



**A University of Sussex PhD thesis**

Available online via Sussex Research Online:

<http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/>

This thesis is protected by copyright which belongs to the author.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Please visit Sussex Research Online for more information and further details

# Restless collection:

---

Ivan Vladislavić and South African  
literary culture

Katie Reid  
PhD Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures  
University of Sussex  
January 2017

For my parents.

## Acknowledgments

With thanks to my supervisor, Professor Stephanie Newell, who inspired and enabled me to begin, and whose drive and energy, and always creative generosity enlivened the process throughout.

My thanks are due to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding the research. Thanks also to the Harry Ransom Center, at the University of Texas in Austin, for a Dissertation Fellowship (2011-12); and to the School of English at the University of Sussex for grants and financial support to pursue the research and related projects and events throughout, and without which the project would not have taken its shape.

I am grateful to all staff at the research institutions I have visited: with particular mention to Gabriela Redwine at the HRC; everyone at the National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown; and all those at Pan McMillan, South Africa, who provided access to the Ravan Press archives.

Personal thanks and acknowledgments are due to Fourie Botha, publisher at Umuzi, for his time; Pamela Thurschwell for her timely sensitivity and for reading the draft; my colleagues Ben Noys and Fiona Price, and to Kai Easton, for their kindness, belief, rigour, and stimulus; to Africa in Words; to James Graham and our always convivial, always 'joint' work; and Anthony Leaker, and to all who sustained things throughout with conversations and friendship. Also, to Nicola and Lauren; to Zandra and Alexander (and St Artaud), and to Roddy, without each of whom the writing would have been made in a much narrower field.

I am especially grateful to Ivan Vladislavić, whose generosity and undaunted patience with his time, materials, and personal archive (not to mention with the postal service between Johannesburg and Brighton) has sustained the writing of this thesis. Minky Schlesinger's various kindnesses have also been an unexpected pleasure and have nudged the research accordingly.

The thesis would not have been possible without Sheila Reid and James Gormley, to whom I owe much more than thanks. Their love and support are the heart of this work.

University of Sussex  
Katie Reid, PhD in Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures

## Restless Collection: Ivan Vladislavić and South African Literary Culture

### Summary

This thesis explores Ivan Vladislavić's negotiation of the call for a specifically South African 'signed authorship' as his body of work travels its literary marketplaces. Identifying an accretive logic and a curatorial mode through a series of his prose-fictions, it seeks to contribute to emergent discussions about Vladislavić's increasing visibility on the world-literary stage and the difficulties of positioning his canny reflexive texts on its terms. Between print-cultural and textualist approaches, the thesis registers the imprint in Vladislavić's oeuvre of other roles and institutional spaces he has occupied in South African literary culture – as an editor, a parallel career begun with oppositional publishers Ravan Press in 1984, and in his longstanding engagement with the visual arts and urban studies – to investigate the ways that Vladislavić's authorial position simultaneously evokes and displaces white, Anglo-South African literary authority. My readings, focused on acts of collecting, collector figures and collections of 'small' locally produced texts, thus range between the neglected pre-lives of stories collected by Vladislavić's first book, to the multiple textual surfaces and self-references embedded across his most recent novel. Engaging the critical figure of 'gathering' and its crossings in the discursive institutions of literature and the archive, I open a number of interrelated concerns with writing South Africa from a site of cultural privilege, and with them, Vladislavić's subtle and complex handling of attendant questions, of assembly, custodianship, and proprietorial relations. Tracing Vladislavić's 'gatherings' and their variously accreted 'worlds', I argue that they are reciprocally resistant to market strategies of accommodation whilst enacting a performative and aesthetic openness to the world. My thesis therefore demonstrates a paradoxical relationship of Vladislavić's work to unified literary spaces, the often vexed (post)national and global literary-critical categorisations, and his emergence as a South African 'world writer'.

## Contents

Acknowledgments .....	1
Summary .....	2
Contents .....	3
Table of figures .....	4
Introduction: South African World Writer .....	5
Part I. The Collection: emergent inheritance .....	21
Divergent aesthetics: unsettling book culture and the states of emergency. Local, ‘micro-local’, and international <i>Missing Persons</i> (1989; 2010).....	21
1. States of emergence: transitional networks and print culture. ‘Little’ locals, ‘small’ magazines .....	25
2. Inheritance: editing, curating – care and dispatch. Ravan and <i>Staffrider</i> .....	78
Mobilizing local(e)s .....	106
Part II. Collectors: suspended custodianship.....	108
‘But they don’t belong to you’: letter-texts and the postal-political .....	108
3. <i>The Restless Supermarket</i> : Proofing the Postal-political .....	122
4. Collecting <i>Double Negatives</i> and making the postal image.....	153
Proliferating containment: excessive address .....	170
Part III. Collecting: exhibiting .....	174
Visual culture and literary markets: ‘breakout’ international texts .....	174
5. Travelling the Literary Marketplace: seeing the collectible in <i>Portrait with Keys</i> .....	187
6. ‘Worlding’ the virgule: <i>TJ/Double Negative</i> .....	207
Collected-curated.....	230
Conclusion collecting: sideways.....	232
Bibliography .....	256

## Table of figures

Figure 1: 'Excerpts from a comic-book by Jeff Lok based on the story 'Tsafendas's Diary'. ( <i>Staffrider</i> . 1988, 7:1, 62-63).....	104
Figure 2. <i>Portrait with Keys: Joburg and what-what</i> , Umuzi back cover and barcode detail with the genre ascription of 'Joburg' (2006a).....	198
Figure 3. <i>Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked</i> , Portobello back cover and barcode detail (2007a).....	198
Figure 4. Norton back cover and genre designation detail, ~ <i>The City of Johannesburg Unlocked</i> (2009a).....	199
Figure 5. <i>Portrait with Keys: -Joburg &amp; what-what</i> (2006a); and <i>-The City of Johannesburg Unlocked</i> (2007a and 2009a).....	200
Figure 6. 'Contents' maps/pages, <i>blank_Architecture, apartheid and after</i> (1998: np). ...	239
Figure 7. Pages from <i>The Model Men</i> exhibition catalogue (2004a: 14; 15). ....	242
Figure 8. Joachim Schönfeldt, 'Silence!'. <i>blank_</i> (1998: B3, 66-67).....	244
Figure 9. David Goldblatt, 'Offices'. <i>blank_</i> (1998: D4, 144-145).....	244

## **Introduction: South African World Writer**

From the emergence of his first book, *Missing Persons* (1989), Ivan Vladislavić has been celebrated as a leading proponent of ‘the now’ and ‘the new’ in fiction writing in and of his native South Africa. Increasingly, Vladislavić has seen consecration on the world literary stage, marked perhaps most decisively by his 2015 win of a prestigious Windham-Campbell Prize at Yale University, a ‘global English-language award’ of \$150,000 recognizing ‘literary achievement’, aiming to ‘provide writers with the opportunity to focus on their work independent of financial concerns’ (Windham Campbell, website). For many, this is a belated recognition of an exceptional (postcolonial) author and prose stylist who continues to engage with the unfinished event of apartheid in a range of subtle and complex negotiations of the interactions between history and memory, visual culture and monumentality, with a markedly attentive focus on the everyday shifting transformations of his urban milieu of Johannesburg.

With his increased worldly visibility has come renewed recognition of the roles and institutional spaces Vladislavić has occupied in the development of South African literary culture: as a highly sought after editor and a reflexive art essayist (cf. Gaylard and Titlestad, 2006); as well as critical interest in the co-operative, shared projects that he has undertaken with new and established South African visual artists, photographers, architects, and curators with proximate concerns and topographical interests to his own (Graham, 2016; and forthcoming 2017; O’Toole, forthcoming 2017). This thesis seeks to add to these emergent conversations about Vladislavić’s distinctive modes of working and sustained reflexive engagement with writing in the ‘global’ language from the site of privilege as a white South African. Recent assessments considering the internationalisation of Vladislavić’s body of work – a series of unconventional, often playfully canny literary prose fictions that



refuse narrative explanations of their context for an international audience and that resist generic or market categorisations – have seen him designated as an exemplar of both limitedly ‘micro-local’ (De Kock, 2014) and dynamically ‘cosmopolitan’ (Naudé, 2014) South African writing as it travels its expanded marketplaces. His concentration on the materially inflected localities, the everyday material and shifting spatial make-up of Johannesburg, have had him labelled ‘the Joburg guy’, a descriptor Vladislavić rejects as limiting (Thurman, 2011). It is one that, nonetheless, has emerged through a series of analyses of his prose-fictions as sensitive mappings and revisionings of the imbrications of Johannesburg in global commodity and geopolitical flows (see, for example, Graham, 2007; Helgesson, 2004; 2015; De Kock, 2014); and often as an indicative basis of the ways that Vladislavić’s finely-tuned language and textual renovations of the material of his urban everyday shift the discursive positioning of anglophone South African literary models, genres, and genealogies in the post-apartheid period (Helgesson, 2004; Marais, 2001). In both cases, the value of Vladislavić’s ‘city writing’ is in the potential to reorient the terms of authority to its finely attenuated local particularities in and through the global South (Nuttall, 2004; Gaylard, 2011).

Vladislavić’s local, situational commitment, Johannesburg and its textual ‘what-what’ and ‘drek’ (as the 2006 South African edition of *Portrait with Keys* would have it), has become paradigmatic, as Pablo Mukherjee asserts, of writing that critically registers unevenness and the ‘manifold contradictions of world capitalism’ in a globalized South Africa, producing ‘a literature that might properly be called “world literature”’ (2012: 473). Building on these assessments, the thesis will explore Vladislavić’s belated establishment as a ‘global’ or ‘world’ writer, his commitment to place and development of a unique, specifically South African aesthetic, and his negotiation of the concomitant registration of the ambivalent place of South African literature in the contemporary global book market. My focus is on those of Vladislavić’s prose-fictions that are manifestly multiple, where sidelong, contingent meanings are constituted through the accumulations and accreted significance of different forms of collected ‘small’ texts, and in Vladislavić’s self-reflexive situation of them as direct engagements with local material and book cultures. Vladislavić’s books are often written through an accumulation of fragments, short stories, even

'small scraps of text' (Rosenthal, 2011: np). I investigate the possibilities of these multiply valenced prose fictions, as staged print-cultural performances (Helgesson, 2004), and for the ways that they might illuminate recent shifts from 'postcolonial' to 'world' literary market constructions, and national or post-national literary qualifications (De Kock, 2001; Loomba et al., 2008). I am also interested in the ways these accretive texts trouble categorisation, such as: the false but prominent distinctions drawn between apartheid and post-apartheid writing; genre and its geopolitical placing as a peripheral form; and the problematic groupings of unidirectional or unified, top-down literary world positions, such as those put forward in influential critical accounts of competitive global literary dynamics, Franco Moretti's 'world literary system' (2000), or Pascale Casanova's 'world literary space' (2004).

With a manifestly close engagement in the politics of his place, writing from and through the city in which he continues to work and live, and a 'longstanding canniness in relation to the narrator-author function', noted by Sarah Nuttall in her contribution to the first full-length edited collection of criticism of Vladislavić's work, *Marginal Spaces* (edited by Gerald Gaylard, 2011: 329), Vladislavić's biographical positioning as authorial representative or worldly literary celebrity comes to be slippery. Vladislavić, the South African author, and his textual experiments, as global products, tend to both occupy and trouble the designations that position the author in role of national representative in a postcolonial literary field, advanced by approaches where the demand of global capital establishes an authority nexus in which the lone 'romantic' author figure must compete from the periphery for recognition on dominant Euro-American terms (Casanova, 2004; Brouillette, 2007). Vladislavić's texts have negotiated these demands, for what Sarah Brouillette conceives of as 'signed authorship' in a postcolonial marketplace that requires authors and their texts to function as signs for specific geopolitical struggles and histories (2007: 71; 106), but they have done so unevenly. These various worldly habituations of Vladislavić's writing register strategies of anxious accommodation into the market demands of publication in the global North: they illustrate the ways that these texts can become freighted with a return to an archive of 'responsibility' for the white anglophone writer in the South African context (cf.

Twidle, 2012), returning to the extent to which South African literature has been persistently defined by its outside (see De Kock, 2001 and 2011; Van der Vlies, 2007; Twidle, 2012).

Contested categories of what might historically constitute 'South African literature' have been attenuated by the fraught experiences of overlapping structures of long regimes of harm, and the requirement for 'epic moral clarity' (Nixon, 1994; Barnett, 1999a) in the inequities of racial capitalism and apartheid. Market determinations have required South Africa to be available in particular ways and for its authors to function as moral literary spokespersons (Chapman, 1996; Brouillette, 2007). A range of recent local and international critical compendium texts, special issues and discipline reviews – what Louise Bethlehem refers to in her review article of two of the most prominent examples as South African literary studies' 'achieved professionalism' (2014) – announce a project of a shared national literary space beset by 'the shadow of its own impossibility' (Chapman, 2010: 2). Yet, this is a project reaching across the heterogeneity, ebullience, energy, and the legacy of the 'gap-toothed' nature of the kinds of cultural production that racial segregation engendered, to borrow a pithy reminder from Clare Butcher (2013), seeking some kind of common frame in global, transnational, networked literary flows (Hofmeyr, 2004; Samuelson, 2013), but that ultimately returns to metaphors by which the South African literary is persistently grouped in its difference, rather than commonality.

I seek to illustrate ways in which Vladislavić's texts travel through these territorialized and epistemological positions and to examine Vladislavić's development of a kind of writing authority that is situated and particular whilst it acknowledges its aesthetic entanglement in a longer history of global – colonial and apartheid – ways of seeing. I contend that Vladislavić negotiates the call for authorial 'responsibility' through a reflexive displacement of the position of moral spokesperson and the cultural authority that his situation as a white, middle-class Anglo-South African writer necessitates by employing a range of strategies in his writing that make other creative working modes legible, albeit often obliquely, or even notably in their absences. The gathering of these 'presences', revealing the

multiple and the many hands, times, and spaces that constitute the production of text, reference Vladislavić's longstanding relationship with and development of a method of working through visual art and in response to visual artists, a process he has referred to as the 'bonded autonomy of a joint product' (Naudé, 2014). They also recall his parallel career as a writer and editor, through rendering of textual detail that potentializes the materiality of signs and the mechanics of text which he mobilizes through the celebrated texture of his prose (see, for example, Warnes, 2000; Miller, 2006; Murray, 2009).

These multiple 'presences' appearing in Vladislavić's work lead my readings towards the collection, viewing collecting as a narrative activity in which the collections' contents function as signs for an altered set of referents, requiring a narrator, collector or curator, to make its meanings (Dilworth, 2003; see for example, 6). I focus on Vladislavić's works in which a variety of acts of collection, featuring 'small', locally produced texts and sites, figure prominently to dramatize cultural and textual production. My choice of texts and readings reflects the development of this writing position as part of Vladislavić's insistent interrogation of the structural inequities of apartheid, long after its official end.<sup>1</sup> I will therefore pay attention to his early career as an editor for radical anti-apartheid press, Ravan Press, and in his involvement with a range of literary subcultures and 'little' magazines, which began his dual career as a writer-editor in the 1980s, and which continues to date.

Indeed, Vladislavić has occupied a number of institutional spaces in the development of South African literary culture. His influential parallel career, as a pre-eminent writer and highly sought-after editor, began when he was employed by the activist publishing house as social studies and fiction editor in 1984 (2010b). As a freelance editor, post-Ravan (1988- ), Vladislavić's skill and sensitivity has been

---

<sup>1</sup> Vladislavić has discussed the persistence of apartheid after its ostensible termination frequently in interview. A clear example of the expression of this in the accreted meanings of the multi-modal texts Vladislavić has been involved in can be found in one of Vladislavić's earlier interviews, with Christopher Warnes (2000: 278-9), where Vladislavić's analogy about the presentness of the past in the structures of fiction proceeds from a discussion of his editing *blank\_\_Architecture and After* (1998), a creatively figured extended exhibition catalogue produced with Hilton Judin, discussed more closely in the Conclusion to this thesis. (See also Thurman, 2011: esp. 56.)

acknowledged by writers of some of the most seminal texts to emerge from the post-apartheid period, including the locally produced edition of Antjie Krog's probing, meditative prose-fiction on her role as a journalist covering the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Country of My Skull* (1998. See Krog, 2006; Graham, 2007: 74).<sup>2</sup> He has also established a reputation as an imaginative, reflexive art critic, compiling and editing *T'kama-Adamastor: Inventions of Africa in a South African Painting (on the canvas with Cyril Coetzee)* (2000b), a series of reflections on a painting based on Andre Brink's rewriting of the South African foundation myth of Adamastor that now hangs in the University of the Witwatersrand Library; and with a significant monograph on conceptual artist Willem Boshoff (2005c). Each are examples of Vladislavić's supple flexing of disciplinary bounds through a close engagement with the interstices between modes and forms, and a mode of working that focuses on the multiple and the shared as marks of reflexivity.

Rather than parse the details of his editing and art-critical career, I seek to illustrate how 'backroom activity' (cf. Penfold, 2014), a series of shared decisions, processes and relationships normally confined to the private marginalia of the publishing archive, is thematized in his work to displace the authorial hand. I read in Vladislavić's own aesthetic a coupling of 'care with authority and power... an active consideration of the ethical challenges involved in inheriting collected materials, in exerting custody over them, and in deploying such materials in the world' (Skotnes and Hamilton, 2014: 11). I refer to 'care' specifically on its etymological terms to invoke a curatorial mode (*curare*: to care). Similarly, I evoke 'dispatch' in terms of its etymological links with the editing function (*ēdō*: to dispatch), to allude to the discursive violence inherent in the processes of inclusion and exclusion that editing necessitates, and to the energies of dissemination, transmission, and publication.

My readings are focused on those of Vladislavić's prose fictions in which the properties of the 'small' story and text push against the unity intimated by the

---

<sup>2</sup> This 2006 special issue of *Scrutiny2* on Vladislavić's work includes, with Krog's, three other 'personal reflections on Ivan Vladislavić as an editor' (10) from Tony Morphet, Fred de Vries, and the social and literary historian Tim Couzens. Shane Graham (2007: 70) also cites Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001), and *The Free Diary of Albie Sachs* (2004) as other seminal South African texts that Vladislavić has edited.

collection and the book. Recently called ‘one of the great writers of the fragment’ by Jan Steyn (2012: np), Vladislavić’s writing regularly mobilizes the simultaneously connective and disruptive properties of the ‘small’, fragmentary text. This has been persuasively theorized in the context of genre and Vladislavić’s revisioning of the short story cycle by Sue Marais (1992; 2001; 2011). Marais’ illustration of the ways in which the short stories operate in cross-referential groupings across Vladislavić’s first book, *Missing Persons* (1989), indicates a broader sense of how the fragment appears and is regularly deployed through and in Vladislavić’s work. Not merely forms of self-contained, subjective articulations where the plurality and differences between its multiple texts are predicated on the book and collection’s unity (see Watt, 2007), the fragment, as it appears throughout Vladislavić’s oeuvre, also indicates the socio-geographical limns in the fragile unity of what it might mean to be South African in its divided national mythos, and the ‘ultimately frustrated intimations of cohesion which the collection [*Missing Persons*] evinces’ (Marais, 1992: 54-55). The productive tensions that emerge through the use of the small text, that which Marais identifies of the cycles of *Missing Persons*, are evident in each of the instances of collections in focus through this thesis, and in such a way as to gesture towards the ‘opening’ up of the conventional bounds of the book, in an acknowledgment of its limits.

Not simply deployed in ways that suggest this rhetorical relationship, one that is produced between various fragmentary articulations within the spaces bracketed by the covers of the books they appear in, often these text fragments have particularly ‘thingly’ qualities, finding mirroring parallels in the ‘story of objects asserting themselves as things’ (Brown, 2001: 4). Admitting a narrative frame to ‘thingness’, Bill Brown’s story, of how ‘the thing really names less an object’ (ibid) than its changed subject-object relations, finds its way through Vladislavić’s texts in lists and inventories of found and familiar objects, and, of, and by their owner-maker subjects: idiosyncratic collectors and hoarders wrestle with the irrepressible contingency of things, satirizing, often with a poignant delicacy, the oppositional pulls inherent in the creative process and the narrative drive for closure and

completionism.<sup>3</sup> Different meanings accrue in these processes of making words things, making things lists, and the ordering impulse, their relationships between order and disorder. With particularly ‘thingly’ qualities, letters also emerge frequently from the surfaces of Vladislavić’s texts, as historical, temporal, geographical and intersubjective markers – from his first story collections *Missing Persons* (1989) and *Propaganda by Monuments* (1996a), to the stories in *101 Detectives* (2015) – and as indicating particularly South African geographies and concerns. These fragmentary things perform their narrative functions as collections, and perform them in the manner of the collection, as they pile up and gather their meanings and we move with them in reading in all their ‘restless’ qualities.

I also focus on Vladislavić’s oeuvre as correspondingly marked by the anchoring function implied by a custodian impulse (see Skotnes and Hamilton, 2014). The problem of inheriting and how to process collections of other’s documents, letters, and papers, the injunction to ‘read them, think about them, edit them or otherwise reorder them, and write about them’, to ‘make something of their leavings’ (2015: 146), is one such refrain. The responsibility inherent in this remaking, that of interfering in their relative completeness, shifting and altering personal archives in a complex set of pulls and personal concerns, is often figured as an ethical burden that must keep the collection shut, autonomous, closed off from textual intervention and the cultural implications and decisions necessary to intervene. Yet responsibility, for and with them, is maintained as the personal papers, trunks and collections of others are held and kept, cared for alongside and with other possessions and more personal collections, conceptual and actual; they are travelled with, and preserved in an ambivalent relationship to the custodian role they confer.

The poet and cultural historian Susan Stewart provides insight into such issues of the structures of assembly and difference in her discussion of museum collections: ‘to have a representative collection is to have both the minimum and the complete number of elements necessary for an autonomous world’ (1993: 152). Time is made synchronous or simultaneous within the collection’s bounds, ‘not something to be

---

<sup>3</sup> See Gaylard (2005) on this particular satirical aspect of Vladislavić’s short story ‘The Book Lover’ (1996a).

restored to an origin' (1993: 151). In this conception, the collection is at once both singular and complete. It places its discrete elements, each with their own authority, side by side, priority residing in arrangement, interrelation, and positionality. Stewart's exploration of the collection in the museum context is significant: Vladislavić's 'collections' regularly and directly reference the other modes of working that inhabit his books, including, and often predominantly, that of visual culture. Modal and generic relationships as well as the component texts assembled together, 'gain power by being "representative", and the collection becomes something more than the sum of its parts' (Dilworth, 2003: 8).<sup>4</sup> There are analogous processes that I identify more explicitly with Vladislavić's mode of writing-collecting, and which he mobilizes in relation to the bounds of the book. Between multiple fragments of text 'ceaselessly referring to one another' (Baudrillard, 1994: 22), Vladislavić's fragmented prose-fictions constitute a paradoxically self-referential world, of other narratives and 'small' story and text cycles, embedded in recessed self-references to his 'joint', outward facing projects with visual artists (see Naudé, 2014; Riach, 2014: 93).

Acts of collection involve acts of possession (Baudrillard, 1994; Benjamin, 1999). They ask questions of acquisition, assembly, and ownership. Absorbed by relations that are 'quintessentially interior' (Dilworth, 2003: 7), the collections' contents move inwards to the orbit and spaces of their collector. Repositioned and 'housed' in new spatial, often domestic, and in new temporal arrangements, objects are brought into the binding of the collection's logic. In the progression through these changed spaces and functions, their individual context of origin, acquisition, and production is effaced, rendered insignificant by the autonomy and seal of the collection's own esoteric world. In this set of movements, typically from public to private, from normative relations to eclectic and particularistic ones, the collection's world liberates objects from their instrumentality, replacing 'history with *classification*' [original stress], with 'order beyond the realm of temporality'

---

<sup>4</sup> Considering the anthology as a collection, Dilworth also discusses the museum and the history of the book as intertwined, converging in the sixteenth century in a set of representative genres featuring the connections between textual and artifactual collections. In Vladislavić's experiments with visual art and gallery practises explored throughout the thesis, this is germane to the 'opening' of the literary category of 'the book'.



(Stewart, 1993: 151). The narrative of history is replaced with the narrative of the collection, and, so, the collector's world-creating possibilities.

The collection, Stewart goes on to say, is, in its total aestheticization of use value, 'a form of art as play... the creation of a new context' which, like other forms of art, stands in a metaphorical relation to the everyday. Although 'the collection is not representational' (1993: 151-2), and so the collector cannot be thought of on the same terms as an artist, with this deft movement across her building definition, Stewart posits the individual collecting subject as both a creative aestheticizing figure rearticulating objects in new, liberating configurations, and as an ordering subject, classifier and taxonomist. The relationship to this ahistoricism and the liberating potential of the collection's newly configured spaces and set of relations is problematized by the taxonomic drive Stewart identifies, which also seeks to fulfil its desire for objects' worldly origins as much as it abstracts that process. The significance of the ordering principles of the individual collecting self's rationale is foregrounded and is, moreover, set in an analogous relation to an artistic transformational praxis. Vladislavić's text collections register this tension provocatively. Questions about relationships, of the history of the collection to the world and how it comes to be embedded, what its avenues are for its narrativization and belonging, questions that occupy the ground between, then, the personal and the social, the limns of the local, inclusion and exclusion, all come to the fore. With them, the centrality, capacities and authority of the individual subject are primary, involved in a meaning making that is both 'world absorbing and world creating', and intimately involved in the quotidian and demotic (Suresh, 2016: 100).<sup>5</sup>

In their gatherings, groupings, sharings, my reading of Vladislavić's 'authored collections', to borrow a resonant phrase from Kate Eichorn (2008), see their aesthetic and liberating potentials entangled in archival processes and those of cultural memory. In focusing on a series of Vladislavić's 'small stories' (1996b: 3), where each of the 'small texts' are concerned with the local, and where the collector/curator figure is writer and author, responsible, then, for the objects in the

---

<sup>5</sup> Suresh is here discussing the centrality and heterotopic properties of the paper file, the 'file and the world' (100), in law proceedings in Delhi through the example of a specific court case.

collections' remaking through the processes of their transmission and dissemination in the bindings of the literary book, a number of the tensions that Stewart's analysis identifies and a set of critical (nomological) intersections begin to cross. Confronting the plasticity of the terms and frequent connotations between 'collection' and 'archive', Eichorn (2008: 3) draws a useful distinction between the constructed, highly regulated collections that produce 'official' narratives about cultural memory and its selective usage for people's lives in the present, such as those housed in official archival sites, 'the archive', and random collections of objects which bring the individual collector pleasure but which may not affect the larger order of things. Drawing on work on this distinction by anthropologist Penelope Papailias, Eichorn goes on to refine the critical valence in addressing more directly the space of overlap between these abstracted terms, suggesting that to choose the term 'archive' over 'collection' is to 'consciously choose to think about documentary assemblages as sites that are as much about texts and textual practices as they are about people and relations of power' (3).

In the archival collections in focus through this thesis, archival, that is, in the overlapping sense that Papailias and Eichorn identify, small texts are involved, in a variety of ways, in processes of becoming 'book'. Questions of history and of the national space intervene in Vladislavić's political engagement with tensions between marginal and dominant voices. The authority of the collector's narrative power and its suspension of the object's material-historical relations, as outlined by Stewart above, recurs through the thesis as it is problematized in relation to writing. It is through his literary prose fictions in which 'marginal', small texts and voices are held in the bounds of a collection, each dramatizing narration, and each with reference to their locality and material histories, that Vladislavić's subtle treatment of the problem of inherited knowledge and cultural production as a white anglophone South African (see Thurman, 2011: 49) becomes most visible, as well as his insistence on denaturalising the power structures where cultural 'documents' and texts of cultural memory risk appropriation by a single dominant group or individual. In their rhetorical and aesthetic possibility, their deployment of the fragment and fragmented text, the literary texts the thesis goes on to look at provide a glimpse into Vladislavić's responses to a broader range of cultural texts in their

assemblage, going on to indicate the sensitivities involved in their transmission. This begins to address Vladislavić's place in the development of South African literary culture by finding points of confluence between his position as a cultural gatekeeper, at Ravan, as an editor, and as an art critic and cultural intellectual (see Gaylard and Titlestad, 2006), in his position as a writer.

In occupying the crossover and tensions between the archive and the collection, I employ figures from the 'abstract archive' of Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1995). This figuration and its overlaps indicates where collecting and the collection can be seen through the metaphor of 'gathering', a metaphor that in Derrida's critique can also describe a self-fulfilling, self-returning circularity of authority and power, the persistent attempt in the Western philosophical tradition to 'gather all identity and memory within the safe enclosure of the circle' (Dooley and Kavanagh, 2014). The *archon*, the guardian of the documents that enter the archive, and keeper and sentry of the power that institutes, legislates, and repeats its law (Derrida, 1995: 1-5), is one such figure that risks crossing with the playful liberating potentials of the collector-curator. I consider these kinds of figures and tropes through a series of archival sites, of alternative publication and literary subcultures, under apartheid and beyond, that Vladislavić has been involved in, and that his collector-curatorial texts engage with. I seek not necessarily to recover a position for Vladislavić in the complex and shifting uncertainties of the socio-political transformations during what I come to view as successive phases of South Africa's 'interregnum' (Gordimer, 1983: 262; see Marais, 2011: 28),<sup>6</sup> but to illustrate ways in which Vladislavić's concern with historicising practices of cultural production for contemporary debates emerges through his work. In this exploration, I make recourse to an 'extra-

---

<sup>6</sup> Emerging through the literary before the political, Nadine Gordimer's 'Living in the Interregnum' (1982), begins to define the period's lineaments with characteristic synergistic style between politics, philosophy, broader culture and the literary: 'I live at 6,000 feet in a society whirling, stamping, swaying with the force of revolutionary change. The vision is heady; the image of the demonic dance is accurate, not romantic: an image of actions springing from emotion, knocking deliberation aside. The city is Johannesburg, the country South Africa, and the time the last years of the colonial era in Africa. ... Historical coordinates don't fit life any longer; new ones, where they exist, have couplings not to the rulers, but to the ruled. It is not for nothing that I chose as an epigraph for my most lately written novel a quotation from Gramsci: "The old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms."' 'Living in the Interregnum' was first published in 1983 and based on the earlier James Lecture, delivered at the New York Institute for the Humanities on October 14, 1982. The novel Gordimer refers to is *July's People* (1981).

textual archive' of Louise Bethlehem's understanding, that is to say, an archive that is both 'autobiographical in a narrow sense, and phenomenological in a wider circuit' (2014: 529). This also illustrates a foundation which, I demonstrate, is profoundly textual and significantly literary, that emerges through the texture of Vladislavić's fictional works in the production of a specific writing position.

As I go on to discuss through the thesis, literary collections and anthologies do much to alter the relationships of their contents to their contexts, making the work familiar in its particular arrangements, recontextualizing it within the collection, or collectors', interests, narrativity and bounds. The literary text collection is one of a particular type, performing a series of indirect relations to commodity culture and the unevenness of global capital practices: the book, as product, compounds these relations, requesting attention to its material life and processes of circulation – strategies of marketing, production, and reception. To some extent, then, I take up the call of recent book history approaches to the region, in order to think about the accumulation of meaning that attaches to Vladislavić's 'small texts'.<sup>7</sup>

In his 2007 study of a mode of reading suitable to the 'predicaments' of South African writing, Van der Vlies recalls the significance of Jerome McGann's attention in *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (1985) to a work's 'textualizations' – the history of its embodiment in successive texts – and its 'socialisations' in its circulation and reception (9). McGann's insight in *The Textual Condition* (1991) that the material aspects of texts, their paratexts, 'typefaces, bindings, book prices, page formats' (13), and the institutions through which they are produced and consumed, are as central to their meaning transmission as their content or linguistic codes, has proved productive for materialist and book-history approaches seeking to situate postcolonial, transnational literary aesthetics in the social dynamics of the marketplace. This is the case both for South African literatures and global reception (Brouillette, 2007; Helgesson, 2009), and for the return of aesthetic modernism to the market in the study of 'little' magazine culture, where the 'bibliographic environment' and its

---

<sup>7</sup> See Andrew Van der Vlies' call for 'New Directions' in a book history approach to South Africanist literary scholarship (2012: 38-41).

signifying system is concentrated by the openness of the form to multiple modes and materials (Brooker and Thacker, 2009: 14; see also McKible, 2002; Dettmar & Watt, 1996). This has particular relevance for my study as it takes as its impetus the 'small' and the 'little', and Vladislavić's involvement with local Johannesburg-based 'little mags' in the 1980s, and the lively experimental energies necessitated by their production contexts under apartheid.

Vicki Tolar Burton offers the concept of 'rhetorical accretion' as the practice of layering, or overlaying 'additional texts over and around the original text' by the production authority: 'as in the accreted growth of stones by the addition of external particles, rhetorical accretion attempts to form a whole from disjointed parts. But unlike the natural process of mineral formation, textual accretion is the result of human agency. With each accretion to a text, the speaker of the text is respoken' (1999: 548). Burton suggests that examining rhetorical accretions, or layers of paratextual scaffolding around the 'core' text allows us to consider 'cultural formation in the larger discourse community' (1999: 548), and access texts in their multiplicity and plenitude, analysing their otherwise subsumed power relations in modes of production and distribution.

Burton's is a feminist methodology and one that seeks to recover the 'core' voice from its overlayering by 'male' paratexts; Vladislavić's 'textual' situation in terms of his positioning in relation to a production authority troubles the conditions of retrieval of an original or 'core' on these terms, suggesting a parallel troubling of subject-object relations and a possible way of reading otherwise, while stressing the importance of a material-rhetorical reading and necessary sensitivity to local conditions and issues of appropriation. Throughout, the collection figures a particular kind of creative labour and mode of writing by which Vladislavić negotiates the demands of South African anglophone literary production and its shifting print-cultural markets.

Considering this negotiation, and with this methodological and textual framework as a point of departure, in part one, I look at the first publication contexts of stories assembled by Vladislavić's first story collection *Missing Persons* (1989) to resituate

some of the sites of meaning production and institutions that Vladislavić's work emerged from and travelled across. Vladislavić's early stories appeared in three local, literary 'little' magazines: *Sesame* (explicitly self-positioned in the English liberal tradition); *Stet* (a predominantly Afrikaans magazine that occasionally published pieces in English of merit); and the groundbreaking radical magazine *Staffrider*. These magazines provide a contextual approach to Vladislavić's emergent aesthetic and a shifting, dynamic network of publication and production in the 1980s states of emergency.

*Staffrider* has a particular significance in this network. During this period, as previously mentioned, Vladislavić worked as an editor for Ravan Press, the publishing house that instituted both *Staffrider* and a range of collective, democratic, non-racial practices through the 1980s. At Ravan, Vladislavić was formally attached to *Staffrider* in 1988 as assistant editor: he was responsible for anthologising an emergent aesthetic in the *Ten Years of Staffrider* anthology (1988); and one of his early stories appeared in the first issue that he edited, 'Tsafendas's Diary' (also 1988). This story is illustrated by the magazine's designer Jeff Lok who produced a comic in response to Vladislavić's ludic, fragmented text. The context of production across these highly mobile, little magazines situates Vladislavić's later development of a mode of working, particularly with visual art and in terms of the dual movements of care and dispatch I associate with his editing work, that is open and reflexive, and through which the author figure is decentralized.

Part two extends the sense of small texts in collection and the entanglement of the collector in contexts of production by focusing on two instances of fictional collections that are in some way postal, of or containing letters and involved in state telecommunicative systems. Moving into a critical approach to the archive as a postal site (Derrida, 1980; Brothman, 1993), one that is contoured by a postal-politics of an extended empire and coloniality (Bennington, 1990; Willis, 2007), I focus the text collectors and their collections in the novels in question through the lens of 'epistolarity', and the letter's capacity to intervene in narrative fiction (Altman, 1982). In each, these 'postal collections' worry at their archontic, custodian figures and indicate the difficulties of the ethical handling and inheritance of others'

texts in the New South Africa. As the postal system is a national one, and as these postal collections enter the narrative present at the point of the newly conceived, post-apartheid nation and its decisive entry into the global economy, they insist on the significance of the recalcitrant material fragments of everyday life under the old order in the present. There is a corresponding development of an authorial position which both asserts itself and steps back from the role of authority through the narrative filters of a proofreader (*The Restless Supermarket*) and photographer (*Double Negative*).

Part three explores the development of this writing position by considering Vladislavić's way of working with visual art and artists as extending the conventional bounds of the literary book. Through mirroring cross-references to 'joint products' and to previous cooperative contexts of cross-cultural production, and employing textual strategies that invite the reader to participate in the production of an alternative kind of text, Vladislavić develops a curatorial mode that continues to insist on his sense of accountability and responsibility as a white South African writer in the neoliberal dispensation, and his negotiations of its demands. I explore the ways that this mode of writing mitigates and is involved in global literary and cultural categorisations and its development through books that were successful on the postcolonial or world literary market terms: *Portrait with Keys*, the genesis of which was a range of projects working with visual artists; and *Double Negative*, a novel written in response to a retrospective of eminent social documentary photographer David Goldblatt's work, which Vladislavić negotiates by embedding in the fabric of the novel a set of references to his other texts that are directly inspired by similar projects.

## **Part I. The Collection: emergent inheritance**

### **Divergent aesthetics: unsettling book culture and the states of emergency. Local, 'micro-local', and international *Missing Persons* (1989; 2010)**

*Missing Persons*, Vladislavić's first book, published by internal oppositional publisher David Philip in 1989, was heralded locally as an innovative departure from previous trends in South African short story writing: a new orientation that registered the possibilities in the passing of the constraints associated with a particular historical moment (Gareth Cornwell qtd. in Marais, 2011: 27), and effecting a disaggregation of previously held imagined South African communities (Marais, 1992: 2001). '[S]howy' (Murray, 1991: 190), 'outrageous' (Brown, 1990: 127), 'astonishing' and 'extraordinary' (Marais' and Morphet's most prominent descriptors, respectively), Vladislavić's *Missing Persons* appeared as a book 'so thoroughly mediated through the meshes of South African reality, so welded by the metaphor' as to fit 'the times perfectly'; times and a text, then, in which '[A]nything can happen' (Morphet [1990], 2011: 24), in a 'society-in-extremis' (Brown, 1990: 129)

Twelve years after its original publication, in her heterotopic reading of Vladislavić's early fiction, Felicity Woods discusses 'Ivan Vladislavić's South Africa' as formed by his disruptive aesthetic 'of sudden inversions or dissolutions, startling fusions or metamorphoses and hilarious, fanciful or downright crazy interventions', repeating Morphet's expansively encompassing pronoun when describing the stories of *Missing Persons*: '[A]nything goes' (Woods, 2001: 21). My exploration below of the neglected first publication contexts of Vladislavić's stories from *Missing Persons* will pick up on 'anything going', as well as its continuing sense of relevance for



Vladislavić's prose from the critical moment of *Missing Persons*' publication well into the post-apartheid period. The phrase is resonant, not simply with the wild inventiveness and freedom it images, significant for Vladislavić's play with form, genre and reflexivity through *Missing Persons* and the collection's creative figuring of a South Africa in transition in its moment of publication; it also resonates with questions of what might remain in the wake of things gone, absences these gestures and energy might leave, and what might be able to then 'take place'. It speaks, then, from a frame of imaginative potential, to both emergence and inheritance.

The stories in *Missing Persons* are stuffed with odd and inexplicable things in processes of subversion – flammable hands, extraordinary bricks bubbling like fermenting loaves of bread, motorized rocking chairs whizzing down the road, thinking caps knitted into furry meat stew – and pervaded by the title's eponymous absence with its sinister state-instituted undertones, irresolvable secrecies indicating conspiracies and gaps at their centre – absent bodies, formalities, understanding. The surreal conflations, sometimes between different things, sometimes between things and non-things, sometimes between things and their proper places, and between comedy and violence, highlight the often-farcical satire of Vladislavić's writing (Gaylard, 2005): this is farce in both its archaic definition 'to stuff, to fill' as well as to the exuberance of its 'exaggerated comedy' (*Chambers English Dictionary* 1993).

Its stories also reveal their farce in the face of the uncanny fictions purported by the apartheid state, their troubling and recalcitrant silences that refuse straightforward identifications. Identifiable locales, registered by recognizable historical anchors, are disturbed by unstable psychic and imaginative geographies and temporalities. *Missing Persons*' stories reference elsewhere, both overly full and startlingly empty, opening their worlds onto knowledge and narrativity outside of the shared fields of perception they put forward, to secrets and unknowns (see Stewart, 1993: 54), to loss and fragmentation. Vladislavić's 'self-consciously deconstructionist mode of presentation' in *Missing Persons* (Peters, 1998: 239) finds its eloquent articulations in the gaps between fractured sites and spaces. Narrativizing 'silenced and repressed sites in the old recorded history of apartheid'

(Peters, 1998: 238), *Missing Persons* opens its textualizations of South African history onto these muted, aporetic spaces, rather than foreclosing difference onto a prefigured vacant territory of the other, ready to write onto with recourse to prescribed, dominant 'texts' (see Spivak, 1990: 1-2). In each of the stories from *Missing Persons* in focus through this part of the thesis, this disturbed landscape of white, suburban life under apartheid is negotiated critically through frustrated alternatives put forward against dominant ways of seeing, raising questions about 'the visibility (and probably the roles) of white ethnic groupings other than the Afrikaners in the story of racism in South Africa', as Wonderboy Peters recognizes of the whole collection (1998: 239). The stories have their ethical charge, not so much in what they say as in their openness to the absences they allude to, in abstract creative exercises that make legible distinctly archival and curatorial imaginaries, that act as sites for the display of missing visual art works and stage imagined gallery and museum spaces through a ludic postmodern textual fabric.

The short story collection is a particular type of book, one that has the capacity to exploit the tensions available in the tendencies for a series of small texts to hang together in connective strands under one title, to enact the values of 'becoming' in gathering together as something more than the sum of its parts (cf. Dilworth, 2003; Eichorn, 2008; Riach, 2014). In *Missing Persons*, Vladislavić deploys this potential affinity whilst simultaneously calling attention to the equally 'ambivalent and unresolved potentialities of the [short story] cycle form', refusing narrative closure or settlement (Marais, 2011: 38). Dominant modes of critical reception of the inventive estrangement of *Missing Persons* have been drawn in relation to the generative potential of associative links, motifs and possible groupings between its eleven collected short texts, necessarily registering, too, that its elusive and polysemic qualities are due to its formal tensions between separated narrative pieces;<sup>8</sup> some are further subdivided and internally fragmented, small texts in processes of division into ever more insistently small parts, performing their own potential for redeployment as units of renarrativization (cf. Collins, 2002/2003). Viewed on these terms, *Missing Persons* lends itself to a deliberate thinking through

---

<sup>8</sup> See for example, Peters, 1998; Leveson, 1991-1992, qtd. in Thurman, 2011; Wannenburg, 1990.

of a specific kind of fictional work, both in the sense of the object and reading experience it makes up, and of a particular sort of creative labour, that might comprise what Vladislavić has described as ‘a highly designed imaginative structure’, with a committed engagement to its locality and context more complex ‘than...realism usually allows’ (1996b: 3).

Vladislavić’s ‘exposure of the textuality of contemporary South African history’ (Marais, 2011: 28), and the well documented development of his early postmodern, what I have termed his ‘farcical’ aesthetic seen in the suggestive bonds in operation across *Missing Persons*, is read here through a more radical opening of the book and its fragmented stories. These alternative readings of the stories’ connective tissue beyond the books’ bindings emerge via their first publication contexts. Prior to the David Philip collection of *Missing Persons* (1989), stories from the volume first appeared in local literary magazines: *Sesame* (Renoster Books); *Stet* (Taurus); and *Staffrider* (Ravan). Although scrupulously bibliographically referenced as they appear in Vladislavić’s later collections, the stories’ publication in these ‘little’ local magazines remain an unmapped aspect of Vladislavić scholarship.

The cartographic reference is deliberate: Vladislavić’s own interest in the divisions of apartheid and the dynamics of physical exclusion and access are thematized in the stories in focus, and foregrounded by the particularities of the production contexts they appear in. Each of the stories involve visual culture and push against conventional boundaries between modes, and the (in)visibility of state archival excesses. In what follows, then, I offer a provisional map of a material-rhetorical approach to *Missing Persons*, drawing on Tolar-Burton’s work on the gathering of paratextual meanings around a text and its re-voicing in ‘rhetorical accretion’ (1999), and the shift in the field of traditional rhetorical study towards ‘diffuse’ (LeFebvre) multi-modal, and socially produced texts as material entities (Clary-Lemon, 2015; Dickson, 1999). With this material methodology in mind, I look to the ephemeral archives of the stories’ first publication pre-lives, to consider them in a network of generative accretions that take up their locality and sociality in ways that can indicate alternative readings of Vladislavić’s (and an anglophone) literary aesthetic under apartheid.

That this map is provisional is also strategic, following Vladislavić's lead: *Missing Persons* is a highly restless text, composed of small, fragmentary parts that refuse to definitively settle on any one as defining or central. Building towards the publication of Vladislavić's first, and comparatively unitary product of the book in 1989, these stories accrue different kinds of connective meanings in their appearances through each of these distinct, literary and print subcultural spaces, particularly as they are 'routed' by spatialized and material conditions of the shifting and increasingly complex oppositional literary culture in the 1980s. I offer here a form of an alternative 'collection', aware of the reflexivity and discursive construction of doing so from a position in the Western academy. Context, paratexts and the rhetorically accretive potential of the magazines' responses to the apartheid-capitalist, white-owned dominance of the book trade are therefore central to my re-readings. Each of these 'small' contexts provide 'small' but significantly instituting sites of alternative publication, 'collecting' differing claims over what might constitute literature in the anti-essentialist, gathering non-racial spirit of their time, under the umbrellas of their individual aesthetic, publishing, and ideological ethos (see McDonald, 2009; 2016).

## **1. States of emergence: transitional networks and print culture.**

### **'Little' locals, 'small' magazines**

*Missing Persons* emerged into the watershed year of 1989, in South Africa a liminal moment, rapidly transitional but not yet 'post-'.<sup>9</sup> In cultural and literary production violent, national controversy (Ménager-Everson, 1992: 61) was triggered by the publication of ANC activist Albie Sachs' call for the renewal of the artist's role in relation to the ANC commitment to a progressively plural South African society, first presented in the indicatively named position paper, 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom', at an ANC in-house seminar on culture of that year (printed in Sachs,

---

<sup>9</sup> F.W De Klerk was elected as South Africa's last apartheid era State President in September 1989, working with Mandela to end de facto racial segregation.

