as-worldliness*. This is a far cry from a proposition that would aim at rehabilitating facile assumptions about universality and particularity.[9] After all, the unity of the world is nothing but its diversity. As Jean-Luc Nancy argues, "the world is a multiplicity of worlds, and its unity is the mutual sharing and exposition of all its worlds—within this world." As for the "sharing of the world," it is, fundamentally, "the law of the world."[10] If, as we believe, the world has nothing other, if it is not subject to any authority, and if it does not have a sovereign, then we must read Africa in the same terms as we read everywhere else. This is not tantamount to diminishing aspects of its supposed originality or even its distinctiveness or the potency of its suffering. It means that scholarship on Africa should be deprovincialized.

Another strategy is to take seriously the fact that Africa like, everywhere else, has its heres, its elsewheres, and its interstices (*emplacement* and *displacement*). Indeed, historically, the continent has been and still is a space of flows, of flux, of translocation, with multiple nexuses of entry and exit points. As evinced by numerous recent studies, the continent we have in mind exists only as a function of circulation and of circuits.[11] It is fundamentally in contact with an *elsewhere*. As such, it is a space that is not only "produced";[12] it is also a space that circu-

9. See the critique by Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

10. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 185.

11. AbdouMaliq Simone, "On the Worlding of African Cities," *African Studies Review* 44, no. 2 (2001): 15–43; Karine Bennafla, *Le commerce frontalier en Afrique Centrale: Acteurs, espaces, pratiques* (Paris: Karthala, 2002); Cheikh Guèye, *Touba: La capitale des mourides* (Paris: Karthala, 2002).

12. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

lates, that is constantly in motion. One of the more potent ways of disrupting and "jamming" the dominant imaginings of Africa is therefore to concern ourselves anew with space and with discontinuities, to revisit our topographical imagination when it comes to this vast geographical landmass made up of a multiplicity of social forms and interlaced boundaries that, though only partially connected, are nevertheless entangled in myriad ways.

In the attempt to overturn predominant readings of Africa, we need to identify sites within the continent, entry and exit points not usually dwelt upon in research and public discourse, that defamiliarize commonsense readings of Africa. Such sites would throw people off their routine readings and deciphering of African spaces. Identifying such sites entails working with new archives—or even with old archives in new ways. One such archive, as we explore in detail in this issue as a whole, is the metropolis itself. Moreover, identifying many such sites at times implies drawing on new *critical pedagogies*—pedagogies of writing, talking, seeing, walking, telling, hearing, drawing, making—each of which pairs the subject and the object in novel ways to enliven the relationship between them and to better express life in motion.

The above considerations explain the general economy of this special issue, which includes conventional academic articles, short and fragmentary essays and commentaries, interviews and images, paths in the fabric of city life—all aiming to provide the reader with a sense of the worldliness of African life in general and of the African metropolis as a compositional process that is displacable and reversible by the act of reading and deciphering. To a large extent, this special issue is a gesture of defamiliarization. Through such a gesture, we hope to shift, if partially, the center of gravity of traditional forms of analysis and interpretations of Africa in global scholarship. We also hope to show that when it comes to things "African," it is possible to move away from the fascination with the horrors of a seemingly static world and to rehabilitate our curiosity while also insisting on this virtue as a necessary hallmark of a truly global academic project.

Lines of Flight

To undertake this project of defamiliarization, there is no better site or scene than the city. To be sure, a focus on the city is not new in African studies. In fact, in most social science disciplines, the city has long been used as a device to read social change. Yet according to James Ferguson, early urban studies (of labor migration, changing forms of marriage, the meaning of "tribalism," legal change and informal social networks, changing forms of rural-urban connections) and

established approaches to urbanization "have all depended, in different ways, on an underlying meta-narrative of modernization."[13] Anthropology, history, and literature have long seen Africans as fundamentally and even essentially rural creatures, while, like elsewhere, the African city itself has been perceived as an emblem of irresolvable conflict.[14] Most of the time, the task of scholarship has been to measure the processes of assimilation to the urban environment and to assess the various ways in which the relationship between the individual and the community is corrupted, reinvented, or maintained. In spite of the existence of old commercial and urban precolonial cultures in the continent, the transition from a rural to an urban life has sometimes been studied as if urban ways of life were totally unknown to those societies prior to European settlement.

Ways of seeing and reading contemporary African cities are still dominated by the metanarrative of urbanization, modernization, and crisis. As is well known, the roots of this metanarrative are to be located in the tenets of nineteenth-century urban reformism, when the problems facing cities were conceived of as diseases of the social body. For these diseases to be cured, society had to be constructed as a knowable and governable object. Its population had to be policed. As far as Africa is concerned, such ways of seeing the city have determined the nature of urban policies, most particularly in South Africa. More specifically, it is in Johannesburg where the relations of capital, technology, labor, and the unequal distribution of wealth engendered the greatest conflict. Here, race became the critical nexus between the body politic, the creation and distribution of wealth, and systematized human degradation.

As a consequence, most studies of Johannesburg have read the city as nothing but the spatial embodiment of unequal economic relations and coercive and segregationist policies. The city's fabric has been described as a structure in need of radical transformation and only rarely as an expression of an aesthetic vision. In so doing, these studies have forgotten that to a large extent, the city (in Africa and elsewhere) has historically been one of the most privileged sites "if not of the emergence of the question of the subject in the modern sense of the word,"[15] then at least of its articulation to reason and sensation. But as we now know, the subject itself is always *en fuite* (leaking, fleeing)—a fiction of ourselves and a fabu-

13. James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 20.

14. Burton Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

15. Hubert Damisch, *Skyline: The Narcissistic City*, trans. John Goodman (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 16.

lation of our world. So is "the city." Rationally planned or not, the city is "better understood in terms of the manner in which it deals with its *fuites* (leaks)."[16]

The same can be said of Africa. It can be better understood in terms of its extracanonical leakages, its lines of flight, its borderlands and interfaces. Johannesburg represents one such borderland, one such line of flight. That is why we have chosen it as the main vector for this project of defamiliarization. That the legibility of this extraordinary place has been reduced in most recent (and less recent) literature to an experience of the pathological and of the abnormal—the "crime city"[17]—is not without parallels elsewhere. After all, the swamp-ridden metropolis of Shanghai in China was, for a long time, "ranked as the most pleasure-mad, rapacious, corrupt, strife-ridden, licentious, squalid, and decadent city in the world."[18] The loathing of Johannesburg in the social sciences should be seen as part of an antiurban ideology that has consistently perceived the industrial city, in particular, as a cesspool of vice. Writing about the industrial revolution and the process of class struggle that engulfed the Witwatersrand at the turn of the twentieth century, historian Charles van Onselen describes Johannesburg as a "concrete encrustation on a set of rocky ridges," without "fertile soil, striking natural vegetation, a lake, a mountain, a valley, a river or even an attractive perennial stream." "It lacks," he writes, "the landscape of affection or mystery easily appropriated by myth-makers and nation-builders."[19]

16. John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 12.

17. On the city of Johannesburg as a space of anxiety, fear, and terror, see Jo Beall, "The People behind the Walls: Insecurity, Identity and Gated Communities in Johannesburg" (working paper 10, Crisis States Programme, London School of Economics, 2002), www.crisisstates.com/Publications/wp10.htm. See also Loren Kruger, "Theatre, Crime and the Edgy City in Post-Apartheid Johannesburg," *Theatre Journal* 53 (2001): 223–52; Lindsay Bremner, "Crime and the Emerging Landscape of Post-Apartheid Johannesburg," in *Blank— : Architecture, Apartheid and After*, ed. Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavić (Rotterdam: NAi, 1998). By contrast, it is striking the extent to which both cultural theorists and practitioners articulate a different view of the city, one that is both less hostile and more engaged with new ways of being in the city. See Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, eds., *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); or, to take one of numerous examples, a recent statement by *kwaito* artist Mzekezeke in the British magazine *The Face*, October 2003, 59: "Let me tell you . . . Jo'burg is now a place of pride, a place of history, a place of liberation. It is a place of African wealth, technology, education and culture."

18. So much was Shanghai loathed that a missionary could proclaim, "If God lets Shanghai endure, he owes an apology to Sodom and Gomorrah." Stella Dong, *Shanghai: The Rise and Fall of a Decadent City* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 1.

19. Charles van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2001), ix. It is worth noting that van Onselen himself draws on a long tradition of loathing the city. Recalling the terms on which Shanghai was invoked (see above), Winston Churchill famously described Johannesburg in similarly puritanical terms as "Monte-Carlo on top of Sodom and Gomorrah" (quoted in Kruger, "Theatre, Crime and the Edgy City," 233).

Van Onselen's views are widely shared. Unlike bodies of literature on other cities, few commentaries on Johannesburg have been preoccupied with the city form and city life either as objects of investigation per se or, even less, as keys to understanding forms of metropolitan modernity. Where this has been attempted, modernity has first and foremost been perceived as coterminous with the development of the capitalist mode of production and the processes by which capitalism as a socioeconomic formation in turn transformed social relations and the consciousness of black urban dwellers. As a consequence, the city that emerges from these commentaries has until recently been populated by "proletarians": a generic term that encompasses slum dwellers, migrant workers, strikers, hawkers, prostitutes, domestic servants, squatters, criminal classes, and so on.[20]

Its "real story," says van Onselen, revolves around "the contest between the narrowly-based economic self-interest of the mine owners" and a "seething mass of struggling humanity" made up of a "relatively cosmopolitan labour" that serves the industry. It is this "immediate clash of class interests around the principal industry" that does more "to excite the passions of the citizenry than any supposedly primordial yearning for cultural expression or strivings for a more encompassing identity." In fact, van Onselen concludes, Johannesburg's "shallowly-rooted, first-generation bourgeoisie and the crass *nouveau riche* of subsequent generations have always felt more comfortable in the bank, the stock exchange and the sports stadium than they have in attending a church, sitting in a concert hall, walking through an art gallery, reading in a library or even serving in the ranks of their city council."[21]

This characterization of early and late modern Johannesburg urban life as a nursery of cynicism (the pursuit of money) and a site of lack (in this case, lack of cultural compass) is widely shared across disciplines. Recognizing that Johannesburg is a product of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and as such filled with the contradictions of the laissez-faire age, architect Clive Chipkin nevertheless argues that the city's "sophistication and modernity" demonstrate "different qualities of creativity, cheek by jowl with slavish mimicry of overseas taste."[22] Forgetting that the city always also operates as a site of fantasy, desire,

20. David Yudelman, *The Emergence of Modern South Africa: State, Capital, and the Incorporation of Organized Labor on the South African Gold Fields, 1902–1939* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1984); Belinda Bozzoli, ed., *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983), especially 151–239.

21. Van Onselen, *New Babylon*, ix, x.

22. Clive M. Chipkin, *Johannesburg Style: Architecture and Society, 1880s–1960s* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1993), 10.

and imagination, recent South African historiography tends to privilege a reading of the urban as a theater of capitalist accumulation and exploitation. This scholarship constitutes an impressive body of work — albeit one that is sutured to a political agenda (the critique of the apartheid state), theoretically narrow (though empirically very strong), and almost entirely undeveloped in terms of comparative foci. These historiographical studies can be separated into three categories.