1991).<sup>10</sup> Sachs' proposal to ban the phrase 'culture is a weapon of the struggle' concentrated previous arguments about reading economies and institutions of meaning, the political use value of art, and the value of cultural production as 'solidarity criticism'. This mode of committed, weaponized expression as political engagement held a narrowed range of themes for Sachs, such as the closing of ambiguity and play, and a reduction of character to functional stereotype (see Newman, 2001; Brown and van Dyk, 1991; Attwell, 1993), ways of writing that Vladislavić's first collection was seen to overturn so decisively.

The debate itself was not new. Several prominent writers and critics had insisted on the space of art as one free from the moral determinism of protest. Notable in the Sachs controversy was Njabulo Ndebele's intervention in early 1984, in a review essay in *Staffrider* magazine, 'Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction' (6:1, 24-25; 42-48). This supple essay (Vladislavić, 2008a), evidencing Ndebele's early Black Consciousness thinking, was a registration of the theoretical insights of 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary', in which Ndebele focused his point that the history of black South African writing was largely that of 'the representation of spectacle' (1986: 143), and that a return to 'ordinary' experience was necessary to counter the radical simplification that apartheid's logic of emergency had burdened black cultural expression with.<sup>11</sup> The debate unleashed by Sachs' paper, standing at its transitional political moment, recapitulates some of the contemporary questions about cultural ownership and power that Ndebele's earlier essay had confronted, but with its questions refocused increasingly in the hands of the ANC as the party best equipped to take on the mantle of political power into South Africa's future. Sachs' liberalizing vision, whilst asking 'whether we have sufficient cultural imagination to grasp the full dimensions of the country that is struggling to give birth to itself' or '[whether we are] still trapped in the multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination' (187), recalled the valuation of political responsibility for the writer in South Africa as located between the categories of 'black writing' – socially committed, embracing the social- and neo-realist strategies

---

<sup>10</sup> Sachs' views were published in the Johannesburg-based paper, then called *The Weekly Mail* in the same week that F.W. de Klerk unbanned the ANC in 1990. See Attwell, 1993: 144.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the political context of 'the spectacular' into which both 'Turkish Tales' and the 'Rediscovery' essay emerged, see Rob Gaylard (2009), 'Rediscovery revisited'.

aimed at minimizing the boundaries between literature and social discourse – and ‘white writing’ – modernist or postmodernist modes of engagement, criticized as lacking social engagement, more conventionally evaluated as ‘literary’ and ‘European’ (Mkhize, 2001; cf. Coetzee, 1988).<sup>12</sup>

In the continuing quest for the best mode of South African cultural expression, and in the import of South Africa’s ‘shift from revolution to reform’ (O’Brien 2001: 38), lay echoes of older debates: issues of control and conferral of aesthetic standards, the location of ‘good taste’ and originality, the language of ownership, and the contested place of colonialist, white-liberal, liberal-formal standardization. In the spectre of the return of the depoliticized, autonomous text lay implications of patronage from an intellectual white liberal elite, and the turning of associated universalized standards against emergent, local, alternative aesthetics. Ari Sitas’s aggressive response to Sachs’ paper in the *Weekly Mail* (9-15 February 1990) returned wholesale to the donor experience of writers such as Dhlomo, Biko, and Black Consciousness writers, as he castigated ‘the castrating practices of Ravan Press editors’ (qtd. in Ménager-Everson, 1992: 62).

As I go on to discuss, at the time of the publication of *Missing Persons* and of the Sachs debate, Vladislavić was assistant editing Ravan’s flagship magazine, *Staffrider*, in the midst of this emphatic 1989 rearticulation of the critical gap in literary production, between forms which favour, broadly speaking: dialectical-materialist (the material well-being of the masses vulnerable to the elision of individual specificities); and liberal-formalist or postmodern aestheticization (vulnerable to the outsider position of inadequate ‘witness’ or the abstraction that diminishes the material inequalities of lived experience in South Africa). In the cultural environment that produced Vladislavić’s emergent writing and in which he was editing at Ravan, these debates also provide an indication of the newness of the rupture that lay beyond the end of apartheid, what Elleke Boehmer has described as ‘a space of which it was impossible to imagine the shape’ (1998: 45). This reiteration takes on pointed

---

<sup>12</sup> These shorthand terms (cited) which capture the polarization of the debate are Jubalani Mkhize’s, the juxtaposition lying in writers’ chosen mode of engagement with apartheid South Africa rather than necessarily racial lines. See 2001: 170-187; 173 in particular.

significance, then, at the very moment the ANC began to consider its political future and the possibilities of entering the global market economy as credible national participant. The tenor of these debates echoes a broader retreat from alternative, radical political futures, its ‘normalization’ as O’Brien coins it (2001), as well as consolidation of the ANC’s cultural wings in the continued struggle for empowerment against structural racist segregation and epistemic violence.

From this timeframe, and mindful of the specific backdrop of the debate of ‘cultural settlement’, Tony Morphet’s early assessment of Vladislavić’s ironic treatment of contemporary South African society in *Missing Persons* views the collection as ‘*translocative* across the lines of the multiple discourses that are constructing the cultural nodes and spaces of society’ (1990, qtd. in Marais, 2011: 27; emphasis in original). Correlatively, concentrating on the ways in which the stories read across and exceed the bounds of previously held groupings, Sue Marais’ incisive reading stresses the collection’s *dislocative* properties: in Vladislavić’s deployment of the short story cycle, ‘a form conventionally associated, both in its local and international manifestations, with regionalism and community’, Marais identifies a radical subversion of any collective sense of identity or of national belonging attached to place (2011: 27-28; 1992: 46). In these readings, the spaces of the South African national and literary imaginary are multiple and heterogeneous. Vladislavić’s collection writes across its possibilities for relocation and discursive resituation.

The ways in which the registration of these multiple local nodes have travelled through the international reception of *Missing Persons* are also revealing of an inheritance of persistent division across and into perceptions of the post-apartheid literary field, what Rian Malan in 2010 called its separated ‘kingdoms of consciousness’ (qtd. in Twidle, 2012: 16). Enabled by a set of international frames, the crossings that *Missing Persons* effects indicate a mobilisation of a literary transnationalism: its fantastical, meta-narrative qualities register the text as an early exemplar of contemporary African “anti-’ or ‘magic- realism” (Mukherjee, 2012; Grzeda, 2013), renovating ‘a narrative language conditioned and chained by the oppressive model of social realism’ (Guidotti, 1999: 235); and providing a

vehicle for the reconciliation of Eurocentric Western rationalism and African tradition (Grzeda, 2013). Acknowledging Vladislavić's Euro-American influences, critics have identified *Missing Person's* narrative-resistant tendencies as postmodern rather than magical-realist (see Barris, 2010: 285; cf. Gaylard, 2005; Thurman, 2011). Detailing the fractured, suburban Anglo-South African white experience in the close locales of Pretoria, *Missing Persons*, in its particular South Africanness, announces its entrance to the 'world' and an 'African' literary. Yet behind these critical assessments, there is a return to the very formal, generic and socio-political categorizations that Vladislavić's book disarticulates in the moment and place of its production, the terms on which a 'minority literature', in this case 'white', are predicated on (see Gaylard, 2011: 8; cf. Coetzee, 1988).

*Missing Persons* has remained, then, a relatively local affair, published in a still isolated apartheid state by leading internal oppositional publisher David Philip (1989).<sup>13</sup> It also remains relatively neglected in international reception (see Thurman and Marais, in Gaylard, 2011), through which it tends to be read as confirming models of literary writing that dominated the latter apartheid years, albeit in its departures from these modes. This is the case despite concerted efforts by Vladislavić's second publisher, Umuzi, a local imprint of Random House-Struik operating from Cape Town, at redress for both of Vladislavić's early collections, *Missing Persons* (1989) and the later *Propaganda by Monuments* (1996a).<sup>14</sup> In 2010, Umuzi produced the joint anthology *Flashback Hotel: Early Stories*, for launch with an author appearance for the 'South Africa Pavilion' focus of the 2010 London Book Fair. This launch failed, not necessarily through a lack of readiness in the market: Vladislavić's international reputation and acclaim had been steadily rising, primarily through international editions and translations of *The Folly* (UK, Granta in 1994), and *Portrait with Keys* (2006a), the first of Umuzi's Vladislavić titles (published in the UK by Portobello Books). It was due, rather, to an 'Act of God': the intended

---

<sup>13</sup> David Philip, one of the leading interventionist publishers of the apartheid era is credited alongside Ravan Press and Ad Donker with transforming the South African literary marketplace in the early 1970s, each taking risks to publish in spite of censorship (McDonald, 2009: 83; 132). Operating as a commercial publisher during apartheid, David Philip survived into the post-apartheid period, and remained Vladislavić's publisher from *Missing Persons* (1989) through to *The Restless Supermarket* (2001; David Philip produced a second edition of *Restless* in 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Gerald Gaylard (2005: 135) judges the earlier *Missing Persons* 'inferior' to *Propaganda by Monuments & Other Stories* (1996a).



international marketing opportunities for South African authors and publishers were eclipsed by the volcanic ash cloud that stopped air travel across Europe, leaving the South Africa pavilion at Earls Court all but deserted.

*Missing Persons*, though, has appeared in more than one guise, and *Flashback Hotel* did prompt some critical redress of the relative neglect of Vladislavić's earliest short story collection. Christopher Thurman's essay "I take up my spade and I dig": Verwoerd, Tsafendas and the Position of the Writer in the Early Fiction of Ivan Vladislavić' (2011) focuses on two stories from *Missing Persons*, 'The Prime-Minister is Dead' and 'Tsafendas's Diary', both of which revisit the circumstances surrounding the assassination of notorious 'architect of apartheid' Hendrik Verwoerd in 1966. With reference to interview material and his reading of the two early stories, Thurman extends the received dominant conception of Vladislavić as a 'post-apartheid writer', which Vladislavić dismisses as a false distinction and a 'marketing category' (2011: 56).

Vladislavić has previously talked about the continuing presence of the past and the impossibility of erasing the structural dominance of apartheid in his fiction (see Warnes, 2000: 278-9), and in discussion with Thurman, apartheid in the mid-80s takes on the permanence of 'interminability' (56). On this basis, Thurman develops Vladislavić's position in critical reception, illustrating that the textual sophistication evident in the stories, particularly when read with aspects of Vladislavić's biography, straddles the descriptors of 'apartheid-era' and 'post-apartheid' literature, evincing as much a mode of writing that reinvents (post)modernist, avant-garde European models as writing that is, and is rather, conditioned by living through apartheid; present 'long after its ostensible termination' (2011: 56). The interrelationships between the two stories, 'Tsafendas's Diary' and 'The Prime-Minister is Dead', and Vladislavić's imaginative re-entry to the seminal moment in apartheid history, is read by Thurman as part of a response to the challenge of finding a position as a writer under apartheid's conditioning, entering its 'big public spectacle', as Vladislavić himself puts it (qtd. in Thurman, 2011: 63). *Missing Persons*, and in particular these two early stories, then, announce a new writing position, one which sees Vladislavić 'making creative use of the problem of inheriting 'whiteness'

in South Africa' (Thurman, 2011: 49).

Thurman's re-situation of Vladislavić as a writer emerging with experimental fictions in the suitably 'liminal' moment of 1989, can be productively extended through attention to the first publication contexts of the stories collected by the David Philip publication. Attention to the first appearances of stories from the volume resituates their interventions in the local literary scene through South Africa's successive states of emergency in the 1980s: publications in the 'little' local *Sesame* bracket the states of emergency, with the first, 'Flashback Hotel \*TYYY',<sup>15</sup> (Renoster Books, Johannesburg, No. 5 - Autumn), appearing in 1985, the year the first of the 1980s states of emergency was imposed in response to violent unrest in the townships; after *Missing Persons*, *Sesame* republished 'A Science of Fragments' in 1990 (Autumn, No. 13), the momentous year for South African politics, and the lifting of the states of emergency and international sanctions. Three further stories from *Missing Persons* were published in local literary magazines in 1988: 'Tsafendas's Diary' in *Staffrider* (7:1); *Stet*, the predominantly Afrikaans little magazine that occasionally published pieces in English of merit, included Vladislavić's story 'The Box' (5:2, April); and 'We Came to the Monument' appeared, again in *Sesame* (No.10, Winter).<sup>16</sup> Vladislavić's aesthetic develops in this period through the discursive network that these magazine publications afford.

Discussing 'The Prime Minister is Dead', the only story from *Missing Persons* to have had its first appearance internationally in *TriQuarterly*, the Chicago Northwestern University literary journal in 1987 (No. 69, Spring/Summer; 447-453), Vladislavić labels it 'a state of emergency' story: '[t]he story itself doesn't emerge from the

---

<sup>15</sup> This is the first of Vladislavić's stories later included in *Missing Persons* to emerge onto the local writing scene, and the titular story of the Umuzi double volume, *Flashback Hotel* (2010a), which includes *Missing Persons* and *Propaganda by Monuments*, (originally David Philip, 1989 and 1996a respectively). As well as redressing relative neglect for Vladislavić's early work, this collected product is a commercial move towards alignment in the initial negotiations for Vladislavić's list and entire oeuvre by Umuzi/Random House Struik, South Africa.

<sup>16</sup> Stories from Vladislavić's second collection, *Propaganda by Monuments* (David Philip, 1996a) had similar initial publication trajectories. In South Africa: 'The WHITES ONLY Bench', in *New Contrast* 1993 (21.3), the oldest surviving literary journal in South Africa, originally edited as *Contrast* by Jack Cope; and 'Propaganda by Monuments' in *Staffrider*, 1992 (10.4). Internationally: 'The Tuba' appeared in *World Literature Today* in 1996 (70.1), University of Oklahoma; 'The Book Lover' was included in the anthology *Obsession* (Serpent's Tail, London, 1995), edited by Sarah Lefanu and Stephen Hayward.

moment of liberation; it emerges from the heart of apartheid, one of the most oppressive times under apartheid' (qtd. in Thurman 2011: 55). In its first publication context, the 'imaginative roping-together' of the generational marker of Verwoerd's assassination, the titular subject of the story, and the oppressive heart of apartheid in the 1980s is made explicit in its contextual arrangement.<sup>17</sup> As I explore further below, the *TriQuarterly* anthology that includes Vladislavić's state of emergency story seeks to redress a map of South African cultural production drawn from its outside.

### **International Academic Persons**

'The Prime Minister is Dead' was collected in a special issue of *TriQuarterly* subtitled 'From South Africa: New Writing, Photographs and Art' (1987). In their introduction to the issue as 'editors for an overseas audience' (28), David Bunn and Jane Taylor, both then lecturers at the University of the Western Cape, make clear their understanding of their mediative discursive position as anthologists, constructing South Africa as a particular object of knowledge for consumption in the Western academy. Alongside their stress on the oppressive climate of the state of emergency South Africa – 'the Botha government's crisis-riddled attempt to control the uncontrollable' (20) – they explicitly point to the issue's focus on the liberating anti-apartheid energies of the contributors' work and counter to the 'bombard[ment]' of international coverage, 'sometimes determined by stereotypes of South Africa common in the sixties' (19). Running at an extensive 496 pages, the issue collects contemporaneous cultural production from established and unknown new, internationally renowned and more locally recognized artists and writers. Its contents are closely paratextually bracketed: prefatory notes explain the inclusion

---

<sup>17</sup> In discussion with Thurman, Vladislavić states that '[w]hat's being roped together imaginatively' in 'The Prime Minister is Dead' is the assassination of Verwoerd and memories of the pageantry and public display of military might involved in the celebrations of the inauguration of the Republic of South Africa in 1961. Thurman re-cites Vladislavić in the roping formulation I have borrowed here, 'because it demonstrates the extent to which Vladislavić's work resists the fallacious assumptions about authenticity and authorial 'integrity' that underlie an increasingly dominant genre in South African literature (following a global trend), namely 'life writing' (2011: 52). These issues of authorial responsibility are in evidence throughout the thesis, particularly in relation to the quotidian material of Johannesburg, the city in which Vladislavić works and lives, and its re-working through Vladislavić's prose. The relation of this re-working to the generic dominance and demand for 'the real' in a post-apartheid literary market inflected by global capital is explored in more detail in part III.

of visual art in the issue and that this is the first time any of the pieces have been published in the US; each contributing piece is prefaced with biographical notes; appendices include a chronology of events in South African history, glossaries of place names and acronyms, and an accompanying map locating its cultural production.

The scholarly care with which the multi-modal issue is framed highlights the significance of concerns about the potential for ‘sanctioned ignorance’ (Spivak, 1999: 2) concerning apartheid South Africa’s reception in the West, as ‘fetishistic...of racial allegory’. Herein the presumption of South Africa as a ‘fully knowable’ space, named and known, reducible to sets of politically binarized agendas, flattens complexity and maintains a hegemonic relation to knowledge production from the global South, as Laura Chrisman argues (2003: 140). Re-imaging South Africa’s cultural heterogeneity in the broad collective of its anti-apartheid episteme is simultaneously tasked with the uneasy identification and re-imposition of an exemplary and coherently organized, unified South African cultural space. The radical potential available in a broader, demotic and accessible range of a democratized understanding of culture is evident in the tensions between its disruptive potential, its heterogeneity, and its need to cohere under a broadly recognisably liberal project in the West.

Vladislavić’s biographical note in *TriQuarterly* states that this is his first story in any ‘major publication’ and that ‘he has just completed a collection of short stories that includes “The Prime Minister is Dead” (447). The ‘completed collection’ yet to be published may account for the flurry of stories from *Missing Persons* that saw their first publications in South Africa in 1988. After the *TriQuarterly* publication, ‘The Prime Minister is Dead’ saw its second publication in 1988(a), also in a formal, scholarly context, the journal of the English Academy of South Africa, *English Academy Review* (5:1, February). The issue, whose short, prefatory editorial note serves only as an apology for its omissions and ‘deficiencies’, again attests to the ungovernable proliferation of new forms of knowledge and cultural production pressing at elite institutional bounds and guardianship of what might constitute ‘South African’ cultural production in the late eighties, as well as an openness to its

accommodation, and a desire to be seen as open to change of fixed parameters. Of its six critical articles, the issue includes two on the position of South African literary studies in the state of emergency: Michael Chapman's 'The liberated zone: the possibilities of imaginative expression in a state of emergency', oft cited as paradigmatic of a radical, materialist response to debates about the relevance of the aesthetic or its subordination to the political; and an article entitled 'Fictions of the Future' by Margaret Lenta. Chapman's search for a position between 'liberal-Marxist' and 'liberal humanist' academic polarities, sensitive to 'the zone of imaginative possibilities as to that of the liberation struggle' (1988: 42), is in implicit dialogue with Lenta's, which opens a shared set of concerns with futurity for writers 'living in an apparently interminable interregnum' (133). 'The Prime Minister is Dead' and Vladislavić's contemporary stories register and resonate with these concerns.

Bunn and Taylor's anthology comes under scrutiny in Chapman's assessment for according attention to poetry with openly materialist leanings and to 'COSATU worker poetry [more] than to writing...which might be more versatile in the more recognisably literary sense' (1988: 33). Attempting to find a position for literary expression in the dislocations of apartheid's emergency, he suggests they 'may be right' in the 'context of human suffering', human rights violations and the urgency of reshaping socio-economic arrangements in South Africa (33). The volume is exceptionally versatile in its representative reach, its inclusivity and subsequent illustration of a broad, anti-apartheid solidarity which cut across mechanistic cultural and aesthetic divides, as well as across racial and class-based divisions, and undercutting 'stereotypes' for its intended international audience.

Vladislavić's story is a versatile and recognisably 'literary' response to the public spectacle of apartheid. Its political critique is, on 'struggle literature' and on Chapman's tentative terms, oblique. Its estranging black humour and absurdity is developed through an imaginative retelling of an 'ordinary place' in Pretoria (1987:

447),<sup>18</sup> the suburb renamed after the ‘chopped ...up’ Verwoerd,<sup>19</sup> made into a living ‘monument’ (448). Against the monumental, the quotidian is troped through gardening metaphors, domestic plots of barely fenced off veld, connecting a white suburban family’s response to the drama of the procession of the state funeral, combined with the militarized pageantry of the inauguration of the Republic (31 May, 1961; see Thurman, 2011: 52). ‘[C]ontrary to a supposedly forward marching journey of a ‘voortrekkerik volk’ (Peters, 1998: 238), the truck carrying Verwoerd’s corpse ‘cough[s], jerk[s]’ and unceremoniously stalls, opening ‘a fascinating gap’ (1987: 452) for the young narrator, and a point of skew of apartheid’s official narrative as he accompanies his father carrying the body of the sovereign chair and visionary of Apartheid in their wheelbarrow to his grave. This site is compressed in the young boy’s head with the compost heap in his back yard, ‘on which practically anything would grow’ (448). It is the hummus of a rich everyday, infused with the malevolent violence and the stuttering of a falsely constructed history that cannot hold its place.

As part of the representative texts selected as both responsive to and shifting Western images of South Africa’s ‘peripheral’ struggle in a ‘major’ collection (Bunn and Taylor, 1987), these publications are an early registration of the complex network of interactions and hierarchies that structure responses to Vladislavić’s work as ‘South African literature’ (cf. Van der Vlies, 2007: esp. 7-12). They are also an example of the ‘same’ text as signifying differently across different bibliographic settings, as Stefan Helgesson suggests after Bornstein’s *Material Modernisms* (2009: 11).<sup>20</sup> These arrangements and accruals of meaning become markedly legible in the interactions between the texts later published in *Missing Persons* and their earlier, ‘smaller’ publishing contexts – short stories in often short-lived, ephemeral magazines: little locals *Stet* (in 1988c); *Staffrider* (1988b); and *Sesame* (in 1985, 1988d, and 1990).

---

<sup>18</sup> Citations of ‘The Prime Minister is Dead’ are drawn from Bunn and Taylor’s anthology (1987); all further parenthetical references are to this publication.

<sup>19</sup> Verwoerd was stabbed, but Vladislavić’s ‘ghoulish Grandma’ (Brown, 1990: 127), reports this grislier act of dismemberment (1987: 448). Vladislavić’s use of ‘panga’ here, and earlier ‘skoffel’ necessitates a footnote translation from the editors, one of the only instances of translation of Afrikaans words in Vladislavić’s anglophone publication contexts.

<sup>20</sup> Helgesson follows McGann’s ‘bibliographical code’ to denote the specificity of printed materials, and print-material conditions in Southern African literary production.

### **Literary magazines: little local(e)s**

Literary magazines and journals are significant sites of cultural production in the dissemination of new voices and developments in writing. They are important forums for criticism and comment in the form of essays and reviews, and in the constitution of new readerships (Oliphant, 2001; McDonald, 2009). Highlighting the engagement between literary production and non-literary discourse, and frequently providing space for participation through correspondence pages and invitation for submissions, they are public forums in contradistinction to the individual literary work (Morrison, 2001), generative of networks of common interest. Writing of the production and dissemination of print cultural products, Andries Oliphant (2001: 91) describes how the 'socially based activities involving a wide range of processes which constitute, reproduce, oppose, resist, and transform the socio-cultural environment' are concentrated by the tendency to the short-life span of the literary journal. A serial and transitory form, literary journals are necessarily responsive to their conditions of production and dissemination, inherently contemporary and current, with an inevitably intensive intimacy between their context and time.

This inflection is dependent on their individual circumstances and characters, and their influence may be limited by various factors: their range of distribution, small, often intensely loyal special interest audiences, level of sales, popularity and influence; but the periodical nature and short-lived ephemera of literary magazines presents opportunities for writers unavailable in more permanent published media. There are more frequent publishing opportunities; they provide a flexible forum open to experimental work; significantly in the oppositional environment of South Africa in the eighties, journals provided the opportunity for that work to enter into co-constitutive relationships with the ideological stance of a particular publishing house or institution, its editors, artists and designers, as well as its audience; alongside various other connections in the field, this presents a wider reception context and a try-out site for the initial presentation of new work.

The significance of the 'little' or avant-garde alternative magazine in the

development of South African literary culture is beginning to attract critical attention (see early positions from Gardiner, 2002; this is also noted by Gunner, 2005: 5), but the scope of study is limited by the form's tendency to remain outside of formal institutional structures and archives, both in production and through private collection. This is particularly true of those shaped through and despite the censorious environment of apartheid. If the literary journal offers an alternative and performative sense of its locality and time, little magazines concentrate further the fitful energies of anti-establishment periodicals, and their relationships to cultural durability and literary normativity, offering ways of reading shifts and flows in literary culture otherwise unavailable in volumes or collections, and that may be obscured by processes of canon-formation and literary valuation (cf. McKible on the modernist 'little', 2002: 10-11).

The literary magazines through which Vladislavić's stories first emerge into the local context prior to the commodity product that is the book each perform as self-consciously self-instituting sites of their own distinct projects and manifestos, freed from institutional and scholarly funding, revenue and reputational requirements, at least nominally if not fully in practice. As mentioned, Vladislavić's writing appeared across three local literary magazines in 1988: two 'littles', *Sesame* (Renoster Books), and *Stet* (Taurus); and *Staffrider* (Ravan Press), which, although strictly outside of the genre of the little magazine on its print and circulation figures, shares the values and ethos of its contemporary little magazines.<sup>21</sup> Where I define the 'littleness' that these magazines share, the delineations of the modernist, avant-garde 'little' is useful, as a group of magazines that 'have lived a kind of private life of their own on the margins of culture ... the gathering places for the 'irreconcilables' of ...literary tradition ... noncommercial by intent' (Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich, 1946: v; 2). With its history of an internationally oriented Euro-American avant-garde, as a forum for experimental writing and the self-conscious establishment of alternative communities of writers, the modernist little magazine has consistently raised questions about the place of the popular and elite, the alternative and contestatory,

---

<sup>21</sup> At its inception in 1978, *Staffrider* had a print run of 10,000 and through this number declined in the eighties, it was still printing 4000 copies into the 1990s (Oliphant, [1991] 2001: 92).



and the interaction in reshaping literary national and social imaginaries in their relation to international aesthetic drives and norms. The form in South Africa in the eighties carries and significantly refocuses these issues, particularly in the explicit politicisation and challenge of operation in the local literary field, and the sharpening of each of the categories that contour the 'little' under late apartheid: 'private', 'margins', 'irreconcilables', 'literary tradition', and the intentionally 'noncommercial' are each subject to protean politicized re-definition.

The internally variegated and counter-cultural specificities of the contexts of these little literary magazines are legible in concentrated form through their pages, energized by their mission and intent, writing to and from the heterogeneity and unruliness of the cultural field in the eighties. Often, they combine a sense of foreboding of the interminable interregnum with the forward-facing possibility in the potential of apartheid's end, both through their Contents pages, and in their Editorials and Comment sections. In their literary sociality and distinct identities in their often-clear proclamations of their intent and politics, these magazines emphatically utilize the form's rallying points of unification, necessary for the identity of the local magazine in a contested environment. These littles, hosts of Vladislavić's early stories in the 1980s states of emergency, provided legitimate sites of alternative, avoiding the censor and subsequent conservatism, and presenting a challenge to unitary spaces – the book, the publishing house, the canon – and to unidirectional flows of circulation and valuation (cf. Tashjian, 1975: xii).

Although *Staffrider* had some circulation as an international consciousness raising periodical, at this time in South Africa the little mag form provided an avenue for an intensely local focus, and the constitution of smaller, by their nature, decentred literary publics, with an acute sense of a mission in engendering a space for the diverse possibilities of the literary that the failing project of apartheid and its state mechanisms had attempted to silence. If there was a broad sense of anti-apartheid purpose, these magazines assumed characters and positions of their own, largely attributable to their editors and the direction they steered their periodicals in. Initiated by literary academics and committed intellectuals, each with a close connection to the University of the Witwatersrand, they were produced from

alternative and oppositional publishing houses that had been formed in direct hostility to apartheid deformations of the literary establishment. Part of the street, 'city, suburb and township' (Gardiner, 2002: 28), rather than taking place through the formal institutional space of the university or the white-owned book markets, literary output was relatively freed from the constraints of departments of English and institutionalized literary norms.

Each of these little magazines, centred in Johannesburg, engendered their own particular form of sociality, revealing in its ambition and limits, across and through the reach of their pages. As available positions for anglophone South African writing, each of these magazines represent distinct literary spaces with differing contextual reflections of receptivity to Vladislavić's early experimental, postmodern fictions. *Sesame*, *Stet* and *Staffrider*, carrying Vladislavić's early stories in 1988, emerge into the 'radical transformative possibilities the eighties espoused' (O'Brien, 2001: 1-6), and the 'balkanization' of literature and literary production (Chapman, 1996: xvi), that had taken so much of its moral and political authority around genre and form (in anglophone terms, 'black', 'African', politicized social and mimetic realism; 'white', 'European' postmodern, 'uncommitted' aesthetics; and the 'white', 'anguished' English liberal position).

If Vladislavić's engagement with the socio-cultural field in the eighties indicates a wider sense of anti-apartheid solidarity, the divisions that separated each production context and gave the magazines their individual spirit and energies as alternative oppositional publications also illustrated a series of oppositions *within* the South African literary field for white Anglo-South African writers. Vladislavić's stories across these contexts appear to illustrate varied landing points of participation in South Africa's 'archipelago' of literary culture (Gray, 1979), and the intersection of a series of margins. These distinctions also indicate the operation of these oppositions at and through a variegated but marginal territory: at the margins of the apartheid state; of militant black opposition; and, under isolationist apartheid South Africa, to the market determinations of the metropolitan literary centres (Chapman, 1996; Brouillette, 2007; Barnett, 1999a). Vladislavić's stories indicate the heterogeneity of local, predominantly white spaces of cultural authority, as well

as the historically produced antagonisms between alternative localizations of knowledge production, of different ‘South Africanizations’ (Helgesson, 2016).

The significance of location and solidarity in these small, intensely performative sites foregrounds the question of positionality. If, as book history scholars remind us after Bourdieu, the ‘space of position-takings’ for South African writers reveals a complicated and deeply unstable relation to literary valuation in relation to national and international hegemonies and capital flows, and to the possibility of identifying any unified category or ‘field’ (Van der Vlies, 2007; Brouillette, 2007), this position-taking, both in terms of the internal dynamics of Vladislavić’s stories and in the politico-cultural dynamics of their paratextual arrangements, reveals itself across these different, distinct forums. Black publisher Jaki Seroke explicitly aligns his sense of the self-fulfilling operation of the era’s ‘repressive tolerance’ in censorship, ‘sensitive literature [circulating] among the educated, the politicized, so that the converted would be speaking to the converted’, with the restrictions on the imagination imposed by paranoias and fears of ‘the blue pencil’ (1985: 38). As the literary magazine extended and diversified the public voice, evading government repression by various means, they also became increasingly important sites for the arbitration or political ‘guardianship’ of the new South African literary space, each wielding the power of their own editorial blue pencils in the shifting political allegiances of successive state censors and boards (McDonald, 2009).

Wielding said pencil as an editor for *Ravan*, and as assistant editor for *Staffrider*, with a story appearing in the magazine in the same year as those published in *Stet*, and *Sesame* (1988), Vladislavić’s interactions with literary magazines, from both sides of the desk, bring questions of production – who writes and for whom? – and cultural authority – who publishes and disseminates and for whom? (see McDonald, 2009) – to the fore, furnishing a nascent self-positioning of his own work in the South African cultural-literary imaginary. Attention to the production contexts of these early stories across these distinct local sites, informs an accretive, sideways reading of Vladislavić’s first work and helps to envision the development of a new writing position formed under apartheid, one which informs and complicates the dominant picture of an aesthetically and binarized field, weaponized in the service of ‘the

struggle'. The significance of the stories' surrounding inter- and intratextual contexts and the magazines' responses both to the divisiveness of apartheid and the changing needs of activism in the later 1980s nuances how we might read Vladislavić's writing 'entrance' through *Missing Persons* and its local, translocal and international designations in critical reception.

### ***Stet* (Taurus): 'The Box' (1988)**

Definition of *stet* - transitive *verb* | \ 'stet\

stetted stetting

: to direct retention of (a word or passage previously ordered to be deleted or omitted from a manuscript or printer's proof) by annotating usually with the word *stet*

Vladislavić has cited both the Euro-American avant-garde and the Afrikaans literature he studied during his joint literature major in the English and the Afrikaans & Nederlands departments at Wits University (the University of the Witwatersrand) as a direct inspiration for his own fiction (2000: 274; 2010b). As part of his formative writing practice incubated in the Afrikaans department, the influence of *Stet* (1982-1991), 'a really great literary magazine' and one of the first places he published (2000: 274), is clear. An Afrikaans 'little', *Stet* carried Vladislavić's story, 'The Box', in English in 1988 (5:2).

*Stet* ran to twenty issues between October 1982 and February 1991, driven by Gerrit Olivier and the magazine's designer Tienie du Plessis, with the financial backing of the vigorous anti-volk publishing house Taurus (1975-1991). Taurus, considered the most prominent and successful Afrikaans oppositional publishing house of the apartheid era, began, like many small interventionist publishers, as a 'cross between a clandestine publisher and a mail-order book club' (McDonald 2009: 100). Initiated when Afrikaans press Human en Rousseau refused Andre Brink's '*n Oomblik in die Wind* after the banning of his *Kennis van die Aand* sent 'shockwaves through the Afrikaans establishment' (Van der Vlies, 2013: 120), Taurus was formed by a group of Afrikaans literary academics and writers affiliated to the new non-racial Writers' Guild, Skrywersgilde, including progressive fiction writer and influential teacher of

Vladislavić's, John Miles.<sup>22</sup> Aiming to provide an avenue for interventionist writing that could side-step the censors and 'compromised' publishing houses, Taurus also worked with sympathetic English-language oppositional publishers, notably with Ravan, who gave Taurus access to their facilities to typeset their manuscripts in secret (Venter, 2007; in Van der Vlies, 2013: 120), and who co-published with Taurus local editions of *July's People* (1981) and *Something Out There* (1984) with Gordimer's support; 'a gesture' as Joe Lelyveld acknowledges in a *New York Times* article in May 1991, 'to the publishers who have done the most to withstand censorship' (qtd. in Van der Vlies, 2013: 122).<sup>23</sup>

*Stet* was Taurus's iconoclastic literary periodical. The climate of activist publishing, and of Ravan's cooperation with Taurus, is informed by a statement of du Plessis' in a 2007 interview with Jurgen Deysel (43): '[during] apartheid there was so much estrangement. Never mind the estrangement between black and white; there was alienation between the English and the Afrikaans. We had good relations with the so-called brown Afrikaans writers, but apart from that there was little cooperation'.<sup>24</sup> Not only does this illustrate the multiple anxieties determining, and determined by the need for small, separate avenues of subversive operation under apartheid conditions; it also provides an indication of the determining conditions of relations between English and Afrikaans production networks, each of which produced these publishing house's flagship magazines, *Staffrider* and *Stet*, and which, in turn, involved the development of localized communities of readerships and consumption networks.

---

<sup>22</sup> Taurus was founded in 1975 by academics Ampie Coetzee, Ernst Lindenberg and John Miles. To bypass the censor and mainstream bookselling conservatism, Taurus distributed the entire print run of Brink's *'n Oomblik in die Wind*, their first title, by mail order, using compositors who could not read Afrikaans. They began to employ more conventional modes of distribution through the 1980s, although booksellers still refused to stock some of their titles. (See McDonald, 2009: 100-103.)

<sup>23</sup> Neither of these Ravan-Taurus local editions of Gordimer's novels, *July's People* or *Something Out There* were picked up by the police, who had previously sent in two works associated with the presses to the censorship board, both of which were passed: *The Black Interpreters*, published by Ravan in 1973, and *What Happened to Burger's Daughter, or How South African Censorship Works* (1980), a booklet published by Taurus, financed by Gordimer in support of Taurus's opposition to censorship and distributed free. See McDonald, 2009: 239; and Coetzee, 1984: 32.

<sup>24</sup> This is Deysel's translation, from a personal interview held with the author (22 May 2007, Pretoria): 'In apartheid was daar soveel verwydering. Never mind die verwydering tussen swart en wit; daar was verwydering tussen Engels en Afrikaans. So ons het goeie verhoudings gehad met die sogenaamde bruin Afrikaanse skrywers, maar daar was min ander samewerking. Dit was 'n politieke ding. As jy iets gedoen het, was dit politiek. Jy kon nie daarvan ontsnap nie' (2007: 43).

### **'The Box'**

Vladislavić's story 'The Box' is one of two stories in English in the issue of *Stet* it appears in (5:2, April 1988, 20-23).<sup>25</sup> The story in its context foregrounds the issue of language and translation, central in terms of ethnic divisions in 'whiteness' (recalling Du Plessis' statement about 'brown' Afrikaans writers above). Praised as the voice of the new postmodern generation, *Stet* represented a 'significant breaking away from the cultural laager of the Afrikaner' (Barnard, 2004: 721) and provided a forum for radicalized rebellious voices in opposition to the conservatism dominating Afrikaans literature (Oliphant, 2001: 101). Many of *Stet*'s contributors who went on to become part of the Afrikaans canon, established their anti-apartheid, anti-establishment credentials through early publication in the magazine.<sup>26</sup> Intended as 'a mouthpiece for the Afrikaans lefties' (Du Plessis in Deysel, 2007: 39), building on the dissent and pantextual experimentation of earlier Afrikaans 'littles,' such as *Wurm* (1966-70), *Stet* was openly subversive, aggressive in its challenge against the government.

In an essay published in an early *Stet* (issue 3, June 1985), entitled 'Towards a National Culture: Oedipus, and Albino, and Others', prominent poet and activist Jeremy Cronin was part of a voice celebrating the magazine's intervention; but the essay also cautioned *Stet*'s preoccupation with the legacy and overturning of the Afrikaner patriarchy. Arguing that the reactionary and negative nature of its critique and resulting 'oedipal and bohemian politics' boundaried its identity articulations to such an extent that it may cut itself off from the broader struggle for inclusive democracy in South Africa, Cronin suggested that the journal's ironic protest is 'comparable to that of the Black Consciousness movement of the 1970s', part of a

---

<sup>25</sup> The other is a compact short stream of consciousness piece that barely takes up a full column, 'Original Dreamtime' by Tony Burton (13).

<sup>26</sup> Deysel lists an illustrative and wide range of Afrikaans contributors, which indicates *Stet*'s span across genre, typical of the more subversive of the little magazines: academic articles by authors such as Leon de Kock, Joan Hambidge, Daniel Hugo, Leonard Koza, Koos Prinsloo, Dan Roodt, Henriette Roos and Hein Willemse; drama by writers such as Hennie Aucamp and Lettie Viljoen; extracts from longer works from novelists Theunis Engelbrecht, Christoffel Lessing, Fransi Phillips and Wessel Pretorius; short stories by Arnold Blumer, MC Botha, Ryk Hattingh, André Letoit, Hansie Pienaar, Paul Riekert, Alexander Strachan, Etienne van Heerden, Eben Venter and George Weideman, and editor of *Staffrider* magazine Chris van Wyk; poetry, with contributions by Breyten Breytenbach, Daniel Hugo, Rosa Keet, Antjie Krog, Peter Snyders, Wilma Stockenström, Barend J Toerien, and Marlene van Niekerk (some of whom Vladislavić has edited and assisted in translating). Deysel's list also includes the genres of: aphorisms; translations; comics; photo essays; letters; and interviews (2007: 42).

short-term politicizing strategy, necessary for the immediacy of the time, but ultimately limiting and self-enclosing (qtd. in Barnard, 2004: 721-2).

Conflicting tensions inherent in the satirical critique *Stet* clearly put forward into literary circles illustrate the dominance of a legacy of violent division and its correlative issue of language and literary value in the apartheid context. In the issue 'The Box' sees its first publication in, *Stet's* aggressive, 'oedipal' tenor is accessible in the magazine's vigorous expansion of the rubric of 'the literary' that pushes its communicative modes, often playfully, beyond ethno-linguistic concerns. *Stet* was a highly visually experimental periodical. It harnessed multiple semiotic modes in experiments across its pages to destabilize conventional genre and modal division as part of its political project, confounding both 'standards' and the censor as the boundaries between art, graphics, and the literary dissipate in a move typical of the self-consciously radical, avant-garde little magazines.<sup>27</sup> Providing space for artists, photographers, and designers, as well as for writers participating in the revisioning of cultural subversion as an oppositional practice, illustrations and graphics extend beyond the borders of text or frame, expanding the rubric of both modes in their working together (text as caption, or illustration as textual augmentation). Stark linocuts, such as 'Injured Police in Hospital' by Leonard Mkhabela which is the issue's cover graphic, sit alongside parodic ads for the magazine itself, which playfully recode conservative and commodity culture in a visual-verbal, self-reflexive hoax.

The issue also carries a surreal photo-comic, 'mike se eiers', by Derek Harms and Jurie Moolman, recalling one of Vladislavić's early experiments with writing and modes of visual culture is the line-drawn, comic-book illustration of his story 'Tsafendas's Diary' by friend and colleague Jeff Lok. The relationship between the written and visual modes and its context of publication, in *Staffrider*, also in 1988, is

---

<sup>27</sup> *Stet* had close ties to the End Conscription Campaign, for example: self-defined as an anti-apartheid rather than pacifist movement (see Gordimer 1988: 254; 305-6), and highly organized as a special interest group under the non-racial umbrella of the United Democratic Front, the ECC aimed to end conscription and encouraged thousands of young white South Africans to reject the call-up to fight in Angola, the 'border wars', and increasingly in the townships. *Stet* deliberately published ECC posters and pamphlets 'to see what the government would do', as *Stet* designer and former director of Taurus puts it (in Deysel 2007: 33).

explored below (“‘Tsafendas’s Diary’ – the comic book’, 1988b). The contents differ, but both sequential comics, a medium rarely seen in contemporary literary littles, are rendered through a radical, avant-garde and aggressively critical aesthetic aimed at the conservative Nationalist state, placing each in a network where their experimental energies were used as forms of explicitly political praxis. In *Stet*, ‘mike’, captioned in alternating Afrikaans and English, flaunts a ‘bastardized’ ‘Englikaans’, a direct slur on the fantasy of linguistic, and therefore of the racial and cultural purity that ‘General Civilised Afrikaans’ was tasked with carrying, and on which apartheid state dominance rested.<sup>28</sup> Mike, a young white Afrikaner, dressed throughout in his underwear, wakes up in his trailer ‘with his hand in a box full of human faeces’, and becomes ‘constipated’ by ‘this nauseating drag that causes a fuss’; the strip ends with Mike being ‘pestered in his domicile’ by an ‘obnoxious photographer’ who photographs him in a liaison with another young white man, also in his underwear like Mike, but wearing women’s shoes (14-16).

An example of the ways *Stet*’s satirical and experimental visual content was used to carry forward its critique, ‘mike’ is subversive along the lines of Cronin’s identification of ‘oedipal’ rebellion, ‘flashing rude signs at the Voortrekkermonument’ (Cronin in Barnard: 721). Harnessing the strong popular history of the photocomic, the Afrikaans fotoboekie, in South Africa (Saint, 2010; Barnard, 2004; O’Toole, 2012a), although not recognisably ‘protest literature’, and clearly functioning as an overtly targeted oppositional piece, ‘mike’ also serves as an appeal to form, and to the fotoboekie’s popular, and linguistic ‘democratic’ possibility in terms of comics’ informal networks of consumption, as well as its own in the pages of *Stet* (Saint, 2010).<sup>29</sup> ‘mike’ reinvents the ‘low’, generically outdated

---

<sup>28</sup> The concept of linguistic ‘bastardy’ evidencing the mixed cultural history of Afrikaner identity and language is Breyten Breytenbach’s. Saint cites Breytenbach in direct reference to the Western photocomic (2010: 951). For a further discussion of the concept, see Kennelly, 2005; and Sanders, 2002: chapter 4. The phrase ‘Algemene Beskaafde Afrikaans’ is cited from Andrew Van der Vlies’s discussion (2016: 191-209) of ‘provincial literature in a global time’ and the case of translations of Marlene Van Niekerk’s novel *Agaat* (2004), operating internally in the Afrikaans version for the local market, as well as into English for the world market (see Van der Vlies, 2016: 206).

<sup>29</sup> Lily Saint suggests that, despite the form’s racially distinct marketing and content which assisted in the inscription of hegemony and particularized sociality (see O’Toole, 2012a, on both the popularity and the evolution of the form), the pulpy, mass, disposable fotoboekie forged an extensive, actively interracial readership. Saint cites examples of people learning to read both Afrikaans and English from them, illustrating how cheap and readily available ‘white’ fotoboekies were, as well as demonstrating that there was a white readership for ‘black’ fotoboekies, and suggesting that



form in the pages of a literary journal to satirize conservative, heteronormative and puritan culture.

'The Box' is at home in *Stet's* 'savage...excoriation of the patriarchs', in Barnard's phrase, which she argues for viewing on its own terms as illustrative of the shape of apartheid's 'callous and humiliating treatment of its own' (2004: 722), as much as it may be 'irresponsible' on the terms of Cronin's broader critique. Indeed, the target of Vladislavić's story is the very possibility of being at 'home' in the deforming disturbances and claustrophobic complicity of white, domestic suburbia under apartheid. An example of a satirical text in which Vladislavić's humour lampoons the entrenchment of power (Gaylard, 2005: 132), 'The Box' plays with scale to satirize the apartheid media and government axis. A suburban couple, Mary and Quentin, deal with a new resident in their home, a six inch, unnamed 'Prime Minister' who Quentin manages to pluck out of the TV one night, mid-way through a particularly forceful speech about his commitment 'to the maintenance of law and order' against 'forces in the outside world, and here within our borders...who seek to overthrow my government by violent means' (1988c: 20).

Another manifestation of Vladislavić's interest in the intersect of visual culture and politics, here the everyday experience of the monumental under apartheid is figured in uncanny relations between the boundaries of virtuality and materiality, highlighting the territorially proscribed technology of the domesticated 'box in the corner' and satirising National Party anxieties about its power. Although he remains unnamed, the story's 'Prime Minister' is a foil for the 'Groot Krokodil', the 'finger-wagging' P.W. Botha (Marais, 2011: 32), whose phrases 'Total Onslaught' and 'Total Strategy', coined to justify the use of increasingly violent force to suppress black resistance, were familiarized through repetition in didactic public broadcasts. Vladislavić emphasizes the irony of the controversial, belated introduction of TV to South Africa, due to the state's fear of national 'dilution', and its function as a central technology for the circulation and perpetuation of hierarchies. We see the

---

Afrikaans and English mixed between their covers as much as in day-to-day speech (2010: 940-957). For an alternative perspective and the 'passive' nature of consumption of the 'photoroman', see Kruger and Watson Shariff, 2001.

contribution of 'the box' to the circulation of Botha's disintegrating public image through the eighties, and, through Quentin's later actions, the exposed 'structured absence' of black South Africans, and the violence by which people were excluded from the social and political life of the nation (Krabill, 2010: 28).