First is a long tradition of urban inquiry that focuses on the spatial dislocation, the class differentiation, and the racial polarization imprinted on the urban landscape by apartheid state-sanctioned segregation and planning.[23] Within these confines, more attention is given to the geographies of poverty, forced removals, and racially based slums and less to the cartographies of affluence.[24] Such studies highlight the various forms of dispossession and spatial exclusion of the black population from the apartheid city and polity. Seeing Johannesburg only in these terms also points to an important failure in most studies of the city — the failure to speak of the city on terms that warrant comparison with other cities in the world.[25]

23. Jennifer Robinson is one of the few urbanists who approaches city space differently. Calling for a reexamination of the apartheid spaces, she writes: "Were those spaces so fixed, so divisive, so certain in their form? Our imaginations have lived for so long with the lines of apartheid space, with the blank spaces in between, the deadening images of power drawn on the ground. We have uncovered many reasons for the emergence of these dividing lines: sanitation, health, planning, government, administration, policing, racism, disgust, employment, class, development strategies, industrialization, political order. . . . Can we begin to shift our experiences and our visions to capture and understand the world of always-moving spaces? . . . In what sense was even the apartheid city — a city of division — a place of movement, of change, of crossings?" "(Im)mobilising Space — Dreaming (of) Change," in Judin and Vladislavić, *Blank—*.

24. See Peter Kallaway and Patrick Pearson, *Johannesburg: Images and Continuities: A History of Working Class Life through Pictures, 1885–1935* (Braamfontein, South Africa: Ravan, 1986); Eddie Koch, "Without Visible Means of Subsistence: Slumyard Culture in Johannesburg, 1918–1940," in Bozzoli, *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*; Deborah M. Hart and Gordon H. Pirie, "The Sight and Soul of Sophiatown," *Geographical Review* 74 (1984): 38–47; Sue Parnell, "Racial Segregation in Johannesburg: The Slums Act, 1934–1939," *South African Geographical Journal* 70 (1988): 112–26; and Sue Parnell, "Slums, Segregation and Poor Whites in Johannesburg, 1920–1934," in *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880–1940*, ed. Robert Morrell (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992).

25. For an extension of this argument into the countryside, see William Beinart, Peter Delius, and Stanley Trapido, eds., *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850–1930* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986). See the critiques by Peris Sean Jones, "'The Basic Assumptions as Regards the Nature and Requirements of a Capital City': Identity, Modernization and Urban Form at Mafikeng's Margins," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, no. 1 (2000): 25–53. For a critique of the thesis of "exceptionalism" in relation to cultural issues, see the introduction to Nuttall and Michael, *Senses of Culture*.

In their attempt to sort out the link between industrialization and urbanization, these accounts envision the city not as an aesthetic project but as a space of division. Planning, in particular, is perceived as that which not only recasts notions of citizenship in the terrain of racial difference but also serves to delineate different city spaces separated by boundaries of class.[26] One such place is the "township."[27] As the title of the book *A City Divided: Johannesburg and Soweto* suggests, the township is both of the city and not of the city.[28] In such studies, the emphasis has been on marginality, and the township is privileged as a site of social struggles or of contestation over the allocation of public goods.[29] Far less attention has been paid to the imbrication of city and township and, in spite of unequal social relations, to township dwellers' practices and imaginations of citiness or the place of the township in the making of the city's many identities. This is despite the fact that people then and now perpetually moved between the city and the township, either to make a living or to access forms of urban life that the township did not provide.[30] Furthermore, the literature fails to situate the township in relation to other kinds of urban agglomerations elsewhere (the urban ghetto, the favela) or in South Africa itself (the inner city, the squatter camp, the homeland, new kinds of settlements of poor black South Africans) and to track the traffic between these places. Such is the case of informal settlements on the urban fringes whose inhab-

26. Alan Mabin and Dan Smit, "Reconstructing South Africa's Cities? The Making of Urban Planning 1900–2000," *Planning Perspectives* 12, no. 2 (1997): 193–223; Ivan Turok, "Urban Planning in the Transition from Apartheid: Part 2—Towards Reconstruction," *Town Planning Review* 65, no. 4 (1994): 355–74.

27. Akihiro Kinda, "The Concept of 'Townships' in Britain and the British Colonies in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Historical Geography* 27, no. 2 (2001): 137–52. For a summary of the literature on the "township" in South Africa, see Belinda Bozzoli, "Why Were the 1980s 'Millenarian'? Style, Repertoire, Space and Authority in South Africa's Black Cities," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 13, no. 1 (2000): 78–110.

28. See Nigel Mandy, *A City Divided: Johannesburg and Soweto* (Braamfontein, South Africa: Macmillan, 1984); and Jo Beall, Owen Crankshaw, and Sue Parnell, *Uniting a Divided City: Governance and Social Exclusion in Johannesburg* (London: Earthscan, 2002).

29. Patrick Bond, *Cities of Gold, Townships of Coal: Essays on South Africa's New Urban Crisis* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World, 2000); Mzwanele Mayekiso, *Township Politics: Civic Struggles for a New South Africa*, ed. Patrick Bond (New York: Monthly Review, 1996). For a similar view from elsewhere, see Allen J. Scott, *Metropolis: From the Division of Labor to Urban Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

30. Achille Mbembe, Nsizwa Dlamini, and Grace Khunou, "Soweto Now," in this issue; William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Knopf, 1996); Peter Marcuse, "Space over Time: The Changing Position of the Black Ghetto in the United States," *Netherlands Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 13, no. 1 (1998), 7–24; and John O'Loughlin and Jürgen Friedrichs, *Social Polarization in Post-Industrial Metropolises* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996).

itants commute to city work zones; concentrated settlements within cities; backyard dwellings in middle-class suburbs; disused buildings in inner-city areas (parts of Johannesburg's eastern downtown section); or hostels or similar institutions whose inhabitants live very close to their places of work.[31]

Second are postapartheid studies, most of which fall within the urban development paradigm so prevalent in the rest of Africa and the developing world.[32] Most of these studies are more concerned with whether the city is changing along vectors of institutional governance, deracialization of service provision, and local politics than about citiness as such.[33] Because they approach the city as a problem to be solved, they are clearly prescriptive. They seek to contribute to policy formulation in fields as varied as community participation, housing, land tenure, service delivery (water, sanitation, roads, electricity, waste removal), local government, municipal finance and governance capacities, urban poverty, and decentralization. In most cases, these instrumentalist and functionalist accounts of the city are preoccupied with larger issues of social justice and social cohesion, equity and efficiency. Their aim is to redress the effects of inequality and past injustices through a better distribution of public goods and the reversal of the system of spatial, economic, and social segregation inherited from apartheid.[34] They end up mapping an urban social geography of needs, the crucial indexes of which are levels of deprivation. In the process, they underplay many other aspects of city life and city forms.[35]

Third are studies preoccupied with the spatial restructuring of the city per se. They note the sprawling, polycentric character of Johannesburg and lament the intensely privatized and quasi-anarchic vision of urban growth underlying this

31. See Ann Bernstein and J. J. McCarthy, *South Africa's "Discarded People": Survival, Adaptation, and Current Challenges*, CDE Research: Policy in the Making 9 (Johannesburg: Centre for Development and Enterprise, 1998).

32. Akin Mabogunje, "Global Urban Futures: An African Perspective," *Urban Forum* 11, no. 2 (2000): 165–83.

33. Jeremy Seekings, "Are South Africa's Cities Changing? Indications from the Mid-1990s," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 1 (2003): 197–202.

34. Alan Mabin, "On the Problems and Prospects of Overcoming Segregation and Fragmentation in Southern Africa's Cities in the Postmodern Era," in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

35. See, for example, Lindsay Bremner, "Reinventing the Johannesburg Inner City," *Cities* 17, no. 3 (2000): 185–93; Owen Crankshaw and Sue Parnell, "Johannesburg: World City in a Poor Country" (paper presented at Urban Futures conference, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2000); Susan Parnell, ed., *Democratising Local Government: The South African Experiment* (Landsdowne, South Africa: University of Cape Town Press, 2002); and Robert Cameron, *The Democratisation of South African Local Government: A Tale of Three Cities* (Pretoria: J. L. van Schaik, 1999).

process. In this regard, they focus, primarily, on what the authors perceive as the citadelization of Johannesburg; that is, the increased barricading within the city through the construction of office complexes and upper-class residences; the polarization of the city by income, occupation, and race; the limited public subsidies and the abdication of independent planning and regulatory action by government; the hyperconcentration of jobs in service-center-oriented office buildings in the northern suburbs; and the increasing power of property developers to structure the evolution of the city.[36] In many instances, the trope of a "city under siege" proves to be simply a juxtaposition of exclusive suburban enclaves, closed spaces, and simulated histories undergirded by a fantasy urbanism and odd lifestyles.[37]

Recent work on the edge city and the suburbs may signal new readings of the city. Lindsay Bremner, for example, describes the "edge city" of Midrand as a "contradictory space" inhabited by many of South Africa's new black elite, where "the colour of one's money rapidly replaces skin colour as the currency of showy success" and where "acquisitiveness goes hand in hand with that other must-have suburban attitude: lack of curiosity about everyone else." She argues that for these new monied classes, "middle class values and preoccupations—individual achievement, status, nuclear family life, space, security and sport—are best satisfied within the infrastructure of the security suburb." Yet, a "relationship with the culture of township life is maintained."[38] Developments in the inner city show that "far from being the ultimate zoned, controlled and compartmentalized city,"

36. Richard Tomlinson ed., *Emerging Johannesburg: Perspectives on the Postapartheid City* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Judin and Vladislavić, *Blank—*.

37. Marlene van Niekerk describes the urban middle-class lifestyle as follows: "We travel in our burglar- and bullet-proof cars from our walled and wired houses to the well-patrolled labyrinths of Westgate, Eastgate, Northgate, all those lookalike bunker-faced shopping malls. Or, if we consider ourselves too cool for trolleys, we take our bods to some leafy suburb or other, to a carefully preserved villagey street, where we cling to our tables in cutesy coffee bars or linger in second-hand bookshops before they disappear, like countless others before them, into even safer neighbourhoods. We'll follow them there too and protect them all over again for as long as they last, sipping our sidewalk cappuccinos, sheltering behind our newspapers and our cellphones. And so we try to shut out the beggars and the parking attendants gesturing to us endlessly with bland knowingness from the margins of our fields of vision." In Judin and Vladislavić, *Blank—*. See, too, Lindsay Bremner, "Closure, Simulation, and 'Making Do' in the Contemporary Johannesburg Landscape," in *Under Siege: Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002); Beall, Crankshaw, and Parnell, *Uniting a Divided City*, 175–95; and Tomlinson, *Emerging Johannesburg*, 56–70.

38. Lindsay Bremner, *Johannesburg: One City, Colliding Worlds* (Johannesburg: STE, 2004). For a novelistic rendition of these movements and their paradoxical nature, see Nadine Gordimer, *The House Gun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).

Johannesburg is now characterized by "messy intersections and overlapping realities. Ordinary, everyday lives, which were excluded from the city by western urban management practices, town planning codes or by the legal and administrative apparatus of apartheid, have brought distant geographical, social and cultural worlds into contact."[39]

The Idea of the Metropolis

Our rendition of Johannesburg proceeds from a different intellectual vantage point. First, we aim to exit the almost exclusive situating of this city within the field of South African studies and, for that matter, African studies, while drawing on the strengths of each. Second, we recognize that Johannesburg is fully located within specialized global circuits of finance, labor, technology, and capital. The city therefore partakes of an increasingly complex organizational architecture that cuts across borders and is deterritorialized.[40]

A geography of Sandton—home to the regional headquarters of multinationals and the specialized corporate services associated with them—would easily demonstrate that the city is increasingly a key articulator in a new, regional geography of centrality, dispersal, mobility, and connectivity that expands not only to the rest of the continent but around the globe. It is the site of a high concentration of strategic resources. For the management of that mobility and connectivity, Johannesburg's resources are its old history of economic advantage (through mining); its dense business, capital exchange, and transport networks; its telematic and conventional infrastructures; its web of international firms; its highly competitive labor market for professionals (finance, accounting, law, advertising) and specialized service workers; its capacity for global transmission and communication; and its increasingly digitized economy. Nevertheless, in our rendering of Johannesburg, we depart from the "global city" paradigm if only because of its economicism and the poverty of its understanding of citiness. Indeed, a city is not simply a string of infrastructures, technologies, and legal entities, however networked these are. It also comprises actual people, images and architectural forms, footprints and memories; the city is a place of manifold rhythms, a world of sounds, private freedom, pleasures, and sensations.[41] It is these rhythms this issue intends to capture via a rehabilitation of the notion of the metropolis.