Quentin and Mary initially keep the once censorious and powerful figure in a hamster cage, the bars of which have clear connotations with political prisoners, and that also, and with casual diminishing dehumanization proffered by his 'prison', render him 'incredibly cute' (21). The cage is kept in view of 'the set' which they all watch together. In one of the first of a series of parodic reversals of negotiations with those in power and 'a classic case of interdependence' (22), the Prime Minister requests Quentin retrieve his wife from the TV, which results in the accidental, bloody and ignominious death of the Minister of Defense, 'smash[ed] into the wall' to 'drop in a heap onto the carpet', his skull caved in 'like an egg' (22). In another concession, Quentin agrees to move the Prime Minister to 'improved' quarters in the spare room, where he charts the 'expanses of the wall to wall carpet' and 'the limits of his new homeland' (22). The backdrop of the absurd and grotesque political situation of apartheid is embedded further into the couple's 'little' suburban story and the domestic recesses of their home.

The processes of kidnap and secretion of these little creatures, violently removed from their environment and forcibly located to another, begin to work inward on Quentin. Power corrupts as he continues to pluck figures from the TV, priests and professors, sportsmen and 'ordinary people' for a developing 'republic' of his own. A confused set of arbitrary boundaries allegorizes the founding of the South African republic and its maintenance, operating on a banal set of justifications and rules, deforming and fracturing Quentin's desires, as 'for the hell of it' he picks out more and more fragmented pieces of disembodied human anatomy: the torso of an opera singer 'thump[s] its stumps on the carpet', the gnashing teeth of the mouth of a toothpaste ad, 'the leg of a statue, half a building, and cubic metre of Indian Ocean', adding a worldly, and in the allusion to the routes of slavery and colonisation through and into the South African Cape, geopolitical dimension to the growing stink of tiny bodies needing to be swept out of the spare room (23).

Potentially both global and local at once, gesturing beyond the immediate contexts and activities of 'text' and reading, television in 'The Box' raises questions about scaled-up sets of complicit power relations, and the diffuse, fragmenting, contradictory cultural codes that constitute identity performances in suburban South Africa. We are drawn into the mechanics of 'watching' as we read, and therefore alerted to the ways in which we might occupy these imaginaries and their textual spaces as we experience them. Marais' comment that the sickening 'open-ended macabre' and black humour of Quentin's 'stupid republic' is one of a future South Africa and world 'gone (and already) insane' (2011: 33), makes explicit what Vladislavić's exposure of the desire to experience the possessive interiority of a delimited, stable, controlled space implies. Quentin's compulsive gathering becomes a powerful and troubling act of collection that is 'predicated on a particular view of subject-object relations as based on domination', that Mieke Bal identifies in James Clifford's work on collecting (1994: 104). This is an attitude that seeks to appropriate and extend inherited taxonomies and knowledge systems, views which permit, even encourage the objectification of humans for display, with, in this case, humanity already diminished by the teletechnological flattening repetitions of 'the box' itself (see Dilworth, 2003: 7; Elsner and Cardinal, 1994: 4-5). The irony, that the TV as collecting ground for Quentin's little republic marks its spaces and reconfigured 'homelands' as exclusively white, is not lost: 'The Box' in this context is energized by *Stet's* subversive critique against the fantasy of Afrikaans purity and political oppression, and part of its dynamic re-situation of Afrikaner identity in a field of contesting meanings.

The radical Afrikaans context of *Stet*, hospitable to both 'black and white' writing (see Oliphant's terms in relation to *Stet's* contemporary magazines and journals, 2001), and 'brown' Afrikaans writers on du Plessis' terms, is also hospitable to Vladislavić's brand of white (anglophone) surreality and sideways critique. This becomes evident both explicitly, in Quentin's hatred and abuse of 'the Prime Minister', and in the more oblique shading of the deformations of state and public power structures into the suburb, the home, and the private personal realm. Telly is a trope for the encryption of the overdetermining vocabularies of less visible and

'hidden' effects of apartheid segregationist policies in the domestic space, enacted and written through its 'global' languages, namely of English, and in its forms of visual literacy. *Stet's* publication of 'The Box' underscores the centrality of language and representation to processes of identification and to the divided communities of resistance and 'whiteness', illustrating Vladislavić's involvement in an Afrikaans-speaking anti-apartheid collectivity in South Africa. Performing its locality linguistically by means of this defiance of the purity of its bounds, *Stet's* is definitively a local resistance, neither valorized as 'protest', nor part of a global frame of moral clarity against apartheid. 'The Box' is both in and outside of the magazine's identity, its critique framed by and proceeding firmly from the complexity of local circumstances.

In the early stories in focus here, Vladislavić was seeking to find an entry point as a writer in apartheid's spectacle, and explicitly writing against the British realist writing that made up the conservative English curriculum at Wits in the late 70s: '[t]here was very little South African work – in fact there was none. Until I was in my third year at university which was 1977, I had never studied an African novel at university in English' (2010b). In the Afrikaans department, 'staffed by some fairly radical academics' (2000: 274), the Afrikaans books were dynamic and contemporary, they were both 'about this place and they were African' (2010b). This contemporaneity and Vladislavić's sense of its cultural locatedness made possible the alignment of his own writing with the stream of early postmodernist and American writers he admired – Vonnegut, Barth, Barthelme – and the experimental Afrikaans fiction from writers who had lived in Europe, and who brought back to South African literature a different set of models from the 'French new novel' and 'strange surrealist work' of early Andre Brink, Jan Rabie, Etienne Leroux, and Breytenbach's early fiction writing (2010b).

These are decidedly cosmopolitan and world literary currents that inform a sense of both a local literary imaginary and, significantly, one that is 'African'. Afrikaans, the language of apartheid structural domination, and, bearing in mind that Vladislavić was studying at Wits in 1976 at the time of the Soweto student protest against the imposition of Afrikaans as the language of instruction, is in this instance

liberatory, and allows for a deeper engagement with South African realities than the liberal English 'trap of realism' (2010b). This registers the desire to establish a writing position under apartheid that can participate in South Africa and of African writing in a different way, accessing space and locations that had been previously closed off and re-registering those spaces as open for experimentation and the new. At the same time, what constitutes the space of an African literary identity, albeit through this syncretic experimentalism, is underpinned by Western cultural locations and a privileged but unstable access to 'Africanness' which registers a longer history of colonialism and oppression. Questions of legacy, complicity, belonging, and whiteness, and moving beyond given and inherited forms, are all raised. These are postcolonial questions, related to finding ways of belonging from the site of privilege, that can remain outside of the cultural anguish and guilt of the white liberal position, 'the one who belongs nowhere' (Gordimer, 1995: 120).

***Sesame* (Renoster Books): 'Flashback Hotel \*TYYY' (1985) - 'A Science of Fragments' (1990)**

*Sesame* (1982-1991), a little magazine also centred in Johannesburg, was a significant context for the first publication of stories later collected in *Missing Persons*, publishing 'Flashback Hotel \*TYYY' in 1985 (No. 5: 14-15), and 'We Came to the Monument' in 1988 (No. 10: 19-24). *Sesame* was founded by poet, writer, and 'self-avowed liberal guardian of the literary' (McDonald, 2009: 189), Lionel Abrahams. *Sesame*, relatively long-running for a 'little mag' (1982-1991), was instituted to provide a forum for 'a lot of good work' which Abrahams felt that for 'political and other reasons, was not likely to be accepted in the extant magazines' (1987: 148). A liberal publication in a 'postliberal' age, *Sesame* was founded in the wake of a series of revisionist challenges to the gradualist political discourse of South African liberalism in the 1970s (see Vaughan, 1982; Blair, 2012). This political shift was variously shaped by the rise of Black Consciousness and black militancy that forced the visibility of apartheid fracture wide open; the establishment of oppositional publishing houses, such as Ravan Press, David Philip, and Ad Donker; and challenges mounted to the humanism that had dominated the South African academy from materialist historians and literary critics (Attwell, 1993; Barnard, 1993).

Abrahams was a highly influential, if controversial figure, in South African letters. From his self-proclaimed 'adolescent' editorship of *The Purple Renoster* which ran from 1956-72, (Abrahams, 1980), 'arguably the most typical "little magazine" of the apartheid era' (McDonald, 2009: 119), to the tight localities evident in the editorials and selections of *Sesame*, Abrahams' intermediary role in South Africa's literary field brokered a series of non-instrumental alternative spaces committed to the development of a local literary culture for English-speaking writers (Gevisser, 1998; Oliphant, 2001). Utilising the relative freedom of the 'little magazine' to debunk the centre-periphery model, Abrahams adhered to an unapologetic, specifically located literary liberalism established with *Renoster* throughout the changing political affiliations of oppositional literary culture in the 1980s and 1990s. His intervention in the literary-cultural sphere grounded an aesthetic oriented around skill and literary excellence, underpinned by tolerant individualist humanism.

Abrahams 'held out for a local version of *l'art pour l'art*, the rhino-horn tower' (Abrahams, 1980: 36), and despite the characteristic deprecating self-parody (*renoster* translates from Afrikaans as *rhino*), as Abrahams distances *Renoster's* values of liberal tolerance from an elitist, exclusivist academic charge, he cites his 'cause to defend...only the best' as also being Leavisite in thrust (1980: 33). There is tension evident here in the young Abrahams' editorial position, between the desire to promulgate a genuinely transcendent cultural and literary value and its technical basis relying on an academically sanctified literary-critical concern with the elsewhere of 'Dead White Male Poets' (cf. De Kock 2010: 19). Both vie uneasily in the contested term of 'universal', which was specifically attenuated by apartheid's troubled social-spatial dynamic, and was to expose Abrahams to criticism.

Inherently conservative, Abrahams came to be identified as an icon of classic liberalism. His struggle with collectivist African practices – 'How', he writes, 'am I to proceed with my life as a South African if, for instance, individualism and "western" logic are somehow inherently wrong, at any rate un-African?' (qtd. in Gevisser 1998: 7) – his outspoken defence of the triumvirate of language, reason, and standards, 'our proven values and proven structures', against 'negative radicalism...strictly

limited in its thinking and promis[ing] a dull, impoverished mental world' (1998: 5-6), drew him into conflict with the right and the left. Oliphant's critique of unacknowledged white liberalism in literary periodicals describes *Sesame* and the 'intimate and close-knit circles' Abrahams preferred to work in as a 'laager of exclusivity', drawing material from a circumscribed, predominantly white group, only penetrated by black writers 'strictly on the terms set by the editor' (2001: 96).

### **Opening *Sesame*: taking place**

From the late 1970s, Vladislavić was part of the Circle of Eight writing group held weekly at Abrahams's home (Vladislavić, 2005a: np). The *Renoster* and its 'formal and spiritual adventure' (Gevisser, 1998: 11) fostered a network of writers, visual artists, architects and other literary figures who went on to participate in the development of South African literary culture in various roles and spheres, and notably, demonstrated the importance and increasing visibility of writer/editor relationships (Gardiner, 2002: 7). Vladislavić acknowledges Abrahams's influence as a 'teacher' and 'friend' in the 'Author's Note' appended to his 2006 'city text', *Portrait with Keys* (2006a: 209). This note, along with the formative contribution of Abrahams's work to the writing of *Portrait*, Vladislavić's own 'book on the city' inspired by Abrahams's grappling 'with what it means to be a citizen of Johannesburg' (209), acknowledges the process of contributing to the volume, *A Writer in Stone: South African Writers Celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Lionel Abrahams* (Friedman & Blumenthal): '[s]oon enough I was caught up in rereading the poems, essays and polemics of Abrahams' (1998a: 209). In the celebratory 1998 volume, Vladislavić's piece testifies to the group's importance for his emergent writing practice, to Abrahams's significance as an editor/mentor in the parallel processes of publishing his first stories and putting *Missing Persons* together, and of 'making' a place for himself, beginning to draw on his own affective and textual map of the city laid down by Abrahams's discipline and attention, and memory of his 'Johburg' (63). These formative topographies emerge through the encouragement of Abrahams, his 'particular magic' as a 'great conjurer of possibility', to 'think clearly, to feel strongly...And, always, to write' (62).

Testifying to the importance of *Sesame* and the community around Abrahams, the contribution in Friedman & Blumenthal's collection, entitled 'A Story', is typical of Vladislavić: a carefully constructed and reflexive composite; a combination of form and genre, memory and fiction; self-aware and teasing at the cross-referencing networks that its address and context trace. The piece includes a direct biographical address in an affectionate letter of thanks to Abrahams, which precedes a short, fragmented prose fiction, 'A Science of Fragments' (here 62-8; previously published in *Missing Persons* in 1989, and in *Sesame*, 13: 1990). Comprising a series of compact meditative memory-pieces on grief and loss, '[i]n memory of Lulu Davis', the epigraph to 'A Science of Fragments' is a quote from Abrahams's poem 'Fragments After a Tour (To Lulu, My Niece)' (1988a: 50-55):

*Fragments neither close  
nor open meaning:  
they may mean anything except  
wholeness, except certainty.* (In Vladislavić, 1998a: 63.)

In her work on *Missing Persons* and Vladislavić's revisioning of the short-story cycle, Sue Marais (1992: 47) notes this epigraph as encapsulating *Missing Persons'* 'frustrated intimation of unity and the dislocated impression created by the collection as a whole'; so much does it strike Marais, that she re-marks its significance in her conclusion in support of her argument about Vladislavić's strategic deployment of the inherently dualistic short-story cycle form to evince the 'conflicting tendencies in South African society towards community and separateness, or *eenheid* and *apartheid*' (1992: 54-55). The reflexive use of the 'small' text and the Janus-faced potentialities of the fragment and the fragmentary form, its simultaneous ability to suggest connection and disjunction, and its own formally localized troubling of any part-whole subsumption, marks not just *Missing Persons* but Vladislavić's corpus, often providing a graphic opening to a textual grappling with apartheid's systemic social and spatial fragmentation. Looking forward to what is considered a paradigmatic text on these terms, *Portrait with Keys* (2006) uses a collection of 138 'small', numbered but otherwise non-synchronous reportage and lived memory texts to disrupt the distinctions between generic and formal economies, and to indicate the labyrinthine, alinear nature of post-apartheid Johannesburg and its shifting boundaries and hiatuses.



Significantly, *Portrait*, by spreading the small texts of this phenomenological archive, based on over 20 years of working and living in Johannesburg, across the surface topography of the book, and marshalling a range of devices that encourage readers to engage in re-mapping and alternative arrangements of the possible interconnections between its text pieces, Vladislavić impresses the impossibility of claims to narrative authority, and offers ways of both representing and seeing Johannesburg that refuse totality or a cohesive, singular overview (Horn, 2011). James Graham, identifying the ethical trajectory in Vladislavić's pursuit of citizenship of Johannesburg through *Portrait*, that elusive belonging and of 'being at home' inspired by Abrahams's example in such an uneven, unhomely space, suggests that it is predicated on Vladislavić's openness to different ways of writing and being in the city. For Graham, these various openings do not seek to collapse or to transcend difference in a utopian gesture, but instead make visible the ways in which they overlap. By bringing into view the tension between individual memory and the possibility of community in these contiguous but coinciding experiences, an ethical futurity emerges for the reader in what Graham terms Vladislavić's 'possible city' (2008: 341).

Graham cites Sue Marais's analysis of the embedded racial literary binarism Vladislavić inherits in employing the short story cycle with *Missing Persons* to support this notion of individual but overlapping experiences in the post-apartheid 'possible city', and to return Vladislavić's early work firmly to the 'self-reflexive spirit of the transitional period' (335-6). In the background is Marais's discussion of Tony Morphet's assessment of the cultural 'settlement' of the period following the Sachs debate, and the influence of postmodernist and poststructuralist theorisations imported from abroad. Disturbing the authority of any extra-textual history or communal South African identity already formed into history from its outside (2001: 200-201), Morphet suggests that these are the kinds of liberal cultural geographies that are evoked by Sachs and Ndebele in their building of a specifically South African aesthetic-cultural, political site.

For Morphet, the experimentalism of Vladislavić's *Missing Persons* exemplifies the kind of contemporary work in which 'the intersections of different discourses open up not only the cross-cutting tracks of history but also the problematic relations between subjectivity and location' (103, qtd. in Marais, 2001: 201). My temporal digression here between *Portrait with Keys* (2006a) and the first of Vladislavić's stories from *Missing Persons* (1989) to be published in the earlier *Sesame*, 'Flashback Hotel \*TYYY' (1985), follows some of the threads of Vladislavić's trajectory and self-conscious intervention in the amplified political arenas of South African cultural memory and production. Additionally, I make it in order to demonstrate some of the ways that that these early negotiations and mediations perform their openness, plurality and dynamism, moving across different localities, as well as the ways they negotiate temporalities in which the legacy of separate 'South Africanizations' of knowledge for the white anglophone writer persist. Vladislavić's early experimentalism and self-conscious leveraging of cosmopolitan literary and critical currents, such as we have seen with *Stet*, starts to open a lateral kind of thinking in its movements across Morphet's various nodes of society. Germinating in the midst of the politicized 1980s, these lateral positions can be seen in the strategies of presentation that exploit the boundaries conventionally held between cultural forms, strategies that Vladislavić develops in later work, some of which I look at in part III ('Collecting: exhibiting'), and that find manifest expression in *Portrait with Keys*.

Graham and Marais detail Vladislavić's revisioning of dominant ways of seeing (post)apartheid separations through *Portrait* and *Missing Persons* respectively – spatialities, temporalities, the literary *sensus communis* and its associated literary manifestations in racial binarisms around genre, mode and intent – illustrating Vladislavić's pioneering use of the short, fragmentary form, and its tendency to 'neither close nor open meaning', to once again recall and conjoin the Abrahams-Vladislavić citation. Both analyses rest on the relatively closed product of the book in order to illustrate the paradoxes and tensions that Vladislavić negotiates. In drawing on Marais, Graham's article initiates the kind of interconnective lines of Vladislavić's canny play with genre between *Missing Persons* and the performative openness of *Portrait* that this thesis goes on to explore, and that is the focus of the

section that follows. I argue that there is room for a perspective that more radically opens the bounds of the book that Vladislavić's formative experiences of publication as an emergent writer indicate. This can then be traced through his oeuvre in his interest in visual culture, and through this, in addressing the developing relationship of text to context – as spatial, historical, and intersubjectively shared – a leveraging of a mode that is simultaneously and self-consciously analeptic and proleptic.

Pursuing her reading of the connective tissue of the short story cycles of *Missing Persons*, Marais traces an 'elusive but compelling network of verbal repercussions and motifs' between 'Flashback Hotel \*TYYY', 'A Science of Fragments', and 'The Terminal Bar', which 'ultimately encompasses every story' under the suggestive import of the collection's title (2011: 33). While I want to keep in view the ethical import of the 'possible' and of futurity, of the connective and overlapping use of the uncertainly 'whole' short text in both books, *Missing Persons* and *Portrait with Keys* (a theme I return to), and in light of Vladislavić's comment to Christopher Warnes that the flexibility of the short story appeals in writing the 'extremes' of Johannesburg life (2000: 280), I argue in the following section for a different perspective of the connective tissue between these early stories and the books. I look beyond the arrangements intimated by the story collection, and instead at those suggested by Vladislavić's reflexive self-positioning in his relationship with the alternative anti-apartheid literary subcultures of which *Sesame* was a, conservative and liberal, part.

### **'Dear Lionel'**

Memories of Abrahams, as consciously evoked presences in Vladislavić's celebrated 'city texts', are extant in the notes and scholarly framings of *Portrait* (2006a); they pop up elsewhere in the body of the text; they develop through 'A Story' (1998a); and in the other publications of 'A Science of Fragments' through the epigraphic citation of Abrahams's poem (1989; 1990). These various appearances of Abrahams are offered in conjunction with the productive tension that the fragment performs. They develop an affiliative and affectionate map of the city and friendship which can be set into a dynamic orientation around this 1998 publication of 'A Science of

Fragments'. With this focus on the publication of 'A Story' I do not intend to fix this context as exceptional or original; it serves as a touchstone that provides an early illustration of the strategies of reference and rhetorical accretion that Vladislavić goes on to develop, engaging in multiple lines of history constructing the present as a means to acknowledge the desire for originary moments. Genealogy and inheritance, complicity and privilege, white 'minor' writing and Abrahams's uncompromising liberalism, are negotiated in these deconstructive gestures, strategies that favour lateral and multiple networks, rather than individually discrete discursive moments.

'A Science of Fragments' is a collage-like text in ten fragmented parts. The section entitled 'Broken Mirror', a magical-realist fragmentary sub-section that intervenes into the contingent real of the memory-pieces that make up the rest of the story, is separated typographically with the use of italics: in *Sesame's* 1990 publication, 'Broken Mirror' is further sub-sectioned, each sub-fragment separated by three asterisks. Its contextual setting is 'the Flashback Hotel'; 'his' focalized sub-sections begin '[i]n the Cavalier Bar at the Flashback Hotel', 'hers' 'in a childhood place', in the Flashback Hotel's 'beautiful gardens' (1990: 34). Vladislavić's short story 'Flashback Hotel \*TYYY' has its first publication before *Missing Persons* also in *Sesame*, issue 5, in 1985.<sup>30</sup> Its narrator is subject to a series of self-erasures, embodying his fancy dress costume 'as a missing person' (15), and compelled to observe and patch together a self-hood from the abstracted presencing of official records - 'Hatches, Matches and Dispatches' (14); its detailed descriptive prose is weighted with the violence of excess and a bomb explosion we are encouraged to think the narrator is responsible for. Mentioned and embedded within, the metafictional experiments with form of 'Flashback Hotel', and its critique of the fracture and fragmentation in the face of the violent abstractions and excavation of anonymity and impersonality under apartheid, find a bracket and their place in the repetitions of 'A Science of Fragments'.

---

<sup>30</sup> Significant in its own accretions of meaning produced by contextual leveraging, 'Flashback Hotel' is also the eponymous story of Umuzi's 2010 collection of *Missing Persons* and *Propaganda by Monuments*.

These direct interconnections stress the self-referential and reflexive links running across *Missing Persons* (see Marais, 2011: 33-34), hinting at the book's ambivalent possibilities as a recuperative story cycle. 'A Science of Fragments' is, as Marais recognizes, an exemplary story in terms of the book's organisation as a series of recalcitrant, disjunctive entities, collecting short, fragmentary fictions, that nonetheless gesture towards a self-consciously holistic design (Marais, 2011: 28). These kinds of parenthetical relations between 'Flashback Hotel' and 'A Science of Fragments' are recalled more explicitly by the latter story in its publication in *Sesame*, 1990, which additionally exploits the flexibility of the little magazine's typography to emphasize the dislocative properties of its fragmenting content; it is this contextual relation, as well as the longer history that encompasses both *Missing Persons* and its writing, that is echoed by the later inclusion of 'A Science of Fragments' in Abrahams's seventieth birthday volume (surtitled 'A Story', 1998a). Viewing these connections through the separate publication histories of the little magazines, loosens 'A Science of Fragments' from the associative networks and possibilities of the short-story cycle within the book, widening its other cyclical, more lateral and potentially dislocative, because multiple, links.

Given this, and in specific relation to the title of the story, Camelia Elias's study of the fragment in literature is instructive. Liberating the 'Romantic' fragment from attention to its form and content, Elias suggests the fragment is to be viewed in terms of its function as a series of acts: of literature, of reading, of writing. This performative fragment, then, 'exhibits an agency of its own' in the self-reflexive writing which 'recognizes in itself the writer's experience of contradiction' (2004: 5). Elias also notes that 'much of the appeal to the fragment relies on the fact that one can never be sure of what exactly constitutes a fragment' (2). She therefore evokes the ways in which the fragment is both singular and multiple, that it exceeds itself and its context by inscribing its own presence as fragment and fragmenting, and that it is predicated on the absence of always already being a singular part apart from any other pieces in its topography. This indeterminacy, or undecidability of the status of the fragment encourages the production of coherence on levels organized around its generative 'agency'.

Vladislavić's framing of 'A Science of Fragments' in Friedman & Blumenthal's collection serves to introduce and highlight the role of another of his strategic deployments of a 'small' textual form that recurs through his work, the letter. This is a form which contributes to the 'agency' of the fragment as performed in 'A Science of Fragments' and its reiteration in 'A Story', and that can be found across Vladislavić's fiction in postal and letter texts, most clearly through the curatorial, collecting mode I identify throughout the thesis. Vladislavić's prefatory letter to the story, addressed '*Dear Lionel*', and signed simply '*Ivan*', enlists the shifting relations of context and the open, public, but evocatively close and intimate address of a correspondence between longstanding friends to introduce 'A Science of Fragments': '*Nearly twenty years have passed since I belonged to 'the group', that writing circle at whose still centre you stand*' (62: italics in original). The letter to Abrahams echoes the first fragment of the story, 'AN UNPOSTED LETTER', which itself dramatizes the act of writing: the protagonist writes a letter taking 'her death, or rather his grief, as theme' (63) that he realizes he intends to 'post' in 'her' grave. In relation to the Abrahams epigraph, this takes on added poignancy as an epitaph to Lulu Davis, Abrahams's niece and Vladislavić's friend at Wits in the seventies, who committed suicide in 1988.<sup>31</sup> We do not read this internal and deeply personal metafictional letter, nor are its contents ever relayed. Instead it remains a private act of loss, a letter unsent, withheld from audience and address and suspended in its delivery.

Within the fiction, the labour of the letter's writing ghosts its intimate and personal act: 'He rewrote the piece three times...he found an error, and had to type it over. It had to be perfect': he is disturbed by his need to 'convert grief into fiction'. The 'letter', whose status becomes ambiguous in its writing – note the telling use of 'piece' – remains 'unposted'. Its white paper an inadequate gesture in the face of his loss, this small fragment of text, the letter-piece, becomes instead a 'voice speaking softly in his pocket' (33; cf. Peters, 1998: 247); audible but unread, the ghosted and disembodied repetitions of the letter-text become a masked and absent centre

---

<sup>31</sup> Abrahams's editorial to *Sesame* 10, 'Concerning *Sesame*' (Winter 1988: 2) expresses grief and bewilderment at Davis's suicide. This is the issue that carries Vladislavić's story, 'We Came to the Monument' (19-24).

around which the fragmented memory narratives of the story build, yet refuse to explain or close. In becoming a story, with a narrative momentum of its own, the silent intimacy of the letter performs and proclaims its fictional status as the fulcrum of the fragments that surround it: in becoming 'A Story' (1998a), as a gift for Abrahams, the early text and its mobilizations of its own letter forms self-consciously incorporate Vladislavić's tribute, to his mentor and to his Lulu Davis' death, into its body and its gathering temporal disjunctures.

Letters are particularly indicative of spatialities tied to temporalities, textual and communicative moments lifted out of time and transported forward, both a grasp at nostalgia and a hope for a future in an object of now (cf. Altman, 1982: 187). I return to this topic and its properties for registering distance and connection later in the thesis. Here, the crossings of the public and private, inherent in the letter form, the possibilities of self-construction, deception and the relative 'authenticity' of direct communication, particularly to the public literary figure of Lionel Abrahams, come together around memory, and the presences of the past in the narrative present. The prefatory letter includes a citation from another of Abrahams's poems, 'Views and Sites',<sup>32</sup> through which Vladislavić finds a tether for his own memory and identity in the rapidly shifting referents of the 'tawdry city' and its 'too changeable streets' (63):

*Or is it where a topsoil of memory  
has been allowed to form  
that one feels a little more  
alive, a little more at home?* (In Vladislavić, 1998a: 62.)

The fertility of this mnemonic cultural 'topsoil' is sprinkled throughout *Portrait with Keys*, part of Vladislavić's celebrated and acutely focused attention to the everyday, composite materials that constitute the critical intensity of citizenship and, in Abrahams's terms, feeling at home in the city (2006a: 209): 'intriguingly concrete', Vladislavić writes of this 'topsoil' in *Portrait*, 'memory is endowed with a hand-warmingly physical quality...[that] might yet carve out or fill a space in the material world' (188/key 133).

---

<sup>32</sup> Vladislavić re-cites Abrahams's poem in an interview with Jan Steyn on his interests of the layering of memory and place (2012a: np).

The cover art of the South African publication (Umuzi) and the epigraph both reference Abrahams's 'The Fall of van Eck House' (1984):

*Memory takes root only half in the folds of the brain:  
Half's in the concrete streets we have lived along.*  
(In Vladislavić, 2006a: np.)

'The Fall of van Eck House', 'an occasional poem about the implosion of this 21-storey skyscraper in 1983', as the 'Notes and Sources' section of *Portrait* has it (2006a: 197),<sup>33</sup> dramatizes Abrahams's connection of self-identity to the built edifices of Johannesburg in their loss, informing a phenomenological, embodied investment of self and city as a politicized form of resistance to abstraction and futurism, what Abrahams stated in his acceptance speech for the Thomas Pringle award for poetry in 1987, as the naivety of a 'revolutionary transcendentalism that finds the given world evil and postpones every good into some new world that it hopes to bring into being' (qtd. in Foley, 1992: 41-42). Vladislavić 'bumps into' this Abrahams in key 133 of *Portrait* (187-8), alongside Herman Charles Bosman, Abrahams's own writing mentor, also committed to a critical revisioning of Johannesburg. In a return to the inventive possibilities of fictionalization, although Vladislavić knew Abrahams and his 'Johburg' closely, both 'memories' of the writers and their presences in the city in this mnemonic key are invented, 'borrowed' from other writers 'between the covers of a book' (187), distancing the experiential and personal by pointing up writing, and memory's always mediated expression.

As the testament to Abrahams's influence on Vladislavić's own work becomes clear, through 'Flashback Hotel', 'A Science of Fragments', 'A Story' and *Portrait with Keys*, it is also set in a longer, specifically literary historical trajectory that itself incorporates *Missing Persons*. Yet the strategies and techniques Vladislavić employs do not provide a genealogical linear reading, seeking to locate or fix the origins or concrete boundaries of the space, contexts, and political connections they draw. The city writers, Bosman and Abrahams, may punctuate Vladislavić's creative

---

<sup>33</sup> The full note reads: 'The main epigraph is from Lionel Abrahams, 'The Fall of van Eck House', an occasional poem about the implosion of this 21-storey skyscraper in 1983. It appeared in *Journal of a New Man* (Ad Donker, Johannesburg, 1984), pp.70-71. Escom House, as it was originally known, was built in the mid-thirties for the Electricity Supply Commission and was among the highest reinforced concrete structures of its time. The design was by P. Rogers Cooke and G.E. Pearse & John Fassler. See Clive Chipkin, *Johannesburg Style: Architecture and Society, 1880s-1960s* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1993).' (2006a: 197).



Johannesburg topsoil, but they do not coincide with its writing subject, or even their own images and representations in the case of *Portrait with Keys*. There is dynamism and mobility in Vladislavić's deployment of these gestures of textual affiliation, which gather their momentum across the energies of the small magazine, the anthology and text collection, and the book, each concerned with and emerging from Johannesburg. The unfolding impact of both the interpersonal and intertextual connections with Abrahams, intimated by the multiple appearances and iterations of this early story across a range of Abrahams's spheres of literary influence, attests to the significance of the fragmentary small text to Vladislavić's aesthetic engagement with the political problems of literary and social community: being in common and the diverse currents constituting belonging as a white Anglo-South African writer criss-cross temporal and discursive locations in the multiple and in different and restless directions. If one of the critical points of Abrahams's liberal aesthetics is its insistence on timelessness, an uncompromising individualism, tradition and talent, and a universalising ahistoricism (see Oliphant, 2001; cf. Kirkwood, 1976), Vladislavić's fragmentary marshalling of Abrahams's poetry as a singular part of his multiply fragmented, collected-curated aesthetic orients Abrahams otherwise, towards future readings and openness. This strategy engages memory and a shared aesthetic intent through the concrete materiality and phenomenological experience of the city. Through the fragment, it simultaneously addresses rupture, division, and re-envisioning of the structures that organize it.

It is this accumulative aesthetic that provides Vladislavić with the simultaneous mobilisation and suspension of the defined political positioning of Abrahams's 'classic' liberalism, even in its embeddedness, and indicates the often remarkably prescient quality of Vladislavić's work. It highlights, too, an engagement with memory and broad cultural mnemonics, and a concern with locatedness in its own historical moment, resisting 'gathering' into a single site, reminding the reader of the promiscuity of aesthetic possibility. Vladislavić's singularity is premised on the range of connections that present themselves through its mutual enlisting of the contingencies of language and shifting relations of context: context, that is, in Barnett's social-geographical sense of 'a distinctly spatial figure not of containment but, insofar as it refers to what precedes, follows and surrounds texts, of the

relations of contingency and proximity between elements' (Barnett, 1999b: 288). It signals a devolution, a 'passing on, sharing, destination, transmission, transfer through development (de-volere), through an unfolding and coming apart', to borrow from Jean Luc Nancy on the ontology of the fragment and meaning-making in the world (1997: 165), which is significant in the transitional state of South Africa's socio-cultural trajectory and future, and to Vladislavić's aesthetic, political self-positioning within it.

### ***Sesame's monuments***

In 1988, *Sesame* carried Vladislavić's story 'We Came to the Monument' in its tenth (Winter) issue (1988d: 19-24). *Sesame* does not include the visual experimentation of the other contemporary little magazines in this study. With the editorial control firmly under Abrahams's guide, *Sesame* remains the most self-consciously literary, by its own estimations of the term, and the least exploratory on broader cultural-aesthetic terms. This choice reflects the more conservative and less protean values of its editorship in the late 1980s, and its desire to assert itself in contradistinction from forums that sought to confound the conventional boundaries between modes and forms as an explicit part of their political project, as is the case with both *Stet* and *Staffrider*. This guarding of the kind of 'clear-cut categories that white liberal guardians like Abrahams cherished' (McDonald, 2009: 190) in the developing politicization of dismantling and cultural experimentation of the 1980s recalls older genealogies of literary assimilationist thinking and colonialist, Enlightenment discourse, in which the boundaries of the literary in South Africa came to be set and policed by early publication contexts, and which fundamentally determined the conditions and experiences of agency that African writers had been required to labour under within the parameters of modernity (Helgesson, 2009). In its own critique of conservative culture and assault on the fiction of white supremacy, 'We Came to the Monument' indicates this longer history, acknowledging and questioning originary, foundational texts of European settlement in South Africa, and employing a fragmentary, postmodern mode to disturb questions of structure and category, of inside and outside.

The majority of the contributions to the issue of *Sesame* that 'We Came' appears in conform to the liberal-literary values the magazine shelters. They are generally openly anti-apartheid and liberal-realist in formal and generic concerns, consolidating what Mark Gevisser notes as *Sesame's* 'suburban' voice (1998: 11). By contrast, 'We Came' is experimental both in form and genre. Highlighted by typographical features, 'We Came' is also markedly visual. Its presentation on the page directs its cultural critique through the visual politics of monumental structures and apartheid cultural monuments: its dual narrative experimental form exploits graphic possibilities, typeface and layout, to highlight its concerns. Moreover, the political thrust of 'We Came' is 'subtle', sublimated within its poetics (Barris, 1990: 6). The rich textures and materiality in the poetic play of its prose are perhaps most clearly thematized through the visionary qualities of one of the story's two central narrators, a statue situated in the unnamed city centre. Commenting on the deformations of humanity under late apartheid, the statue's recurrent nightmare of being 'toppled' and scavenged for souvenirs ends in the revelation to his 'attackers' (19) of 'a sticky heart pacing out the confines of [his] broken ribcage' (20). With a 'sticky' rather than a 'bleeding heart', then, Vladislavić's story works in and through its liberal-literary context in a number of ways.

Form and visual presentation interact to highlight the story's focus on the frustrated possibilities of integration in the structural violence and discursive bankruptcy of late apartheid. In its appearance in *Sesame*, this interaction, in turn, maps the negotiation of literary-critical ideological positioning of the magazine itself. *Sesame's* word-processed, cheap and speedy production values, its cover graphic and layout confer a distinctive aesthetic on the magazine as an object consonant with its politics as an alternative literary space, while enclosing parameters around its own evaluative deeming. In its assertion of its own identity and desirability as a literary object, the issue's paratexts articulate a particular kind of liberal literary guardianship and the maintenance of a network of like-minded writers and readers, as well as the ambivalences and tensions of holding that position in the mounting socio-cultural antagonisms of its historical moment, that 'We Came' both sits with and troubles.

### **Our irresponsibility**

The cover graphic for the issue that 'We Came' appears in (10, Winter '88), by Gus Ferguson, is a line-drawn image of a white man wearing suitably readerly spectacles, with a glass of wine to hand and notebook at the ready, calmly reading a magazine entitled 'POETRY' that is in flames, burning from the bottom up. Signalling the bourgeois props of the liberal middle-class and the ambivalent position of the little literary magazine, the 'POETRY' of the image is either self-imploding, in connotations of the potential and systemic violence of censorship, or has been set alight, as of destruction by revolutionary war for liberation. In either case of the unseen cultural arsonists, Ferguson's graphic places the suburban reading of the 'poetry' magazine at, potentially as, the centre of incendiary unrest, while the reader of 'POETRY' is blithely unaffected by the conflagration burning in his hands.

What may well be a qualified parodic reversal of the quietism of literary pursuits in the midst of the violence of the late 1980s, an anxiety about 'fiddling while Rome burns', is reflected in Abrahams's opening editorial: 'in the face of what looks like a collapse of political hope for the country...the prospect [of] turmoil and long years of tension without foreseeable release...[is] a scene in which a little literary magazine seems pointless and out of place' (3). The editorial closes on an affirmation of the centrality of 'humanity' and its own guardianship of 'people's freedom (hard-won during the long history of civilizations) to think individually, feel individually and express themselves according to their individual visions' (3): it is this explicitly liberal, universalist-individualist guardianship, offered to its reader and, in the piece's collective editorial pronoun, as a position they already occupy, that 'will be the nature of our irresponsibility and indiscipline, our "marginality", our "irrelevance"' (3).

Abrahams's editorial may indicate the socio-political shifts from the climate of separatism and Black Consciousness thinking in which *Sesame* was instituted towards the gathering reinvention forged by the growing merge between non-violent, liberal, mass democratic and non-racial discourses through the 1980s (Rich, 1997; Blair, 2012). Although Rich's revisionist arguments suggest that the political ideology of liberalism became unrecognisable in this shift, Abrahams's editorial is

an explicit assertion of *Sesame's* classically recognisable liberal-humanist aspirations as its political agency in a post-liberal climate where, as J.M. Coetzee states, 'the Left freely used "liberal", as well as "humanist", as terms of abuse' (2002: 322). In the face of Abrahams's principled, defensive assertion of his 'little' aesthetic space, the relationship between irrelevance and centrality that Ferguson's cover captures in terms of *Sesame's* place in print cultural production strikes as doubly ironic: it reflexively inscribes the magazine's own sense of its marginality and distance from 'real' socio-political transformations, and the devaluation of its dominant, if embattled, position at a traditionally held discursive 'centre' of literary production. By recalling contemporary periodical culture more broadly, the fitful and restless reinventions of the 'POETRY' magazine and its role as a forum for critical debate through the 1980s, the cover graphic references *Sesame's* literary-political alternatives: sites, such as the radical 'urbanity' of the democratic spaces of black aligned, non-racial magazines like *Staffrider*; and debates, about the elitist paternalistic liberal guardianship of the 'individual visions' that were seen to constitute the literary on the terms of 'civilisations' past.

While *Sesame* retreats from Ferguson's self-image, sidelined into its white suburban corner, no such authority or self-coincidence emerges from 'We Came'. The focus of the critique of 'We Came' is pointedly directed towards the cultural and memorial practices of conservative Afrikaner ethno-nationalism. Yet, in the story's expression of the intense desire for transcendence of apartheid's structural conditions, its negotiation between distinct, separated voices, and its focus on the grammar and determinations of apartheid capitalism, its terms are broadened to indicate the exhaustion and obsolescence of a variously privileged transhistorical whiteness. The story exposes in its unfolding process a complex set of antagonisms and allegiances in a desire for points of commonality. Emerging from the white, English-speaking liberal-humanist context of *Sesame*, 'We Came' exposes and denaturalizes the textual nature of its power validation through a focus on visual culture and the monumental.

### **'We Came to the Monument'**

In the post-apartheid re-negotiation of public heritage, Vladislavić's interest in postmodern literary models and their relevance for his exploration of the referential uncertainty of monuments and museums as signs has been well documented (Warnes, 2000; Graham, 2007; Kossew, 2010). 'We Came to the Monument' is relatively neglected at this level. Published in *Sesame* in 1988, the story functions as an epitaph for its own 'Monument'. Published during the states of emergency, the post-liberal, postmodern energies of 'We Came', in combination with its explicitly liberal-humanist publication context, registers uncertainty in the negotiation of newly conceptualized, decolonizing social and political spaces, and changing ways of seeing through the shifting cultural settlement.

Set in an unnamed city that has been devastated by armed rebellion, 'We Came' captures the besieged atmosphere of the late apartheid regime, both in its imaginary of the aftermath of a bloody liberation war, and its reflection of the violent conditions of the cycles of civic revolt and repressive state reprisal that characterized its successive states of emergency. Details of the 'ruined Monument' (1988d: 21) of the story's title identify it unambiguously as one of South Africa's most symbolically laden memorial sites, the Voortrekker Monument. The stolid persistence of the 'black block on the broken hills' (20) of Vladislavić's story recalls the Voortrekker Monument's stocky granite edifice which sits on the Pretoria skyline, 'squat and solid like an art deco pepper pot' for critic David Bunn, (1998: 104), or 'like some misplaced Bakelite radio' in Annie E. Coombes' description (2003: 28).

From a post-apartheid perspective, these art historian critics use similes that open the ironies available in the architectural hyperbole of the Voortrekker Monument. This is a representational instability that Vladislavić's 1988 story exploits on the textual level to signal the circumscribed geographies its characters must inhabit. The story evokes the narrative content of the Monument's marble friezes, a 'chronicle, telling the whole story of our people. A story of origins, of pioneers, of battles and massacres, and long journeys marked by heroism and suffering' (19). In a seemingly fantastical moment, a beam of sunlight falls from the Monument's

ceiling onto 'a dead unintelligible face' (21); potentially of an irruptive magical realism, this moment documents the mythical narrative built in to the architectural logic of the Voortrekker Monument, in which 'the monument itself renews its historical referent' (Bunn, 1998: 104) through an oculus in the ceiling, designed so that a dagger of light falls from the dome onto the symbolic sarcophagus of the martyred trekker leader Piet Retief and an inscription taken from the Afrikaans anthem 'Die Stem'.<sup>34</sup>

Built in this way to embody an incontestable version of an Afrikaner ethno-nationalist past in every architectural detail, the Voortrekker Monument is a hegemonic space of consignment. It operates on an archival economy as proposed by Derrida's *Archive Fever*: both in the assignation of place or residence, 'to consign, to deposit', in a more or less permanent dwelling that which is being archived (1996: 3-5); and in the classifying and gathering together of signs to present a homogenous whole, 'a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration' (3). Derrida calls the operation of the legitimacy and the authority conferred by this instituting process 'house arrest' (2). Through its focus on the declining relevance of the 'arresting' archival discursive power instantiated in the material structures of Voortrekker Monument, 'We Came' engages a critique of both musealization, the uncritical nostalgic attention to the past, and the destructive, totalising energies of the teleological futurism of the Voortrekker myth (cf. Gaylard, 2011). In its attempt to find alternative ethical and democratic potential in the spectacle and moral opprobrium of the late apartheid order, 'We Came' also negotiates the risks, inherent in the desire to fix and retain the past in the present and in the production of meaningful possibilities for the future, subscribed internally by the monumental and the Monument itself, and that are also inscribed in the white writing position in apartheid South Africa at this juncture. Querying the possibility of finding alternative writing positions that are not recuperable by the archival economy of the Monument's gathering built-in to an apartheid 'house arrest', the story traverses the potential of making 'crucial narratives of the past real and present in social memory without casting them in

---

<sup>34</sup> Die Stem van Suid-Afrika' was used as the national anthem of apartheid South Africa from 1957 to 1994.

bronze or consigning them to the archive or the museum', as Shane Graham writes (2009: 17).

The multiple and the fragmentary are mobilized to this effect, initially providing alternative strands of meaning to the archival solidity of the Monument. The primary metafictional strategy of 'We came', and its distinct intervention in its appearance in the liberal, largely non-visual *Sesame*, lie in the twinned perspectives of its alternating first-person narrators. Shuttling between the unnamed, deserted city, a 'place reeling between monument and ruin' (20), and 'the Monument' of the story's title, also 'in ruins' (20), the temporal and spatial fractures of the narrative surface are visually mapped, distinguished typographically. The first narrative strand, in bold, is the vivid (occasionally purple), mytho-poetic imaginary of a statue situated in the story's progressively embattled city. The statue is willed to life, '**to become a man**', by desire, which takes shape in his love for a young woman he sees from his plinth: '**Sometimes she suddenly filled the space [next to the bus-shelter], and then I was very pleased with her, and with the inevitability of my love for her**' (20).<sup>35</sup> The second voice, in neutral typeface, comprises the more straightforwardly mimetic descriptions and experiences of the ruined Monument from the perspective of the only daughter of a man named Steenkamp, the leader of a small band of '**refugees**' (22), five families attempting to return north from their 'place in the bush' to their home city, which has been devastated after 'long years of siege' (19).

Monuments and statues are solid physical markers around which group and national narratives gain power and authority for a selectively figured future, discursively set down in 'the hard currency of stone' (Herwitz, 2012: 94). In 'We Came', this is subverted, but to gathered back into the heart of a stony fixity and arrest, a result of the characters' homelessness and restless search for home. The overwhelming pull of the narrative centre that is the skidding temporality and

---

<sup>35</sup> In *Missing Persons*, the typographical distinction is made through italics. The typeface and word processing used throughout *Sesame* (by Wordstyle) does not include any use of italics. In the reading that follows, the references are from the issue of 'We Came to the Monument' in *Sesame* (10: Winter, 1988) and I have followed the typographical referencing as printed throughout, with the narrative of the statue in bold.



collective pull of the Monument itself, the temporal and spatial deconstructive strategies, the back-and-forth topographical and syntactical disturbances of the narrative surface, perform the possibility of ethical openings that are ultimately frustrated by divided commonalities tied to the Monument's available constructions of place. The statue, as an official memorial structure, and the young woman, identified solely by the Voortrekker patronym and the only proper name in use throughout,<sup>36</sup> are each weighted by the symbolically laden historical positions they are destined to occupy beyond their narrative present.