39. Bremner, *Johannesburg*, 46, 115.

40. See Saskia Sassen, ed., *Global Networks, Linked Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

41. Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 2002), chap. 1.

A large corpus of contemporary literature on cities has taken up the theme of bodies on the move. It has attempted to ask how we can better understand the city through the framework of the body, how the body transforms the city and vice versa. This work draws on Michel de Certeau's essay "Walking in the City." De Certeau understands the walker as someone who "actualises . . . possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge."[42] In particular, this literature has revisited Walter Benjamin's concept of *flânerie* to read the city from its street-level intimations, as a lived complexity that requires alternative narratives and maps based on wandering. These writings emphasize the spatial and temporal openness of the city as a place of manifold rhythms forged through daily encounters and multiple experiences of time and space; the city as a series of imprints from the past, the daily tracks of movement across, and links beyond, the city itself.[43] It neglects, however, the fact that striating openness and flow depend on a whole series of rules, conventions, and institutions of regulation and control; and that much of city life is about the engineering of certainty.[44] Moreover, as we indicated above, this philosophy of urban space needs revisiting in the contexts of African cities, which also help us to revise our readings of cities elsewhere.

We are persuaded that in Africa, analyses of capitalist modernity have not fully apprehended the fact that it is not simply in the North that "the culture of modernity became synonymous with the culture of the metropolis."[45] Recently, the new urbanism of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century has been the main framework for explorations of modernity in places as varied as China and Brazil.[46]

As far as we are concerned, Johannesburg is first and foremost a *metropolis* in every conceivable sense of the term. In fact, the entire history of its built structures testifies to its inscription into the canons of modern Western urban aesthetics. After all, until very recently, Johannesburg described itself as the largest and most modern European city in Africa. As amply demonstrated by Clive Chipkin,

42. Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 98.

43. Amin and Thrift, *Cities*, 9.

44. Amin and Thrift, *Cities*, 26.

45. See David Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity: Critical Explorations* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 2001), 161.

46. See Wen-Hsien Yeh, ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), especially pt. 1, 131–230; Xiaobing Tang, *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), especially chaps. 8 and 9; and Vivian Schelling, ed., *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America* (London: Verso, 2001), 75–126.

this meant that Johannesburg was the progeny of nineteenth-century European industrial society. This inland city developed as an industrial metropolis supported by gold mining. A breeding ground for modernism, it grew as a frontier city closely tied to the global market economy and the world of consumption while at the same time mired in bigotry and prejudice, constantly caught between what it could be and what it ended up being.

The city's fabric and cultural styles borrowed from the major trends of the time and from an assortment of sometimes disconnected sources — from Victorian and Edwardian architecture; from the provincial versions of the French Second Empire to modernized (or neo-) classicism and futurism to stunted Manhattan-style skyscrapers; and from art nouveau to the rigid symmetry of the Beaux-Arts, art deco, modernism, and Le Corbusier's *esprit nouveau*. Says Chipkin, most technological innovations were experimented with at one point or the other in Johannesburg: "prefabricated iron-fronted shop buildings, barrel-vaulted arcades with prismatic glass skylights, cast-iron gas lamps, electric lighting, telephone wires linking the finance houses and emporia to the central telephone exchange, horse-drawn trams with their destination signs to distant suburbs, and after 1892 the presence of the railroad linking the interior with the maritime systems of the seaboard."[47]

But official or commercial architecture did not take its lead simply from overseas paradigms and precedents. If Johannesburg's ideas of the metropolis did filter in from overseas, cultural traffic with New Delhi, with the sister dominions (Canada, New Zealand, Australia), with the East African triangle (Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, and Zanzibar), and with Brazil also shaped them. A substantial city of the empire in the African Southern Hemisphere during the first half of the twentieth century, Johannesburg also created a metropolitan style of its own. The shifts from one style to another were themselves a testament to its history of opulence.

Right from the beginning, the defining character of the city was its trading square and its commercial streets. Banks, finance houses, offices, clubs, and mining company headquarters dominated the streetscapes. Everywhere in the commercial streets, Chipkin argues, "a new consumer world and new building technology had sprung up side by side virtually ready-made on this remote piece of the veld." There was evidence of contact with high fashion in London, Paris, and New York (main shopping streets, latest American automobiles, fancy lingerie, department stores, jewelry designs, polished gems, and so on), "together with the

47. Chipkin, *Johannesburg Style*, 22.

latest imported *fin de siècle* decoration from the Continent, up-to-date fabrics and wallpapers from London's West End emporia, latest lines in Manchester cotton goods and a flood of commercial products ready to clutter up colonial interiors with exotic bric-à-brac from the world market."[48]

Violence was instrumental in the creation and sustainability of such an avant-garde culture and cosmopolitan flavor. In fact, Johannesburg's metropolitan consciousness did not derive merely from the city's inscription into the structures of exchange and imperial networks of the time. It went hand in hand with the most pervasive forms of white supremacy (*wit baasskap*) and, until the 1930s, the most brutalizing forms of economic violence. Indeed, the black poor, whether walking on foot, housed in the squalor of the mine compounds, living in slums along the railway lines, or exhibiting their "bundles and rural sticks, tobacco pipes and mouth harps,"[49] were living examples of the fact that a commercial and metropolitan society does not necessarily guarantee political liberty. In fact, a commercial society—just as a cosmopolitan one—could be founded on settler racism and oppression.