Voicing both allegorical (group) and particular (individual) perspectives, although each narrative voice has its own referential diegesis that follows a broadly retrospective chronology, the interchanging sections of 'We Came' make their own temporal interventions into text. Operating around the tightly circumscribed localities of the Monument and the city, and the corresponding 'real' of the Voortrekker Monument and, in the line of sight of the narrative's map, the statue's situation around the British built Union Buildings of Pretoria, the longer history of divided settler, colonialist geographies of South Africa are raised, topographies around which competing legitimations of territorial control and group identities cohere.

With the visual cue of alternating bold and neutral type producing a feeling of the surface cracking, this dual building and unfixing creates instability on the textual level: to borrow a phrase from Asako Nakai, there is a 'generative disruption in the discursive practice' (2000: 16). These multiple memory texts bring forth a tension between the individualized, separate group identities and the possibility of a

---

<sup>36</sup> This embedded allusion to the 'oft-quoted' memoirs of Anna Steenkamp, niece of founding father Piet Retief, is an example of a particularly local intertextual reference to the Voortrekker originary myth that contributes to the 'monstrous legibility' of the story's Monument as Voortrekker Monument, although with differing degrees of resonance according to the specifics of reception networks and context. Recalling the emancipation of the Cape Slaves and claiming explicitly religious motives for the start of the Trek from the Cape, Steenkamp wrote in her memoirs: 'It is not so much their freedom that drove us to such lengths, as their being placed on an equal footing with Christians, contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinction of race and religion, so that it was intolerable for any decent Christian to bow down beneath such a yoke: wherefore we rather withdrew in order thus to preserve our doctrines in purity.' As Lucia Saks notes (2011: 146), this describes the constellations of purity and contamination, master and slave, and cultural preservation that found its ultimate codification in the ideology of apartheid.

different kind of communal future. Revealing the exigencies of multiple experiences and identities in the possibilities of transition, the separate narrative blocks and their multiple histories intervene and participate in an overwritten account of history and symbolically simplified society. Although in these movements across the narrative strands, there is potential for a move from grand, linear narrative imposition to horizontal notions of memory, place, and different arrangements of collectivity that might occur in the narrative present at different rates, their visual distinction and mapping on the page indicates the impossibility of moving beyond identities formed by history. With a stress on seeing, framing and perspective, the form, accented by its presentation, moves us between moments of silence and articulation, while its gaps illustrate incommensurability, and impress an intense desire for basic human joining and contact.

The statue, with the poignancy of romantic lyricism, dreams, loves, creates poetry, in bold; the girl, in neutral, describes, confides, and relates. The typographical distinction between the alternating bold and neutral type holds throughout, visually indicating the differentiation between the two voices, pointing up the narrative ruptures which prevent the intimacy and communion so desired by their separation, made legible by the interstices between each of their self-enclosed, self-contained perspectives. Typographically, this is perhaps most significantly thematized by the visual impact of the bold type, which becomes particularly appropriate to the solidity of the object speaking through it in the statue's first-person narrative. This emphasis draws attention to its *materiality*, of its writing – its taking place on the page in the magazine, and by extension the story's construction and its authorial hand – as well as that of the fictional monument it represents. Simultaneously, *textuality* is foregrounded. The statue-narrative is the one with explicitly literary qualities which bespeak its desire to transcend its stone body: remaining behind in the city, '**a monumental silence, dry and hollow**'; waiting, as he says, '**my turn to speak through my love's talkative hands, her fluent skin**' (19). In this inventive literariness, the story is moved beyond its material and context-bound 'appearance' in type, performing its excess and thematizing possibilities of thinking past structure and its limits. '**I have a few things to tell you, and a lot of time. ...I am only surface**', the statue relates as it introduces itself at the story's opening,

proceeding by proclaiming narrative unreliability and instability by a paradoxical proclamation of affective human qualities: **'There is no more to me than meets the eye. / Except that I have a heart, and a brain. And I can invent a tongue. That is all I need to invent a monument as quick and fickle as a kite'** (19).

In 'voicing' the statue of 'We Came', whose will and capacity to 'invent' is given weight, in the type, and as its double mention is embedded by the repetitive poetic rhythm of the sentence structure, Vladislavić mobilizes the dual potential of an inventive 'tongue'. The erection of public statuary marks the consciously constructed relationship between a political culture and its representations of the past through place. '[S]patial anchors for historical traditions' (Foote, Tóth, & Árvay, 2000: 305) statues, with monuments, are a spectacularized form of the mute evidence of built landscapes that have been explicitly designed in the service of contemporary political and ideological narratives. The relationship between ideology and physical materiality speaks through the paradox of the (dead) cultural artefact and the (enlivened) affect of the human body, its language tripping from a tongue informed by eyes, heart, and brain. Through the statue's opening gambit, the text we read, as we begin to read it, makes us aware of the invention that constitutes it, and its textuality. The statue self-fictionalizes, and wills change to, and as a part of the built environment it belongs to as it humanizes.

This opening metafictional device, inscribing its self-awareness of becoming text, begins the narrative's own supplementarity: as we read we repeat the statue's already self-repetitive, inventive gesture. An early example of Vladislavić's interest in the reiterations of place, 'the physical and symbolic changes undergone by public spaces and architectural constructions' (Popescu, 2003: 419), this is metonymic of the ways that the presentation of 'We Came' in *Sesame* works with and through the experimental poetics of its content. In simple terms, the solidity conventionally conveyed by bold type is undercut by metafiction, by irreality and its literary 'exorbitance' (Said, 1983: 189). On the other hand, the literary-visual tie of typeface and the page returns us to the mechanisms of production that delimit the text as object. These mechanisms, in turn, become particularly visible in the context of the object that is the local little magazine, exemplary as it is of its moment, the material

realities of its circulation, reception and, in the case of *Sesame* in 1988, its need for political self-validation.

Sophisticated narrative strategies integrate with the story's formal layout and its typographical distinctions to illustrate the subtle specular dynamics of 'We Came' which operate in the face of the inexorable gathering properties that the discursive power of the Monument exerts. The band of refugees wandering the post-apocalyptic landscape, the 'latter-day Voortrekker party of survivors' (Brown, 1990; qtd. in Marais, 1992: 53), only get as far as the Monument in their dream of returning home: 'We were on our way to the city, but we came to the Monument and it seemed like a place to stay' (19); the statue, initially situated at a busy intersection in the city, where he is able to watch '**carelessly over the people**' and they over him (19), abandons his pedestal in the midst of the devastation and walks '**through the gutted city...along the route taken by the refugees. And so I came at length to the Monument and it seemed like a place to stay**' (22). In the transfigurations of the immediate physical world of the narrators of 'We Came to the Monument', the boundaries of the physical, natural and social worlds press so hard against each other as to dissolve. Statues and people are mirrored in the understanding that stone is 'not a passive element' (19). As the narrative progresses in its back and forth between its voices, both contribute to the construction of the single object of reading, the Monument itself, through which the performative 'we' of the story's title finds its place. The narrative's bifurcation is acted upon internally by the accumulative force of its centripetal pull inward. The possible openness available in the fragmentary form is closed down as the characters seal themselves in.

Retreating ever inwards, the characters are pulled by the interior logic of what Bunn's architectural analysis of Afrikaner monumental structures labels the language of 'originary inscription', an anxious spectacular economy endlessly repeated to produce forms of affect associated with the foundational myth of the Great Trek (1998: 102). Typography maps topography. Fleeing the gutted city, taking up a position as a corner sentinel of the monolithic Monument, the statue retreats further inside when disturbed by the Steenkamp scouts, from '**frieze to frieze, trying to find a place to hide**'. Finding himself '**in a corner, among the**

**vanquished**' (24), 'We Came' ends as the daughter/granddaughter makes her home under the same frieze, and gives us an almost true ekphrastic reading of an existing frieze in the Voortrekker Monument, a panel which depicts the treaty drawn up between the Afrikaner leader Piet Retief and the king Dingane kaSenzangakhona Zulu, seceding land in Natal to the Voortrekkers.

True to the 'monstrous legibility' of the Voortrekker myth (Coombes, 2003: 25), Dingane is described in the straightforward prose of the young woman as '[t]he enemy. He sits awkwardly on the edge of his chair. He looks like a man who has never sat in a chair before. He holds a quill in his left hand. He is about to make a cross on the document which our leader pushes towards him' (23). Visually distinct, graphically illustrating the impossibility for these characters to move beyond the identities pre-formed by the monumental structures of apartheid history, the alternating building blocks of the narrative wall-in the narrative's bifurcations. Mapped onto each other through the shared, entombing experience of the Dingane frieze, the picture of colonial domination through inscription, this strategy emphasizes the reflexive interplay between form, structure, and the focus on the monolith of apartheid architectonics, teasing at the demarcations between the visual and written so crucial to contemporary cultural debate.

I want to call attention to this interpenetration of the visuality of the form and architectonics here as it emerges from the liberal *Sesame* to explore the authorial strategy by which 'We Came' critically registers the available positions for 'responsible' cultural engagement from the site of privilege as a white, Anglo-South African writer. This story maps itself through a specifically concentrated focus on controlled spatialities, the systematic architecture of apartheid's manufactured and built structures and their divisive claims on space, cultural memory, and identity; it is particularly concerned with the logic of apartheid as an architectonic in itself, a systematic, ideologically structured architecture of restriction (see Bawa and Herwitz, 2008). Simultaneously, through its combined focus on the defensive originary inscriptions and partial histories of the ideologically architected material structures in and around Pretoria, and its acutely reflexive awareness of its own formal architecture, the critique of 'We Came' is positioned in a longer history of

Western metaphysics, of an architecture of imperialism and biopolitical, epistemic violence in South Africa, and the 'architectonic of reason'.

As the naturalized procession of systematic and hierarchical ordering of knowledge and its institutions, issuing *a priori* from a reasoning, self-sufficient, transcendental subject, the Kantian architectonic and its moral corollary in the categorical imperative, has long been pressed in the service of Enlightenment thinking.<sup>37</sup> Informing Empire's 'imaginative geographies of Reason' (Jacobs, 2002: 3) and its accompanying classificatory, taxonomic zeal, the architectonic of the colonial expansionist rationality that is the assumption of the grand narratives of the Western humanist imaginary to pursue knowledge to its utmost bounds, in the name of pure Reason, is justified by the 'universal' validity of the pursuit (Devenney, 1994: 14; Syrotinski, 2007: 41). In the postcolonial critique, the universalist, insufficiently historicized claims regarding a transcendental *sensus communis* and its disposition to the cosmopolitan world community are no longer defensible (see for example, Huggan, 2001; Derrida, 2005; Spivak, 1985; and 1999; Kimmerle & Oosterling, 2000). The separation and silences between the distinct sets of antagonisms, pasts and possible futures that 'We Came' contours impress this problematic.

The violence of the competing territorial and teleological claims and the impossibility of being-in-common emerge through the historicizing and localizing coordinates of the ideologically driven aesthetic object, in both the monument and the statue. It is through these objects that the desire for an 'ordinary' humanness becomes legible as it is progressively silenced, sealed in to a repetitive return by the Monument's dominant overwriting, its own stony, archival house arrest (Derrida, 1996). This alludes to a series of intersecting questions about the failures and

---

<sup>37</sup> See Kant's third chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason's* 'Transcendental Doctrine of Method', entitled 'The Architectonic of Pure Reason' (1855: 503-514). In addition to those cited in the chapter above, notable engagements with the production of universality in and through the *sensus communis* read as the aesthetic corollary of Kantian architectonic of Reason, include Spivak's in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), which, in turn, is produced in dialogue with Derrida's 'The Ends of Man' (1982): both concern the strategic anthropologizing of Western philosophy, and the production of 'man' as rational and universal being through exclusion and the attempt at mastery over difference, what Spivak rather broadly comes to term as Western philosophy's 'native informant'. (See 'Chapter 1: Philosophy' in *A Critique*, esp. 9-37; see also Ola Abdalkafor on Spivak, 2015).

possibilities of aesthetic production: as the bearer of collective meaning; of the limits of its humanizing aspiration when implicated in the destructive aspects of modernity; of how to do justice to the past whilst acknowledging participation in the overlapping networks of local, national(ist), international, and global relationships. There is a notable production of silence around the possible alternative to the impotence of the civilization the Monument attests to: the revolutionary body that attacks the city is an invisible, destructive, silent tide. This set of manoeuvres between material, textual, aesthetic, and locality also situates the story in its own politics, undergirded by its metanarrative, generic, and formal experimentation. What remains is the exposed suturing of multiple epistemologies, where the poetics of the 'seam', here in the failed leap between the 'I' and the 'we' of community, marks its own crisis (De Kock, 2001: 275-277).

Discussing the restrictions imposed on the novelistic imagination under late-apartheid in the 1980s, Elleke Boehmer outlines a general trend whereby endings are 'arrested in a difficult and frozen now' (1998: 48). This hiatus in vision, Boehmer suggests, is suspended between antagonism against late apartheid, and an uncertainty about registering any ultimate end, or final 'collapse' (50). What seems impossible to imagine, particularly as the monological linear progression of an 'ongoing, unfolding destiny' loses purchase, are new beginnings, the 'convinced and convincing opening up or testing of options' (44). 'We Came to the Monument' occupies the aporia of this 'hemming in' through the monumental. The narrative pushes the self-enclosing logic of the political solipsism of apartheid, its investment in origins and resolute conclusions. Through this, several 'ends', foreclosures of various exclusionary social and political narratives, are collected, both made visible and are frustrated.

This marks a departure from Vladislavić's general commitment to narrative openness. 'We Came' unfolds a more ambivalent relationship to ends, its protagonists trapped in the tomb-like sepulchre of the Monument, the radical energies outside having swept through and abandoned the city. The 'long thread of history' re-spools, 'so carelessly unwound into space'. Time reverses, 'the hourglass' becoming a glass case and living museum piece as its sand grains are blown aloft,

settling in 'the blood' of the people. Nature's processes reverse to crack from the statue's skull, 'hopes and hungers as improbable as birds take flight against a steep grey sky and disappear. Except for one' (24). Closing on a 'howl' and a clawing of hope and hunger into the earth, land, and an 'ancient face of joy and grief', we are left with the lyricism of the statue that has turned its back on 'civilisation' and humanity, concerned with the disjunction of a refigured personal and collective self.

Without the narrative openings onto its surrounds in *Missing Persons*, and given the explicit white, English-speaking liberalism of the magazine and its emphatic assertion in the issue's accretive paratexts, this can be read as a complex grounding of possibility in textuality. As the protagonists come together in a joint typeface, which signals an uneasy accommodation in the Monument's overarching structure, and in a language privileging the imagination as the site of a shared history, it is through a visionary epistemology that evokes the familiar literary romantic parameters of the lyric anglophone settler poetics (see Klopper, 2012: esp. 591-2) that 'We Came' seals its ends. The two narrative threads are finally housed in an inescapably violent potential of staking a claim to land without community or nation, a narrative of cultural 'unsettlement' of homogenized whiteness.<sup>38</sup> In its publication in *Sesame*, the story demonstrates the frustrated possibility of community and communication, or of a 'joinedness', to borrow from Mark Sanders (2002), under the pull to complicity in the hegemonic architectonic of late eighties apartheid, exposing the poverty of languages attempting the fixity of originary inscription and the complexities of articulating the new. It also marks itself as, in a similar sense to 'The Box' in *Stet*, both within and pushing beyond the magazine's paratextual framing and surrounding liberal-realist material.

In conjunction with its presentation in *Sesame*, Vladislavić's story evokes the independent magazine context in its consciousness of material histories as they

---

<sup>38</sup> In his chapter 'The lyric poem during and after apartheid' for the *Cambridge History of South African Literature*, Dirk Klopper cites J.M. Coetzee on "the burden of finding a home in Africa for a consciousness formed in and by a language whose history lies on another continent", and Coetzee's suggestion to 'eschew what he calls 'the prospect position' employed by earlier South African poets and to opt instead for 'an unsettled habitation in the landscape' (p. 173).' The dualism Klopper diagnoses in Coetzee's 'unsettled habitation' and the impossibility of immanence is germane in terms of Vladislavić's monuments in the context of *Sesame* (2012: 591-592).



intertwine with its irruptive fiction. In the materiality of the histories that this archive of Vladislavić's involvement with *Sesame* offers, the magazine, as alternative site or space for a common cause of resistance to the apartheid regime, parallels some of the primary concerns of 'We Came' and of 'A Science of Fragments'—fragmentation and agency, issues of belonging, place and precariousness, a phenomenological archive and the risks of consignment, a highly concentrated relationship to the volatility of its production moment, its 'now', the potential to expose both the collectives and small communities on the margins, as well as their divides. Each a part of the accumulative ethic I have been exploring, these accretive qualities complicate the autonomy of 'the work' by thickening its modes of inheritance, affiliation and engagement, primarily in relation to its production context and the gatekeeper function that the editor/writer relationship confers, highlighted by the shifting and uneasy period of cultural 'settlement' (Sachs, 1989), and its liberalizing vision.

## **2. Inheritance: editing, curating – care and dispatch. Ravan and *Staffrider***

### **Social Studies and Fiction: Ravan Press (1984-)**

It is to this role, and specifically in the context of Vladislavić's work as simultaneously editor and writer for the same magazine, *Staffrider*, that I now turn. Vladislavić was employed as social studies and fiction editor for oppositional press Ravan in 1984, on an introduction from Abrahams to then publisher at the house Mike Kirkwood. For Vladislavić, the publishing environment at Ravan, 'closer to cultural activism than...to what one thinks of conventionally as publishing' (2010b), appealed as a way of belonging to, and operating meaningfully in apartheid South Africa, an ambivalent set of possibilities for contribution as a white anglophone South African that the publication of 'We Came' in *Sesame* four years later, with its lyrical, dystopic close on the mythic power of Afrikaner ethno-nationalism, puts into question. As someone who would have 'found it difficult to join an underground structure or to get military training and become that active a member of the resistance', editing at Ravan offered Vladislavić a mode of engagement by 'being part of meaningful work, publishing revisionist histories that made sense to me and

publishing poetry that made sense to me – being part of a movement in culture’ (2010b; see also 2000a: 274). Vladislavić has also described the significance of the collective ethos at Ravan and its informal structure in its working practices. The editors sat in a single room, ‘talked and joked, overheard one another’s telephone conversations, edited and argued’ (Vladislavić, 2014b: np).

During Vladislavić’s tenure at Ravan (1984-1990), through South Africa’s successive states of emergency, the press operated as a collective, self-consciously democratizing site of textual production. Energized by a radical, materialist political project, driven by Kirkwood, Ravan’s experimental practices were explicitly aimed at challenging the boundaries and conventionally held definitions of the literary, evading the repressive, censorious state and circumventing the associated conservatism of the white-owned book trade (McDonald, 2009). Enabled by funding from anti-apartheid bodies, mainly in Europe, Kirkwood had established Ravan as home of *Staffrider* in 1978. Simultaneously, he tapped into a particular current of academic writing, as Tony Morphet puts it, ‘maverick academics, especially the Marxist historians [who] not only had great things to say about the country but also made for better reading than most novels’ (Morphet, 1996: np). As well as building Ravan’s list, broadly aligning it with his conception of Ravan’s position as a ‘transitional’ publisher, Kirkwood set about devolving the management structure to a more collective and non-racial model, attempting to reconcile his position as a ‘white, quasicommercial publisher committed to promoting black writing’ (McDonald, 2009: 142).

Kirkwood’s ‘experiment’ with the non-racial trust illustrated his commitment to the Press reflecting the rapidly gathering transitional culture. Yet it also exposed intractable problems with Ravan’s position as white-owned, post-liberal guardians of what was deemed to constitute the literary field. Editing at Ravan for Vladislavić involved immersion in a remarkably heterogeneous range of oppositional writing, from writers and scholars, prominent, established, and ‘new’, across dynamic de- and reforming genres and disciplines that were concerned with active intervention into the humanist, conservative climates of the divided and various ‘localizations’ of knowledge and scholarship. Vladislavić describes the formative experience of

editing social historian Tim Couzens' first book, *The New African* (1985), a groundbreaking study of revisionist literary history, as an example of Ravan coming to operate as an informal radical arm of Wits University Press (2010b).<sup>39</sup> The significance of the interrelationship between the social studies and social history output of Wits was central in reorienting the terms by which the national and local were thought (Helgesson, 2016: 170), and in facing the significant questions of relevant participation from a position outside of the Anglo-European metropolitan frame. These debates were often hosted in and across the alternative sites of literary journals and other cultural magazines that had emerged as a result of the qualifications on available public forums enforced by censorship (see Oliphant, 2001; Gardiner, 2002; and McDonald, 2009).

During this period, Vladislavić was also engaged in the politically and ethically fraught care and handling of an emergent and embattled South African black aesthetic, exemplified by Ravan's flagship, innovative magazine *Staffrider*, for which Vladislavić was assistant editor between 1988 and 1990. What Vladislavić describes as his 'formal attachment to the magazine' (2013b) included co-editing volumes seven, eight, and nine along with Oliphant, an output which included two special issues: the commemorative anthology *Ten Years of Staffrider* (which took the place of Vol.7, Nos.3&4); and the *Worker Culture* issue (Vol.8, Nos.3&4). Each of these retrospective collections of *Staffrider* work exposed the editors, and the press as a whole, to critiques in terms of its political place and function in contemporary cultural production, in the context of the 'settlement' debates. As a cultural magazine associated in its early years with Black Consciousness thinking, and through its lifetime, a highly successful instituting and site of debate in the developments around contemporary politics of 'culture as a weapon of the struggle', *Staffrider* also exposed Vladislavić to a similarly culturally diverse variety of visual artists and documentary photographers, responding to and breaking the grounds and imposed boundaries of South Africa's segregated, turbulent public sphere.

---

<sup>39</sup> Couzens later contributed to the 2006 special issue of *Scrutiny2* on Vladislavić's work, 'Controversial Interpretations of Ivan Vladislavić', describing Vladislavić's skill as an editor, one of his roles as a 'public intellectual' (Gaylard and Titlestad, 2006: 10) aptly as 'quiet'. (See Graham, 2017: 'The Quiet Editor'.)

On his first day at the Press, Vladislavić describes taking home:

a set of the magazines, including the banned issues retrieved from mislabelled boxes, and over the next few weeks, while I was finding my feet in the house, I read them from cover to cover... For an individual in search of symbolic attachment, as I was, *Staffrider* held out a simple promise. Here was a South Africa in which Meadowlands and Morningside were on the same page, where Douglas Livingstone of Durban and Mango Tshabangu of Jabavu were side by side, with nothing between them but a stretch of paper and a 1-point rule. The resonance of such a simple idea is almost impossible to recapture now, but in the demented, divided space of apartheid it was bracing. All the other borders the magazine crossed between fiction and autobiography, written and spoken word, lyrical flight and social documentary rest on that first idealistic gesture. The magazine belongs to all who live in it (2008a: np).

The attention to the material, and the copy, and the gesture to the non-racial ethos of the magazine's pages as one of potential belonging, as well as the polyvocality and mobility across generic boundaries is illustrative (cf. Riach, 2014: 83-4).<sup>40</sup> Vladislavić describes the hallmark of submissions as those 'written in longhand in ballpoint in a school exercise book', and the store of back issues of Ravan texts and of *Staffriders* in the Berea house that served the publishing house as a 'little high-rise Hillbrow made of books and magazines'; the 'dense, enduring presence' of its archive in the publishing house as differentiated from the 'come and go' status it held for readers; the 'little bandaids' correcting a typo on the front cover of Vol.3, No.2 (1980), moving him 'as much as anything the magazine ever published' (2008: np). Vladislavić's experience of the rawness of the materials and the materiality of the magazine itself at Ravan, its physical presence and form as well as its quotidian and everyday ephemerality, is significant for the conception of its social and political potential at Ravan as a forum for belonging and for the development of a polyvocal South African literature in the silencing divisions of apartheid. It is also revealing of the position as editor at Ravan at this time, and the physical handling of a range of material, involving both care and dispatch in the unusual publishing environment Kirkwood had forged at Ravan.

---

<sup>40</sup> Riach suggests there is a gesture to the country's non-racial Constitution in the last sentence of Vladislavić's statement about the inclusivity of *Staffrider's* pages.

**Consigning the radical: anthologizing. Ten Years of *Staffrider*, Oliphant/Vladislavić (1988)**

The status of the special double issue *Ten Years of Staffrider* that Vladislavić co-edited with Andries Oliphant in 1988, is an object lesson of its kind in its straddling of the line between curation and editing, the need for ‘quiet’ handling and care, and the inevitable erasures involved in the making of the *Staffrider* archive. As we have seen with *TriQuarterly*, an anthology is a particular type of text collection. As collective sites, anthologies offer an opportunity to consider how they institute meaning and carry authority as singular kinds of discursive spaces (Dilworth, 2003). At risk through its processes of abstraction through re- and potential de-contextualisation, the selection process involved in anthologizing participates in an economy of deeming, closing the bounds around a representative example. *Staffrider*’s ethically open politics and policies had been able to host new and disruptive, often fragile articulations, ‘adjacent to, clustered around, askance from, and on the borders of that which is privileged as being ‘archive” (Skotnes and Hamilton, 2014: 4), and which emerged into a contested censorious environment, and a ‘culture of excisions’ (Nuttall, 2002: 288). In compiling the double special issue of *Ten Years*, Oliphant and Vladislavić are tasked with consolidation, both marking and inventing a moment in the magazine’s history: collecting exemplary moments of the radical and often deliberately unruly, heterogeneous aesthetic that the magazine had instituted; and charting the shifts in the development of the magazine, its place, production, and its deep commitment to South Africa’s democratic revolution.

The radically democratic drive of the early *Staffrider* archives, evidenced across the magazine itself, illustrates a willingness to be pushed by content beyond its own institutions, and indeed its pages, into expanded publics and topographies. The magazine was active in the development of a newly conceptualized national literary marketplace through its conscious appeal to a readership excluded by apartheid. A series of *Staffrider* initiatives, including oral and popular performances and workshops, and modes of visual art and photography, reached an expanded audience, entering homes and everyday intimacies that apartheid had excluded (Ndebele, 1996: np). These vital energies generated processes unrecuperable in

conventional print publications, and that even its own pages could but gesture to (Ravan archives, Pan McMillan Johannesburg). In overspilling and asserting new cohesions of meaningful expression, *Staffrider* had exposed and sheltered multiple, because racialized epistemologies, and thence differing experiences of modernity, with debates about artistic value and the divided literary-cultural topos often carried out in developments across its pages. In this sense, the magazine became a ground for alternative formations of citizenship beyond the restrictions of race, and, therefore, of a broad and inclusive non-racial national imaginary (cf. Penfold, 2013: 100-116).

Such altering, broadly archival processes crossed with the concerns of scholarly historical reclamation 'from below', texts and intellectual, cultural currents such as those passing through the social studies list at Ravan. This contextual confluence refocused attention on guardianship and paternalism, and the editors' role as a highly morally and ethically politicized one, whilst validating the necessity of a recuperative careful attention to concealed, silenced histories to bring them into shared discourse. The danger of consigning the radical past of *Staffrider* to a commemoration, a representative integrated past 'safely ruptured from the present' (Shepherd and Haber, qtd. in Skotnes and Hamilton, 2014: 13), at a point where participation in the invention of a new future and culture for South Africa was far from assured, is self-consciously legible in the editorial interventions, while these risks are made evident in the hostile criticisms of the volume at the same time.

Oliphant and Vladislavić co-edit this anthology, one of the first instances of the conjoined, in this case, editorial signatures that Vladislavić has gone on to develop in a range of multi-modal projects, typically urban in focus and interdiscursive in structure, throughout his dual career as writer and editor to date. In their joint Preface, Oliphant and Vladislavić celebrate *Staffrider* as 'one of the most successful cultural journals ever published' in South Africa (Oliphant/Vladislavić 1988: vii). They go on to explain that the selection process for inclusion in the anthology involved 'collaboration' between the editors and 'various photographers, artists, poets, prose writers and essayists' (note the order in which these generic representative contributors appear, privileging documentary realism and visual art

before modes of imaginative writing, in which poetry is prioritized). This is described as an 'arduous but rewarding exercise', bringing with it an 'insight into the intricate relationship between the magazine and the various surrounding ideological perspectives' and political and historical developments of the past ten years ('Preface', vii). This conjoins the significance of the magazine's content and its production processes in the anthology's present, a backroom visibility that is stressed by the inclusion of pieces by each of the magazine's editors in its history.

Mike Kirkwood has an article on the early *Staffrider* and its collective non-interventionist editing policy, and Christopher Van Wyk, editor of *Staffrider* 'for approximately six years' from 1982 (1988: 166) is interviewed by Oliphant later in the volume, discussing the shifts from that early Black Consciousness influenced policy. What emerges from these three pieces from the editors, each of whom were publishing their own writing across other forums, are tensions in terms of the direction of the magazine as predominantly a literary or a more broadly cultural forum and, correlatively, the magazine's informing ideologies and cultural determinations. These tensions are nuanced further with the republication of *Staffrider* essays and critical pieces about the place the variety of modes that *Staffrider* provided a significant platform for in the liberation struggle: Joyce Ozynski's article on the democratising and witness function of documentary photography, a critical intervention of *Staffrider* in terms of its import as a popular cultural journal (163-164); or Thamsanqa Mnyele's intervention on the role of art and of the graphic artist as cultural worker (297-302). Perhaps, above all, the editors' pieces do more to reveal the interaction between, on the one hand, the increased visibility of the spaces of production and consumption with, on the other, the complex set of relationships involved in the persistent 'anomaly of white money and a black readership' that J.M. Coetzee recognized in his early analysis of this 'African literary magazine' (1979: 235).

Reviews of the anthology reveal both the complexity and embattled status of anti-apartheid positions in the literary field, and the increasing attention paid in these debates to the consecrative influence of the editor position and the cultural power residing in that position. These critical assessments tend to focus on the changing

production contexts of the work, affording the editorial space and the decisions taken their significant leverage and responsibility. The anthology reveals how much those production contexts shifted aesthetically and ideologically over ten years, and how responsive and capacious the magazine had been as a forum for content reflecting cultural and political changes.

*Ten Years* was produced as a book and criticized heavily for its change in physical format, a trend Mark Visser identified *Staffrider* developing ‘in the late 1980s’, the tenure of Oliphant with Vladislavić as assistant. For Visser, *Staffrider*’s move from magazine to journal format, from low-cost mag to ‘something altogether more respectable’ (Visser: 42, qtd. in Riach, 2014), represented, as Riach states, ‘a move away from its populist roots’ (Riach: 82). David Maughan-Brown’s staunch critique, that the anthology represented ‘an unambiguous recantation of virtually every interesting and challenging innovation embodied in the early *Staffrider*’ (1989: 12), looks back from 1988 to the editors’ betrayal of a specifically Black Consciousness aesthetic that found space in its earlier, less formal expression. Michael Chapman, however, historicizes the anthology as a response to the changing needs of consciousness-raising in the later eighties: his review is clear about the editorial choices of the anthology’s inclusions as mapping the complex shifts of allegiance which, ‘in the *early* Eighties began to marginalize Black Consciousness and reassemble intellectual and social life around the forces of the ANC, the UDF, Cosatu and, in terms of writing, the non-racial Congress of South African Writers (COSAW)’ (1990: 379; my emphasis). Political references and ‘recantations’, to use the terms of Maughan-Brown’s critique, span back over the ten years the anthology commemorates, from 1978. The temporal arc also accesses the changing fortunes of Ravan Press in its publication of radical and innovative voices and creation of new avenues for their expression.

Maughan-Brown’s review refers to the status of the anthology as performing a ‘reliquary’ function and to Kirkwood’s ‘Remembering *Staffrider*’, an introductory essay to the issue, as an elegy. His critique concerns the place of the anthology as an elite object, and withdrawal ‘of all the magazine had stood for’ (1989: 12). But Kirkwood’s essay, an ‘exercise in selective memory’ (1988: 8), suggests the role



Maughan-Brown ascribes to it had 'always been somewhat symbolic' (4), that the magazine had long required 'a refit', and that its diminished radicality and reduced ability to 'be a mouthpiece through which whole communities could speak to each other' (9) had been in train for some time. While Kirkwood's tone is commemorative in *Ten Years*, and this is proper to the period of his involvement with the magazine at its foundation and inception, his essay reflects changes and what he terms 'mistakes' made in the editorial position over the course of its development. Disappointment is evident: the energy and optimism of the magazine's foundational premise and community ethos of the early editorial position and layout are related as 'dangerous populist fantasies' (2); mentioning the censorship period of the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions and the 'Info scandal' as one which allowed *Staffrider* to survive its early bannings without concession to its content, Kirkwood goes on to describe the magazine as developing, in the face of more organized, rationalized cultural struggle organizations and groups into 'a relic' (3).

Established by Kirkwood in 1978, the magazine had a deliberately minimal, non-elitist editorial policy, as articulated in Kirkwood's first and only editorial for the magazine, 'About *Staffrider*': 'The new writing has altered the scope and function of literature in South Africa in ways we have still to discover. The aim of this magazine is not to impose 'standards' but to provide a regular meeting place for the new writers and their readers, a forum to help shape the future of our literature' (Kirkwood, 1978: 1). A poet and literary academic, Kirkwood had brought to Ravan his experience of founding and editing with Tony Morphet the little magazine *Bolt* (1970-1975), self-proclaimed magazine of the literary society at the University of Natal (1971, No.5). Although *Bolt* had encouraged and received black writing, notably poetry and comment by Oswald Mtshali (1973, No.7) and poetry and fiction from Jaki Serote (see 1972, No.6 and 1973, No.9), by 1978, questions of collaboration and co-option and urgent calls for self-sufficiency from Black Consciousness and Africanist adherents had become acute in cultural and literary activities. Sensitive to his position as a white guardian of the literary, and a fierce critic of the exclusivity and promulgation of universalist norms in the guise of aesthetic standards of white liberal journals (Oliphant, 2001), with *Staffrider*, Kirkwood took a radical stance, proclaiming 'that he would publish anything literate

he got' (Morphet, 1996: np). His move, to harness the "direct line" to the community in which the writer live[d]' and the ethos of writing groups that had formed after '76, which rejected deference to canonized white norms and standards, shunted *Staffrider* from the liberal aesthetic tradition.

Contrary to *Ten Years'* opening editorial by Vladislavić and Oliphant, which supports the importance and inclusion of its visual output, Kirkwood's essay is solely interested in literary production. His concession to the magazine's potential and ongoing relevance is to its function as a literary magazine (4). Articulating the break between the old and the 'new *Staffrider*' (4), the 'new' announcing the period of Vladislavić's official tenure at the magazine, he sounds the sealing of the archive of *Staffrider*'s radical past, consigned to 'the bizarre museum of South African history' (4). Several future potentials emerge for Kirkwood's central figure of the literary *Staffrider*: popular history 'from below' with the inclusion of community oral histories, such as Miriam Tlali's 'Soweto Speaking' interviews, perhaps requiring 'lesser skills than the authorial variety' (6), are together seen as the potential for the 'decolonization' (7) of South Africa's material pasts in the hands of the contemporary writer. Anecdotal examples of interest in a practical, everyday 'people's history' and enlargening the positive reception contexts of popular history in the magazine involve serendipitous finds initiated by Ravan book displays, such as Philip Bonner's *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires* and Peter Delius's *The Land Belongs to Us*, both groundbreaking revisionist social history texts published by Ravan. It is in this field, Kirkwood states, that the new *Staffrider* could make a productive contribution towards playing 'a supportive, universalising role' (8).

Harnessing the desire to circulate their own work among the writers who were part of the broader cultural groups the magazine had published, Kirkwood recalls the alternative distribution system, which relied on connections forged with writers' groups around the country (and here Kirkwood acknowledges Mothobe Mutloatse's knowledge and influence). Summarized for Kirkwood by 'the sight of a Sowetan *Staffrider* seller whose street call was 'Knowledge!'", these new and evolving readerships are set against the 'anonymity of the shops' (5) and the conservative white bookselling chain. In the pages of this periodical, a literary magazine as it is in

Kirkwood's conception, the creative space of the 'new' and the 'now' is one that *Staffrider* is privileged enough to be able to host and foster, rather than one generated as pre-determined project or outcome.

For Kirkwood, the space of the literary also involves a synthesis of the Sowetan street seller's cry of 'knowledge'. Its implications of comprehension, education and wisdom, and the demands of a publishing output in an evolving market, a market which is accessed via a personal, direct and familiar link, stand against the faceless mechanisms of apartheid-driven capital. It is also this, the alternative distribution system, resting on writers' groups around the country, which provides the national scope of the magazine's potential: the Sowetan seller is emblematic but not necessarily representative of the diversity of conditions in townships and communities across South Africa. Kirkwood's setting of the skilled, 'specialist 'spreader' within [each writers' group's] ranks' (6) against the anonymity of the bookshops, suggests a collective spirit but confers a national homogeneity. Produced in Johannesburg, knowledge exchange and movement between otherwise resistant socio-political geographies, intellectual and physical, is tied up in the location of the magazine as product and, crucially, as *literary* project.

Recalling contemporary debates about the place of 'the literary', Kirkwood's simultaneous particular and intimate engagement with, and need to distance himself from the subsequent unfolding project of *Staffrider* is evident in his sidelong critique of editorial decisions that serve to separate oral histories from the literary. Here, as elsewhere, Kirkwood's project for the writer is one that encompasses the ongoing development of a 'distinct and unique' working class literature, evolved from the life experiences of organized South African workers the magazine published, 'often under revealingly trite banners such as *Staffworker* – the outcome of attempts to integrate working class material within a predominantly populist milieu' (8). Similarly, Kirkwood hands on the mantle to Vladislavić and Oliphant as he advocates the new *Staffrider* as a forum for a broader conception of the literary in an inclusion of and respect for the 'non-Western' storytelling form. For Kirkwood, the 'storyteller' channels not only the revised material of the tale, reflecting everyday realities otherwise unheard, but its telling, and emphasizes the principle

which governs traditional art, that it must have a function that nourishes and is nourished by the community: '[I]t strikes me as strange that, at a time when such an emphasis is being placed on the collection of oral testimony, we have not made any attempt to locate and record people with some fame *as storytellers*. It is this inexplicable omission that *Staffrider* may be in a unique position to rectify' (9).<sup>41</sup> In itself revealing of Kirkwood's relationship with Ravan and *Staffrider*, as well as these declaratives about literary culture and the future, Kirkwood acknowledges his own contribution to the magazine as 'occasional and marginal after the first year or so', crediting the 'great many people' who contributed to the magazine, singling out Mutloatse in the significance of networks and writers' groups (1988: 5), and including the anonymous 'those' whose marks were made 'invisibly, with a blue pencil' (1988: 10).

The significance of the collective and responsive nature of the magazine's production to its set of turbulent cultural-political moments, and its extra-textual influences are also reflected in Christopher Van Wyk's contribution to the anthology, '*Staffrider* and the politics of culture' (1988: 165-170). In this interview with Oliphant, Van Wyk describes his involvement with the magazine and explains the marked change from the self-editing and self-reliance method broadly informed by Black Consciousness under Kirkwood's foundation to the alternative non-racial perspectives of the newly formed United Democratic Front that underpinned his

---

<sup>41</sup> In 1984, the year Vladislavić began working for Ravan, Ravan began a pamphlet series under Kirkwood's direction with more explicit links to Walter Benjamin's 'Storyteller'. Entitled 'The Storyteller Series', the first in what was explicitly intended as populist, interventionist publishing initiative was Johannes Rantete's 'The Third Day of September: an eye-witness account of the Sebokeng Rebellion of 1984', a citizen-journalist report of the uprising and state recriminations in Sebokeng, part of the Vaal Triangle protest against the apartheid regime. The Vaal uprising was brutally put down. During what was believed to be the biggest military raid against black people living in the townships and hostels, initiating the wave of popular unrest that, for many, marked the beginning of the end of apartheid in the 1980s, Rantete was detained on November 23, having been arrested distributing the published pamphlets in Sebokeng for Ravan. Due to the risks and difficulties inherent in publishing material, figured through Kirkwood's localization of the Benjaminian 'storyteller' figure at the time, and in its distribution, Rantete's is the first and only in the series (Vladislavić, 2010b; further material and letters related to 'The Storyteller Series' consulted in the Ravan Press archives and courtesy of Vladislavić). Kirkwood's interest in Benjamin's storyteller figure had already been explored in *Staffrider* earlier in the year in Ndebele's 'Some Turkish Tales' (1984, 6:1, 24-25; 42-48), commissioned by Kirkwood for the magazine. Significantly, Ndebele's essay (24-25; and 42-48) and Yahir Kemal's 'A Dirty Story' (6-14), the story taken from Kemal's *Anatolian Tales* that Ndebele riffs from, were framed together as being part of a new *Staffrider* series, '*The Storytellers*': a 'series of stories 'from afar' introduced by 'home' writers' (see 6:1, 6).

own editorship. Van Wyk was previously editor of the self-started, incredibly short lived 'little', *Wietie*,<sup>42</sup> set up in 1980 in direct opposition to the 'loose editorial policy [and]...system of self-editing' of the early *Staffrider* (1988: 166). He was persuaded to return to Ravan by Kirkwood later that year, specifically to contribute to the development of *Staffrider* and to redirect the self-editing policy in the changing political climate, testament to Kirkwood's success as a publisher and commitment to the success of the magazine. As well as orienting *Staffrider* ideologically in the wake of the breakdown of voluntary resistance writers' groups across the country through the early 1980s (see McDonald, 2009: 200-216), Van Wyk, in a move to promote the 'new writing' generated by Kirkwood's inclusive vision into the South African literary future, began to reject authors whose work he did not consider suitable for publication (see 1988: 167-168).

Van Wyk also committed to working editorially with those writers he rejected, writers, Vladislavić relates, 'who arrived at the [Ravan] house like pilgrims from all over the Rand. [Chris] spent half his time on a bench in the garden, going through handwritten poems in school exercise books with the authors, or unrolling drawings on the counter where the orders were packaged' (2014b: np). Closing the structurally instituted gap for writers by employing editorial standards, Van Wyk began to address criticism that positioned the magazine as insufficient for inclusion in 'the literary', a position strengthened by perceptions of the ideological drive of the magazine, that it had 'willy nilly, come to have the function of catering for black writers only, especially those with a social or didactic purpose' (Cullinan, 1980: 87).<sup>43</sup>

Alongside the fierce energy and commitment of Van Wyk and his employment of literary standards on the work of the emergent black, predominantly urban

---

<sup>42</sup> Gardiner suggests that of the short runs of the little mags in South Africa, *Wietie* was probably 'the shortest lived of all ... [it] ran to a single number' (2002: 23). See also McDonald, 2009: 149.

<sup>43</sup> This expression against the perceived Black Consciousness exclusivity of *Staffrider* comes as Patrick Cullinan announces a new literary magazine, *The Bloody Horse*, a magazine which, in Cullinan's telling comment on prevailing cultural politics, was to be open to 'all the writers of this country' (1980: 87, my emphasis). A joint venture with Lionel Abrahams, *The Bloody Horse* provided Vladislavić with one of his first publication outlets: his short story 'The Periscope', a violent and bloody hallucinatory tale, involving traps, skewed separate worlds and focused on questions of scale and perspective, was published in No.5 in 1981 (8-13).

aesthetic that *Staffrider's* pages offered, the anti-hegemonic ethos of *Staffrider's* early policies remained in its collective and communal spirit. Speaking to Oliphant in 1988, articulating the highly complex nature of the magazine's relationship to broader political thinking during his time as Editor, Van Wyk is clear that *Staffrider* is a 'cultural magazine' (1988: 168). In its development along the openly declared non-racial lines of the 1980s, and in the service of a broader inclusivity, *Staffrider* was active in the development of a newly conceptualized national literary marketplace through its conscious appeal to a readership excluded by apartheid. The 'direct line to the community', a feature of the 'new writing' the magazine was founded to foster and disseminate, meant that its content reconceptualized the boundaries between the literary and the cultural.

These structural conditions necessitated alterations in copyright, acquisition, and ownership, directly affecting the publishing industry that Ravan, and its funders, were operating through, crossing into Van Wyk's direction of the new protean community and marketplace of the magazine. Significantly, these issues crossed the boundaries around ownership of text, from publishing house through editor, reader, writer. Van Wyk was first named as *Staffrider's* editor in 1982, a year in which, in an appeal to advertisers, *Staffrider* boasted a national readership of well over 50,000 people, emphasizing the passage of the magazine from workers' hand to hand (Vol.5, No.1, np). By 1981, recognizable 'Staffriders' confirmed themselves as writers in the magazine, collectively self-named in relation to the writing published across its pages; even earlier in Van Wyk's nascent editorship and during his first series of formal interventions into the magazine in its shift away from the initial 'skelm of sorts' organization (Kirkwood, 1978: 1), the copyright notice that conferred rights to the individual authors and which remained the magazine's standard until its close was introduced (Vol.3, No.2, 1980; Contents page). When the magazine was 'self-edited' in its early years, the first editorial proclaimed the magazine to be the collective editorial property of its contributors.

As well as the crossing of these proprietorial relations, in its commitment to promoting a 'writing/reading revolution' (Kirkwood, 1988: 5) per se, *Staffrider* crossed a number of forms and genres, serving as, in Van Wyk's terms, a successful

'forum or meeting place' (1988: 169) for an increasingly non-racial, explicitly hybridized mode of anglophone cultural production. What is perhaps most significant about the explanatory and justificatory essays included in *10 Years* is the way they stand against the selected content to illustrate the diversity of the non-racial, anglophone, 'local' literary within the apartheid context. I explore them to this extent here, partly because they make visible some of the contours, privileges and ethical issues of the backroom work at Ravan, 'crucial', as Vladislavić describes it, to his 'whole sense of the world' (2000a: 274). From within the *10 Years* collection, they reveal a yoking together of a collective sensibility and the conscious attempt to widen conceptions of what might constitute the literary, alongside and through other media, and in the process, democratize aesthetic and culturally located power structures and terms. Within this exploration, it is Kirkwood's essay that I engage with most closely, to some extent because of the lifespan of the magazine's political reach that its ambivalent and uncertain projections reveal, from the Editorial comment of its very first issue to the unstable present of the celebratory *10 Year* anthology that it reappears in. The ways in which this span incorporates and traverses the anthology's content also re-emphasizes Kirkwood's insistence on the privileged political potential of the literary form for humanist intervention.

As much as Kirkwood signals the failure of the early *Staffrider* project, in terms of integration of the possibilities of a new and inclusive literary culture, he imbues the outgoing magazine with hope for a vision of it yet to come. As he passes the mantle of the magazine's custodianship into Vladislavić and Oliphant's hands, though, already the conditions of its possibility mean it must be figured as legacy, on the terms of, even within, the formative policies of inclusion he himself had initiated in the early magazine. This paradoxical position reveals much about the dense complexity of the relationship between cultural production and the political context it emerges from, and the performative gestures of openness that *Staffrider* was generative of. The retrospective essays from the editors in this 1988 double issue expose the critical friction between deployments of resistance rhetoric and its promotion, as well as the culturally consecrative position of the publication process and editorial role for the writing included in its pages and its democratic project,

writing with both materialist and more recognisably literary leanings (see Chapman, 1987: 33).

### **'Tsafendas's Diary' – the comic book, Vladislavić/Lok (1988)**

As well as assistant editing *Staffrider* (1988-1990), and co-editing the large special issue anthologies with Oliphant, the magazine was host to Vladislavić's writing: 'Tsafendas's Diary' was published in *Staffrider* Vol. 7, No. 1 (1988: 64-69); and 'Propaganda by Monuments', in 1992, Vol.10, No.4 (5-28).<sup>44</sup> The stress on both the intervention and the de-investment of authority of the publisher and editor role we have seen through the editorial positions collected by *Ten Years*, has additional significance for the first publication of Vladislavić's story later included in *Missing Persons*, 'Tsafendas's Diary', in *Staffrider*, also in 1988 and two issues before the *Ten Years* double commemorative anthology (7.1). Vladislavić is both contributor to and formally edits the *Staffrider* issue that his story appears in.

The story is prefaced by two pages excerpted from a 'comic-book' version that uses Vladislavić's text verbatim, drawn by then *Staffrider* designer, Jeff Lok (1988b: 62-63; the story, un-illustrated, is on pp. 64-69). This visual presentation is characteristic of *Staffrider's* continued experimentalism and deformation of conventionally held literary boundaries: the self-conscious democratization of modes with multi-modal inclusion and significance of visual material is here, as is the loosening of aesthetic hierarchies and levelling of 'high' and 'low' cultural

---

<sup>44</sup> 'Propaganda by Monuments' sees its first publication in *Staffrider* in 1992 (10.4), later collected in the volume of the same name, *Propaganda by Monuments* in 1996 (David Philip). Graham Riach (2014) provides a welcome corrective to the neglect of the *Staffrider* publication of 'Propaganda by Monuments' and includes a brief but persuasive discussion of this first publication context as complicating the story's dominant evaluation in its 1996 form as 'post-apartheid literature', with its epistolary structure both fragmenting and mapping temporal and geographical transition. Riach's reading of the story and resulting analysis of its radical 'collage-like effects...both in plot and form' (2014: 82) which sees it lying in tension with the developing 'tidying' in *Staffrider's* editorial practice, a conservatism relating to the 'normalization' of South Africa as it moved into a global neoliberal post-apartheid order, is also persuasive. By the time of 'Propaganda's' publication in *Staffrider*, however, Vladislavić was no longer assistant editor of the magazine: Vladislavić was not on Ravan's board but working freelance (2013b), and *Staffrider* was no longer under the auspices of Ravan, having moved to the publishing umbrella of the non-racial Congress of South African Writers in 1991 (as of Vol.9, No.3). 'Tsafendas's Diary', published in 1988 in the midst of the gathering cultural 'settlement', and the first issue to which Vladislavić was formally attached as editor, is, rather, exemplary on these terms.



designations that *Staffrider* promoted. Although Vladislavić's story, in its own literary experimentation with the fragmented form, reworked rather than co-created by Lok's illustrations, sits as a self-contained entity in the publication, 'Tsafendas's Diary: the comic-book' also provides, I argue, a nascent example of Vladislavić's texts' productive interrelationship and experiments with visual art and artists, which develops into what Vladislavić later refers to as the 'bonded autonomy' of a range of joint working practices and products (see Naudé, 2014) and a persistent emphasis on visual art across Vladislavić's oeuvre.

This particular instance of publication also provides an early example of these joins and joint processes, making visible Vladislavić's concerns about inheritance and knowledge production, and the dual position of writer and editor in the complex interventionist publishing and cultural production networks across South Africa in the late stages of apartheid's states of emergency. Simultaneously, the 'joint' presentation of Lok's comic and Vladislavić's story stands somewhat apart from the expectations of overt political activism of *Staffrider's* cultural content. Particularly in combination, the comic and Vladislavić's formally experimental story indicate international, Euro-American intellectual currents, coming together in a local, nationally significant publication context that explicitly aims at bringing a South African demotic into being.

There are a number of 'firsts' associated with the issue of *Staffrider* that carries 'Tsafendas's Diary' (7.1, 1988b): it is both the first issue of *Staffrider* to publish Vladislavić's writing, and the first issue of *Staffrider* that Vladislavić was formally attached to as assistant editor. With this issue, the magazine has a new layout and features. It has moved to a smaller, in-hand physical format. Not quite yet the more formal journal appearance it took in its move from the auspices of Ravan to the collective umbrella ownership of the Congress of South African Writers in 1991, its contents are grouped 'tidily', according to mode or genre, indicating a move towards the 'conservatism' in its organisation that Vaughan-Brown and Visser identify in their criticisms of *Ten Years*.<sup>45</sup> Bio details, and 'Notes on some contributors' [my

---

<sup>45</sup> Arguably, this kind of organization of material that is heavily criticized in the *10 Years* anthology is evident when the magazine was still 'self-edited', as early as the seventh issue of *Staffrider* in 1979

stress, indicating the varied nature of contributions in the repressive environment] are introduced within the front cover, as is a prefatory 'Comment' section by the Editor, two additions that survived the further changes to the magazine until its close.

Oliphant's 'Comment' is the first editorial for the magazine since Kirkwood articulated the minimal intervention policy in the very first issue in 1978 and announced the abdication of the editor's function and role, initiating the openness of its collective space. While Oliphant confirms *Staffrider's* space as a public forum, inviting participants in and comments on the magazine, his is a determinedly scholarly intellectual introduction, firmly oriented to the literary as its primary response to broader cultural currents (1988: 2-3). He begins with the place of literature in the magazine's ten-year history, going on to discuss the relationship between literature and politics or history 'in terms of a complexly mediated dialectic', which, 'while remaining fully cognizant of the prevailing coercive hierarchies ... posits an open non-stratified and co-extensive scenario in which the traces of each are present in all' (3). Introducing the new-look magazine with this, Oliphant warns of dismissal as 'comical' any simplification of its cultural contribution rendered by 'historical and political reductionism or idealist transcendentalism' (3). The place of the magazine in terms of contestations around the local literary field, the 'real differences in politics and aesthetics' which, as Vladislavić later concedes, 'could not be resolved in the layout' (2008a: np), and the distance and reconceptualization of audience and address between the very first editorial penned by Kirkwood of Vol.1, No.1 in 1978, and this, the first editorial since, are clear. This issue heralds a strong new, managed vision with the editorial hand firmly in control of its direction.

Additionally, in a new, named role in the magazine's production, its Designer is Jeff Lok; Lok remains as *Staffrider's* designer for the duration of the Oliphant/Vladislavić editorship, until COSAW take the reins of the magazine in 1991. Although just two

---

(Vol.2 No.3), and when the contents page first divided material by genre. Content was divided into categories of Stories, Poems, Photographs, Columns, Graphic, and included a separate section designated for Writers' 'Groups'.

pages of extracts from Lok's visual reworking of Vladislavić's story, 'Tsafendas's Diary: The comic-book', are provided, this is the first recognizable narrative comic strip to appear in *Staffrider* as sequential art, distinct from a single graphic illustration in cartoon or comic-book aesthetic. Lok, a member of the influential Possession Arts, an experimental Dada-derived collective active in the cultural underground movement of the early 1980s (Smith 2011: 130-131; O'Toole 2008: np), features in various ways in the biographies of some of Vladislavić's texts, and through them, in Vladislavić's own biography and relationship with the 'plastic' arts, as Sean O'Toole notes (2017): Lok provided the cover illustration for *Missing Persons* (1989); in an interview with Jan Steyn in the arts and literary journal *The White Review* (2012a), Vladislavić discusses a collaboration, '[m]any years ago' with Lok, who is referred to as 'a proper artist', making a sculpture called 'The Big Shy': 'It was a cabinet in which the heads of three prime ministers rested on iron stalks. We planned to cast these heads in lead, but we only got as far as the clay models' (np); this planning of a conceptual art piece has its echo as Lok appears through Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys* in relation to the pair's discussion of how to categorize Lok's idea for a figurative, fictional memorial art-work to be, 'The Great Wall of Jeff' (2006a: 46-49), consisting of resin blocks containing an object from 'every person in the Greater Johannesburg area' to be built 'while there is still time' (49).

This relationship, in light of the context of this first publication and collaborative rendition of 'Tsafendas's Diary' in *Staffrider*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (1988b), augments both the story's form and its content, particularly in its probing at scenes of origin, at the logics of completion and closure, and its circulating of the authority necessary to apply and carry through these bounds. The story is made up of 22 short, numbered fragments. Emerging from a radical magazine and prefaced by the illustrations of extracts from Lok's comic, the use of the dynamic poetics of the fragment takes on the political and ontological stakes of the story's content, questioning narrative continuity and the state's control of archival excess under the hallucinatory violence of apartheid.

'Tsafendas's Diary' is a story of secrets, legacies and redundancy. Its formal

experimentation plays on readers' gaps in knowledge and information, saturated by satirical metaphors of simultaneous fertility and decomposition, activity and rot. It is the narrator's Granny who instructs the child to fetch the relentlessly proper noun that is 'Tsafendas's Diary' from the Police Museum in Pretoria, 'the key to all mysteries' (fr.4: 64).<sup>46</sup> Knitting the boy a thinking cap, tacking together a pungent meat-blanket for him, making him keep a fecund hole in the backyard 'fed', and producing a map to the Police Museum, 'a rambling lopsided blanket...a breeding-colony of tassels, pom-poms, fringes and frills' (fr.8: 65), as well as 'driving' him there in her 'motorized rocking chair', Granny crafts and commands him through the bizarre items that are a summons for the boy to act: "The time for thinking is over," she says. 'It's time to act. Go in and get it. Do not be afraid: no one will suspect a child'. It is Granny, too, who articulates rights to the imaginative property of Tsafendas's Diary, "[R]emember, we are its rightful owners" (fr.13: 67), pulling the boy into her assertion of ownership and collective identity, 'keep[ing] time' with the incessant rock of her chair.

Appropriate to its oppositional context in *Staffrider*, the critical thrust of 'Tsafendas's Diary' is not peripheral, revisiting a particularly vexed moment in the apartheid narrative, the assassination of its 'architect', 'Die Rots' ('The Rock'), Hendrik Verwoerd in 1966. Stabbed as he sat on the front bench at the heart of the whites-only parliamentary chamber by a lowly uniformed courier and Mozambican of mixed racial descent, Dimitri Tsafendas, the event's risk of exposure of the 'idiocy of the state bureaucracy that [Verwoerd's] apartheid project had spawned...a murder by farce, by bureaucratic bathos' (Posel, 2009: 343), created a highly controlled but unstable entry into the national imaginary: the 'mad Greek' subject to a series of myth-making, and accretive state produced narratives (see Posel, 2009; and Twidle, 2015);<sup>47</sup> his name synonymous with the 'art of stabbing in the

---

<sup>46</sup> All further references to 'Tsafendas's Diary' are taken from the *Staffrider* publication (1988b, 7:1), unless otherwise indicated, and include the relevant fragment number ('fr.'), followed by the page number.

<sup>47</sup> Deborah Posel (2009) and Hedley Twidle's (2015) readings of the official report of the assassination reveal its bifurcations, and the gaps between Tsafendas's extraordinary biography and the silencing manoeuvres of the 'official' discourses surrounding him. Denied visibility by a regime attempting to recuperate the sovereignty of white supremacy after Verwoerd's death, Tsafendas's act was rendered as both 'meaningless and masterplot', the assassin an 'outcast' and a 'failure', who nonetheless nurtured 'a cunning plan to make use of his power to destroy the head of a Government

townships... 'I will tsafenda you' (Ndebele, 1984: 47).<sup>48</sup>

Vladislavić has discussed the place of the Diary in his story as 'an emblem of Tsafendas himself; kept as a secret, completely inaccessible. There is an analogy with the political prisoners – people who are kept hidden away, who actually represent important truths about society that have been concealed' (Thurman, 2011: 59). Writing about this event, itself replete with a series of iconic and emblematic images which cut to the very heart of apartheid and the psychotic delusions it was generative of, 'Tsafendas's Diary' is relentlessly restless. The story is never that of Verwoerd's assassin, nor the event's unstable entry into the national narrative. 'Tsafendas's Diary' is, instead, a narrative explicitly concerned with its own haunting by other narratives, obscured or made opaque by apartheid control. Through the ruptures and gaps that point to the excisions 'surrounding and producing Tsafendas' (Twidle, 2015: 17), 'Tsafendas's Diary' traces the indecipherable and the unmanageable accretion that the state-control of information paradoxically produces. In its sustained suspicion of chronology, which continues to question its own generation, 'Tsafendas's Diary', particularly as published in *Staffrider*, evinces Vladislavić's intention to write about 'the obvious images in an interesting fresh way', having by then edited overly political writing at Ravan through his career (Vladislavić, 2000: 278).

When Granny makes reference to Tsafendas's text, or script, it is as intensely desired as it is a feared object. Pulling the rocking chair over in front of 'the Prison' in Pretoria, Granny feeds her grandson her deep suspicions, building ambivalence and fear into her instructions: 'He's been there all these years. Sitting on his secrets, hatching them out, feeding them from his filthy mouth, caring for them until they are dark and ugly enough to be sent out into the world' (fr.9: 66). The Diary, as 'key to all mysteries' for Granny (fr.4: 64), illustrates complicity and undecidability in the

---

that he hated' (from the *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the Late Dr. the Honourable Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd* (Pretoria: Government Publications, 1966); qtd. in Twidle, 2015: 11).

<sup>48</sup> Ndebele (1984: 6:1, 24-25; 42-48) mentions Tsafendas as part of his discussion about political commitment and contemporary writing, citing the popularity of oral storytelling of 'the street' and its quotidian politics as an alternative to 'overtly political stories' and the assumption that the latter are what the 'African masses really want' that his essay critiques (see 47-8).

white imaginary, indicating, as Thurman recognizes, a broader suspicion of the 'obscure codes governing apartheid South Africa', of 'National Party or Broederbond conspiracies' decided deep in the 'maze of the proverbial corridors of power' (2011: 59). This ageing female figure shoulders the burden of a secret knowledge she cannot directly impart to the child, instead architecting the boy's creative imagination, written through all the marks of homely mundanity, shot through with apparently arbitrary transformations, such as that from breeding-colony blanket to map, both standing as the topographies of a ghostly bureaucratic officialdom and state-institution, each accompanied by the unhinging excesses of the 'things' she gives him to act with, in their name, a familial proprietary and proper noun which remains unmentioned throughout. In these shifting registers, she hands down her set of injunctions with indirection, deviant and self-righteous, deferral and substitution organizing their communication.

Although numbered chronologically, the action of the fragments is non-linear, ranging across temporalities and locations, between subjective dreamscapes and verifiable historical detail, collapsing personal and public spaces and knowledges. Consistency is maintained through the first-person narrative perspective, and lent enclosure by the ordering function of the fragments' numeral 'plan'. Evinced the difficult relation that the fragment maintains to the whole, in the implication of a movement towards a transcendental logic of completion whilst resisting incorporation and cohesion on the basis of its own radical incompleteness, the slices of 'Tsafendas's Diary' we receive offer an unstable and destabilizing experience, one that, I argue, remains as fundamentally suspicious as it is generative of it.

Under this pressure, the Diary takes form in several different signifying potentials. The narrator is dominated by the 'mysteries of meat and the imagination' (fr.4: 64) via the authority figure of Granny, who wields her force over him in images of state control, part school, part prison, part torture chamber (she punishes him by making him go 'back to the hole' in fr.12: 66). The first-person, numbered fragments indicate the desire for self-assertion, against the feed of Granny. They are suggestive of an individual act of self-management and self-fashioning in writing, marks of the desire for alternative order and control. When the child follows Granny's map into the

recesses of the Police Museum, '(past Dangerous Weapons, Forgery, Terrorism and Ritual Murders)' (fr.13: 67), he finds instead of Tsafendas's Diary an empty room. The boy's own rendering of Tsafendas's Diary to give to her instead is a compilation, dredged up from dreams. Marking the 'relentless passing of the days and nights' (fr.16: 67), the boy's rendering of the Diary is a record of ideological imprisonment. It is also a collection of factual information: 'I give Granny Tsafendas's Diary...the hands begin to fly, past calendars, a map of the world, a map of South Africa, lists of public holidays, members of parliament, embassies, the capitals of the world, the currencies, timetables for buses and trains' (fr.18: 68). The Diary as written object is neither confessional nor conspiratorial, emptied of speculation.

When Granny receives this object, 'wrapped in brown paper and tied up with string', she rejects it by taking ownership of another, already existing Diary: "Here it is," she says. She draws out the long black ribbon. 'I've had it all along' (fr.18: 68). This ribbon is her own creation:

Granny is knitting a long black ribbon. Its fanged head is buried in the fleshy folds of her hands. The throat curves to the floor, where the blade of the rocker pins it, lets it go, pins it, lets it go. The body is fat and bloated, heaped coil upon coil. The narrow tail flicks in the corner of the room.

'What is it?'

Her fingers twist, easing the ribbon from her skin.

'What do you think it is, child?' (fr.10, 66).

This allusion to the talking tapeworm buried deep in Tsafendas's guts that he was widely reported as having acted on, is read by Thurman as a reference to the acceptance of a monstrous social alibi (Twidle, 2015: 8-9), misrepresenting Tsafendas as psychotically deluded, rather than acting against a ruling body he objected to: 'an oversimplification, perhaps a lie – created by the apartheid government and widely accepted by the population' (Thurman, 2011: 61).<sup>49</sup> In Vladislavić's story, the virulent and potent image of the obsessive knitted-Diary-worm, as National party alibi and Diary object, embedded in the surreally

---

<sup>49</sup> Although the details of Tsafendas's interrogation or confession were not made public, Tsafendas was found unfit to stand trial by reason of insanity because of 'the strong perception that his life was ruled by a tapeworm, a figment of his imagination'. Drawing heavily on this monstrous symbol of psychological disorder at Tsafendas's trial, Justice Beyers pronounced: '[I could] as little try a man who has not at least the makings of a rational mind, as I could try a dog or an inert implement – [Tsafendas] is a meaningless creature.' (Key, 1999).

dematerialising bird-like body of Granny, reveal her plans and creations exceeding themselves, pointing to the redundancy of her grandchild's act of making his own Tsafendas's Diary, like the eventual redundancy of her meat thinking cap, and the tasselled pom-pom blanket of her Police Museum 'map'. As she acknowledges the Diary as the worm-ribbon and her own creative act of making, she begins the act of deconstructing it. The excess of its threads, the 'pile of crinkled wool [that] grows next to the chair, larger and larger, looms over Granny, ingests her' (fr.18: 69). Eventually swallowed by her own unruly excessive creations in the process of reclaiming them back from her grandson, Granny is both link and severance, generative and impotent, positing meaning in order to evaporate it.

Granny and her ruthless Defargian 'knitting'<sup>50</sup> are eventually absorbed by the compost heap, the 'hole' of decomposing matter in the child-narrator's back garden. Thurman's analysis, that the pit comes to signify creative inscription as the child digs in 'papers' and running ink along with the kitchen scraps his Granny makes him feed it with (fr.22: 69), and comments on the legacy of whiteness and of white writing, is persuasive. But neither of the figurations of the writing position – the compost pit or the Diary of the story's title, both of which signify the narrator's development as his *re*-inscription of received, and here macabre and conflicted ideas – ultimately offer transcendence or foreclosure of the violent limit of the apartheid legacy that predominates in the image of Granny. The Diary of the story's title takes on a number of shifting and unstable possibilities that work with the story's form and first-person focalisation to dramatize the doubling gestures of fictionalized self-writing –

---

<sup>50</sup> The reference is to the ruthlessness of Madame Defarge of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and her knitting of a secret 'map' of those to be destroyed by the revolutionaries in France: "'Tell the wind and fire where to stop," returned Madame; "but don't tell me"' (1994: 3.12.334). The belated revelation of her motive, the devastation of her family at the hands of the aristocracy, and her simultaneous humanization and excessive monstrosity of her desire for vengeance, her 'ghosting' at the hands of ideological war, is persistently deferred in Vladislavić's Granny figure. This magnifies the destabilizing qualities and uncertainties of the story as a political response and the comparatively discomfiting lack of purchase in relation to Dickens' narrative warning knell that Madame articulates so forcefully in her occupation of both historical and social possibility and portent. Granny's cryptic mapping cannot occupy this same political, cultural space, although the allusions suggest the grim undercurrents of rage. The reference additionally bears mention because of Dickens' appearance in key two of *Portrait with Keys* as Scrooge's London becomes part of Vladislavić's affective, aesthetic map of Johannesburg, and in relation to whom Joburg dwellers are afforded the possibility of dealing 'kindly and responsibly with a life put into their hands by fate', of those who may be 'lost' in the city (2006a: 11-13; 12).



between opacity and transparency, private and public – and trouble the authentication of the narrating subject as the sole producer of the narrative.

The boy is compelled to ‘feed’ the sinkhole; the work of writing, pen and ink, along with inherited and current materials, is part of its sustenance: ‘I hear [Granny] cooking, bubbling and squeaking, in the meaty broth at the centre of the earth...I’m digging it in. I have to feed the insatiable earth...I take up my spade and I dig it in’ (fr.22: 69). Thurman conceptualizes this literarily, noting the allusion to Heaney’s poem ‘Digging’, and Vladislavić acknowledges the connection (2011: 62). While I agree with Thurman that this is a striking metaphor for the inheritance of whiteness in South Africa and the accompanying acknowledgement that Vladislavić’s work is as much conditioned by apartheid as demonstrating a decisive break from it, in this complex inheritance and filiation, the boy’s position as a writer-artist is radically unstable.

‘Tsafendas’s Diary’ and its pit is a self-reflexive reminder of the risk of absorption of narratives into larger orchestrated scripts, where resistance can be co-opted, silenced or elided in the service of more dominant, opposing hierarchies of knowledge. The make-up of the mulch that the boy must decide on himself, now that and more significantly because his Granny is part of it, describes a complex tracing of the revelation of acts of memory and forgetting in structures of complicity and intimacy. The boy’s digging *in*, rather than up, of the shared past, of its found fabric and the intimacy of the intergenerational relationships includes, in the conceptualization of it as ‘white writing’, the ludic possibilities of aesthetic production and of input into the changing cultural imaginary (cf. Thurman, 2011). From the weaponized cultural narrative ascribed to *Staffrider* and its position in the ‘theory wars’ of the 1980s where political responsibility was seen to find its best expression in engaged social realist writing in the mode of Louise Bethlehem’s ‘rhetoric of urgency’ (2001), the terms of this critique against appropriation are broadened to a non-racial frame.

With an implication that writing is vulnerable, to tainted legacies and to co-optation in the service of other grander narratives, visual art and the geographies of the state

spectacle provide the boy with a future tense, compromised but with a degree of relative freedom from the 'insatiable' Granny/apartheid pit (fr.22: 69). The strategies for embodying historical memory and knowledge, placed under extreme pressure by the apartheid state, begin to shift from the logocentrically oriented 'treasure hunt' of Granny to a visual and spatial language that places disparate moments in contiguity, making the connections visible. The space between each fragment confers visual rhythm and form. This is given further nuance through the transformation of two locations from centres of white, state power, the Parliament building in Cape Town and the Police Headquarters in Pretoria,<sup>51</sup> to museums and/or galleries holding conceptual art. It is the structure of the gallery and the exhibition that houses his imaginings, and the new possibilities forged by Granny's sinister rotting stitching and unravellings.

Vladislavić illustrates the boy's understanding of the event of the assassination through two dreams, prompted by Granny's meat 'thinking-cap', and through which two references specifically denote museum and gallery practices. The boy's ethical urge takes shape in a very mature dream for a 10-year-old, in which he is a professional curator of the Houses of Parliament, showing tourists 'the historic bloodstains' on the spot where 'Tsafendas slaughtered the Prime Minister' (fr.7:65). The curatorial role involves responsibility for the co-creation of publics and interventions in the practices of production and consumption, the carrying and influence of the relations between artists and historical periods, and their visibility in the wider cultural scene. In this conception, Tsafendas and Verwoerd together are artists, producing the mise-en-scene: the boy, as writer, steps back to the 'quieter' space of showing, illustrating the multiple implications of orchestration and spectacle and the responsibilities of presentation practices (Cohen, 2014; Martinon, 2013). When he follows Granny's map to the Police Museum, he finds instead of the Diary a conceptual artwork, which describes apartheid's hold on the young, suburban imaginary: an arc traces the passage of a bullet from a man's gun into the

---

<sup>51</sup> The Police Museum was housed in the building of the Police Headquarters, both institutions since closed in the new dispensation. The building simultaneously contained the clandestine interrogation centre of the infamous national security police on its first floor, while the public museum operated directed below it. See Comaroff and Comaroff, (2004).

brain of a young girl asleep in bed.<sup>52</sup> This is carried through to a later dream of the boy's in which he sees Tsafendas's fist holding a fluorescent arc which penetrates and smashes Verwoerd's skull (fr.17: 67-68).

Each instance of museum, gallery and visual art practices, performed in or through state institutions of control, bring together a powerful analogy of the unseen, the unacknowledged and deathly overarching structures of apartheid on the next generation. The numbers to each of the fragments begin to act as diectics with a distinctly curatorial character: the numbering of the fragments begins to suggest captions and signage in the gallery-space, indicating direction and a map through to particular, guided ways of viewing, also indicative of the directed movement of bodies and information into an expanded public where 'they are each framed and reframed in the shifting spectacles of power' (Butcher, 2013: np).



Figure 1: 'Excerpts from a comic-book by Jeff Lok based on the story "Tsafendas's Diary'. (Staffrider. 1988, 7:1, 62-63).

The two-page extract from Lok's comic picks up on the fragmented texture of Vladislavić's story, with its interruptive play between presence and absence

<sup>52</sup> The conceptual artwork, described by the child, is one of the first instances of an ekphrastic description of a non-existing visual art work, a mode which becomes part of Vladislavić's metier in negotiating collaborative projects with visual artists, important amongst the concerns of this thesis, and which I go on to explore in part III.

represented by the 'gutter' or gap between panels (McCloud, 1993: 67), organizing the reading sideways, rather than the radical back and forth of the fragments themselves. Despite the organizing frames of the panels, the comic maintains Vladislavić's unsettling of oppositions between narrative and spectacle; with heavy, violent strokes in the visual language, the potency of the images and the immediacy of their communication is generative of a vibrancy and rhythm that echoes the narrative scenario. Both locations of the boy's visions, Parliament and the Police Museum, are dramatized by Lok's comic: the faces we see are Tsafendas's and Verwoerd's, while the boy's is masked by Granny's thinking cap. In the scenario where the boy 'curates' the surreal, secret apartheid artistry that orchestrates its violence, this framing of visibility and the spectacle, of revelation and hiding, is germane. Lok borrows from the visual language of Black Power and solidarity symbols to portray Tsafendas's fist, embedding it in the magazine's visual frame, through which the symbol occurs frequently, and highlighting the story's challenge to the state alibi of Tsafendas's insanity, its intention to illustrate that Tsafendas 'was probably more sane than anyone in the room!' (Vladislavić qtd. in Thurman, 2011: 59). This implicates the penetrating logic of apartheid structures, secrecy and complicity, while the solidarity symbol links Tsafendas's act with black South Africans and the broader anti-apartheid movement, as a moral, political, and rational response.

The inventive play of Vladislavić's story puts forward a disturbed temporality and signals an emergent aesthetic, one which negotiates the ambivalent privilege of inheriting anglophone whiteness conditioned by apartheid. That 'Tsafendas's Diary' appears in *Staffrider* in its syncretic and mosaic-like cultural format, ahead of its inclusion in the publication of *Missing Persons* and, as Vladislavić's first story for *Staffrider* appears in this issue of the magazine, the first that Vladislavić co-edited, evidences a significant change in his conception of the magazine and indicates his stake in the changed political environment its Editorial alludes to. 'Joins' become visible, collective and participatory working practices. Through recourse to the language of visual and conceptual art, the gallery and the curatorial, 'Tsafendas's Diary' reframes the act of representation.

### **Mobilizing local(e)s**

The fragmentary nature of Vladislavić's work under high apartheid registers the hallucinatory qualities of living under a regime of violence. The 'small', sometimes internally sub-divided texts that appear in these 'little' magazines in the 1980s before they are collected by the publication of *Missing Persons*, also allow for a dynamic movement, where crossings of form, genre and content indicate a conscious mobilisation of an aesthetic, literary transnationalism that remains located in South African, apartheid realities. Simultaneously translocative and dislocative, reading the stories through their first production contexts, themselves highly charged and intensely localized dynamic sites of production and circulation, reveal some of the contours of their travels across the local literary field, divided under isolationism, and by the racial, political and cultural stipulations of the censorship board in a state of emergency.

Each of these small instituting sites created a space for alternative literary production, self-consciously intervening into definitions of the literary, and each participating in the gathering, non-racial democratic movement. Articulated prior to the kinds of tensions/faultlines exposed and passed on by the Sachs debate, these magazines provide a complex picture of anti-apartheid print culture, a view not available, necessarily, in the production or reception of the book, or the negotiations with the state machinery of the politicized cultural context that literary products were confronted with. Each with a distinct aesthetic and materiality, examples of avenues for active engagement in an oppositional and alternative poetics, each site is concerned with the deformation of the inherited knowledge production and operations of the power of apartheid.

Reading Vladislavić's stories in their first publication contexts with attention to the connective networks of generative rhetorical accretion traces the possibilities of a protean, ephemeral kind of collection in reading, extending the given product of the anthology and the book. This enables a view of Vladislavić's involvement in South African literary culture through some of the contours of inheritance in his emergent aesthetic. My primary focus on these stories' publications in 1988 traces their multiple openings and strategies of connection through the discursive possibilities

afforded by the complex networks of contemporary media in the altering needs of anti-apartheid activism in the later 1980s. Vladislavić's is a writing position informed by the ways his editing role for an interventionist publishing house embedded his work in the strategies, lived experience, and fabric of cultural-aesthetic resistance under the cracking surfaces of the late apartheid state through the successive states of emergency.

The stress on an emergent participatory praxis and transformation opens readings of Vladislavić's early 'small' texts in their 'little' contexts to a series of gestures concerned with moving across conventionally held bounds that constitute 'the literary'. There is an early registration of a writing practice concerned with other disciplines, particularly the significance of visual art and gallery practices, congruent modes of looking, gathering and collecting, and an uncertain custodianship or curatorial concern with the authority conferred by this open, participatory working method, and in the handling and processing of other's materials, found and inherited. The impact of these currents can be traced through Vladislavić's engagement with the book, both as collections in themselves and as they move through reconfigured literary marketplaces, local and international, illustrating a creative mobility across the expectations of the writer to produce a position of moral and ethical clarity in representing South Africa on the international stage. The significance of visual culture in the development of these energies and trajectories across Vladislavić's work is explored more directly in part III. In part II, I focus on the thematization of these developing concerns through the ways the fictional collector figure registers the altered spaces available for the white South African writer in the period immediately surrounding the democratic election of 1994.

## Part II. Collectors: suspended custodianship

### **'But they don't belong to you': letter-texts and the postal-political**

"Let's talk about the letters,' I said, dipping a biscuit in my tea. 'Why have you kept them?'  
 'What else can I do?'  
 'But they don't belong to you.'  
 'But they do'" (*Double Negative*, 2011a: 131).

In an interview launching the joint product made between social documentary photographer David Goldblatt and Vladislavić, *TJ/Double Negative* (2010), art editor and publisher Bronwyn Law-Viljoen describes the protagonist of the novel, Neville Lister's paralysis: '[h]e can't be a real activist but he can't *not* act, so he is caught in the middle of two possible positions and hence doesn't do *anything*' (Law-Viljoen, 2011: 347). This 'particular affliction' of Neville's, nominated by Law-Viljoen as white liberalism, is figured, then, both as suspension (between) and as withdrawal (inaction).

Characteristically, Vladislavić is circumspect in his response to Law-Viljoen's subsequent questions about the 'failure of [white] liberalism' in South Africa (347) in relation to the novel. Talking about himself rather than his character, 'I should be talking about Neville' (348), his is a customary and non-prescriptive position in relation to his texts that allows for and accords significance to reader response. In this brief exchange about whiteness in South Africa between these three white English-speaking South Africans, publisher Law-Viljoen, photographer Goldblatt, and, in this instance, writer (rather than editor or art-critic), Vladislavić, tensions between activism and passivity, position taking and withdrawal are swiftly drawn. Goldblatt, in his responses, makes it clear that he is a liberal, that his sense of any kind of failure in white liberalism is inherent in the philosophy itself and its non-activist stance. He is also clear that he is not a political activist, and cannot be, that it is his art-practice that provides a platform, the possibility of taking a position, a

position from which he can explore, directly, his own political views regarding making a life and career in South Africa (348-9). Vladislavić, in contrast, does not discuss his art-practice at all, or 'the book' directly: he mentions the possibilities of activism at Ravan in the 1980s, that he 'ended up in an activist publishing house', before discussing the difficulties inherent in the possibilities of engagement in radical or activist politics in apartheid South Africa, as an experience of the 'common dilemma' of wrestling with 'privilege, and ... passivity' (348).

Ranging across his own experience, Vladislavić's response here at once removes both his fictional character 'Neville' (who he 'should' be talking about) and Vladislavić's own craft from the exchange (instead mentioning his experience of publishing); the book, the work, the writer, is suspended from the realm of 'active politics' *and* its correlative negative of quietism. Simultaneously, the parameters of the interview keep the text in view: Vladislavić's self-conscious slip, 'I should be talking about Neville', re-defines those parameters, serving to bring the fictional text back to the political discussion and, belatedly, making us aware of its 'absence'. The text is now both inextricable and at a remove from a particularly located politics of resistance, a politics that itself resists accommodation into any kind of position of cultural authority, or of the cultural confidence which that degree of position-taking necessitates. This troubles authority on multiple levels, in multiple ways. This picture of the difficulties of political activism and positions available to white South Africans, over the period that *TJ/Double Negative* covers (the body of photographs range from 1948-2010), is drawn in an exchange between self-aware artists and cultural producers. It is concordant but multiple as a result. In this exchange, it is the figure of the author that draws back from the shared space of authority and consequently problematizes it, and with it, fiction, text and related issues of knowledge creation and acquisition, preservation and transmission.

I will go on to explore Vladislavić's novel as part of the joint project with David Goldblatt, *TJ/Double Negative*, in part III. I draw attention to this point of the launch interview here, though, to introduce two instances of fictional collections that appear in novels published ten years apart, *The Restless Supermarket* (2001), and *Double Negative* (2011a, the standalone edition of the novel, published by Umuzi).



In each, Vladislavić's deployment of the fragmentary form is coupled with the narrative filter of a first-person, white anglophone male collector figure, both of which trace the ongoing concerns that emerge through the interview's moment (cited above). The interview illustrates the ways in which the difficulties of wrestling with the position of authority that cultural production necessitates is persistently drawn in explicit relation to white, political identity. It also demonstrates the possibilities of being able to take that position as a beneficiary of apartheid, from or in relation to South Africa, 'a strange and morally tangled place to live in' to quote Samantha Vice on 'whiteness' (2010: 323), and in such a way as it can amount to more than self-criticism.

That this moment in the interview, of talking about this particular conception of South African political selfhood, emerges through a sidestepped discussion of a fictional character serves to reiterate its point: it comes via the white male, English speaking, middle-class protagonist of *Double Negative*, Neville Lister, also an artist involved in the ethical concerns of representation in post-apartheid South Africa. Given that Vladislavić's responses are bracketed by Goldblatt's more assertive ones in the course of the interview, what I have identified as 'this moment' in the conversation is also curiously contained by what surrounds it – Goldblatt's confident liberalism – as much as it emerges from it. It performs, then, very succinctly, the ways in which Vladislavić simultaneously displaces and evokes white, male, English-speaking authority, specifically literary authority, a strategy that emerges through the readings and re-readings in part I of 'A Science of Fragments' and its intra- and extra-textual references, for example, and that is present in both the novels that are the focus of part II, *The Restless Supermarket* and *Double Negative*.

Neither of the protagonist collector figures of either of these novels is a writer, but both are involved in different kinds of aesthetic or print-cultural production. Their collections then operate culturally and metareflexively, touching on the productive tensions of the fragment evidenced in the modes, forms, and appearances of Vladislavić's early stories, and extending these concerns through the book form. In these novels, and through the thematic concerns their protagonists share, Vladislavić repositions this, what is ostensibly his own, literary authority in

ambivalent relation to other kinds of 'textual work' that signal the authority of the documentary and archival source. In this, he specifically stresses their significance to his own novelistic practice through the transformative processes and metaphors of the 'authored collection' (Eichorn, 2008). It is with a view to the production of this position, suspended and withdrawn, actively inactive, and its production of a particular space of articulation, enfolded and revealing, that I introduce these representative instances of gathering collector figures to explore Vladislavić's insistence on this problematic of inheritance, knowledge production and ownership, extending this into post-apartheid South Africa through the figure of the post and the letter form. The collections I go on to discuss indicate the development of the curatorial mode of fiction writing that I identify through Vladislavić's work, and touch on the significance of questions of the archive in the 'New South Africa'.

### **Addresses unknown: collecting belonging, collecting 'postal' texts**

In both instances in focus, anxious collector figures gather fragmentary, 'small' texts that find their 'thingliness' (Brown, 2001) in and through the discourses of the letter and the post. Both resulting collections have a postal structure – of letters and negotiating in some way the contours of the authority of the state-run postal system – and act within the structure of the novels in such a way as to dramatize the construction of new textual spaces: spaces of belonging and dislocation, departure and arrival; the construction of a textual writing self and of a reader as addressee; and a scrambling of the delineations between the public and private that the institution of the post passes over. Both text-collections intervene into the body of the novels they appear in with irruptive lyrical and fragmentary flourishes, reflecting with self-satirizing humour on the pervasive sense of cultural wonder at the non-violent, bloodless transition to majority democracy in 1994. Each is also concerned through these means with questioning epistemological and bureaucratic constructions of the emergence of 'new' national spaces and geographies.

The first of these examples is that of a series textual errors that are narrativized to make up the central part of *The Restless Supermarket* (2001), 'The Proofreader's Derby'. Fragments initially labelled 'corrigenda', the text pieces that comprise the

collection's body are plucked from the various local print publications and gathered together by its disagreeable, curmudgeonly proofreader protagonist, Aubrey Tearle. These fragments are not strictly epistolary, but begin to conform to a postal structure in their collected body and as they are initially off-set by another collection, of Tearle's letters: sent to and printed by the national newspaper, *The Star*, they are then re-extracted, copied, catalogued and filed in the same taxonomic site as the errors they detail. Tearle's intentionally public missives, correcting and so including these textual errors in repetition and to perpetuity, are 'open letters' but only of a type that ironically reinscribe Tearle's closure and inability to open to the new.

The other postal gathering in question is the doubled collection of letter-texts that converge in the middle section of *Double Negative* (2011a): one part of the cache is intergenerational, letters and their enclosed clippings, sent by the photographer protagonist, Neville Lister's mother to her son, which he collects in individual accretions over the time-span of the novel; its composite negative gives the mid-section of the novel its title, 'Dead Letters'. Passed on to Neville by a relative stranger this latter collection is already complete, gathered during high apartheid and providing a mise-en-abyme of pre-authored, pre-owned and pre-addressed materials. Suspended in a temporal fold which is the abeyance of non-arrival, this lost letter-archive registers the ethical issues of privilege in processing their strayed estrangement and belated private correspondences.

Through their reflexive intertextual contribution to the wider narratives in which they sit, the small-text collections of both *Double Negative* and *The Restless Supermarket* straddle South Africa's 'Transition', commenting on changing interpretive processes and structures of return in the new dispensation: Neville's letter collections are narratively significant when he comes back to the new South Africa after a period of self-exile in London; Tearle's collection reveals the entrenchment of myopic blindness to the discursive changes that will exclude him from active participation in the new liberal democratic order. By capitalizing 'transition' above, I intentionally evoke Monica Popescu's usage (2005: 5), who states that in its emergence as a proper noun in South Africa, 'Transition' became 'a rhetorical strategy, a magic word – a word that is hardly expected to explain the

status quo, but which provides a convenient label to positively connote an evolution and to mask and justify a social, economic, or political “lack”.

In their addresses, stamps and postal marks, letters and their journey through the state-postal system indicate their own ‘Transitional’ kinds of temporalities as clearly identifiable in particularly spatial discourses and questions of positionality. Punctuated by gaps of non-arrival and of misaddress, the undersides of what, following Popescu, we might call these politically expedient labels of convenience which perform to envelop political and social ‘lack’ in a more hopeful trajectory, are opened, unfolded and made legible in their recalcitrance and non-completion. Functioning to facilitate transitional and processal movements in themselves, the temporal and geographical ‘stamps’ of the letter and postal system that mark the bodies of Vladislavić’s fictional postal collections indicate apartheid as anachronistically freighted into the post-apartheid period. In a series of these self-contradictory revelations, their exposure, through the compulsive acts of gathering that seek to locate the letter form in a stillness and singularity, is a symptom of their collector-figures’ desire for familiarity in processes of rapid change.

These postal sorts of historical markers are imprinted on each of the multiple textual fragments that make up these collections, pointing up the comfort in the relative stability classification can afford, as well as its attendant labour. It is also with the implications for the novels of the fluid, translocative possibilities of the post in mind, that I view Tearle’s and Neville’s collections as postal by considering their ‘letterness’ and epistolary qualities as mobilizing a series of *spatialized* fragmentary material surfaces. Each in themselves and *en masse* in collected form, these surfaces then intervene fragmentarily into the limits of the geographies of the texts that frame them, making comment, not simply on the socio-political conditions of their becoming a ‘body of work’, but specifically on literary-material grounds, in and about the bounds of the book and in the South African context.

In reading Vladislavić’s registration of the risks of passing over the radical incompleteness of apartheid’s closure, and those inherent in the implications for the book through the postal metaphors that these fictional collections embody, I make a

methodological shift. The material-rhetorical mode of analysis that focuses on layers of paratextual accretions established in part I, moves inward to the internal mechanics of each novel as they refract the questions of positionality required by the contextual situations and discursive instabilities in and around their modes and moment of production. In defining the 'letterness' of these novels, whilst I employ Janet Gurkin Altman's working definition of 'epistolarity', as the 'letter's potential to create narrative, figurative and other types of meaning' (1982: 4), I expand her discussion of the epistolary form as one that intervenes in its contextual, pre-existing narrative structures to consider the destination and arrival points of Tearle and Lister's collections in a wider notion of 'postal politics' (Derrida, 1980). Accessing the small, everyday familiarity of the post, Vladislavić's collector figures negotiate 'Transitional' South Africa on interpersonal and self-fashioning communicative grounds, while the rhetorical gaps of the 'New' nation's acquiescence to global market terms come into view through the instituting function that the 'liberal postal dream' holds in the maintenance of Western conceptions of the nation-state (Bennington, 1990).

### **Postal dreams – epistolarity and the post-**

Considering Aubrey Tearle and Neville Lister's collections as 'postal' involves them in an economy of constitution that parallels the uncertainty that their collector makers inherit and negotiate in the shifting socio-political circumstances of the nation-building space.<sup>53</sup> As well as thinking through the cartographic, intersubjective and temporal frame of Altman's 'epistolarity', my reading of Aubrey's and Neville's fragmentary postal-text collections is informed by Derrida's 'postal principle', which signifies the complex and vast system of senders and receivers who, on entering the state-run postal system, are subjected to its technology, authority and its promise (Derrida, 1980). As revenues are collected in the form of stamps and taxes, origins and destinations are monitored in the language of address, which for both collections still registers as the limit of both Afrikaans and English as competing languages of the South African state.

---

<sup>53</sup> Cf. McGregor and Nuttall, 2007, whose volume, *At Risk*, highlights uncertainty as the defining narrative perspective of the 'post-anti-apartheid' era (see Kruger, 2002: 233).

The 'post' and its discursive systems are both sentinel and means of surveillance; the postman [facteur] the system's 'soldier', carrying the secrets of power, and operating as a 'facteur de la vérité', a 'factor in the system who guarantees its reliability and veracity' (Kauffman, 1992: 86-7). The status of any dispatch relies on the state governed system of the post and the discourse of the postal system it enters: the post 'dispatches whomever and whatever is involved with it' (Simon, 2002: 67). In this nexus, the letter stresses authority as a writing effect, of modernity conferred by literacy, an authority buttressed by the post, police, ideology.<sup>54</sup> In the postcolony of South Africa and at the point of the formation of the new nation, this apparatus of outward address and geopolitical legacy of European hegemonic authority resonates within Vladislavić's anglophone literary production ambivalently, as Tearle and Lister's postal concerns both demonstrate.

The letter's trajectory traces its designated spatialities in its crossing of geographical boundary and location: the cohesion and familiarity of the letter form indicates the socio-spatial discourses involved in the act of production – *from here to there*. These locations are also informed by the intersubjective constructions inherent in the letter and in epistolarity, whereby the addressee and the location of that addressee is a fundamental determinant in the constitution of the address and contents of the letter (Altman, 1982; Siegart, 1999). Identity as tied to location is returned and confirmed by the letter's interpersonal proxy and hopeful telecommunicative trajectory. Crucially, for both Tearle and Lister as custodians of their postal collections, in this postal system, missives and their addresses are subject to disruption. The myth of the letter arriving into the hands of its intended addressee is a fantasy, a 'postal dream' of uninterrupted delivery, where senders deposit their communications in full expectation of their desired and destined arrival, anticipating the same arc and relay in return.