The figure of the black poor also marks one of the limits of classical theories of the metropolis, which hold that the most revelatory facets of modern metropolitan life lie on the *surface*, in the ephemeral and the visible (shop fronts, shop windows, café terraces, street cars, automobiles), in the display of the commodity with or without its aesthetic veil.[50] The privileging of surfaces and visuality conceals the ubiquity of the metropolitan form. The case of Johannesburg clearly shows that one of the characteristic features of a metropolis is an *underneath*. As the name Egoli (City of Gold) indicates, this is a city born out of a ruthless, extractive, mining economy. As such, it is one incarnation of "the actual world of human labor, of grubby production, of toil, exploitation, and minimum wage work" that Marx so eloquently spoke about.[51] In other words, beneath the visible landscape and the surface of the metropolis, its objects and social relations, are

48. Chipkin, *Johannesburg Style*, 18.

49. Chipkin, *Johannesburg Style*, 122.

50. See, for example, Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Péter Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop: Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

51. Andy Merriffield and Erik Swyngedouw, *The Urbanization of Injustice* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 63.

concealed or embedded other orders of visibility, other scripts that are not reducible to the built form, the house facade, or simply the street experience of the metaphorical figure of the flaneur.

Although the black poor, the squatters, and slum dwellers constituted the other modernity — or the underside of Johannesburg's modernity — the Johannesburg of the 1950s, in particular, gave rise to a racially diverse and fluid culture. Best documented in the literature on the city is the emergence of Sophiatown as a center of urban black culture that "offered unprecedented possibilities for blacks to choose and invent their society from the novel distractions of urban life. . . . [It was] a dazzling new cosmopolitan world, relatively free from state control where all classes mixed, . . . a juxtaposition of dream and myth which inspired a literary generation to use it as a symbolic reference point. . . . [It was] a juxtaposition fraught with ambiguities."[52] It had its intellectual milieus, with writers and musicians. Located at an interracial frontier, they confronted the raw edges of the racial city and, in the process, produced new cultural practices and styles of thought.[53]

In Johannesburg, the underneath of the metropolis is akin to the world of extraction — the underground city of gold mining, with its own syntax, its arteries, its depth, its darkness, and the crucial figure of the *migrant worker*. Living in places and circumstances not of his or her choosing, the migrant worker is constrained to experience the metropolis as a site of radical uncertainty, unpredictability, and insecurity. Under these conditions, culture and aesthetics become an open-ended construction built into existing and often misused infrastructures. Made up of stranded affiliations, the metropolis in the southern part of the African continent emerged out of complex structures — including psychic ones — that far exceed the possibilities of the apartheid grid. In fact, seen from beneath, the migrant worker more than the flaneur is the paradoxical cultural figure of African modernity — the one who is both beneath the city and outside of its orders of visibility.

Postapartheid South Africa has given a new centrality to the figure of the migrant in general and that of the stranger in particular. Indeed, over the last

52. Paul Gready, "The Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties: The Unreal Reality of Their World," in *Readings in African Popular Fiction*, ed. Stephanie Newell (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 144.

53. See Peter Abrahams, *Tell Freedom: Memories of Africa* (New York: Knopf, 1954); Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Bhekizizwe Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001), chaps. 4–7.

quarter of the twentieth century, substantial shifts took place in the urban social division of labor and in the corporate organization of industrial production in the city. The process of globalization and its associated consequences (the casualization of labor, the privatization of most basic services) have fostered the emergence of multiple economies not limited to the corporate form. The inequality in the concentration of strategic resources and activities between the different segments of the city has sharpened since the 1990s. A parallel economy—informal and transnational—has emerged. As we have seen above, a socioeconomic fragmentation is also visible in the built environment of the city: a geography of fortifications and enclosures; increasing demand for spatial and social insulation; and reliance on technologies of security, control, and surveillance.[54] In this context, the *stranger* and the *criminal* now assume, more than ever, greater prominence in most urban imaginations.[55] These extreme forms of fortification need to be counterbalanced by attention to other, varied responses to the city's transformations, most of which reflect the complexities of class, race, generation, and ideology.

Johannesburg is a metropolis in the sense used by Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, and others, that is, a capitalist formation closely tied to the money economy and individuality, to calculability and fortuitousness. Metropolitan existence here is "displayed" not necessarily through exhibitions or parks, but via an enticing array of consumer labels and products, highways and luminous flows, store windows and huge advertising billboards, new architecture and, more generally, technophilia. To a large extent, this is what Simmel meant by a *culture of things*. For him, the representation of the metropolis occurred through the lavish display of a plethora of objects "crowded together in close proximity," which paralyzed the senses and hypnotized the spectator. From this perspective, what passes in the eyes of Johannesburg's fiercest critics as crass material trappings could very well be understood as an aesthetic of plentitude.[56]

Contemporary Johannesburg is the premier metropolis in Africa in terms of technology, wealth, and racial complexity, as well as cultural practices and formal institutions—apparent through the sheer quantification of the world of goods, of

54. Compare with São Paulo in Teresa Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

55. See in particular Phaswane Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of Natal Press, 2001); and Sarah Nuttall, "City Forms and Writing the 'Now' in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 2 (2004).

56. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. and trans. Kurt Wolff (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950).

production and consumption. It is a thoroughly polyglot urban formation whose influence, connections, and identifications extend beyond its locality and well beyond South Africa.[57] A magnet in terms of art, architecture, music, fashion, and multiple sites of invention, Johannesburg is peopled not just by workers, the poor, criminals, and illegal immigrants, but also by civic-minded public intellectuals of all races, as well as highly skilled migrants, jet-setters, and a new black elite. It is a home to corporate headquarters, finance houses, legal services, accounting firms, media outlets, entertainment industries, and information technology ventures.