Yet, to 'post' is to count on the suspensive delay of the postal system, with its enforcing, surveilling military 'mailman', both the custodian and guarantor of the

---

<sup>54</sup> See Kauffman (1998: 87) who cites Derrida's *The Post Card* (1980), 'I have renounced literature, everything in it is a post and police affair' (PC, 144)'.

post's nexus of power, and potentially 'the least secure point in the entire communications system' (Siegart, 1999: 11). In this potential, the teleological movements of the postal dream's system of origin and arrival – *from here to there, dear you, it's me* – are subject to interference and loss, interruptions that belong to the very structure of the postal principle itself. The vulnerability of the system to interception is also the very condition that allows and perpetuates the postal dream. The mythology of the postal order generates and interrupts itself (Derrida, 1980).

Each novel, in its own interaction with epistolarity and postal politics, dramatizes textuality, intertextuality, cultural self-constitution, and information transmission. Epistolarity and postal politics indicate broader cultural memory spaces, and point up the implications for national identity and the re-structuring of ideological boundaries in the rise of 'truth' and 'reconciliation' in South Africa. Through the addresses of each of their multiple, connective properties, and through what I term the destinal arcs of each of these collections, the discourse of the letter and its cartographical constructions act as a catalyst to explore the interconnected geographies they denote. Written into, emerging from, yet firmly held within the anglophone novel, these letter and postal collections dramatize the construction and transmission of cultural memory and its constitution of place in the shifts to the new political dispensation of 1994.

In its broad, postal discourse, the epistolary text-piece, like the fragment, is performative, both a rupturing and a cohesive gesture, mobilized to reinforce conventions and order *and* as a mode of resistance and deconstruction (cf. Elias, 2004; Altman, 1982). These conflicting energies parallel the ostensible completeness of the collection, in sum and in the synchronicity it gains as a self-enclosing hermetic 'world', a world-making that requires the action of collecting and therefore ultimately insists on incompleteness. Together, they problematize modes of recuperative historicization and related questions of structures of preservation and public display, so central to South Africa's democratic nation-building project. Overlapping with archival concerns, for Tearle and Lister, questions arise around the deeming process in their postal collections and these paradoxes of self-enclosing non-closure that their conservation illuminates: of what merits inclusion and why;

of custodianship, the duty and responsibility of maintenance; and the imperative to preservation that the custodial impulse must carry.

As ordinary as this impulse is in both cases and with both these collector figures outside of the professional archiving or curatorial world, they still perform regulatory functions amongst their objects of knowledge-creation and transmission, simultaneously exposing the converse of the creativity of collecting in its potential for neurotic hoarding, and desire for mastery and control. Following *The Post Card*, Brien Brothman emphasizes the simultaneously self-confirming and vulnerable relay of the postal economy as analogous to the processes of the archive: 'for the preservation and transmission of meaning, of intention, of identity and being...Archives form part of – or simply are – a huge postal system which goes by the name of western civilization' (1993: 211). In the postal dream, the archive is located as a processal, or 'postal', specifically Western site. In both Tearle and Lister's postal collections, official, highly regulated 'archival' sources overlap with their own, citizen-individual re-organizations of them (cf. Azoulay, 2011), requiring their custodians to reconsider and 'curate' their own 'place' in relation to the shifting locations of authority and cultural privilege in the changing political dispensation.

In viewing Tearle and Lister as these kinds of guardian-postmen of their cultural inheritances, Stewart Motha's formulation (2009), which recognizes the significance of 'indigenous sovereignty' as that which is at stake in political self-determination in processes of decolonization, and which persists as the *archive* of colonialism, is informative: my assessment of the ways 'the postal' can access Vladislavić's undermining of a conventional culturally authoritative, white anglophone writing position as identitarian spokesperson for the 'new' South Africa, links the temporalities of the postal to its political in a South Africa in 'Transition'. As Motha states, the persistence of the *arche* of colonialism as the 'foundation, ground, authorization of what is 'now'', is also the constitutive drive of the 'new', as *postcolonial* democracy, 'repeatedly claimed to be the phenomenon to be recovered and preserved where an anti-colonial being remains critical of postcolonial compromises' (2009: 299-300). The postal collections of these novels question to dramatize the suspension of available critical and participatory roles in the



establishment of the 'Rainbow Nation' South Africa and in majority democracy, encircling questions of indigeneity and political independence.

The postal-dream as a self-fulfilling archival site reiterates the European archive as a historical means of consolidating first monarchical, then sovereign nation-state power across expanding territories. Questions of the archive, as a way of knowing and as a form of power, are particularly resonant with the ethnographic and racial classification of the colonial and apartheid regimes, and with questions of modernity and Enlightenment individuality (Richards, 1993) in the production of authoritative text. In the teleological arc of Western civilization's 'postal dream', the competence of the site of the postal archive as a guarantor of 'truth' is inextricable from its dissemination or transmission, its 'sending out', with its dominant political assumptions enfolded by its relay and self-correspondence. Thus, the material spatial aspects that condition the availability of its contents are the conditions of their transmissibility through telecommunicative space: the collection as archive – about texts as much as people and the relations of power, and the custodians and authority the guardian-mailman figure confers (Eichorn, 2008; Hamilton et al., 2002) – is, as 'relay station', tied up with systems of information transmission and ways of reading, bound to its material content, its geographical location, to what it has preserved and preserves.

In the potentiality inherent in the instability of the period in which Tearle and Lister curate their collections, this, in turn, has material consequences in terms of cultural institutionalization: the archive 'sends out' a constituted version of its competence to be 'returned to sender' as a discursive formation of its own cultural 'truth' with the archival 'postmen' as guardians of hermeneutic competence. Both protagonists respond to their collections in ways that are formative for their own acts of making 'text' and of self-inscription; for both, their 'objects are accompanied by projects' (Baudrillard, 2005: 111), forms of self-making and self-destination. Distinct from the concept of random accumulation, or the collecting of consumer goods, those purchased, or those with use value (Stewart, 1993: 153; Baudrillard, 2005: 111-116), both collections in focus here consist of fragments of retrieved textual material found in Johannesburg, taken out of their place and time and enfolded in their

correspondences.

Both Lister and Tearle repurpose each of their collections' contents in a form of remaking that embeds them as subjects in the city to locate themselves in a changed and protean urban space. Both indicate the cross-interventions between the city spaces the collections have been made in, and their other constitutive spaces: Europe features as a transnational pole in both. The interlocking sets of international geographies the postal coordinates indicate are emphasized by their white, English-speaking collectors. The implications for the geographies the novels as products traverse are foregrounded by the concentrated textual form the letter and the postally constituted fragment signify.

As each of the novels' protagonists negotiate their ways of belonging in a newly or nascently post-apartheid Johannesburg through their postal collections, their constructions – their authoring, editing, curating of the small texts at hand into their new arrangements – trace the contours of correspondence: *from* and *to*, and *from me, to you*. This postal structure indicates intersubjectivity in the relay and interrogates the broader tensions inherent in opening to new, expanded communities of South Africa in transition as sent out into the global space. Moreover, the project of the new South Africa is complicated by the anachronistic persistence of apartheid structures traced by the contents of these letter-text collections. Questions of exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, emerge both from the trajectory of the letter and its envelope (Neumark, 2005), and from the collections' creation (Dilworth, 2003). The metaphor of the postal, and Vladislavić's attentive use of postal structures, widens the two poles of sending and receiver into the multiple, and illustrates the possibility of return, delay, and interception. The postal-collection and its potential for relay dramatizes the act of textual production and its own processes, issues of belonging, levels of participation and complicity.

Letters and small texts that take destinal forms as they appear in their wider narratives are, like the fragment and the bonded but discrete items of the collection (Stewart, 1993), self-contained autonomous units in larger configurations, lending themselves to juxtapositioning and elliptical writing (Altman, 1982: 187), and

leading us to a similar kind of reading. Through each novel in their range of textual strategies, the potential for a 'finished' or 'closed' archive of collected correspondence from the apartheid era is troubled as these collections infiltrate the narrative present of the post-apartheid space. As we read, the production of text as collected material, the collector as author and sole creative authority, and the curatorial possibilities of his voice as privileged white, Anglo-South African are problematized in the to-and-fro that correspondence indicates. Although, as previously noted, the letter-writer and the collector-figure appear frequently across Vladislavić's oeuvre, it is the ways in which the small stories of each converge in *The Restless Supermarket's* 'The Proofreader's Derby' and the 'Dead Letters' of *Double Negative* that serves to extend comment on the form they emerge through: small stories of collection and those of postal fragments come together to open the political, aesthetic possibilities of the anglophone (white liberal-realist) South African novel in the contemporary demands of dominant socio-cultural narratives of national transformation.

The custodian impulse that emerges through my discussion in part I of the range of Vladislavić's work in the 1980s, evident in the fictional output and through his publishing and editing role, is extended as issues of collection, curation, and collaboration complicate the possibilities of form. In his 2015 short story collection, *101 Detectives*, Vladislavić describes the 'problem' of being left people's papers, the obsessional pull of the desire to make something of their 'memory-laden, use-soiled things', and the dangers he feels in their potential contact with his 'living breathing skin' (145). In both the fictional collections I go on to look at, as well as the inherited or self-appointed custodian roles of text-objects 'entrusted' to their care by others (this is Vladislavić's emphasis, 2015: 146), this dangerous 'mal', or feverish threat of the archivally weighted fragments they must care for, disturbs geographical and temporal order.

The implications of this postal irony within the fictions are of a material nature – of the multiple surfaces of the text fragments as objects in their own right and their stubborn taking up of space; and are abstract – uncanny, even, each composite

body carrying destructive, infectiously pollutant, and magical properties.<sup>55</sup> In the period of transformation and triumphant trajectory beyond the violent constraints of apartheid, these dual energies take on political consequence (see Hamilton et al., 2002; Graham, 2009). Both collector figures must deal with these politicized postal-archival energies, particularly in the choices of the collection's making, its initial framing and narrativization as an object of knowledge, and the abstract and the material in the same discursive site.

The processes of collecting affect their collectors' archival impulses – to order, historicize, shelter, 'sort' (Kauffman, 1988: 96). These drives emerge less as a means for sealing or closing off, of facilitating the ironic amnesia of placing items into reserve so as to enable their forgetting (see Derrida, 1996: 3; also in Hamilton et al., 2002: 42), than, in their persistence as things of matter, for the ethical difficulties involved in creativity and intervention, energy and transformation. The stakes are high for these white anglophone custodian figures: processes and opportunities for intervention and artistic practice are subject to failure and non-arrival, misaddress and loss. Figured through the postal, the responsibilities of handling collected documents cross with those of taking place in South Africa through states of 'Transition', and the possibilities of disrupting the circularity of the kinds of self-fulfilling cultural authority that would address and return the self to same.

In *The Restless Supermarket* and *Double Negative*, epistolary content and its postal discourse are involved in acts of collection, traversing and traversed by this complex confluence of discourses of the 'post-': the postal system as archival system; the archive of a system of writing as a system of telecommunications; and of assumed, geopolitically constituted identities sent to tenuous destinations. For Tearle and

---

<sup>55</sup> This conforms to the *mal d'archive*, in its highly abstract sense as put forward by Derrida's *Archive Fever*, through which psychoanalysis offers a theory of the archive as constituted through the conflicting forces, characterized as 'archive destroying' (1995: 13-14), and the simultaneous drive to conservation and preservation (see also Hamilton et al., 2002). In its sense of a literal infection, Vladislavić's story also references historian Carolyn Steedman's impatience with Derrida's abstraction of the archive in her *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, which seeks to resituate the archive's *mal* as a result of the literal processes of contact with material objects in the archive, to return them to the concrete site that the historian enters, and offering a history of maladies caused by contact with the objects' containment of 'all the filthy trades that have, by circuitous routes, deposited their end products in the archives', their archival dust, glue, ink, that the historian handles and processes (2002: esp.27).

Lister, this intersects powerfully with the construction of identity and the construction of cultural text. Their small, postal-text gatherings become integral to their own creative processes, and to what they 'send out' as versions of their own cultural competence in the as yet unknown cultural addresses of the 'new South Africa'.

### **3. *The Restless Supermarket: Proofing the Postal-political***

Aubrey Tearle, the cantankerous proofreader protagonist of *The Restless Supermarket* (2001) is one of the 'performative avatars' (Gaylard, 2011: 7), the narrative filter of the white, anglophone male, through which Vladislavić refocuses the post-apartheid urban space. Seen exclusively through the first-person narrator's increasingly myopic eyes, the novel is set in the shifting inner-city suburb of Hillbrow, Johannesburg, where the city's transformations, from the late eighties up to the dawn of the year of the first democratic elections in South Africa, are mapped through tropic constructions of 'correction'. Critically assessed as one in Vladislavić's body of 'city texts' (see, for example Shane Graham, 2007; Nuttall, 2004; James Graham, 2008), *Restless* illustrates changing modes of the consumption and production of space and the possibilities of ethical habitation in the protean Johannesburg it engages with (see Marais, 2002). Part of the novel's integral 'restlessness' shifts around the accommodation and deformation of inherited (colonial) modern urban shapes, and new maps of publics in movement and migration (Mbembe, 2004).

To borrow from Nuttall's work on city forms in the representations of Hillbrow in *Restless* and Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2000), the overlapping intensities of a 'patchy inventory of the old apartheid city', a largely white suburb, inhabited and amended by Eastern European immigrants, begins to give way in the establishment of a largely black, 'highly tensile, intra-African multicultural' (2004: 744). The latter, revised 'inventory' is a useful figure to think through the obsessive corrector that is Tearle the retired proofreader, and his frustrated desire to catalogue, list and proofread the 'errors' the city produces in the transfer between its 'old' and 'new' realities. These changes in the inventory of the neighbourhood and

Tearle's closest community at the close of Vladislavić's novel are a nascent illustration of the 'new' Hillbrow Nuttall's figure describes. Tearle's various strategies for the writing in of his dated white body to the extended 'Afropolis' of Johannesburg the suburb comes to represent is reflected in the chaotic, celebratory violence of the novel's closing section. During 'The Goodbye Bash', Tearle must concede the 'new' intra-South African multicultural street 'inventory' that his home suburb has become (see Nuttall, 2004: 745-746), which makes bare the limitations of his understanding of cultural ownership and propriety, even of the lists and systems he 'owns' and produces, in its altering spaces.<sup>56</sup>

The other primary register of agitated transformation of the locality's 'political grammar of apartheid' (Norval, 1996: 10) is in Vladislavić's reflexive mobilisation of the mutability of the novel's 'global' language (see Charos, 2008). Vladislavić's stress on the mechanics of language and of print throughout construct an urban experience and forms of social capital that determine Tearle's obnoxious discursive policing of his textual and socio-material surroundings. In Tearle's obsessive drive to 'correct', *Restless* engages linguistic binaries through the scrambling possibilities of *différance* (Helgesson, 2004: 778; cf. Warnes, 2000). This, in turn, pushes at the limits of the anglophone novel in the contemporary South African context (see Marais, 2002; Putter, 2012), inviting explorations of Vladislavić's ethical fiction writing in the possibilities of community and togetherness in the face of the racist constructions that inform Tearle's understanding of 'we'.

Mike Marais' ethical reading recognizes that in Tearle's (and the novel's) collapsing of difference between language and social reality, his inevitably frustrated desire for closure and totality reveals instead the possibility of a 'social order which recognizes

---

<sup>56</sup> At the point of my direct citations from Nuttall's article (2004: 744), she is discussing Mpe's rather than Vladislavić's novel, and Hillbrow's incoming migrant figures, who Mpe labels 'black internationals', in relation to Alan Morris's 1999 study of the suburb. Morris's study finds that while acts of overt racism were no longer perceived as common, xenophobia and 'political racism' increased in light of an anti-apartheid struggle that had not bred an ethos of international solidarity or respect for diversity, but that nonetheless held the seeds of a nascent Afropolitanism. See also, more recently, Anne Putter on *Restless* (2012: 64), who, in her reading of the novel's Hillbrow, brings together Liz Gunner (2003) and Irikidzayi Manase's (2007) emphasis on the cosmopolitan and worldly nature of immigration into the suburb and the resulting interrogation of an idea of a singular national home, a notion that *Restless* refracts through Tearle's relentless first-person perception of it.

that it *is* because it is always and inevitably incomplete' (2002: 109). Extending Marais' argument, Stefan Helgesson (2004) focuses more specifically on the ironic registration in Tearle's corrections of a globalized, commodity driven social-linguistic order in the 'devolution of South African English' (778), placing Tearle as a wilfully imagined citizen of an outmoded concept of an English speaking 'Republic of Letters', validated through the maintenance of its 'standards' and its 'microtechnically distributed power' (2004: 785).

I engage with the discursive import of these arguments in reading a paradoxical aesthetic openness in Tearle's self-appointed custodianship of South African anglophone 'standards', coupled with the expansion of his micro-local obsessions to a sovereign, worldly set of ambitions. The gaps and often effusive incompleteness of the 'proof' exposed in Tearle's distorted correcting drive slip the reader into a series of identifications with the book. Becoming a part of Tearle's 'we' as we read, the text constructs a series of positions through the failure of Tearle's postal-political text collections, as I term them. Both Marais' point, that Tearle's inability to approach the other on their terms is a function of his embeddedness in discourse which 'enables the cruelty that characterizes his actions' (2002: 104), and Helgesson's discussion of the imaginary constitution of the 'we' of his 'civilised' European identity as derived from the disseminated authority of its print-world, are significant in this formulation of Tearle's circular, archontic self-address. Throughout, Tearle's is a jealously guarded archive of anglophone-European South Africanness, a discursive construction flowing, as Helene Strauss pinpoints (2008: 33), 'directly from Vladislavić's presentation of the interconnectedness of the linguistic, the social and the spatial in the novel' (cf. Graham, 2007).

This attention in *Restless* to text that manifestly displays a confluence of the verbal and intersubjective (linguistic and social), and its expression through local geographies of the South African city space (the spatial), is registered in concentrated form by the text's epistolarity (see Altman). Indeed, Strauss's succinct statement (above) could itself be a description of the letter, a formal presence in the novel as part of Tearle's collecting-correcting practices, and one which I extend to the postal-political to access their various kinds of address. The possibilities of

arrival, or closure, then illustrate ways that Tearle uses and manipulates the arc and postal relay of the *to* and *from*, *here* to *there*, to constitute and maintain his self-aggrandizing discursive community, and to reiterate the coordinates of the location and dissemination of its print-cultural capital and power. I argue that in Tearle's obsessive archival processing of these letter texts, which come together with other collected text fragments he uses to bolster his discursive authority, epistolarity and the postal-political archive of a 'republic of letters' exposes the maintenance and, more significantly, the re-authorisation of a bankrupted white identity in the 'new' national geographies of South Africa in transition.

### **Collecting-correcting: destinal neuroses**

107. Deaths ... 'I will always remember your simile' (2001: 64)

Performing his own imaginative acts of correction or deletion of anything he finds undesirable in Hillbrow, Tearle's punctilious eye fastidiously applies linguistic standards to counter perceived deterioration. Tearle's lexical obsessions, taxonomic impulses, and desire for order find their way from the printed page to the social, to be returned to self and self-authority in a set of obsessive collecting practices. Pursuing 'that most genteel form of activism, the letter to the editor' (81), Tearle is an 'accomplished composer of letters to the press...and an expert curator of lists, ditto' (102), lists, moreover, 'of every description...species of violence...lists of lists' (91). In the burgeoning multiplicity of the textual surfaces of these letters and lists, along with the ever-increasing signs of deterioration in the excess of errors and fragments of 'corrigenda', 'things to be corrected, especially in a printed book' (61), nothing he sees escapes his systematizing, filing, and ordering eye/I. Both city and collection sit at the centre of his tightly controlled anglophone print-cultural world. Microtechnically distributed power transmutes through this curatorial, selective, organising drive to a series of bankrupted racist aggressions that come to register Tearle's extensive territorial ambitions, to 'pass [the] entire city through the eye of a proofreader's needle' (298).

Tearle's attempts to wrest back desired order of the uniformly white, colonial, suburban inventory in the period leading up to apartheid's official demise are



intimately concerned with the control conferred by his 'life's work' as a proofreader. As I go on to discuss, this role develops through the novel into a set of obsessive collecting-correcting practices. Further to this, in the frequent slippages between collecting and correcting, or between cognitive and abstract, and material, textual gathering, Tearle's self-identity as a white anglophone South African male also comes to be constructed postally. Retired from a lifetime's work with the department of Post and Telecommunications, as a self-appointed guardian of an entrenched cultural order and 'truth', correcting errors becomes a vehicle for his attempts to re-establish the order that has slipped somehow into the gaps of the radically changed city and social, public life: '[s]tandards of proofreading have been declining steadily since the nineteen-sixties, when the permissive attitude to life first gained ground, and so have standards of morality, conduct in public life, personal hygiene and medical care, the standard of living, and so on. Decline with a capital D.' (81).

Moving to Hillbrow, Tearle finds the city's public spaces diminished, evidence of its 'greying' (130; see Kruger 2013: 106):

where once there had been benches for whites only, now there were no benches at all to discourage loitering...The public library was a morgue for dead romances. There were no pavement cafés à la française. The weather was suitable, but not the social climate: the city fathers quite rightly did not want people baring their fangs in broad daylight, cluttering the thoroughfares, and giving the have-nots mistaken ideas about wealth and leisure (15-16).

That Tearle overdetermines these spaces with binaries dividing institutions of education, books and civility from the grubbier, more violent, non-white animals of labour and poverty informs his understanding of 'the Golden City as it were, Egoli as it are' (3). A specific version of the city which, as Caitlin Charos argues, 'testifies to the "greatness" and success of the English imperial project in South Africa' (2008: 29), Tearle undermines its isiZulu name by aligning it with grammatical error. Accordingly, he finds refuge in the 'Café Europa', a space with a 'European ambience. Prima' (17), and quickly becomes 'their most venerable patron, an incorrigible 'European' (15). In his retirement, the Europa becomes Tearle's workspace, 'home-away-from-home' (122), and the location of the multiple collections' abstract curatorial labour and his placing them firmly within the reaffirmed linguistic,

Western-postal address that become the ground of his apartheid city's segregationist terms.

Self-confessedly unable to tell jokes, Tearle's first-person narrative is adeptly witty, whilst exposing the prejudices embedded in his aggressive, obsessive linguistic play. As a result, although Tearle himself is objectionable, humourless and 'dry' (88), the narrative is a delight to read. The text is littered with puns. For the reader, these visualize and perform the plurality of cultural practices in Hillbrow in an ironic register through Tearle's racist desire to control, separate and 'other' them from his own. Recalling the farcical aesthetic identified in the stories collected by *Missing Persons*, between comedy and violence, stuffed and exaggerated,<sup>57</sup> these puns function, too, as part of the novel's illustration of the extent of Tearle's drive to collect/correct any composite intermixture. They are both subject to and of his satirical riffs on the categories and 'species' of textual error already predetermined, logged and recorded. Where his puns about European migrant culture exploit paranomasiac potential to illustrate the associative creativity available in his riffing along signifying chains – 'Portuguese workforce: manuel labour' (28); '[t]he wurst is still to come' (54) – his remarks about race, while asserting the same masterful flexing of his lexical prowess, reveal that 'the skin colour and physiognomy of black or coloured people are the principal 'species of error' he fixates on as perpetually uncorrected' (Marais, 2002: 104), part of an ambivalent anxiety response he uses to essentialize and denigrate an African group.

In her access of Vladislavić's ethical fiction writing in *Restless*, Charos (2008) cites moments of 'postcolonial laughter' prompted by Tearle's ironic assertion of the possibilities of community early in the novel: 'What do I mean by 'we'? Don't make me laugh' (Vladislavić, 2001: 6).<sup>58</sup> As entry points for Tearle into 'an uncertain, but more open and tolerant period of transition', Charos sees Tearle's humorous interactions with the new, increasingly black clientele of the Cafe Europa breaking

---

<sup>57</sup> I use this formulation in the introductory section to part I of this thesis to consider the potency of the surreal and uncanny confluences that run through Vladislavić's early prose fictions, produced during apartheid's successive states of emergency.

<sup>58</sup> Charos acknowledges Marais' exploration of this argument and the given passage, and applies it to *Restless* through Susanne Reichl and Mark Stein's (2005) *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial* (2008: 32).

down his rigid essentialisms, serving to expose him to the 'transcultural competence' (2008: 32) afforded by Vladislavić's concern with 'playing *together*' (26, original stress). As examples of the inadequacy of Tearle's systems to cope with change and his inability to open himself to community or togetherness, the metareflexive irony of these moments of laughter is one of the strategies by which 'we', as community of readers of the novel, are pulled in to the subtle play of its textual fabric. As the novel holds and accretes word-play in both Tearle's farcical, individualistic collections and our laughter, shared with the characters, that indicates Vladislavić's concern with points of joining in, distinctions between the two begin to blur. Emphasized by the first-person narrative filter, positioned as both Tearle's and, by the novel itself, Vladislavić's 'we', we laugh, in turn, 'at' and 'with' racist, objectionable Tearle, in turn, worked and working 'with' and 'on' the prose in the processes of reading. Part of the anxious restlessness of the text emerges from this ethical concern with playing together with the prose, as *Restless* opens itself to a textual indeterminacy that allows the possibility of difference, and by which it becomes increasingly difficult to identify its forms and directions of address.

Yet Tearle is systematically unable to appreciate or tolerate transition. The discourse of the letter, a form in perpetual transition, and that of the collection, one which paradoxically registers its always incomplete status, and the motions between the intersubjective and individualistic concerns of each, introduce degrees of textual instability that Tearle must manage. Responding to the indeterminacy his own mode of interaction produces in the narrative 'real', Tearle bolsters his compulsive need to fix and return to the proper through the systematic assembly of 'proof': galley-page, position and place, error and solution are recorded for posterity, as self-evidence of their indubitable necessity in an organisational tour de force impervious to misinterpretation or doubt.

We are introduced to this, Tearle's 'life's work', through his 'System of Records', a vast indexical grid of meticulously categorized typographical errors, based on a lifetime's collection retrieved from his surroundings. As text is fragmented into its constituent linguistic details in the System and as these are absorbed by the neurotic and particularistic orbit of Tearle's hoarding, history is effaced, replaced by the

classificatory zeal of the collection's arrangements (Stewart, 1993). In the process of this obsessive establishment of boundaries and the world-creating possibilities that the binding both of his collector's logic and that the collection's re-arrangements affords, his working practices are conflated with his conservative, racist worldview as he turns attention from texts to his habitual environments and the socio-political changes he observes in them. In this particular taxonomic drive and the movement from text to social con-text, history, in the form of colonialist and apartheid ways of seeing, reasserts itself. The novel exploits this interplay between effacement and exposure, a movement which produces much of its multiply destabilizing humour, to position the text and the experience of reading it in sets of discomfiting identifications between the individual and particularistic, and the social and political, interrogating and suspending sites of white privilege and autonomy.

The 'story of my life' (59) as he acknowledges it to be, 'The System of Records' collects Tearle's identity-body of 'invisible work', invisible because successfully undertaken. Ruminating on his legacy 'apart from these shop-soiled mortal remains', he lists 'a pile of manuals and documents, obscure gazettes, directories and yearbooks, most of them out of print, which I had proofread well, and on which I had therefore left no visible trace' (25). The System is an early response to the drive to leave for posterity 'a little mark, something of lasting value to which my name might be attached' (25). Its 'grandiose...beauty of error' (64) is later developed into the fictional mark of 'The Proofreader's Derby', a site where his 'social proofreading' is translated into 'fable' (Marais, 2002: 102) and the ironies of recovering order and creating narrative collide in a curatorial and accidentally fictional writing mode.

The early taxonomic impulses in Tearle's System are resonant with his appreciation of apartheid categorisation. Throughout the novel his most direct instances of racism are betrayed in his anxiety around the inevitable leaking of his and apartheid ideal categories, or his dismissal of anything that cannot or will not be 'proofed' through taxonomy's machines for separation. In one of the many ironies of Tearle's systems of meaning production, and at the root of his anxious repetitions, 'proof' of race and its pure or ideal category was ever regressive in the typological method of

classification taxonomy. Due to its 'fissiparous nature' (Dubow, 1995: 114), the discursive 'product' it sought to control and segregate was a fiction of its own making, and it was that very entity, race, that slipped the classifier (cf. Haraway, 1997: 234). As the narrative moves through the long years of South Africa's political transitions, both into and out of the apartheid regime, these normative ideals and their categorical slippage are exposed as fantastical, and at times, farcically outlandish fallacies in the ethics of play and communities of laughter that *The Restless Supermarket* ironically inscribes; simultaneously, they are reasserted and therefore remain, re-inscribed by Tearle's particularistic and individual curating, and their endless repetition in the timeless historical present of his correction-collections.

This changed and protected relation of the time-space of the collection is echoed in Tearle's relentless first-person narrative perspective and its ignorance of the socio-political shifts the historical moments around him clearly represent. Presented and collected in small increments of racist aggressions, Tearle is blinded to his own objectionable politics by a mask of proofreading and collection-correction as a series of small apolitical, ahistorical acts. His first and especially pleasing example of corrigenda for the System is from the '*Pretoria News* of 7 January 1956. An article on poultry farming' (62). 1956 is a notable year in the establishment of the apartheid regime: the year of the Industrial Conciliation Act, subsequently renamed the Labour Relations Act, that prohibited the registration of Trade Unions with mixed-racial membership, prohibited strikes, and instituted protected labour for whites; it was the year of the Women's March, presenting a petition against the blanket application of pass laws to parliament, marked as a national holiday in the New South Africa (August 8); and it was the year of the first Treason Trial detainments in December, when 144 anti-apartheid activists were arrested on the grounds of High Treason, including Nelson Mandela and the chairman of the ANC, Chief Albert Luthuli.

Because of Tearle's long history with the material, the fragmentary corrigenda collected in 'The System of Records' freights notably politicized acts of apartheid, via scraps of what appear to be negligible apartheid era text, into the narrative present, whilst commenting on contemporary socio-political change negatively on the

grounds of increasing 'Decline'. Tearle's ordering impulse of the fragmentary, into its 'new' shape in order to preserve its 'old' stability, is explicitly a custodian one, worrying at archival questions of designation, of what may be deemed 'proper' objects of knowledge for inheritance. By analogy, the ideologies and subject-positions that may be at work in the construction and dissemination of such a collection are also reflexively scrutinized (cf. Hamilton and Skotnes, 2014), as is the making of 'text' and its implications for cultural memory. Tearle's 'System' and its 'Records' trouble at the realms of the individual, particularistic motivations of the collector by participating in both refiguration and cultural preservation of these fragmented documents of the past, archival concerns that come together in the narrative present of historical moment of regime change and Mandela's rise to power. These archival moments are written out through a novel published in post-Truth and Reconciliation Commission South Africa's reckoning with the national archive, and the interrogation of documentation, and, or even as, processes of interpretation (cf. Hamilton et al., 2002).

The relay between past and present, and their interplay in the constitution of shared cultural practices, informs the shifting temporality of *Restless's* tight first-person perspective. Our location in part one, 'The Café Europa', and that of both Tearle's nostalgic retrospection – '[m]y golden days, caesar salad days, days of whiskey and roses' (102) – and dystopian proleptic flashes – '[i]n a word: chaos' (6) – are provided by the novel's collections. It is their dates that punctuate and pin the narrative in a long South African history of the establishment of apartheid and socio-political upheaval and transition. In addition to the recorded dates of each of the System's corrigenda fragments and their painstaking adherence to the organizational demands of the System itself, Tearle offers up a selection of 'letters to the editor' that he sends to the local *Star*. Dated at their head between the earliest, 18 July 1987, and the last, of 13 December 1993, each is signed, 'Yours faithfully, A. Tearle (Proofreader, retired)', or, in note form, 'Sincerely, etcetera'.<sup>59</sup> In all, six of

---

<sup>59</sup> The letters are composed, filed, sent and received in the retrospection of part one. They are listed here in order of appearance to illustrate their function as markers in the novel's jittery cross temporality: letter one is dated 7 December 1993 (33); letter two, 18 July 1987 (45-46); letter three 13 December 1993 (56); number four, 17 May 1988 (105-107); the penultimate is dated 12 October 1989 (156); the letter whose contents Tearle describes (167-168), which is then embedded in the

these letters appear in the text, five of which we read in their entirety as Tearle proudly reproduces them. A familiar generic form in themselves, these letters to the editor are shaped and marked by their proper appearance appropriate to correspondence, emerging from the rest of the narrative in the specificities of their address and their own temporal spaces.

Through Tearle's letter collection to the *Star*, with drafts first written by hand and preserved scrupulously in his notebooks, folders and files, his obsession with error takes its place in the national political space, the space of the newspaper's broader circulation. Epistolarity bolsters his status as a self-styled citizen 'activist', justifying that of his 'System' and 'Records', disseminating his particular brand of social proofing to the paper's distribution networks. Correspondence returns and supports Tearle's own position, which is established through the sociality of his letters, the Café Europa its locus and 'republic'. His place and participation in the order of the city and the broader consumption networks of the newspaper are reaffirmed as value returning to him his sense of 'civic duty and decency' (28). The earliest letter we read, 'a good one' (45), dated 1987, takes up arms against a change in formatting of the *Star's* crossword puzzle. Its publication provides Tearle with an occasion to introduce himself to a contemporary, Spilkin, initiating the friendships and bonhomie of the Europa's 'republic of letters'; in response to Tearle's letter, the *Star* publishes 'a brace of readers' letters' in support, each re-registered and filed in the self-fulfilling System, expanding this public, in forms of (re)publication, until 'Tearle and Tradition...prevail' (50).

This opening out to a 'we' and wider community is predicated on processes of repetition and recording, on re-inscription as a means to circumscription. Revealed by this temporal strategy and the historical markers provided by Tearle's dual self-appointed citizen-activist archive, the ordering zeal of Tearle's 'Traditions' in the 'System of Records' operates with the discursive power of 'Letters' and a print republic in a postal economy. By 'return' in a postal relay, Tearle's own understanding of the rewards of participation in 'civilized life' is delivered back to

---

fabric of the prose in ways that the reproduction of the other letter forms in their entirety refuses, is written on the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, which places it in or around February 1990.

him, maintaining the vanguard of an old order that proofreading comes to represent. Fragments of text from the advancement of the apartheid regime in the 1950s are fundamental to the constitution of that order and 'civility'. His arrogance, at times laughable in its parodic excess, returns, in the manner of the postal dream as an archival, archontic circularity, 'seek[ing] to construct itself as a circumscribed totality', as Marais suggests (2002: 103).

The extended, but somewhat subsumed metaphor of the postal, lying quietly in Tearle's past life's work proofing the telephone directory for the department of Post and Communications – for Tearle, 'the Book, plain and simple' (97) – alongside Tearle's desire for the social bonhomie of a 'lettered' public, traces and bolsters the self-fulfilling imaginative community prescribed by the relay system of the postal order. Ironically, as the postal dream also reinscribes Tearle's adherence to an outdated, colonial European postal economy, it impounds his absolute failure to communicate, to address others in the changing South Africa; a failure, then, to be flexible enough to join in or to truly 'relate', itself a 'telegraphically hopeful' (Murray, 2009: 141), carefully enveloped anagram of his proper name and signature.

### **Becoming (postal) text: 'The Proofreader's Derby'**

These issues of relating and intersubjective opening to a broader 'we' find shape in the apotheosis of his ordering project and ultimate collection for posterity, 'The Proofreader's Derby', Tearle's own internal meta-narrative construction. Comprising the entire central section of *The Restless Supermarket*, Tearle's mini-epic fantasy novella is a fictionalized rearrangement, a re-collection, of his life's collected works. Meta-reflexive, in Tearle's narrative construct of the 'Derby', hero and fictional foil, Fluxman, battles epic disorder in the violently disturbed city of 'Alibia', suitably armed with blue pencil in hand, flourishing his delete mark, and in the company of the venerable 'Proofreader's Society'. As its fictionalized form, 'The Proofreader's Derby' romps through the excesses of Tearle's 'System of Records' and gathered up textual 'species of error', thematizing its own conditions of production, exposing Tearle to the threatening potential of the dissemination of his self-authored spaces and its opening of multiple interpretive possibilities and resulting polyvocality.



Desire, ambition, and the curatorial constitution of narrative coalesce in 'The Proofreader's Derby'. It is also the locus for the hopeful potential of opening the individualistic collection process to its broader collective interpretation, to Tearle's 'we' and the possibilities of playing *with* his own authored 'text', in a form of reading together (cf. Charos, 2008). Again, it is the collection as desired for correct, proper text that provides this potential opening to community, for Tearle to re-address and rearrange his obsession with the proper, and to relate. The most poignant of these potentials is in Tearle's relationship to Merle, a woman with whom he is later romantically linked as 'Mr and Mrs Dictionary' (95). On their introduction, Merle already knows him as 'A. Tearle' having read his 'letters to the editor' (72-73), with the fame of his 'System of Records' preceding him (85). What they share and the possibility of relationship it provides is revealed as she 'flutter[s]' through the Record's index cards with 'practiced ease' (85-86). But it quickly becomes apparent that where Tearle's punning is immediately foreclosed if 'not constructive' (88), Merle's ease is primarily because of her word *play*, which is open and collaborative, 'always trying to create something new' (88). Where she delights in the possibilities of slippage, her lists 'no more than pretexts for games' (88), Tearle becomes increasingly anxious about his System and its ordering of 'accidents of carelessness or ignorance, designated as such, and held up for scrutiny' (101) – an anxiety that overflows in the face of change in the city's addresses.

Merle allows Tearle a discursive mini-opening: as Vladislavić says 'he learns things from her that allow him to make the very small change that he makes, this tiny growth, barely perceptible' (2005b: 8). This change, and the possibility for Tearle to relate, even to love, is quashed, poignantly delimited by his compulsive need for indexical order, the very thing that brings him and Merle together and opens him to change and accommodation. It is Merle who suggests that 'The Records' (100) be narrativized and written up into 'The Proofreader's Derby', 'a test of skill for the whole clan of proofreaders' (101). Tearle, seduced, ostensibly by solving the proofreading problem of the 'tension between momentum and inertia' (100) accedes, and in the process, registers the scale of his ambition in the legacy of his 'mark', revealing the extent of his thwarted desire. As adjunctive prop to his slipping identity, 'The Proofreader's Derby' functions as a love-letter of sorts: for his version

of the city refracted by the Café Europa in its imminent loss as it changes hands in the corresponding regime change in the dawn of 1994; constituting and as a gift to his intense desire for Merle; but ultimately always to his own project and 'main purpose', proofreading itself, and the paradoxically impossible correction of order (read anglophone, textual) unsullied by disorder.

The literary-curatorial aspects that the praxis of collection becomes in the rearrangement of his text-pieces as fictional prose operate as a machine for the generation of these desires, dismantling the distinction between theory and process (cf. Martinon, 2013). Like each of the text's reproduced letters and corrigenda fragments, as part of the novel's temporal strategy, the Derby, comprising a mini-novella and the entire mid-section of the book, is self-contained. Archiving Tearle's fragmentary corrigenda from when 'Records' began (the 1950s) to the narrative present of December 1993, the Derby also emphatically intervenes in the novel's narrative structure, enveloped by the retrospection of 'The Café Europa', Part I, and the linear 'Goodbye Bash' of Part III.

Vladislavić makes the point in an interview that Tearle's language of memory is 'more stable and refined' than the language he uses when in the narrative present where 'the sentences are much shorter. He's got a harder edge and he's quite insinuating and so on' (2002: 125-6). The first section of the novel is the period of Tearle's current text gatherings and letter-writing, which themselves date between 1987 and December 1993, veering across and extending the period of 'CODESA this and CODESA that' (12) in the novel's sliding temporal frame. Tearle's relative stability and anchoring through his archival collecting practice gives way in the narrative present of the third and final section of the novel, 'The Goodbye Bash', in the face of the imminent closure of the Europa and the loss of his own self-fulfilling addresses. The Bash, held at the dawning of the momentous year of 1994, is also the moment he is due to make his collection-correction and competition public in the launch of the Derby, when the changing management and clientele of the Europa become an altered 'reading' public for what has become of his opus.

In the same interview cited above, Vladislavić notes that the last lines of both Part I

and III of the novel contain a reference to 'the world', seeming to 'reflect some ambition in [Tearle], as narrator, to consume everything, to contain everything' (2002: 126). Consumption and containment are primary tropes that cross in the collection, negotiating ownership in the lines between its world-absorbing desire and world-creating possibilities. For Tearle, these competing drives are reflected politically in the creation of a postal-political national site, which brings the ideological potentials of the contextual past of his System into focus in the 'imaginary relationships' and 'fancy' of the fields of fiction, and away from the relatively safe 'manicured lawns of the given' (103).

### **Addressing Tearle's 'world'**

Establishing the coordinates of address of Tearle's postal-political collections, and the location of his self-circular labour, the Café Europa as Tearle's 'home-away-from-home' (122) is enmeshed in his imaginative projections onto the Café's mural of 'the walled city of Alibia' (19). Tearle registers the composite Europe of the mural city on the café's wall as timeless and impermeable by incorporating his idealized version of it as his novella's metafictional setting, establishing his mark on the wall and the material of the Café, as much as its mark is made in 'The Derby', his own idea of his legacy. A 'perfect alibi, a generous elsewhere' (19), Alibia is a composite, "nowhere in particular. Or rather anywhere in general", as he describes it to Merle. The immediate internal meditation that follows is a literary one: 'Not Erewhon, but Erewhyna. Alibia. Did the name come to me on the spur of the moment?' (74).

As the reader is granted privileged access and drawn along Tearle's signifying chains through a literary-philosophical reference, it is the satirical novel of English imperial adventure, Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872), that is negatively recalled. This first link is established, albeit in refusal, with the utopia – meaning 'no place' – as affirmative, and that of non-normative possibility. But Tearle's 'alibi' is not the literary-utopic space of 'nowhere' or 'no place'. Pushing the literary reference through Tearle's pursuit of the lexical to its ends, Vladislavić designates this city-text 'anywhere'. Alibia is an 'anywhere' that is highly regulated by borders and indications of inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion; an 'anywhere' where walls and boundaries are profligate and condition the possibility of its existence,

constructed by, on, and within walls, figurative and material.

Tearle's Alibia/perfect alibi in the Europa is as much a mural on the wall, created and painted by others, as Tearle's appropriation of it in his own ambitious fantasy projection. A dense mesh of stereotyped European images that collapse periodization, the alibi flattens into homogeneous generality that nonetheless subtly privileges the textual signs of the imperial 'civilized West', as distinct from the liberating energies of 'nowhere' and its echo of 'no place'. An imagined cityscape that defines a community 'in which the immigrant might find the landmarks he had left behind', Alibia includes a harbour, beach, and canal; wharves and warehouses 'by no means quaint but necessarily somewhat Dickensian'; in the squares are 'outdoor Cafés and neon signs advertising nightclubs; but in the windows of the houses up above, oil-lamps were burning'. In its mix of religious domes, steeple and modestly proportioned office blocks, a 'Slav would feel just as at home... as a Dutchman' (19).

As anyplace, a mash of imaginative but clichéd projection, Alibia is emptied of (geo)political potential and the possibility of satirical or spatial resistance as it is drained of its singularity. In relation to the 'greying' Hillbrow that Tearle wants to escape, Alibia negates locatedness and locality of any sort, and the realities of local conditions. But Tearle's 'anywhere' is specific to the discourse of civility he attributes to its location on the wall of the Café Europa. It acts in a fantasy of simulacrum as that discourse's alibi, its mask both vindicating and betraying Tearle's authority as he admits having never set foot in Europe. The anywhere it promotes is one that is explicitly non-African, and one that cannot exist without its anchor in Hillbrow.

Alibia is a 'perfect alibi' on the terms of its definition as 'an excuse, a pretext; a plea of innocence' (OED). An appeal to blank complicity with the colonial settler position that attempts to deny and erase prior claims to place based on race, it is also particularized in terms of a print cultural empire in collection-correction, and the extension both of his social proofreading and of his expansive desires into the fabric of Hillbrow's Europa. In terms of what Alibia comes to house and the complexity of his relationship with it, notable for its exposure of Tearle's intersecting anxious

racism and misogyny is his inventorial description of Nomsa, one of the new 'gang' of the Europa, and its ambivalent sexualization: 'the chubby one...Why did she remind me of vegetables? Eggplant. Her skin had a purple sheen I'd never observed on a colour chart...Mouth improbably large, lips like segments of some sea-fruit...Not to mention her backside. Bang! Bang!' (263-264). By contrast, his desire for Merle is instantly more identifiable and therefore more suitably repressed and refined. This version of desire surfaces via the safety of a detour through a projected vision of a fantasy of her whimsical vulnerability and rescue, straight out of anachronistic generic Romance novel, placed in the composite Europe of Alibia:

There is dew on the terraced lawns of the Hotel Grande, where Merle goes walking before dinner. It is the dew that makes her kick off her shoes and it is her bare feet and the wet hem of her gown that make her the talk of Alibia. When she catches a chill, Dr Plesance has remedies, all of which he had tried out on himself while performing voluntary service during various epidemics. So the ambulance returns empty to the hospital on the hill and Merle is carried on a chaise into the doctor's parlour (75).

If Alibia provides some refuge from the ontological uncertainty Tearle experiences on the Johannesburg streets (Graham, 2006) and increasingly in the Europa itself, it does not represent 'home'. Rather than synecdochic of place, as it is for the 'immigrants' who recognize landmarks of cultural belonging in its fabrications which underscore their distance from both the mural and 'home', Alibia's abiding attraction for Tearle is of similitude and specularity, of merging and escapism: 'in the middle of the city, bulging above the skyline and overhung by a dirty brown cloud, was a hill whose bumpy summit looked auspiciously like the crown of my own head. My personal Golgotha' (20). An Aramaic word meaning 'skull' or 'bald', Tearle's spatial, topographical reference to Golgotha is suitably descriptive of the unattractive growths on his denuded scalp (20): 'indeed that hill might have been a study of my head, cast into relief against a permanent sunset' (21).

In its evocation of its very particular textual, indeed, book-historical narrative, as the Judaeo-Christian site of ultimate suffering and self-sacrifice, with magnanimity, forgiveness and reconciliation, the reference insists on Tearle's own absolute

centrality within the mural wall, whilst it inscribes his immaculate distance from it as its hero of epic magnitude, its tortured messiah.<sup>60</sup> His messianic possession of the space takes on sovereign dimensions, mapping his own worldview and desires into its empty possibilities, othering its bounds on its specific and racial terms:

[A]fterwards, when one of the others cast a shadow on my head-shaped hill, my capital, it was as if they were inside my head. My head was in the city, a part of it, as solid as the earth beneath my feet. And Wessels and the others were in my head, flitting through it like migrant workers without the proper papers, as insubstantial as shadows (152).