The city has become the great shopping mall for most of sub-Saharan Africa, a place of circulation and exchange. New geographies of retailing and consumption are redefining the economic and cultural horizons of contemporary Johannesburg.[58] Its consumer spaces (the department store, the mall, and the casino) can be read, as elsewhere, as "symbolic and metaphoric territories."[59] Finally, it is a city where historical structures of racial inequity are simultaneously being sedimented and unbundled; in which conceptions of race are being reinterrogated and remade in myriad ways; and in which cosmopolitanism resides, flourishes, or lies dormant—an "unfinished city" thrust by the force of circumstances into a conversation between the past and the future, between Africa and the world.[60] Rather than explore these configurations in any detail, all films made about the city to date have confined themselves to rendering its supposed apocalyptic proportions, as if ordinary lives simply did not exist in this metropolitan culture. There is no question that Johannesburg is a city that, from the origins, has symbolized novelty, exuberance, adventurism, and, to a large extent, the possibility of a kind of freedom.[61] Even though here the tension between order and movement took a dramatic form as evidenced by the pass laws and other instances of surveillance, control, and punishment, the way in which freedom was ultimately experienced drew upon the experiential possibilities offered by the city form elsewhere.[62]

57. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood*.

58. Keith S. O. Beavon, "Northern Johannesburg: Part of the 'Rainbow' or Neo-Apartheid City in the Making?" *Mots pluriels*, no. 13 (2000), www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP1300kb.html.

59. Louise Crewe, "Geographies of Retailing and Consumption," *Progress in Human Geography* 24, no. 2 (2000): 275–90.

60. Thomas Bender, *The Unfinished City: New York and the Metropolitan Idea* (New York: New Press, 2002).

61. See, for example, Nelson Mandela's description of Johannesburg in *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Randburg, South Africa: Macdonald Purnell, 1994).

62. Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003), 208.

We have called this issue "Johannesburg — The Elusive Metropolis," and as indicated above, we mean this in several senses. This is an *elusive* metropolis because either it is denigrated as being a set of ugly urban agglomerations, a crime city, or a security-obsessed dystopia, or it is elevated as a place of rapacious survival, "making do," and chance encounters. It is an elusive metropolis because of the multiplicity of registers in which it is African (or perhaps not at all, or not enough); European (or perhaps not, or no longer), or even American (by virtue of its embeddedness in commodity exchange and its culture of consumption). Its very elusiveness makes it especially compelling as an object of study, and the theoretical work of this introduction has been to draw its metropolitan charge into being.

The Structure of the Issue

The issue is composed of two parts. The first section comprises academic-style essays. Each concentrates on issues and case materials that are particularly intriguing because they signal what is emerging at the borderlands and across the interfaces of the city. Each also highlights a field of changing matrices of identity, power, and culture. Finally, each attempts to encompass multiplicity and to account for experiences of flux. In the process, each reveals a heterogeneous archive. The essays introduce and work with theoretical notions of "superfluity," "self-stylization," "people as infrastructure," and methods of reading the "suffering body of the city." Each works with a city fragment in order to map distinct practices. Neither the theoretical notions, nor the method of reading, are meant to oppose class and political-economic issues with those of culture or to downplay the ongoing forms of injustice and exclusion resulting from the deepening of market relations and the sometimes brutal power of capital.

Working with, and contra, Georg Simmel, Achille Mbembe uses the notion of superfluity to reorder well-known, as well as new, material into a complex theoretical argument. For him, "superfluity" does not refer only to the aesthetics of surfaces and quantities but also to the dialectics of indispensability and expendability of life, people, and things. More specifically, he describes two new public theaters of consumption in which space and images are both figural forms and aestheticized commodities, Melrose Arch and Montecasino. In the process, he revisits the biopolitics of Johannesburg as a "racial city" and its transition to a metropolitan form; he also explores what he calls the "city unconscious." Mbembe shows that the new political economy of superfluity in this metropolis develops in and through cultural and aesthetic tastes and the creation of surfaces and images.

The creative éclat of these images and surfaces, in turn, functions to override and displace historical memory through quotidian practices and fantasies of consumption and fantasy. This he interprets as foundational to "the psychic life of the city" after the dark period of apartheid. As elsewhere, cultural sensitivities and urban subjectivities in contemporary Johannesburg's metropolitan life draw their energy from thoroughly commodified and marketed cityscapes.[63] To a great extent, the commodity form becomes *the* form of existence for Johannesburg's residents, including the poor.

AbdouMaliq Simone examines another city fragment, that of the inner city. He argues that the boundaries of Johannesburg are constantly mediated through an *infrastructure*. For Simone, urban infrastructure in the friction zones of the metropolis is made up not only of wires, ducts, tunnels, highways, electricity, and automobiles. It is in the first instance made up of what he calls "people," "bodies," "intersections," and "networks." These entities form the topological connections that give meaning to practices of social reproduction across city time and space. These very practices, almost of necessity, are contingent, uncertain, and unpredictable. At the same time, these people, bodies, intersections, and networks structure and delineate the material culture of the city. They constitute the fabric—or infrastructure—of contemporary African metropolises.

Returning to the suburbs, Sarah Nuttall's analysis is focused on some of the most salient changes in the production and circulation of global metropolitan cultural and aesthetic forms. In her study of Y culture in Rosebank, she demonstrates that metropolitan life among middle-class youth in South Africa consists of a series of encounters with images, signs, sounds, and objects in constant motion. Whether they appear in the form of billboards, magazines, dress codes, music, radio programs, or advertising, images and signs in particular are incessantly disseminated and recycled or "accessorized" as coding devices and relocated according to the peculiarities of each place. They are also a powerful barometer of changes in the constitution of racial identities and crossover cultures.

Finally, writing on AIDS in Johannesburg, Frédéric Le Marcis begins on the margins of the city (in the outskirts of the township of Alexandra, next to Sandton) and follows the movement of AIDS sufferers from there to the various locations in the city where they might find relief. His is not a reading of the storefronts and windows, café terraces, street cars, and automobiles that form the

63. Vincenzo Ruggiero, *Movements in the City: Conflict in the European Metropolis* (Harlow, U.K.: Prentice Hall, 2001).

letters of Benjamin's or de Certeau's alphabet of the city. The essay reveals a network and nodes of circulation and traces a geography of the city that is very different from the visible forms of circulation we see on its highways. In the process, he shows that the city is not simply a place of mobility. It can be read from different vantage points: from above, from below, or from in between its very surfaces. It can remain largely hidden, opaque and invisible, especially when seen from the point of view of the itinerant body of the sufferer. Its boundaries are permeable and stretched. They can be mapped only if we take seriously nonconventional urban itineraries.