The threat of the Europa's Alibia as a topography of (semantic) geographical indeterminacy, his fantasy productions and their need for rationalization and control, and his subsequent disavowal of Alibia as home and bureaucratic identification with it instead are offset by his identification as a 'true Johannesburger' (19). His belonging in the Café Europa and his affection for its Alibia revolves around his proximity to the landmark Hillbrow Telecommunications Tower, 'our very own Bow Bells - or so Spilkin used to say' (19. See Graham, 2007: 82; cf. Charos, 2008). As Alibia's 'Anywhere' takes on these increasingly complex topographical coordinates, Tearle calls on the Tower's 'proper' name, after the Nationalist JG Strijdom. Prime Minister from 1954-58, a strong proponent of racial segregation and a leading figure in the disenfranchisement of those labelled 'Coloured' under the apartheid regime (Charos, 2008: 31), Strijdom also held the post of Minister of Posts and Telecommunications during his political career.

'Planted like a stake, conceived as a citadel celebrating Verwoerd's dream' (Groenewald and Legge, 2008: 10), the Strijdom Tower was designed to enable the efficient implementation of a transmission network of cultural state power. Like the memorializing practices of the Voortrekker Monument that Vladislavić critiques in 'We Came', the Tower was conceived as a monumental salute to a white Afrikaans nation immovably rooted in the African earth. Also a celebratory location of

---

<sup>60</sup> In early Christian mythology, Golgotha is thought to be the burial place of the first man, Adam, hence its name as 'the place of the skull'. In a later reflection of the day Tearle first noticed the hill in the mural, he suggests it could be 'Arthur's Seat or the Mount of Olives, depending on your nationality. Possibly even one of the hills of Rome' (149), confirming the co-ordinates of the specific European nationalities that would count for inclusion in Tearle's worldly addresses.

'aesthetic pleasure...information and authority' (Ferns 1999: 87), the Strijdom Tower housed a revolving restaurant at its pinnacle, locating another desiring fantasy for Tearle of '[d]inner dancing, and so on. Cheek to cheek, with the world at one's feet' (122). Symbolized by triangulation of Alibia, Tearle's own head, and the thrusting symbol of the apartheid state's telecommunicative ambitions embodied in the Post Office Tower, the civilisation of print-culture, the literary imaginary and the power nexus of the apartheid state are pinned to Tearle's Alibia, 'housed' in the Europa, and designated as national, defensible, sovereign territory.

Geoffrey Bennington's 'Postal politics and the institution of the nation' (1990: 121-137) links the borders or frontiers of the modern nation state to the 'post' and the 'postal principle'. The politics of the nation, Western Enlightenment liberal modernity, comes with the invention of the post: all communication is a postal affair, indispensable to 'civilization and social life' (1990: 125). Bennington discusses the potential disturbance of this conception of the liberal democratic nation-state by a 'non-postal', i.e. non-Western, politics. He goes on to see the narration of the nation as an anxious, repetitive masking of this disruptive potential, a prospect that is also the very condition of its imperial dominance and its own possibility. Distributed through print culture and 'the post', the institution of the nation is a narrative act, predicated to conceal the violence of the silenced hierarchy that both privileges the West and 'constitutes its possibility and its limit' in national differentiation. This is a 'primary global violence', both 'postal' and the nation's necessary condition (1990: 131).

In Tearle's Hillbrow and in the complexities of the *post*-ing of apartheid, the Europa's Alibia begins to conform to this postal registration of anxiously projected national space, consequently revealing the locations of its illiberal underside articulated by its postal politics (Bennington, 1990; Brothman, 1993). In critical dialogue with Bennington's analysis, and through Hardt and Negri's (2001) extension of the nation-state under the conditions of global capital, Ika Willis's work determines the ongoing, teleological sites of Empire, the political, and of sovereignty as:

opened...according to an archival structure: the technically and historically conditioned organization of telecommunication networks, where a telecommunication network is understood as

the set of material and technical constraints on the transmission and availability of information through space and time (2007: 340).

The establishment of the sovereignty of the nation-state is, in as much as it is archival, also postal-political in the specificity of the telecommunication conditions that govern its movement across borders. This allows us to account, as Willis so aptly puts it, 'simultaneously for geopolitical and telecommunicative space' (Willis, 2007: 340). The inscription of the nation in terrestrial space self-assigns the continuation of its imperial ambitions whilst it 'constitutes itself through the practices by which it determines its edges' (Willis, 2007: 339).

As Tearle's narrative of the Alibian imaginary and its political-spatial determinations proceeds, he registers himself, in Alibia, as sovereign. Alibia becomes a site of a postal archive-nation. Specifically narrating the edges of its borders, Tearle's imperializing territorial ambition is revealed, linking his delusions of self-determined centrality to the Department of Post and Telecommunications in a cultural and political dream. In the postal-political, the sovereign national space, constituted by its archival 'outsides', is sent out to the political destination that it pre-constructs in full anticipation of its safe arrival, what Montesquieu calls its 'brilliant end' (Bennington, 1990: 128). This dispatch sets out to achieve both self-confirmation, and the erasure of its unjust and unstable foundation: '[t]he arrival of the letter should erase its delivery' (Bennington: 128). The globalizing, imperial and archival system as postal-political is determined by the liberal addresses of Western modernity. As Alibia's consuming, containing narrator, its sovereign, sentry and 'mailman', Tearle acts 'postally' to determine its edges, taking the shapes of its postal 'sealing in' (Derrida, 1980) through these modes of determining, founding address.

In the textual 'real' of the Café Europa, the Johannesburg 'real' of the Hillbrow/Post and Telecommunications/Post Office/Strijdom Tower is the fulcrum of the telos of the uninterrupted delivery of Tearle's South African 'European', Nationalist postal dream. The fantasy of its projection finds its dehumanizing segregationist desires in Tearle's topographical creations in the fictional 'real' of Alibia-as-mural city and Alibia-as-wall. Bolstered by the logic of the postal, Tearle's Alibia and its 'borders' become both destination and reception for his own cultural transmission network,



troubling materiality in the borders between narration and its performativity, a blurring that reaches a fuller exposure in the metatextual, metafictional 'real' of 'The Proofreader's Derby'.

Each of Tearle's collections come to be curated into this projected topography and its triangular coordinates that make up his 'civilized republic' of an Alibian South Africa. They are predicated on an anglophone print cultural and telecommunications system. Their discursive sites are disseminated out to a preconstructed address and confirmed in that correspondence. In his gathering of self-interested concerns into his Alibian 'anywhere', Tearle writes to a 'Dearly beloved', a *textual* South Africa and colonialist archive stored and filed in him, in his *kop*, that is staked into Johannesburg's all-white apartheid heart by the symbol of the old city's thrusting technologies of power, cultural transmission and dispatch. Vladislavić creates historical irony through Tearle's unquestioning adoption of this Anglo-South African postal framework tied to the telecommunications ambitions of the apartheid state, also signalling the performative constructed nature of the political project of the archive, bound as it is to the dominance of telecommunicative constitution, to writing as a postal effect. Through the lens of the postal archival relay, the civilization of Tearle's republic of letters, formed through and in book and print-cultural history, is inextricably written to by the inadvertent intertextual creativity Tearle wrestles with in the processes of collection. The real symbols of the shifting geopolitical power structures of its teletechnological dissemination are highlighted as we hold and read the real object of *Restless* as book.

Helgesson recognizes that Tearle's self-positioning is 'ubiquitous and evanescent at the same time' and that his 'megalomania arises from a conviction that he is tinkering with the very mechanics of civilized life' (2004: 781). His assertion that Tearle is, '[c]rucially...*not* a literary person but a man of print' (783), captures the de-politicisation of cultural hierarchies: to any proofreader worth his salt, errors make an equivalence from a 'chewing-gum wrapper...to a Bible' (Vladislavić, 2001: 95-96), from English literary-utopic *Erewhon* to Adamic, personalized Golgotha. Vladislavić's engagement with print culture, whilst a satirical, farcical undermining, operates by a process of often hilarious disavowal of the creative imagination in

what becomes an ethics of literary play, of fragmentary corrections-collections becoming fictional text and multiply accreted intertext.

This literary 'becoming' is not infrequently troubled by Tearle's illiberal, explicitly political undertone, as with, for example, his imagining of self-policing Alibian borders against the movement and definition of what constitutes 'migrants' in the changing city space, resonant with the legacy of apartheid's pass laws, and those archival remnants of postal self-determination in the new possibilities of South Africa's postcolonial sovereignty. The Europa's Alibia is the space where Tearle experiences both temporalities, of nostalgia and the potential in its altered futurity, as the temporal arc of the letter and the collection bolster its unfounded, unfixed and momentary affiliations, echoed in the movement of the narrative's prolepsis and analeptic shifts. Alibia is an alibi for a narrative imaginary for Tearle, an escape from the impossibility of the logocentric completion he desires and into a reification of the unsubstantiated fictions of belief that furnished apartheid's aggressive territorializing. Therein lies its unbearable attraction. For a man who longs for a sentence that means exactly what it said, the implications of narrative openings to his own imaginative 'microworlds' projected into the site of Alibia and their potential for transcendence of the material realities of Hillbrow, are deeply ambivalent.

A transfigured Alibia is the urban setting for what becomes the prose-fiction of 'The Proofreader's Derby' where Tearle has his protagonist, Fluxman, lead a highly organized elite group of the Proofreader's Society to act as the postal custodians of Alibia's borders. Re-envisioning Tearle's racist worldview, viewed through the postal-political, these leaders project the possibility of a strictly re-ordered, national community, policed by efficient custodians of anglophone print-cultural competence. The Alibia that is the fictional setting of the Derby is, in its fictional connection with the *arche* of colonialism which is exposed in Tearle's desire as sovereign of a self-determined republic of letters, postally constructed. It is also an explicitly curated textual space. It is a collection of texts, appropriated into their new arrangements, and revealed to be multi-temporal, multi-sited, experiential

(Martinon, 2013; Hamilton & Skotnes, 2014), subject to these shifting and paradoxically destabilizing effects.

The reorganisation of the System's fragments into the Derby brings the ideological potentials of Tearle's politically blind narrative curation and their contextual antecedents into focus. The alibi is unmasked. Without the pin of the Europa and the Post Office Tower into the heart of Hillbrow's 'real', the Alibia of Tearle's imaginative projection is a free flowing and rampantly contingent 'universe', 'sent out' as a love-letter to its very own project through the vehicle of the metafictional internal novella, from within the heart of the novel we read. This begins to join us in, to construct and implicate us as its addressee and 'we', while we scan the text under the burden of 'proof', co-opted into the attempt to trace its errors, questioning hegemonic structures of power whilst redrawing the frames of multiply complicit acts of shared curation and adaptation.

It is in the possibilities forged by the reluctant opening of Tearle's literary imagination in the creative making of 'The Proofreader's Derby' and its exposure in its 'sending out' to a 'reading public' of the altering Europa that the self-returning circularity of his imagined discursive authority and self-actualizing sovereignty over Alibia begins to come unstuck, necessitating a more ethical relationship to the changing communities around him. The idea of a coherent writer figure in control of texts' destination and addresses is undermined (cf. Evans, 2009). Tearle's construction of 'destinations' for his collected letters, and later letter-texts are revealed, rather than through arrival and reception, through gaps, slippages and in the imaginative, discursive spaces *between* subject and object, concept and materiality.

### **'Darling My Conrad Mandela': return to sender**

The Derby, and its purged setting of Alibia's 'anywhere' is the vehicle by which these slippages are belatedly revealed to him, highlighting the distance between his and Vladislavić's perceptive narrative control. Viewing the Derby through a postal-political framework and epistolarity, the projected destiny for Tearle's project is his bolstering of its, and therefore his own, authority through institutionalization in the

imaginary of the 'European' archive itself: as a guardian of its competence and veracity, he expects to 'send off' 'The Proofreader's Derby' into the correspondence of the Europa, for it to be received by his addressees of like-minded correctors, 'up to [their] elbows in rejectamenta' (99). That it is 'sent out' at all is in a circular anticipation of its return as a discursive formation, corresponding in full agreement with the discursive network it has entered. 'The Proofreader's Derby' exemplifies the linguistic adventure trope that Tearle's 'postal dream' has as its destination address, that is the uninterrupted delivery of order in the English language *to* the English language, with its attendant colonialist, Eurocentric assumptions and clear delineations between categories not to be mixed. This is the 'Golden City', the Johannesburg of the old order, bolstered by the modernity of print culture and unevenness of its dissemination, and unsullied by contemporary, commercial 'Decline'.

Helgesson's insight (2004) that language, in Tearle's use of it, carries both its colonialist past and its contemporary consumerist inflections, is of value here: in Helgesson's analysis, the colonial English-speaking map is worked on and undone through by the alterations of a globalizing culture. Inadvertently, as Tearle fictionalizes and narrates the story of his corrections for posterity, they proffer evolution and potential recuperation in a *postcolonial* frame where structures of domination, particularly in terms of the influence and inequalities of anglophone print culture, become visible. In Vladislavić's hands, if not Tearle's, the ironies that the postal text collections afford, in their slippages and gaps, reveal the *posting* of the colonial 'text-archive' as implicated in the *arche*, the foundation and authorization of what is 'now' and the constitutive force of the transformative 'new' (Motha, 2009). This exposure through the sending and receiving positions of the postal relay allows both for an ethical position of entry through English, effecting its 'devolution' in Helgesson's terms in its South African context (2001: 778-779) by satirizing Tearle's own deluded self-positioning and 'sovereign' address, and the troubling potential of its coexistent persistence, built in to the grammar of Tearle's correcting collections. This begins to open the gap between the metafictional author and reader positions the Derby implies, but not before the text, and Tearle's guiding structures of racist, taxonomic usages relayed in his first-person appeals, takes us

with it on its adventure journey to Alibia and beyond.

It is as Tearle begins to write out, to forge relationships, and become involved in narrativization and structures of the imagination of potential play that his destinations go astray. This meta-reflexive failure of Tearle's expected destinal system reveals the extent of his imaginative constructs and their misdirection. Instead of correspondence, Tearle's transmissions serve to widen gaps rather than act as bridges. As slave to linguistic and discursive orders, Tearle's relationship with others can only be mediated by and through them (Charos, 2008; Marais, 2002). In a corresponding and characteristically unselfconsciously self-aggrandizing gesture, Tearle plans to deliver 'The Proofreader's Derby' at the 'Goodbye Bash' for the Café Europa's closure, keeping the potential of its racist relay and its 'return to sender' within its own comfortably predetermined bounds. With the specific territory within which the Café Europa must be limited to for the address to succeed pre-mapped, the domain of the destination is already colonized by Tearle's own relay system and expectation of its self-fulfilling transmission and return. This is a pre-determined romantic address, with its triumvirate of symbols of its foundations, of Alibia as *kop*, the civilized Europa, and the Strijdom Tower as its primary site, which aims to keep present a specifically ordered form of its addressee that it must then construct, send out and reflect.

In 'the great unfastening' of the Derby's Alibia (205), an elongated apocalyptic event vividly described by its narrator-defender Fluxman, the material make-up of the city unhinges and sickeningly fragments, filling with monsters, '[b]eyond repair', a 'cacophony of categories, a jumble of kinds, an elemental disorder, wanton and fatal' (189). Its streets impossible to order or dispatch to, it is the 'Proofreaders' who reorder its 'errors so odd they seemed to belong to another civilization' (196), doing what they can 'to preserve the proper boundaries between things' (209), with their personal delete marks and 'blue pencils': '[t]ake care of the paperwork and the world will take care of itself' (206). Vladislavić ironically and reflexively invokes the metafictional unfixing that collapses the distinctions between implied readers, internal and external, and which Tearle's fiction writing exposes, as he has Tearle, voiced by his own fictional double Fluxman, write a second 'great unfastening' (205)

in the Derby, that threatens not just the fictional fabric and guardian community of the Derby's Alibia, but the very project and material of 'The Proofreader's Derby' itself. Fluxman finds Munnery, 'the most fastidious of proofreaders, a stickler for sequence and consequence, a meticulous keeper of order' and his 'Dictionary of Geographical Terms', his life's work (215), in shocking disarray:

The room was papered with printed sheets. Not just the walls but the door, the window behind the desk, the cupboards, the shelves, the desk itself – every surface had a page stuck to it. There were even papers pinned to the ceiling, with their edges curling downwards, and untidy stacks on the floors, weighted by rusty cogs and crankshafts and lumps of wood, with their edges curling upwards. Between the reciprocal curves of ceiling and floor, Fluxman felt curiously suspended, like an afterthought in brackets. The papers rustled and waved, making visible an imperceptible breeze, and it seemed as if the room was breathing uneasily and muttering to itself. (214-215).

Compressed in this image of disorientation and the desperate attempt to pin down the 'great project of [a] life' (215), which finds its counterpart in Tearle's 'Records', are unruly excesses that are simultaneously material and discursive. Significantly, they are rendered in the very fabric and texture of books, and animated by the threatening power of print culture and fiction.

Munnery's project, his dictionary, is a collection of nouns, naming and categorising the material of the physical world. In 'The Proofreader's Derby', paper pages rebel against the weight of objects and things. They disorder semiotic relations to the point of dissolution. This moment refuses to yield even to the established conventions of the Derby's narrative constructions, which in themselves inadvertently trouble delineations between inert objects of discovery and discursive processes of storytelling. Fluxman's confident self-identity is suddenly pulled out from under him. His position is abrogated by the reciprocity between pages and the discursive spaces they form. These are exposed, not simply in the ways that the novel's 'devolution' of English is achieved through its dual operations of 'the setting to work of *différance*' and 'rendering the medium of print visible for the reader' (Helgesson, 2004: 778), but also in opening the depoliticized collections of print and print material to the literary operations of the metafictional. Anxieties abound,

suspending Fluxman's place in his 'sentence that means exactly what it said', exposed instead to connotation and myth, to metaphorical possibilities.

Increasingly, as the fictional and the corrected cross and coalesce, Tearle's carefully curated paperwork destinations cease to correspond. In part III of the novel, 'The Goodbye Bash', the resonant ironies of misaddress and profligate textual possibility are again impacted in a broader network of postal politics. By this point, Tearle's letters have already ceased to function as part of any city-text correspondence as he loses power. On the release of Mandela, who he carelessly dubs 'Conrad' not Comrade Mandela, an oblique intertextual reference to the Africa of *Heart of Darkness*, Tearle's letter to the *Star* includes a riff on Mandela's spectacles, and a neurotically anxious point about the threatening potentialities of semantic alteration or equivocation: 'He could scarcely have a clear-sighted view of world affairs...Surely people realized that the lack of appropriate lenses might lead to serious errors of judgement; a single word misread – 'suspicious' for 'auspicious', say, or 'congenital' for 'congenial', or 'treasonable' for 'reasonable – might plunge the country into crisis' (167). This letter is returned to sender, 'unread', for Tearle the 'first sign that people like us would no longer have a say' (168).

Similarly, the launch of 'The Proofreader's Derby' is a spectacular failure, its 'undelivered' status ironically impressing the contextual limits of its own non-arrival, destabilizing ideas of destination and destiny, and stressing the instability involved in the invention of its own fictional worlds. As the 'Goodbye Bash' for the Café Europa and the ambivalent comforts of the Alibia mural's empty 'Anywhere' descends into farce. Tearle finds out he is the last to know that Merle has died, and his romantic address and dedication of 'The Proofreader's Derby' to her, a significant part of its fictional possibility, is to remain forever suspended in non-arrival. The 'new citizens' of the Europa attack Tearle's racism and bigotry on the very grounds that his postal-destinal, civilized self-identity is constituted by:

"You worked for the regime,' she said.  
 'I proofread the telephone directory!'  
 'Exactly. How do you think the cops found out where people lived?'"  
 (262).

Copies of the uncorrected Derby disappear from the Europa, stolen, or scattered by

an 'ill wind' out to 'the four corners of the city' (300).

Both internal narrative 'real' and 'fictional' worlds are narrated in the same manner: in Tearle's confused narration, the slippage between the predominance of Tearle's 'real', first-person, documentary-style focalisation of part one, and the fantastical untethering of his imagination in the Derby, leaks into the Europa's 'Bash'. This impresses how Tearle has always been a product of his own fictional addresses. Tearle's excessive obsession with the 'four corners' of anglophone Europe-as-World and the old imposed 'order' of apartheid ends up parodying itself in its bankruptcy. Instead, the spaces of agency for Tearle lie, paradoxically, in the multifarious heterogeneity of the specifically South African discursive network that *The Restless Supermarket* inscribes in the refraction of his destinal dream, particular to the city scapes of Johannesburg and the Hillbrow Tower. Grasping for the histories gathered by his System, the order of a European colonial grammar and the early apartheid past, Tearle resists but is unable to escape the processes of change, even in the self-authored rearranged collection of his own literary fantasy (cf. Charos, 2008: 29). But it is this very process that reveals its alternative; without his need for fixity we would not see the possibilities for movement. His view of fragmentation as deterioration and disorder are determinably unfixed by his own production of fragmentary text in 'The Proofreader's Derby'. Tearle undermines his own attempts at mastery through his failed imposition of it. The radical openness that 'The Proofreader's Derby' offers to the inflexible order of 'The System of Records' is, paradoxically, both constative and performative.

Correspondence always implies process in its 'from' and 'to': in *The Restless Supermarket*, the implication of and the desire for any linearity in that process is ironically refused. Various forms of correspondence and postal tele-communication *develop* in the novel as they become part of Tearle's obsessive self-gathering, to become, instead misplaced *processes* which then impress a meta-reflexive instability. This textual instability paradoxically inscribes limits in terms of boundaries, racist discourses, and their playing out in specific geographies through Tearle's 'respect for rules and regulations, the dedication to matter in its proper order' (42), but only to constantly draw attention to and subject them to disruption and irony, reflected



through the scrutiny of the external, reader's position.

Through *The Restless Supermarket* the subjective experience of Tearle's compulsive desire for closure is spatialized, not only within the confines of the novel, but also in its demand on the reader to position themselves in relation to the discourses evoked. Vladislavić himself says in an interview that this kind of positionality is crucial to an ethical response to the post-apartheid landscape, moving away from it being 'pretty clear what you should be 'for' and what you should be 'against', and it [having been] easy to occupy those positions in a lazy way', to 'begin to find a new kind of purchase on what's out there and understand it again' (2005b: 2 and 3, respectively). The errors that Aubrey spends his life attempting to correct, finding their zenith in 'The Proofreader's Derby', provide both real and implied 'gaps' that demand the reader pay attention to what may be between the lines.

In the time-capsule of its 'Records', the System troubles at Tearle's depoliticized, individualized motivations of the collector-corrector by participating in processes of alteration, renewal, and cultural preservation (see Hamilton et al., 2002). The Derby's Alibia re-curates metonymic slices of the apartheid past, through Tearle's narrative filter. Standing alone as a novella-text, the Derby's grandiose fictional misaddresses leave us to guess at the fragments' con- and subtexts, creating mirroring heterogeneities of multiple narrative possibilities from within the bounds of the book. On the one hand, this contributes to the possibilities of a radical *re-writing* in *re-reading*, a sending-up of apartheid era fragments and Tearle's adherence to them through their new arrangements. On the other, there is a wholesale freighting of Tearle's collected texts in repetition in the narrative present, a re-embedding process and pinning-down within the fabric and possibilities of the prose-fiction.

Called by the curatorial modes of its narrative construction to imaginatively proof the Derby, it is consistently reduced to its constituent parts. As its renarrativization remains within classification in this way, its reduction to print can only occur *in the process of* interpretive reading practice. The handling, alteration and processing of material texts, small texts, and those of the everyday, as well as their forms and

modes of mobility, are restlessly dramatized in the creation and the reading of Tearle's own prose-fiction. This also allows a development of the various imagined communities the novel creates, sustains and worries at, to include a wider literary field, or 'republic of letters' in Casanova's (2004) and in Helgesson's (2004; 2009) terms, based on imagined destinations of 'world literature' and instances of its misaddress. In making up the entire central metafictional narrative of 'The Proofreader's Derby', Tearle's evocations of his collected textual corrigenda, disrupt the discreteness of the book or completed, whole text as we read.<sup>61</sup> Each corrected-gathered fragment explicitly refers out to other texts, intertexts through a longer history, as they implicate the reader, involving us in the play of recognizing their antecedents. This speaks to the object of the book as a series of interlinked and variously worked objects. Despite itself, the Derby becomes a site of transition, enfolded by the different temporal moments of the narrative that contains it.

It is through Tearle's failure as a guardian of his own project, his own postal system, and as a failed 'postman', symbolized by the anxious projection of Munnery's failed dictionary and the destinal failure of the Derby, that we, as readers, become its destination. There are several errors left scattered through the text. These errors address us directly, constructing us as proofreaders, drawing us in to the topographies of 'the back rooms' where proofreaders are 'born, and made' (99). As the text constructs us as a spotter of errors, proofing the proofreader, we are also drawn into the 'new' spaces of the city, so that we, with Vladislavić 'learn what the new city is about. Learn what the new spaces are about' (2005b: np). As proofreaders, the Derby, and by extension its envelope of *The Restless Supermarket*, becomes addressed to us, written for us as it writes directly to us. Its destination traverses us, interpellates us, requiring attention on the summons of its relay and our response. If the Derby dramatizes a curatorial mode of literary production, concerned with the re-narrativization of found and collected materials, the possibilities of both complicity and commonality in the presupposed audience for its fiction dramatizes the dynamics of reception. We become determinants of the Derby because of the passage into obscurity of its originally intended destination.

---

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Marais (2002: 114), who argues that the book's material presence is troubled by its internal argument of its 'own impossibility' on linguistic terms.

The irony of its misdirection is the radical openings it affords.

This attention to openness signals an inability to close, sounding a textual warning that radical openness should not necessarily signal optimism: the 'post' of post-apartheid does not reflect the closure or the end of the old regime 'since de facto discrimination and many of the 'proliferating binaries of apartheid' endure beyond the system's political demise', as Charos notes.<sup>62</sup> The Derby we read is the corrected one, the controlled one, shot through with the thrills of deletion. Tearle's one true love, the relaying self-correspondent that reflects back the version of his self that he projects, proofreading, is linked to apartheid history, through the medium of print (Helgesson, 2004: 784).

'The Proofreader's Derby' impresses the ways that intended destinations and imagined communities of address are suspended and rendered incomplete by the disarticulation of apartheid in the nascent post-apartheid period. Rather than reflecting or being subject to processes of change, in being sent out to the world, it deletes itself and scatters to its constituent pieces under the pressure of its own excessive meta-reflexive acts. It is therefore removed from active political consideration, suspended and withdrawn. But in the manner of the alibi, hidden in plain sight, as the novel closes we learn Tearle has decided to stay in the new South Africa, to 'get on with the correction' (304). Tearle remains in Johannesburg as collector/corrector, likening the streetlights of Hillbrow to 'maggots battenning on the foul proof of the world' (304), once again reducing creative praxis to the object of print.

Postal-politics emerge through the interlinked archive-collections of 'The Proofreader's Derby' and the 'System of Records', their narrativized, corrected adventure caper illustrating ways that the 'linguistic order of colonial Europe must be recovered' (Marais, 2002: 102), compromising narrative authority and the transparency of the narrative act. Tearle's letters and the collected intertexts that make up the Derby's own self-fulfilling promise write into and comment on the

---

<sup>62</sup> Charos cites Christopher Warnes's 'The Making and Unmaking of History' (2000); 25.

other, problematizing the very archival institution they are premised on, and with it trouble the bounds of history, literature, text. These are *local* texts and fragments, constructed through a postal-political that seals its edges through a series of imagined destinations and communities, and transnational outsides.

Throughout *The Restless Supermarket*, letters, identity as a postal effect, and the result of transmission and relay, received or sent, intersect with Derrida's 'postal principle' of and in the institution of the archive. Read through this lens, the intertwined difficulty of these 'spaces' – of nation, of apartheid, of nascent post-apartheid, of inscription and communication, and, consequently, of the novel and the book itself – correspond with and to the demarcation of the boundaries around its postal-political constitution. Through the avatar of the illiberal proofreader, and the range of textual strategies that draw the reader in to his methods, *The Restless Supermarket* self-reflexively comments on its own participation in these processes.

#### **4. Collecting *Double Negatives* and making the postal image**

##### **'Dead Letters': suspended in action**

In the doubled archive-collection of letters in *Double Negative*, one of Vladislavić's central metaphors employed throughout, that of 'dead letters', also the title of the mid-section of the novel, specifically indicates and traces the concerns articulated in the interview cited at the opening of part II. Letters and the letter form provide viable but abstracted spaces of alternative in *Double Negative*, spaces that have become static (inactive) and that are placed outside of or significantly at a remove from the central narrative and its trajectory (suspended).

The novel spans Neville Lister's development as a photographer, from his years as a drop-out student in the era of high apartheid, through the Transition period and into post-apartheid 'Rainbow Nation' South Africa, to the date of the novel's publication, 2010. Vladislavić exploits the letter form in *Double Negative* across this time-span to indicate spatial discourses – dislocation and fragmentation, belonging and positionality, with geographies clearly indicated by the letter and its address, the stamp, and its franking – and to dramatize the interplay between the textual, the

written, and less 'legible' or readable marks of expression and self-construction in the changing socio-political South African context. The 'dead letter' form intersects with these constructions to raise the spectre of fictionalization and historicity, preservation and recuperation, and the imaginative reconstructions surrounding voices, silence and the secret in a post-apartheid, post-Truth and Reconciliation South Africa.

Perhaps most significantly for Neville, letters provide alternative narrative spaces, that become creative spaces of possibility and care, indicating transition as transformative potential. Letters are, of course, transitional sites, in themselves a function of their dispatch – they move from here to there, from address to addressee, from the present of their writing to the present of their reading. The difficulty of wrestling with alternative, with privilege and passivity, the impossibility of reconciling the social and economic gaps instituted by apartheid and its violence and brutality, and the absolute necessity of doing so as its beneficiary, register through these alternative spaces; while the presence of 'dead' letters, those that never arrive at their destination, also indicate failure, the endstopping of the postal and intersubjective promise that their delivery sets up.

Although *Double Negative's* narrative spans the relationship between two photographers and changes in the ways of *seeing* Johannesburg, the most significant texts in the book are letters, the most significant writers, letter writers. Yet the protagonist, the 'I' himself, never writes a letter or constructs his own position in this way – rather, he is acted on by letters and his own postal collections. There are two very different sets of collected letters in 'Dead Letters' and both end up in Neville's possession. At the close of the novel, he is still caught between the epistemological demands of the two in his growth and development as a South African artist in his own right, and his quest for political purchase and cultural confidence that is not entangled in archontic postal privilege. I will focus on the particular forms of constructed, 'authored' spaces that Neville circles around in a newly post-apartheid South Africa and that emphasize the potential that the correspondences provide us with in *Double Negative*.

### **Small stories. In correspondence**

Often most explicit in South African exilic/emigre writing, references to 'letters home' as gestures of belonging, or of mapping where one stands, are numerous and varied. Figured as discursive spaces that cross between the private and public connections that constitute the demands of home, letters ambivalently construct and maintain the country 'outside' of the South Africa that they evoke.<sup>63</sup> For the protagonist of *Double Negative*, Neville, self-exiled in London in the 1980s, apartheid South Africa is kept present 'for one reason', his mother's letters (2011a: 86). It is not the letters' contents, which describe his mother's fairly conventional, suburban existence in Johannesburg, that constitute significant meaning for Neville so much as what they enclose – recipes for South African dishes, shopping lists found in the bottom of trolleys at the local supermarket, photos, cuttings from the newspaper, 'some small story most people would have read past' (86) – text fragments that recreate the quotidian fabric of cultural memory. Neville keeps all of his mother's letters, despite his lack of interest in their 'brisk accounts of engagement parties and kitchen teas'. It is the material the letters bring that keep the 'shape' of Neville's South Africa in his 'heart' (86), all of which he collects and preserves in a Black Magic chocolate box.

As 'things', letters become objects of possession only when they take on a certain relation to the subject that is possessed of them. The relative materiality of these letters from within the aesthetic form of the novel, also indicated by the objects they hold, their 'thingness' on Bill Brown's terms, impresses their immediacy, their 'reality' to the touch, and an understanding of the letter as 'authentic' and as a 'real' story: first-person, intimate, relating experience. These rupture Neville's life in England, outside of the South Africa they represent for him. His mother's letter-objects become, for him, totemic 'evidence' from home, paradoxical carriers of materiality – the paper, the stamp as evidence of its relay, the envelope, handwriting, address and signature, plus their enclosures – and indicators of disembodiment, distances between both temporal and spatial – presence and absence.

---

<sup>63</sup> See Sheila Boniface Davies and Georgina Horrell, (2005), 'Letters home', a special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* that came about as a result of the 'Letters Home Festival' held at St John's College, Cambridge, 2004, scheduled to coincide with the tenth year of South African democracy.

Letters, and specifically the ethics of preservation of these paradoxical containers of self and other, sender and recipient, become metonymic of persistent concerns elsewhere in *Double Negative*: how to provide possibilities of resistance to the deeply embedded legacy of apartheid practices through an aesthetic form, and how to negotiate the persistence of inequalities in the post-apartheid space. The interaction between photography and the text of *Double Negative* will be explored more fully later in the thesis (part III, 'Collecting: exhibiting'). Vladislavić's use of letters in the 'standalone' novel (2011a) does indicate its genesis in an interplay with photography that gestures to the limits of text as we read it, a limit that Neville's postal collections trace as they fail to 'arrive' in the economy of epistolarity. Letters become bound to the visual as well as the textual: Neville's mother's letters write interiority and intimacy for Neville which he expresses through visual metaphors – the country that is evoked by them keeps its 'shape' in Neville's 'heart', and in his mind's eye (86). His involvement with the letter form extends when he comes across a peculiar and accidental archive of letters on his return to South Africa, made up of stolen 'dead letters' from their 'official' archive in the dead letter office, all of which had been sent, misplaced and re-arranged, 're-collected' during the apartheid era.

In her introduction to her 2011 interview with Vladislavić, Paola Splendore encapsulates Neville's fascination with this curious collection of dead letters in explicitly visual terms, 'the "dead letters" [are] mutilated stories that can never be completely known like the snapshots that portray their protagonists' (in Vladislavić, 2011b: 54). Yet for Neville, the privacy of the letters, and by extension the intimacy relayed through writing and text, can access the complex vectors of cultural belonging in post-apartheid South Africa in a way that photographs appear to threaten: as spectacle, photographs 'annihilate memory...swallow[ing] the available light and cast[ing] everything around them into shadow'. (87) Throughout 'Dead Letters' Vladislavić's persistent concerns with the possibilities of text and authority, and his exploration of visual media as an alternative mnemonic, are drawn through the letter form.

The letter is fixed textually in its address and construction of addressee, yet it is also

a moving carrier of meaning, evoking the geographies of its address, a site moving between these sites. For Gerald MacLean 'the textual trace of the discoverable past – the "letter" itself, we might say – is invariably caught and suspended while travelling from here to there, directed between different sites' (2001: 176). The letter writer, striving for immediacy and presence of both events and addressee, creates a perpetual present, 'attempts to close the gap between his locus and the addressee's (here/there) and creates the illusion of the present (*now*) by oscillation between the *then* of past and future' (Altman, 1982: 187). The belated temporality of the 'present' of the letter indicates the impact of the past on its series of suspended current moments. In 'Dead Letters', postal dreams of safe arrival are broken, and the apartheid present is freighted into the new South Africa: available in these small, concentratedly localized texts, memory, the presence of everyday intimacies from within the deformations of the apartheid state, is the tool through which the possibility of alternative histories can emerge.

Letters require the places they are directed from and to; and as much as they require them, they construct them in advance of their sending – imagined geographies – as well as the imaginative arc that maps the distances between locations and addressees. Apart from highlighting gaps and tensions inherent in the social geographies that construct imagined and lived spaces, as we have seen in Tearle's fantastical projections in *The Restless Supermarket*, and indicated in the movement from 'here' to 'there', the letter-form provides the possibility of a unified identity created in 'correspondence' with others, constructed from 'me' to 'you'. The intersubjective realm that exists between correspondents constructs both self and other in the experience of writing and of reading: *For you, from me*. These intersubjective constructions are created for us in advance of the letter, and we agree to them on receipt: because constructed in advance of sending, the recipient is 'made' in the very act of transmission.

This relay of the letter form enfolds a consensual agreement between its parties, an intersubjective complicity in its elements of tacit consent. In *Double Negative*, Neville's mother's letters, and their 'enclosures', map the intimacy of the intersubjective 'summons' to belonging, belonging to an identity that the letters, in



their address, reinforce and reconstruct. David A. Gerber, who has analysed letters in the context of mass immigration, argues that this summoned sense of self is served most profoundly through abiding relationships with significant others that the letter form serves to bridge in situations of enforced absence (2005: 318). The spaces of 'home', of being loved in to an unavoidable complicity, as a white South African and a beneficiary of apartheid, are kept continually present, even as Neville attempts to avoid them in self-exile. They are enfolded into the alternative geography that the correspondences evoke. Apartheid South Africa, enclosed in this way by a mother's love and careful administration of her public, cultural realm, is inextricable from the intimacy of Neville's sense of home and belonging. It is the letters and enclosures, '[t]his ragbag of fragments, collected over a decade' that finally hold him together; Neville's hoarded collection of fragmented correspondences and everyday story-bits becomes 'the jagged seam where the ill-fitting halves of [his] life touched' (87).

As much as this 'ragbag' holds together Neville's ill-fitting halves, the jagged seam between them also figures a ruptured continuity. To write a letter, as Altman states, is 'to map one's coordinates – temporal, spatial, emotional, intellectual' (1982: 119). Yet the letter writer is also 'engaged in the impossible task of making present both events and addressee' (Altman, 1982: 187) collapsing the here/there gap to create the illusion of a presence, a construction of an identity that is predicated on absence, that can never be complete because always in the process of construction. In *Double Negative*, the strategic deployment of these 'alternative' narrative forms links spaces and time in a way that exposes a disjuncture, an uneasy co-existence of 'presence' and the 'present' that highlights negotiations of deterministic 'history' on identity and complicity for the liberal white South African. This, Neville's adult relationship with home, is explicitly set up as an epistolary one, and one involved in multiple poles of cultural selection and consecration, collection and the archive. The stress on the collected epistolary moments of the novel illustrate how identification grows through and as a result of transmissions, sent, intercepted and received.

Neville's mother's letter collection, or '[m]ore precisely [that of] her enclosures' (86), initiates 'Dead Letters', as the mid-section of the novel, itself a kind of a jagged

seam of the novel's narrative that holds together Neville's life before and after his self-exile. 'Dead Letters' begins at the point of the 1994 South African election, an event Neville experiences in London, where he has drifted into a career as a photographer. The experience of the election outside the South African Embassy in Trafalgar Square and its celebratory atmosphere amongst other South Africans propels Neville's sense of belonging firmly back to South Africa and, feeling he has wasted the opportunity to participate in 'the History of his country' (75), he moves back to Johannesburg, longing for its 'prose' (76).

Drawn, instinctively, to revisit the places and spots he had been taken to as a teenager by the famous photographer Saul Auerbach (in part one of the novel), Neville begins to explore these changed, post-apartheid spaces from his own perspective, re-encountering the people chosen by Auerbach as subjects and, in the process, finding his own distinctive response and practice as an artist in his own right. This echo of Auerbach's photographic praxis is one of the novel's resounding double negatives. Enclosed by the other two sections of the novel, 'Available Light' (pt. one) and 'Small Talk' (pt. three), 'Dead Letters', opens with '[t]he end of apartheid' as experienced in England (75) and closes with the sales pitch of an estate agent in Johannesburg's 'rainbow nation territory' (134). Bracketed by moments that describe the New South Africa, 'Dead Letters' illustrates a violence around collection, custodian and archival practices, and the difficulty of locating new possibility for cultural production in its belated present. That linkage of temporality and topography, of the making of 'text' and cultural memory, through the image and through fiction, is most forcefully indicated by the metaphors of epistolarity through the negative of Neville's first collection.

### **Dying 'postal principles' and re-collection. Languages of address**

In *Double Negative's* post-apartheid Johannesburg, all manner of destination and constructions of belonging are evoked to be displaced in light of tropes of collecting and of the postal system. On his return to South Africa, Neville's involvement with the dead letters informs his sense of identification with the disorienting changes to the Johannesburg of his youth. Neville works out that they were collected over a period of years when he was a child in the mid-seventies, an era of forced re-

settlements and violently altering South African geographies. In this collection, letters are prematurely removed from their active service, taken out of the postal economy's cycle of correspondence. The official dead letter office, the sealed office of the state-run postal process which retains letters that cannot be delivered, becomes, through the mid-section of *Double Negative*, a preserved alternative archive that stands as a widow's monument to her partner, Dr Pinheiro. Dr Pinheiro's memorial also monumentalizes the vulnerability of the postal system, its national and personal identity relay construction as predicated on its withdrawal, self-erasure and suspension (Derrida, 1980; Bennington, 1990), and in specifically South African terms.

Dr Pinheiro, a 'gifted physician' (114) and refugee from Mozambique, although relatively proficient in English cannot speak or read Afrikaans when he arrives in South Africa, although as a 'poor white', he is offered and able to take sheltered employment, sorting letters in the post office: "A doctor, a man who should be giving injections and saving lives, standing all day and throwing letters into pigeonholes. Sheltered employment for people with deaf ears and crooked feet" (115). Without an internalized linguistic map of Johannesburg, Pinheiro begins to bring those letters home whose addresses he cannot decipher, to protect his job. He goes through these with his landlady, who describes the process to Neville; "It was like solving a crime. That's how we fell in love." (116) In this love story, resonant in Vladislavić's deployment of the highlighted narrative conceits of genre fiction in focalising the widow's voice, the intersection of the apartheid state-run postal system and Dr Pinheiro as one of its guardians of efficiency and delivery, and the hermeneutic desire to plot the pieces and unravel the 'crime' that is a letter not arriving at its destination, pulls together an extraordinary archival-postal collection. This unofficial dead letter office in the Johannesburg house grows and Pinheiro incorporates novelty post boxes he finds and salvages, ironic, iconoclastic takes on the self-aggrandizement of the postal service and his job given to him as a poor and unwanted immigrant: "One day, he came in with a letterbox shaped like a golf ball on a tee ... When I asked him what it was for, he said it was the start of our museum. Somebody has to keep an eye on posterity." (117)

There is humour here, characteristic of Vladislavić's brand, yet this alternative archive, as it becomes, emphasizes an economy of belatedness and, ultimately, of redundancy. The letter archive, with its gimmicky boxes 'shaped like shoes and dice' (118) is viewed by Neville, and us, belatedly in the New South Africa and after Dr Pinheiro's death. The belated temporality of the letter, oriented as it is to the future in which it will arrive, is doubly impacted. If, as previously discussed, letter writers are bound to write in a first-person present preoccupied with the future (Altman), the significance of the dead letter is the absolute break of the promise that futurity holds. Moreover, Neville's mother's 'live' letters, given life by Neville in his own collection as they accrete meaning in their destinations outside of South Africa, begin to be deconstructed, mirrored by dead letters *inside* the country, correspondences that have needed to negotiate the vagaries of the South African apartheid state run postal system and are exiled *within*. As much as letters dramatize the temporal space of an unknown future into which they write – a peculiar temporal space exemplified in the post-apartheid period that Neville returns to – dead letters also figure its coming as well as prefiguring its exhaustion and the redundancy of its promise in the shifting contingencies of the failing apartheid postal relay.

That this comes about due to the linguistic imposition of Afrikaans and segregationist policies weights Pinheiro's collection to the state, to the competency of its postal system to be delivering the correct missive to the right place, at the right time. This is the logic of the 'postal principle'; Pinheiro entrusted as its sentry and archontic guardian. The political point that Dr Pinheiro's archive then makes is in its active interruption of the state run postal order in Afrikaans, the postal dream of the apartheid state and the interruption of its cultural competence as archive, sending itself out in the fantasy of arrival and confirmation of its address: one that guarantees purity and efficiency from its own to its own.

Pinheiro intervenes, at first inadvertently, and begins to construct an alternative history to the one that is projected by the apartheid state that continues to self-presume as efficient, saving the letters and their stories from the spectral violence of the 'purgatory for lost mail' and the Calvinist fiery and absolute finality of 'the incinerator' (128). In his incompetence in terms of the purity of an Afrikaans

linguistic map, at the point where the authorities were creating a series of white-only Afrikaans citadels, there is the creation of spaces of alternative and potential transformation. Even as these letters register positions of relative white privilege, they illustrate its unevenness and its redundancy, the fragility of its assumed cultural dominance. An ironic distance opens between the apartheid system's supposed stability, and its haphazard random elaborations that are based on the illogic that founds racial supremacy (Dubow, 1995; Vladislavić, 2010b).

Pinheiro, the Portuguese speaker from Mozambique, taken inside, to the heart of machinations of responsibility for the postal dream, is not a guarantor of state-sponsored cultural competence as it is conducted in Afrikaans. He interrupts the very process of potential interruption, the fragility of a system based on oppressive power and exclusion, of temporalities that cross histories of the inception of justificatory structures, intimately connected to location – to geopolitical realities and their construction of identities. The correspondences involved in the Afrikaans postal principle are broken, made redundant. It is, though, a double negative – a deeply ambivalent space, as the mailman is himself dislocated, de-authorized.

The postal-political coordinates of the Pinheiro archive are involved in the mythology of the postal dream that Dr Pinheiro operates by interrupting. The myth of the fantasy of uninterrupted projected arrival, with the letter's archival relay entrusted to the relay between postbox and postman, sorter and letterbox, nonetheless remains tied to the apartheid state. The letters are withdrawn from political, national service, but they are also removed from their personal capacity, the possibility of their affect. The relationships carried by the enveloped material become suspended in Pinheiro's act of resistance, also an act of possession, and his ironic narrative of a disturbed 'posterity' (cf. Stewart, 1993; and Dilworth, 2003). In effect, we watch the operation of a kind of inadvertent censor, as Dr Pinheiro removes letters from their destinal and intersubjective possibilities, enacting the drama of intercepted meaning production, enclosed in the very political and ideological circumstances of its own making. Pinheiro's removal of letters emphasizes how vulnerable the teleological movements of the postal dream's system of origin and arrival are; its weaknesses are doubly exposed, as it is

undermined from within.