What these four essays show is that Johannesburg has a tacit history. It is a history of the cultures that created it and that long years of apartheid and racial segregation have buried beneath the surfaces of the city. In fact, Johannesburg has all along been a polycentric and international city that has developed its own brand of cosmopolitan culture (built spaces; styles of architecture; social and cultural spaces such as cinemas, stores, parks, squares, music, religion, and even literature). As in many metropolises of the South, it is a city where splendor and squalor exist side by side and in which technologies of speed are dramatically changing people's experience of time, of space, and of self.[64] Just as in Mumbai or Rio de Janeiro, each cultural stratum has brought an intricate system of interconnections to bear upon a hybrid history that continually permeates the present. Over the past quarter century, its boundaries have become so geographically and socially permeable and stretched that the city seems to have no fixed parts, no completeness, and almost no discrete center. Like the continent itself, it is an amalgam of often disjointed circulatory processes. Turning its back on the rigid rationalities of planning and racial separation, it has become, in spite of itself, a place of intermingling and improvisation. Its very porosity means that, released from the iron cage of apartheid, it can now continually fashion and refashion itself.

The second section we have called Voice-Lines. It consists of shorter pieces and interviews. Indeed, one way of invoking the city, of fashioning it, of bringing Johannesburg into being as a metropolis, is *to make it talk*. To generate the voices of the city itself is to venture into the realm of sensory intimation.[65] It is—as we have found in the process of putting together this issue—not only to interpret monuments, images, built forms, and self histories. It is also to draw on wider

64. See Arjun Appadurai, "Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics," *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 21–47; and Livio Sansone on Salvador de Bahia, *Blackness without Ethnicity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

65. Amin and Thrift, *Cities*, 9.

styles of writing, vocabularies that are not always academic, and nonconventional itineraries and mappings, such as those of journalists, artists, architects, and young people.

These voice-lines point to themes and realities that very often have outpaced academic research. Mindful of what we wanted to do in this issue, and of the relative poverty of the available literature on the citiness of Johannesburg and the modernity of African life-forms, we revisited the essay form and the interview form—both critical pedagogies with a long history, though often discarded in mainstream academic practice. The interventions in this section are united not only by form and style but also by theme: each concerns the remapping of physical and imaginary public spaces of the city of Johannesburg.

John Matshikiza elaborates on the idea of the "unfinished city," which we alluded to above. He describes Johannesburg as a politically and racially charged city and the "humming terminus of a two-way street" between South Africa and cities on the rest of the continent—Lagos, Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, Lusaka, Luanda—cities to which many South Africans headed in exile ("thousands of ex-thieves, intellectuals, good-time boys and girls, nurses, teachers, jailbirds, gunslingers, and dedicated revolutionaries, they brought a new element of excitement, danger, and curiosity to Africa's cities").

In Dakar, Matshikiza learns about being African and being human (neither available to him in the dark concatenation of apartheid South Africa), a process he writes about not as an abstraction but as a thickly saturated mixed and remixed placement. Coming home to Johannesburg, city of his birth, he occupies it as an "African foreigner." In a delicate refolding back onto the first half of the essay, he writes about xenophobia, as Africans engage with one another across cities or via the realities and imaginations of Johannesburg. The essay also says much about the temporalities of here and elsewhere, home and exile. Matshikiza's voice—which shifts as it recounts the city's political moments—is at its most distant in the present and its most intimate in the past, as if the freedom of the present itself represents a kind of estrangement. After all, it is in the present moment that he is free to be a stranger. The past is conveyed in the present tense, captured intensely in psychic time, where the immediacy of voice is most felt, most vivid.

In the next fragment that makes up the Voice-Lines section, Nsizwa Dlamini and Grace Khunou, two young South Africans who represent the postapartheid generation after Matshikiza's, discuss the township in the city and the city in the township. Their voices draw out the extent to which cities must be negotiated but also how citiness, for them, has to do with the idea of motion—not the simple

traversal of space, the act of going from here to there, but the negotiation of several disparate sites and zones, in which they may behave in different ways. To move through the city, to be mobile, is to defeat apartheid's spatial design, which sought to render black people static. Thus these young city dwellers in motion reinvent the geography of the township in the city, putting disparate places next to each other, creating personal maps. The spaces across which people perpetually move and commute to and from become different things to different people—and produce new cultures of invention and commodification well beyond the temporal geographies of the apartheid moment.

The final three interventions engage with the built spaces of the city. Mark Gevisser discusses the shaping of new public spaces from the dark places of the city's past. He examines how four city prisons are forming the site of South Africa's new Constitutional Court in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. Gevisser works with the notion of how modern cities create simulacra of democratic public space to represent an ethos out of which the city is developing. The struggle to find a form to express the new city is one that Lindsay Bremner vividly engages with in her short essay. Bremner discusses the final designs in an architectural competition for the remaking of a historical public space in Kliptown, Soweto. The architectural competition held for the development of Freedom Square offered architects and designers an opportunity to construct "a new urban democracy in South Africa." Bremner reads building in terms more of topography than of landscape, as a Deleuzian, continuous, folded surface of experience.

In the interview with Johannesburg architect and artist Rodney Place, Johannesburg is again seen and imagined as being a city-in-formation. The architect/artist chooses spaces from which to take up different viewpoints, accepting neither their given meanings nor functions. Place combines physical acts with acts of imagination, unearths spatial and territorial clichés, "agitating them with language." In part, he reclaims the modernist structures of Johannesburg, detaching them from their original ideological aims and meanings, letting them exist in pure physicality, since their instructional intentions are redundant to people already social and urban in their habits. Place describes South Africa's urban landscapes as inherited machines—up-for-grabs territorial frames waiting for waves of (cultural) occupation, the *friche* waiting to happen. He advocates an "ordinary urbanism," vernacular landscapes versus the impositions of a "social vision."

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