Vulnerable in his role allotted to him in the mythology of the postal dream, Pinheiro makes the postal dream doubly vulnerable to fracture and mistrust. The sealed stagnant space of the dead letter office is displaced to be replaced, relocated and given new life in terms of meaning production and ownership. Dead in light of their non-arrival, their messages truncated, their correspondences broken, this archive signals the gaps in the political and ideological closure of the apartheid system, and the inadvertent creation of spaces of alternative and potential transformation. Dr Pinheiro's dead letter archive critically points up the system's instrumental logic, of the telos of the uninterrupted delivery of the postal dream, and the anxieties of interminable interruption that haunt it, with its attendant histories and cultural memory formations. In the maintenance of a South African archive, created in a displaced Johannesburg home, its own postal politics are indivisible from its history. This is not activism, but an act of survival; Dr Pinheiro can only inadvertently intervene. What, then, can this alternative archive communicate in terms of its sending out? Does this create a viable alternative, or a mimesis?

In the period of the new South Africa and the public, state undertaking for Truth and Reconciliation, these 'dead' letters take life in an alternative postal politics, that interrogates the desire for a publicly articulated, confessional spectacle as the constitutive process of the new national consciousness. Norie Neumark (2005: 6) articulates the vulnerability of the envelope as synecdoche for the vulnerability of the postal relay: '[as] containers, envelopes fold inside into outside, public into private. They are an affective and material point of contact – part closing and barrier, part opening – a site at which the public and private fold into one another'. Holding out the 'promise of uncertainty', they represent both threat of vulnerability and guardian of privacy. The discrete pocket of the letter's envelope works to support the narratorial interstitiality, temporal and spatial, that the epistolarity of the letter form bolsters.

As 'Dead Letters' draws to a close, Neville watches as Mrs Pinheiro slices open the dead letters for him, and envisions the lives that come tripping out of them: '[F]ree

at last, stretching their limbs and cracking their joints, they began to tell their stories...an unbroken line of creatures delighted to suck air into their lungs and born to speak' (131). A release of captives, of embodied stories, reborn, they take space, participating in the geography of the Pinheiro's sedate Johannesburg garden, out of place and out of time, doubly anachronistic in the new South Africa. Self-reflexively commenting on the book's participation in postal processes, using the letter form emphatically, the lyrical flourishes of this section disturb the otherwise broadly realist frame of the novel, taking flight in the spaces and sites of Neville's first-person narrative, tapping into the 'darker vein of magic' Vladislavić sees running through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: 'a space in which people were brought to life or laid to rest in the rituals of storytelling' (2013c).<sup>64</sup>

The afterlives of the dead letters are impressed as those of permanent displacement, permanently suspended in, and as, unrealised narratives, unrelentingly unfinished stories of a violent apartheid past *in situ* in the garden arrangement of the collected jokey post-boxes that make up the Pinheiro cultural history narrative to which they, very privately, now belong. The first letter the Widow Pinheiro slices open unfolds a 'prison cell, a small bare room with walls the same pale green as the envelope' (130): the body she smooths out of its pale green cell is 'damp' and 'bloodied.... [A]s he held out his bound wrists and made to speak, she closed him between her palms like a paper lantern and slipped the envelope back in the pack' (130). As the intersubjective and cultural summons of South African letters and the epistolary relationship emerges, Vladislavić's comment that they construct 'lives' and 'worlds' is germane to the temporal-spatial modality of the collection: as these worlds are absorbed into the collection's orbit, they are vulnerable to the sensitivities involved in their assemblage together and their potential retransmission, re-opening and re-sending out.

Multiple, existing in the many times of their readings, projected and actual, Widow

---

<sup>64</sup> Vladislavić has spoken of his admiration of Antjie Krog's writing on this subject (2000). He had a close relationship to *Country of My Skull*, editing it for Random House South Africa (see Krog, 2006), and was distressed to find the experimental, genre defying fictional digressions of her text excised from the edition re-edited for the US market (see correspondence held in the archives at NELM, Grahamstown).

Pinheiro's openings also summon a series of inviolable 'inside' spaces, through the maintenance and fixing of parameters involved in the conventions of the letter form, creating 'outsides' of exclusion, secrecy, misdirection, arbitrary censorship. As Altman identifies, the epistolary, in 'integrating the act of reading into the fiction... constitutes an internalizing action that blurs the very distinctions that we make between the internal and external reader' (1982: 112). The positioning of the reader in terms of the letter stresses the slippage of what demarcates, encloses and boundaries the inside, as well as the continual fracturing of the public face of 'official' discourse. This troubling of boundaries involves us as the reader of the letter, which is always destined for another and keeps open 'the function of the letter's dual potential for transparency (portrait of soul, confession, vehicle of narrative) and opacity (mask, weapon, event within narrative)' (Altman, 1982: 186).

Our 'reading' of what Neville's mother calls 'Pinheiro's ark' (128) is indirectly filtered through narrative description, further abstracting the 'real' lives they contain, discomfiting the distance between 'artist' and passive recipient, or witness, enacting the drama of textual production and consumption under the strangely distorted political and ideological circumstances of its making. We do not 'see' the letters, except in Neville's lyrical description of their embodied contents. This sense of voyeuristic involvement internalizes the reader position to the narrative itself and therefore evokes an uncomfortable familiarity. This discomfort is further supported by the familiar space set up by the reliability of the use of the conventional letter form, vividly impressing the cultural shock that the TRC brought to the complicity meted out by the silences of the apartheid state. Neville's imagining and ekphrastic, snapshot rendering of the contents of the dead letters strips them of their historical particularity whilst opening lines of communication to their written moments, raising a series of ethical questions in terms of the place of the artist, in visualisation and in the creation of 'story'.

The letter traverses both the public and the private, is intimately predicated on the need for an audience, and the guarantee of the postal system is open to subversion, subject to misdirection, non-arrival, public airing and misconception. Can these worlds ever end, or arrive at their destination? Can they do anything but remain



redundant, truncated messages, stripped of their relations, of their intended meaning in the world, forms of temporal excess without destination, without development, trapped in a continuous past-present, enclosed and silenced? The crossing of the private and the public that is so characteristic of epistolarity, alongside the ruptures of the narrative as other voices fold out their lives to take first-person narrative possession through the space of their letters, disturb the novel's internal spaces. In Vladislavić's own terms, '[w]orlds do fold out of them, lives fold out of them' (qtd. in Law-Viljoen, 2011: 356). How, the novel asks, can these proliferating narratives, the sadness and redundancy of their available spaces, for their 'unfolding lives', and their lack of destination under apartheid rule, be anything but debris, excess? Do they have a right to be responsibly processed, the right of the recuperative exposure of the public and the politically altered state space?

When Neville goes back to the Pinheiro's house after a break in contact with Mrs Pinheiro, he finds it empty and is shown round by the estate agent with a 'rainbow nation' sales patter. Neville is left with his memory of the archive, as we are left with it in the pages of *Double Negative*, raising further questions for the boundary between the private and the public in an era facing the archival processes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Where can this kind of information go in a period that questions order to re-write outdated institutional practices? And what of the fabric of Neville's mother's letters that helped keep the shape of a country in a self-exiled young man's heart? What place does this have in the new South Africa?

### **Legacy, misplacement and destinal post-apartheid**

In the envelope of the novel itself and its more sustained realist bracketing sections, these proliferating questions raised by 'Dead Letters' are further complicated as Neville 'inherits' the letter collection and the custodianship of its 'ark', the responsibility for its ongoing life. Its series of multiple handlings, addresses, writings and re-writings, and its multiply reconfigured history, moves into the 'post-letter era' in section three of the novel, 'Small Talk'. Set late in the first decade of the 2000s, the affective contact point of envelopes are now absent from communications, which are completed at speed via email and cell phone, in new and concatenating citizen archives (see Azoulay, 2011), enabled by teletechnology and its global reformulation

of more traditionally circumscribed, bounded spaces. During a meeting between Neville and a young journalist, blogger, and tweeter, Janie Amanpour, 'not exactly a 'born-free' but...not a child of apartheid either' (175), who is researching an article on Neville as an upcoming art photographer of note, Neville shows Janie his collections: the intensely personal, interiorized everyday fragments of his Black Magic chocolate box – "'cool'", she quips, "'like Forrest Gump except all the chocolates have been scoffed'" (174); and Dr Pinheiro's arrested, closed and complete dead letter collection that has come into his possession.

Reassuring her the archived letters were given to him "'a long time ago'", and that it has 'never been clear who the authorities are in this case' (175), Janie views the static objects with their franked, stamped, precisely dated and recalcitrant envelopes in an age of globalized digital correspondence. Her interview with Neville pushes through a range multi-layered and fluid interactions between text and screen, enhanced by the complex layers of tele-media, which she utilizes to record and relentlessly curate her own interactive and performative narrative, highlighting the anachronistic materiality of the deathly endstopped objects in front of them. As they go on to discuss the archive, what Neville's 'next project' for the dead letters, conceptually or ethically, remains unclear: he talks about the randomized potentialities of delivering them to their original destinations, emphasizing the possibility that these addresses may no longer exist in the restructuring and transformation of South Africa's post-apartheid urban spaces; he considers photographing the letterboxes that are their ultimate and intended destinations: "No ways, not good enough", is Janie's flattening response (176).

Her response to the letters challenges Neville directly on ethical and aesthetic grounds (176). Janie wants their contents and the lives they represent to be memorialized appropriately, but to be contained in that space of the publicly available story. The weight of the letters, as material products, loaded with their old, unread stories, enveloped by their fantastic collective narrative of the archive itself, propels them and Neville into a heavy and unwanted past for Janie, perpetuating an aesthetic of suffering from an unethical history that has little function in her now: "it's time to move on" (177). For Neville, the letters are unfinished business:

uncomfortable about violating their private worlds, he still believes they deserve action. Neville stresses the structural elements of the letters' suspended status, the sealed-in autonomy of the private world of their collective identity as doubly unrecoverable in the postal dream of the apartheid state apparatuses, and therefore respect for their 'small, messy lives' that their multiple, destinal failures preserve (174). Janie's desire is for revelation and reconstitution, for the personal recuperation of untold truths: '[Y]ou never know the lives people have lived until you ask, and asking is an obligation' (177).

There is a conflict in the custody of the inherited collected materials, between the durability of the word and the disposability of their writing surfaces, the political implications inherent in the ways the collection accretes meaning, and the coupling of care with the power over their possible destinal arrival. In a later email to let Neville know her initial impressions have been posted on blog, she accuses him of 'making them up':

So the ethical question – Whose letters? – yields to an aesthetic one – How convincing are they? Well done on clearing that hurdle. I picture you bent over your bench like a monk, with a stack of antique stationery under your fist and an old airmail sticker on the tip of your tongue, stuff you've been hoarding for ever and at last have a use for. Pretending to be someone you're not, inventing signatures for your alter egos, making up weird handwritings and breaking English into little pieces. (191)

As Janie and Neville imaginatively project their curation of the collection in antagonistic ways, the series of narrative pockets, the little formal envelopes that letters represent, delivered to the reader by the body of the novel, point up the ethics of representation and storytelling in a locally conceived frame. The postal economy of Neville's collections remains situated in the power and authority of state-run systems of communication *and* the ethics of having to operate in a wider geopolitical system as South Africa moves onto an increasingly globalized world platform.

Epistolarity places *Double Negative* in a context of reception that insists on a continued negotiation and interrogation of the post-apartheid space, the impact of what is actually 'seen' and heard and/or what may be 'hidden' and silenced,

questioning, *as we read, how we read* the construction of texts and their histories, memories, spaces, texts as they are made. Collected epistolary spaces illustrate *Double Negative* as a doubly resistant text: resisting a legacy of apartheid by incorporating it into available spaces of resistance, into available potential sites taken or stolen now, and complicating those spaces, refusing a self-referential space of liberalism. Letter archives, in the novel, are suspended within a particularly located politics of resistance by remaining just outside of its available appeals in address – the slitting open of the vulnerable envelope to watch the ordinary lives come tumbling out; the arrogance of the postal principle and its choice of what it chooses to construct to send out; the ‘violence of the archive itself, *as archive, as archival violence*’ (Derrida, 1995: 12; stress original).

Referencing the launch interview (2010: 347-349) cited at the opening of this part of the thesis (‘Collectors: suspended custodianship’), through epistolarity and Neville’s letter collections, the difficulties of authority and cultural production are drawn in relation to white political identity, from or in relation to South Africa’s longer history and personal, even idiosyncratic versions of cultural memory. In the economy of epistolarity that ‘Dead Letters’ sets up, it is the maternal line, the mother’s letters that arrive at their destination: the idea of literary authority, specifically masculine literary authority, is, in a move that echoes throughout the novel, simultaneously evoked and displaced. Keying into a European literary history and the historically ‘feminine’ role of the epistolary writer, this also signals the simultaneous presence and exhaustion of the chauvinism of apartheid, the disturbance of filial understanding and the displacement of legacies, powerfully referenced in the metaphor of ‘death’, in a post-apartheid context where ‘fathers’ and father figures delineate complex lines of affiliation and belonging, choice and inheritance. *Double Negative* draws attention to the constructedness of South African histories as they move into the future, a space that leaves apartheid behind but must deal with its legacy now. We also see the potential Pinheiros, Auerbachs, and Nevilles that are behind our own cultural relays, gatekeeping the interactions from and between writers and readers.

Furthermore, we are written to by the novel. As with the invitation to competitively

proofread Tearle's multiply constituted texts, in the postal inheritances of *Double Negative*, the act of reading is dramatized. We are then called to participate in the specifically intersubjective way that Vladislavić's epistolarity suggests. The postal collections unfold a picture of the difficulties of political activism and positions available to white South Africans over the period that *Double Negative* covers and we are implicated in the ethics that it indicates. In writing this novel, Vladislavić sends out the site of privilege in contemporary South African cultural production to an open destination in the present tense of reading, the possibility of returning to sender the paradoxes of loss and authority in the white, male, English-speaking writer's position, an interrogation of the relationships between the written word and the authority to speak, to make of other's texts and surfaces of inscription archive, to collect and preserve home, somewhere between suspension, inaction, and narrativizing collected histories, complicating these spaces anew.

### **Proliferating containment: excessive address**

In each novel looked at through this section of the thesis, parallel postal archive-collections write into and comment on the other, performing an excess of their own address, refusing straightforward access to the apartheid past and bringing its ethical import into the present of South Africa's 'new' national space. Tearle's documentary 'System of Records' feeds the neurotic anxiety that saturates its creative remaking in 'The Proofreader's Derby'; Neville's Black Magic collection, his mother's carefully curated quotidian alternatives to the mainstream apartheid news, vies uneasily with the ethics surrounding the questions of the cache of dead letters, placed in his hands only through a series of misdirections. Documentary, archival, and 'authentic' small stories begin to cross-contaminate into the murky ethics of ownership and fictionalisation, of responsible handling, of care and authority, and of sending out to the vagaries of dispatch.

Through their destinal possibilities and associated topographical constructions, the collections in focus address their particular place and time but through the recognition of a wider geographical network of other places and addresses on which that place constitutively depends. Multi-located, the arc of the discourse of epistolarity as it is applied to that of the collection is, then, historical and spatial,

archival and geopolitical. Intervening into the book through these excessive addresses, these postal text collections dramatize the space of the book as multiply constituted. Strategies which ask us to recognize their antecedents, while not fully exposing their content but enveloping them in the possibilities of fictional prose, invite and involve us directly in the politics of the creative act by which they are made. This negotiation of the written text, and the book, the negotiation of cultural ownership and the difficulties of aestheticization in a culture of witness, intervenes into the self-fulfilling circularity of the postal dream at the narrative present of the coming into being of the newly conceived nation-state, and South Africa's entry into 'global' neoliberal democracy. Into the space, then, of the 'post-'

The 'private' texts of these collections, letters and the fragments that have a postal structure and elements of epistolarity, connect acts of ordering, classifying and categorizing – the construction of discourse – with acts of writing which support and constitute a performance of self. To look more specifically at the epistolarity and postal politics in the correspondence between 'truth' and 'fiction', history and narrative, and of self-constructions available in the postal-form in these novels is to encounter the relay of desire and how it influences content, signalling the performative constructed nature of the political project of the archive, bound as it is to the dominance of the nation-state i.e. what comes *in*, and how these constituents affect the writing of interiority, what is written and dispatched *out*. The archive and the letter intersect in ways that begin to reach for the fragmented 'truth' of both story and what exceeds it: each discrete item simultaneously 'stuff' and 'process', behaving as noun and verb, beyond their collector-inheritors' handling, querying processes of storying, history and knowledge, and what is history, literature, archive and text, undoing associated epistemological topographies.

Simultaneously, the book as a product evokes practices of this very demarcation, particularly with the demands for truth and historical reclamation in the South African situation of the collected sections of the narrative present. Both asserting and deconstructing these epistemological markers, Vladislavić's postal collections illustrate the role of ideology in organizing and curating belated, inherited material. Through their exploration of both the colonial and apartheid contexts, from which

their archival sources emerge, damning themselves despite, and because of, their ordinariness and intimacy.

By setting the disruptive generic interventions of these postal-collections at the time of the ANC's move to state-power and the establishment of the TRC, thereby stressing the changing conceptions of the nation-state's reliance on history as a national archive and its imperative for refiguration (cf. Hamilton et al., 2002), 'The Proofreader's Derby' and the 'co-authored' collections that envelope the 'Dead Letters' of *Double Negative*, request alternative ways of reading the archive for and of the 'New' South Africa. This is a new set of addresses for a map that can be non-totalizing and exceed binary classification, and that can intervene into the legitimizing dominance of the archive as a postal system inscribed in Western civility with its determinations through a history of imperialist domination. Receiving a response to the sending out of these alternatives necessitates a continuity between the receiving and sending positions, which in the state of transition to the New South Africa and its necessity for the discovery of 'truth' for the national project of reconciliation is incomplete, still in process. Intersecting this 'story', the dream of the 'postal archive' and licensing the political leveraging potential of multi-layered counter-postings may be possible, but it is fraught. By opening the definitions of the archive and its postal formation through the spatio-temporally locating material surfaces of the letter, as bound by the collection and its shifting sets of imagined addresses, Vladislavić's postal-collectors articulate its profligate possibilities of meaning (Brothman, 1993).

The figurations of arrested postal politics within these novels suspend their cultural privilege and open questions of cultural ownership and liberal hegemony. To return to the questions of ownership, privilege, and belonging that the cited interview raises and with which I opened this second part of the thesis, the discourse of the letter and the ways that it accretes its meanings within the hermetic worlds of collections Vladislavić addresses them into, dramatizes intervention through the bounds of the book, opening its authority and its own address to alternative possibility. Tearle and Lister's multiply addressed postal collections illustrate an ongoing concern with sites of privilege and problematic aspects of ownership, text,

fiction, and cultural memory. Bracketed, enveloped, and rearranged by others, passing through different contexts and handlings, these text collections extend Vladislavić's experiment with the 'small' local text to question the national address of authorial ownership as they are narrativized and re-made – as they are written. Passing through the arcs and loops of the post, the 'post-', and its 'dream', the fragments of meaning the collections preserve demonstrate the teletechnological geographies of sets of imagined communities and their negotiations with various forms of power, as they are read, received, and re-created. In the processes of becoming text, these postal collections not only dramatize processes of the production of print, but the multiple correspondences involved in its dissemination, reception, and consumption, querying the aesthetic process and suspending the authorial role as the book is sent out, dispatched as object and product, intersecting concerns explored in part III.



### Part III. Collecting: exhibiting

#### Visual culture and literary markets: 'breakout' international texts

This part of the thesis focuses on two of Vladislavić's 'breakout' international texts into the (anglophone) global literary market, *Portrait with Keys* (2006a) and *Double Negative*. The former was published by Portobello Books in the UK (2006b, and 2007a), and by Norton in the US (2009a); the latter, initially published as part of a joint art-book project with photographer David Goldblatt, *TJ/Double Negative* (Contrasto, 2010), was released as a standalone novel by Umuzi in 2011(a), and taken up by grassroots, independent UK-based publishers And Other Stories in 2013. Each of these long-form prose works take up the sustained experiment with the accretive potentials of the 'small' text across Vladislavić's oeuvre. Concerned with how the collection and collecting can access memory in ways that continue to negotiate the unfinished events of colonial and apartheid histories in South Africa, these texts also figure curation and the gallery or exhibition context as a creative praxis and mode of writing. Additionally, read as specifically 'curated' books, they provide comment on locality and the conditions of collectability in a changing literary marketplace.

Each of Vladislavić's texts I look at here challenge the international literary market and its authorial designations as they travel. Examples of Vladislavić's books as spaces containing multiple modes of cultural production which are narratively driven by their multi-modal interdiscursivity, they are both explicitly concerned with the visual. Sections of *Portrait* were produced and published as discrete projects in collaboration with visual artists and photographers. *Double Negative*, made in response to David Goldblatt's retrospective collection of Johannesburg photos in *TJ* (2010), becomes, through its reworking of the interstices between fiction writing and visual art, a landing space for previous projects that have had a similar 'joint' genesis. Through this creative re-making and unique mode of working

with and through the cultural and aesthetic material of Johannesburg, Vladislavić's role and responsibilities as author-writer and cultural commentator of his worldly 'place', are *displaced*, suspended in relation to the multiply figured presences of these other modes. Following the development of this authorial position, attended to throughout the thesis, in this section I identify another series of textual strategies by which the author-figure steps back in relation to the cultural products of others, observing the textual traces in each of the different locations and moments of their re-production contexts.

I discuss the international marketing concerns of *Portrait with Keys* primarily through Sarah Brouillette's innovative study, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007), which incorporates authors who anticipate the diasporization of their own readership. Brouillette draws attention to the legitimating strategies of an industry that commodifies 'the postcolonial' for Western consumption through the authors' recoding of it. Success in the postcolonial marketplace so conceived demands that texts *are* particular and local but in ways that are required to speak persuasively to the global. Authors are positioned as increasingly self-conscious participants in their own negotiation of the penetrating commercialising logic that would otherwise subsume their production under a commodity sign of the 'exotic' (cf. Huggan, 2001; Casanova, 2004; Graham, 2016).

The ways that Vladislavić's novel *Double Negative* takes up its 'worldliness' in its instances of publication demonstrates the recent shift from the postcolonial towards global literary market concerns. Whilst the marketing of the later novel echoes that of the earlier *Portrait with Keys*, in the problematic groupings of a unidirectionally applied, formally recognisable postcolonial locality and authorial self-coding in a competitive 'world republic of letters', *Double Negative's* production context also evidences a movement towards a more decentralized post-national, world-systemic perspective, and a self-conscious leveraging of the kinds of cooperative network analyses of the field found in discussions of a world literary

approach, where 'core', 'periphery' and 'semi-periphery' are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality.<sup>65</sup>

In the belated entry of the South African book market to the global context, a local market which developed from a robust, largely oppositional publishing industry under apartheid despite its history of cultural isolation, participation on these terms and through these strategies of accommodation comes to be complex. Where the dominance of the 'global project' acts to subvert the local and the desire for equality pressurizes for conformity to a powerful norm of dominant cultural recognition, the construction of the 'postcolonial national' or 'postcolonial South African author' as product is problematized on geopolitical terms. Firmly located in Johannesburg, but with an openness that makes them aesthetically 'worldly', Vladislavić's texts perform a translocality and transnationalism that troubles the market requirement for the kinds of 'signed authorship' that constitutes the 'national paratext' by which South African authors have come to be read and valued (Brouillette, 2007), and which persists in the changing designations of altering 'world' markets.

In the range of working methods Vladislavić employs that mitigate marketing categories, alongside the registration of these market anxieties so cogently analysed by Brouillette, there is also evidence of what Sudesh Mishra describes as the 'elsewhere' spaces of creative writing, those 'not quite penetrated by commodity logic' (2006: 110). As Vladislavić mobilizes modes which exceed or side-step the conventions of 'the literary', there is the possibility of an authorial self-positioning that defines itself in relation to its own authority. This troubles the perception of

---

<sup>65</sup> Drawing from Wallerstein and Franco Moretti amongst others, Graham, Niblett, and Deckard argue that the 'world-literary', hyphenated, might be a useful term through which to think of postcolonial literature's entanglement in the capitalist world-system, acknowledging the global literary to be 'one, yet unequal' (2012). Alongside this useful materialist conception of the 'world' in the world literary, consolidating positions, such as Saskia Sassen's on the overlapping epistemologies of global relations (2000; 2013), or the 'minor transnationalisms' of Lionnet and Shih's 2005 edited volume, where minor-minor relations reveal a complex and heterogeneous set of flows and interactions, emphasize the significance of South-South relations. Vermuelen and Helgesson's *Institutions of World Literature* (2016) also reformulates conceptions of the postcolonial literary marketplace to acknowledge decentralized cultural and power dynamics in contemporary literary flows. This 'world' and the worlding of the postcolonial literary informs my usage of it in the South African context through Brouillette's analysis, particularly in terms of the ways in which Vladislavić's prose-collection texts in focus throughout the thesis cross and interlink across these formulations and kinds of market positionings.

authors forced to 'sell out' to the determinants of the global market, to multinational corporate publishing houses who then manipulate that work into an exotic 'postcolonial brand' for niche sales (Fraser, 2008: 185-6; Brouillette, 2007). There is, in Vladislavić's fluid cross-generic experimentation, a flexibility and openness that move beyond a 'top down' approach to postcolonial literature where the postcolonial book is seen as a product of the intervention of overseas publishing conglomerations, but that is vulnerable to and must negotiate the power structures involved in dominant world literary markets and commercial possibility.<sup>66</sup>

### **'Return' to the Real: writing the 'now' and the documentary gesture**

In her influential 2004 article, Sarah Nuttall sets out to theorize the 'now' of South African literary-cultural production. Citing Vladislavić's Hillbrow in *The Restless Supermarket* (2001) as depicting 'a city that has become fluid to itself' (745), Nuttall's project seeks its own ethical demand for renewal in the possibilities of what she later terms 'a politics of the emergent' (2006). This is a politics which lies somewhere between our relation to the past and its vestigial traces and the aspirations of the possible, the 'fictions with which people fill the future' (732). I stress the significance of the fictional for this ethical and political fluidity and the 'now' as it develops through and into the latter article's publication date, in 2006, as it is the same year and cultural moment as the first publication of the 'creative non-fiction', *Portrait with Keys*. For the purposes of the exploration in this part of the thesis, this date takes on significance as I place it in correspondence with the contemporary debate about the ethical and political validity of fiction writing, particularly the novel form, in the manifest violence and persistent inequalities of post-apartheid South African realities. This debate surfaced most prominently in South African literary letters in 2010, the year of the first publication of Vladislavić's most recent novel to date, as part of the joint *TJ/Double Negative* project (with David Goldblatt).

Taking as its title and point of departure a panel discussion at the 2010 Cape Town International Book Fair, featuring the pre-eminent 'creative non-fiction' writers

---

<sup>66</sup> See Fraser (2008: 164-188), whose nuanced discussion of this problematic from a different perspective of readership and reception begins to dismantle binarization and hierarchies but still maintains the power of the constructed marketplace, albeit a rapidly shifting one.

Antony Albeker, Rian Malan, and Jonny Steinberg, Hedley Twidle's 2012 article, "In a Country where You couldn't Make this Shit up?": Literary Non-Fiction in South Africa', discusses the 'now' of South African writing in terms of the contemporary rise of non-fiction and its ability to 'exceed the novelist's wildest imaginings' (emphasis in original: 6). Summing the sweeping gestures of prominent South African literary and cultural debate, perhaps, he suggests, demanded by the end of a decade, Twidle goes on to reiterate that the repeated claims of fiction in South Africa are being 'outstripped, outdone or overpowered by non-fiction' (2012: 5). Both the fictionalized memoir of *Portrait* and the reality/realism play that is *Double Negative* provide and complicate a registration of their contemporary conditions and for white anglophone South African literary fiction-writing. They each negotiate their 'nows' through a registration of their distinct curatorial modes, and as they each refract the collection's multi-temporal, multi-sited imaginary in its conceptual movements between the material and its re-narrativization.

Debates about the purchase or claims of fiction in the violent inequality of the post-millennial, post-apartheid South African 'now' registered at this point through a number of critical forums, with attention persistently drawn to the viability of literature to the present moment. In his contribution to the 2011 compendium text, *SA Lit: Beyond 2000*, 'The end of 'South African' literary history? Judging 'national' fiction in a transnational era', Leon de Kock returns to the tongue-in-cheek provocation posed by his keynote at Wits University colloquium in 2005 entitled 'Does South African literature still exist?'. Self-consciously revisiting the question in relation to the mechanics of the literary prize and the necessity of authorial 'celebrity' as national sign, or paratexts on Brouillette's terms, the progression of De Kock's thesis points up the ways that changes to the local literary field and its hungry embrace of its 'larger membership of 'world' literature' (2011: 26) as the legislative and symbolic restrictions of the apartheid era were dismantled after 1990, occurred at the very point the 'globe' became postnational.

De Kock's is not a lone voice in drawing a decline of the literary novel alongside the socio-economic implications of the capitulation to the global market and the cultural changes that no longer require the oppositional 'political novel' post-apartheid. In

the range of voices participating in the contemporary debate about this issue hosted by the online book pages of *The Sunday Independent*, South Africa, Imraan Coovadia has gone so far as to draw the South African novel into an explicitly economic frame, likening the two by suggesting that both the South African economy and the South African novel suffer an overreliance on overseas models and markets and a corresponding distance from everyday realities on the ground (2012: np). There is a correlative issue and instability in these debates in the relationship between information and reception, of what might constitute reliable, ethical purchase, translated across to writers and the public/s they write toward. In the rise of the global virtualization of media, these issues cede into questions of the unevenness of the 'democratization' of access, particularly in a country beset by the legacies of an apartheid education system in its entry and participation in a radically uneven global system. Degrees of tension emerge between the local and the global in South Africa's participation in a 'postnational' literary market

During the 2010 Cape Town Book Fair discussion, Duncan Brown spoke of South Africa's national site as one in 'perpetual transition', acknowledging the rise of the creative non-fiction genre as, concomitantly, *the* genre of South African writing, making its meanings 'at the unstable fault line of the literary and the journalistic, the imaginative and the reportorial'. In a later published conversation between Brown and Antjie Krog about '*the* genre', Krog cites Vladislavić's 'fictional *Portrait with Keys*' as 'non-fiction about a part of Johannesburg' (2011: 57). At the moment of these debates, *Double Negative* was published in South Africa (2010), Vladislavić's most recent novel and his first (unambiguous) return to the form after *Restless* in 2001.<sup>67</sup> Both texts, *Portrait* and *Double Negative*, mobilize and exhibit the documentary and historical gesture that is the visual media on which their writing builds, as they also emphatically commit to aestheticization and to the possibilities afforded by fiction. Both micro-local and worldly texts, they register a manifestly uneven and violent, globalized Johannesburg and disappointment in the post-apartheid promise. Both, in their narrative strategies and experiments with their

---

<sup>67</sup> The potential ambiguity of Vladislavić's use of the novel form comes from the debate surrounding *The Exploded View* (2004b) and the generic classification of its four interconnected stories. The debate is cited in relation to its limits around the possibilities of fiction for South Africa's contemporary moment further below.

various mobilizations of form, slip the categories and terms on which they are defined as signs for the contemporary South African moment.

On these canny reflexive terms, Vladislavić's persistent questioning of the narrator-author function, the identification or non-identification with his narrators/focalizers, evades a wholesale taking up of the national authorial role. This strategic effacement has long been noted in relation to the slippage of his generic play, which has marked his writing as particularly responsive to its South African contemporary moment and literary 'now'. Nuttall (2011: 329) cites the controversial exclusion of Vladislavić's 2004 text, *The Exploded View*, from the 2005 South African Sunday Times Fiction Award, on the grounds that it was 'not a novel', as well as the generic ambiguity of *Portrait with Keys* (2006a). Vladislavić chose not to comment about *The Exploded View*'s exclusion from the prize initially, although in a later interview, he expressed his concerns about its inherent limiting gesture, not only for writing generally, but specifically in the historical moment the text emerges from: 'it closes down the possibilities of what fiction might be. And in a cultural moment, we in fact want to be sending the opposite message, of the endless and indefinable possibilities of what fiction can be' (qtd. in Miller, 2006: 139). In this especially local manifestation of what might constitute literary valuation, Vladislavić's statement illustrates the persistence of debates and sites regarding the spaces of art and the imagination, its liberal or radical possibilities, cultural ownership and power, and the restrictive determinism of the demands for moral, political responsibility in fiction writing in South Africa's still divided post-apartheid topos.

These issues are germane to my readings of *Portrait* and *Double Negative* as landing sites and new kinds of fictional 'exhibition texts' that illustrate new negotiations of the politics of the novelistic space. Vladislavić's approach to genre and generic categories is a playful resistant mode that defies categorization and emphasizes the openings of fiction, demonstrating a kind of mobility that appears to be less interested in traditional coherence and stable singular meanings that come from one reliable source, than a reflexive interrogation of the imposition of boundaries. This extends to his non-fiction work: in his commission by the David Krut Taxi Series to

write an essay on conceptual artist Willem Boshoff, Vladislavić asked if he could write a novel. Krut, 'predictably' said no, but nevertheless, Vladislavić 'came to the project with a very well-developed sense of Boshoff as a fiction' (2005d). Vladislavić has also said that he considers himself to have 'always been something of a realist', citing 'The Whites Only Bench' and 'Courage', both stories included in *Propaganda by Monuments & Other Stories* (1996a), as examples. 'Then again', he goes on to say, 'since publishing *Double Negative*, I've published *The Loss Library* and *A Labour of Moles*, which can hardly be accused of realism (and it is often an accusation)' (2013: np).

That Vladislavić's comment about realism's contested relationship to the literary sphere in South Africa and his own work is parenthetical is informative. Whatever 'accusations' may be levelled, of realist writing or otherwise, Vladislavić's experimental ranging across genre, and his favouring of collected, fragmentary forms of meaning confirms the ways in which his prose fiction has tended to avoid 'big', 'grand' or overtly political stories of the realist tradition, thereby resisting its resolutions and conclusions in its content (Rosenthal, 2011). For Vladislavić, this choice is often mirrored by form: in short story collections; novels that are not quite novel-like enough to be considered by the literary establishment as such (for example, *The Exploded View*); fragmentary 'marginal' writing (such as the collected fragments of *Portrait with Keys*); and evidenced in 'joint' work with architects, urbanists, photographers and artists (a group in which *Double Negative* sits), on experimental projects that typically seek to reframe the ways in which everyday life in South Africa is imagined and lived.<sup>68</sup>

The accretive elements and cross-referential processes between these various texts and their smaller inter- and intratexts plays with literary expectations and reiterates their accrual of meaning and contextual relations, a print-cultural memory game frequently played by Vladislavić (Rosenthal, 2011: np). This approach, evident through his oeuvre, reflects his distaste for offering 'explanations' of South Africa or

---

<sup>68</sup> Projects in this latter group might also include: *blank\_Architecture and After*, co-edited with Hilton Judin (1998); *Ponte City* (2014), produced with photographers Subotsky and Waterhouse; *Oblique*, with South African photographer Abrie Fourie (2012); and *Overseas*, with photographer Roger Palmer (2004), amongst others. See Reid and Graham, forthcoming 2017.



South African apartheid, although both are densely present throughout the work in such a way as to require considerable foreknowledge of their social and cultural contexts, in ways that require an engagement with and interrogation of the conditions of the post-apartheid space.

This reflects the turn to non-fictional modes of cultural engagement in this post-apartheid, postmillennial South Africa, in which Twidle sees a broader rise in the 'cultural industrialization of the real'. Twidle argues that it is precisely in what he terms the 'decompression' of the post-anti-apartheid moment (Kruger, 2002) that the South African literary imagination exhibits a marked return to 'the real – or at least the real's aura', to 'texts marked by topicality, immediacy, accountability and verifiability'. Significantly, Twidle goes on to characterize this as a return to *'responsibility'* – with its immediate ethical connotations but also more distant etymological echoes of response, or responsiveness to the contemporary moment' (9, emphasis in original).<sup>69</sup> South African fiction authors face both an ethical responsibility to respond to the 'reality' of the now and disappointments of the post-apartheid promise in a recapitulation to longstanding debates about the most appropriate formal response, debates noted in part I; in the postcolonial book market, there is a concomitant requirement to present themselves as a saleable brand within those market concerns. Simultaneously, in local terms, the viability of literature to the contemporary moment is in question, pushed to documentary concerns by the demands of its competing present.

In these observations about the South African literary in a world-literary system, Twidle is careful to avoid exceptionalizing South Africa on global terms. The rise of non-fiction in South Africa is situated as part of 'a wider, international turn toward a bewildering array of non-fictional forms', in what he diagnoses as a 'powerful sense of culture-wide exhaustion with the 'literary,' 'lyrical' or 'liberal' anglophone

---

<sup>69</sup> This 'contemporary moment' and its concomitant call for a 'real' response is critically inflected by a return to a constellation of critical-political discourses of social history and documentary practices associated with the postcolonial recuperative possibilities of history-from-below, intellectual currents and dialogues that marked apartheid South Africa's internationalized anti-apartheid movement from the universities through the 1980s, and which Vladislavić came into contact with via Ravan's flexing of the academic and literary bounds, and his participation in this as Ravan's Social Studies and Fiction Editor. See part I, ch.2, 'Ravan Press'.

novel' (2012: 15).<sup>70</sup> The fall of the 'literary' novel in the South African cultural imaginary, then, coincides with the rise of a global teletechnological 'new real'. Discussing the popularity or fashion for generic forms in terms of classifying writing within the programmatic system of international marketing and sales, Twidle cites *Portrait with Keys* as a paradigmatic contemporary example of the 'intensely literary histories and sensibilities' of works effaced under the marketing and trade classifications of 'non-fiction' (7).<sup>71</sup>

I will go on to discuss the vicissitudes of *Portrait's* classification on these terms in more detail below. I highlight Twidle's mention of Vladislavić in this analysis of the circulation of value in the contemporary South African marketplace here because, apart from an acknowledgement of *Portrait's* concerns with the South African 'now' as it circulates in a global market, Twidle's mention of Vladislavić's fictionalized memoir opens the terms of the debate onto a number of his significant insights: it is not that poststructuralist conceptions of the atrophying of the real has prompted a return to ways of recuperating it, at least not on the South African scene, but that aesthetic or literary narratives have been prompted to pursue this 'responsibly'; and that this pursuit, particularly in the shape of the creative non-fiction that has risen to dominate the South African literary field through the 1990s and into the 2000s, proceeds on the basis of a (re)turn to the avowedly Marxist social history and historians of the History Workshop in the 1980s at Wits University in Johannesburg, the monographs and books that Vladislavić edited in his first role at Ravan Press.

Twidle argues, and the papers in the special issue his article introduces attest, that the monographs produced in the intellectual climate at Wits were progenitors of a

---

<sup>70</sup> Twidle makes this observation following readings of Nuttall's 'Reality Hunger: The Way We Read Now' (10); Shields' polemic *Reality Manifesto* (11); and (11-12), Zadie Smith's 2008 *New York Review of Books* piece, 'Two Paths for the Novel' (November) on 'the future for the anglophone novel' and the dominance in the US market of 'lyrical Realism...the image of what we have been taught to value in fiction', as emerging from this story in the interpretive and market conditions of two contemporaneous books, Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (Pantheon) and *Remainder* by Tom McCarthy (Vintage). Twidle cites the reprinted version, 'Two Directions for the Novel' from Smith's 2009 essay collection, *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (71-2).

<sup>71</sup> Twidle pairs *Portrait* in this nexus with Antjie Krog's *Country of my Skull*, a text that Vladislavić edited for the South African and UK market, but whose US publisher, Broadway (2000), chose to employ an American editor for, excising the more lyrical, fictional 'digressions' of Krog's prose in their edition.

contemporary requirement for accountability. In Rob Nixon's words: 'the ambitions associated with history from below informed literary narratives about marginalized subcultures and ethnicities' (2012: 40). This cannot help but contour the parameters around the South African literary to a return to the earlier, materialist and revisionist, and specifically postcolonial market frame. It is from these parameters that my readings of the 'literary novel' *Double Negative* and the 'creative non-fiction' of *Portrait* will proceed, considering the strategies by which Vladislavić negotiates this call to responsibility. The ways his reflexive experiments with genre accrete meaning in their international reception recall their engagement with locality through allusions to the extratextual and means of production.

### **Generic Migration: 'exhibitioning' texts**

Equally significant for this part of my study is the confluence of the multi-modal, formal, and generic overlaps of Vladislavić's work as it appears through the writing in the two books in focus, and its comment on the histories and localities of literary designation in the texts' outward-facing trajectories and sensibilities. As part of his contribution to the special issue of *Safundi* prompted by Twidle's exploration, Rob Nixon picks up on a phrase used by Twidle, 'generic migration', who in turn takes up its usage following David Attwell and Derek Attridge's discussion of alternative models of literary influence in the development of South African literary culture in the *Cambridge History of South African Literature* (2012: 6-7). Attwell and Attridge's suggestion is that literary influence in South Africa, the communication between divided modes and spheres in segregationist conditions, did occur historically but in ways that have been neglected. In the contiguous but separate cultural environments under apartheid, the exchanges were channelled into forums not conventionally associated with literary history and its pursuit by literary historians.

This figuration of literary migration as specific to the demarcations and attempts at their bridging in the South African context is clearly persuasive in all three instances of its critical usage cited here – Twidle's in diagnosing the 'now' of South African literature, Attwell and Attridge's contemporary bridging possibility across South African literary history, and Nixon's resituation of the academy and social history to

the more available 'public' spaces of the literary. In each the migration is a movement of the literary: it is literature that migrates across its boundaries to other disciplinary and commercial shores. It is both a particularly localized (i.e. 'South African') response to the disappointment of the post-apartheid promise and the subsequent rise in the ethical demand on writers to write 'the now', 'news as news' (in Twidle's formulation), and the commercial conditions of the commodity as prescribed by a context of neo-liberal globalization.

Vladislavić's cross-category 'migrations' of form, genre, content, and modes of cultural expression speak to these concerns. What I will go on to explore in this part of the thesis is the ways that Vladislavić's tendency towards the collecting together of multiple texts and surfaces of inscription that are also intensely visual in *Portrait* and *Double Negative*, albeit held by the bounds of the relatively unitary and stable object of the book, can be figured as 'migratory' in a similar way. I am also interested in the ways in which these migrations are effaced in the conditions of desirability, or on the grounds of the collectability of these texts, and in the market terms of what constitutes an appropriately worldly South African *literary-fiction*, or a literary text that can be accommodated on both global and local terms. In their movement across the geopolitical histories and spaces that the discourses of these marketplaces constitute, these books enact a local commitment whilst remaining aesthetically open to the world.

*Portrait with Keys* (2006a) and *Double Negative* (2011a), have both contributed to the establishment of Vladislavić as a South African, postcolonial fiction writer of note. Both texts resonate with the concerns explored throughout the thesis – of collection, curation, and Vladislavić's non-collaborative collaboration – as they move firmly into the international literary marketplace and negotiate their access to its postcolonial, global systems. *Portrait with Keys* is a creative non-fiction text, made up of 138 numbered short texts, many produced in earlier 'joint' products with artists and photographers. It is focused on the experience of living and working in post-apartheid Johannesburg, narrated by a walker-writer, cannily identifiable as 'Ivan Vladislavić/Ivan/Vlad'. *Double Negative*, a novel written predominantly in a realist mode and produced in response to a body of photographs by eminent social

documentary photographer David Goldblatt, plays with the real and its fictionalisation through its characters, modes and genre switches, and investigations into the documentary status of photography in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa.

Both reference their contemporary moments of production clearly, and combine visual and textual culture as a mode by which they insist on a continued interrogation of the conditions that have dictated structural violence and social inequities in a detailed engagement with the complexities of the post-apartheid urban space. They contribute to the picture of Vladislavić as an author who is both firmly situated in contemporary South African realities and increasingly an international presence on the global literary stage. Yet, these texts resist strategies of accommodation in these markets so defined, and in ways that complicate the circulation and integrity of the book, particularly the novel, as representative of the South African 'real', contributing to revaluations of the reception contexts of Vladislavić's prose-fiction.

This is also more than the transitional movements of the literary-aesthetic as consolidating a deconstructive gesture towards South African social histories, or of pointing to those histories to expose the structures of silencing and dominance that persist in contemporary geopolitical experience. Although in both texts in focus, Vladislavić's gestures to 'generic migration' do cross the social and narrative ambitions of the specifically South African cultural product and the lines of responsibility that are drawn through the 'reality fiction' debates above, they disperse these links by referencing other 'reals', of pre-existing projects that Vladislavić has been involved in. Both texts are collections of this kind, offering different experiences of curated text, and both involve the politics and capital of collectability in the literary market. Each gather their internal interconnections, references, influences and intertexts, through aesthetic sensibilities, primarily visual; in their dispatch and sending out, these references permit 'destinal' disturbances in their postcolonial or world literary market designations. *Portrait's* strategies of flexing the bounds of the category of the literary, however, fail to land.

## **5. Travelling the Literary Marketplace: seeing the collectible in *Portrait with Keys***

Vladislavić has indicated that his ‘creative non-fiction’ text, *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked* (2006a), is not to be read for narrative (De Vries, 2006: np). Indeed, it both frustrates and subverts those readerly expectations as it appears to solicit and encourage them. Self-conscious of its own construction, comprised of 138 unnamed but numbered small text pieces, *Portrait’s* form indicates an acutely conscious, self-reflexive topography. With the text and its own overall geography made up of non-synchronous city ‘bits’, the spaces and geographies of *Portrait* are presented by the fragments’ rupturing and cohesive gestures, opening the ethical possibility in the spaces and gaps between. In our reading of and following around these multiple sites, there is the potential for its ‘possible city’ (Graham, 2008), the possibility of contiguous and changing relations, of new contextual arrangements and of a changed future. Yet for its openness, *Portrait* is a highly wrought, self-consciously ‘collected’ text. Vladislavić has commented on the process of writing *Portrait* as ‘more difficult’ than a novel, ‘because it’s more constructed...it’s a more constructed world because it’s so selective. It’s not a comprehensive picture of something, it’s a partial selective thing and that means the construction of it and trying to make it coherent and keep it all together is more demanding’ (2006c: np).

In *Portrait*, the 138 numbered but untitled fragments or ‘keys’ (which recall the curatorial diectics of the numbered fragmentary form of ‘Tsafendas’s Diary’, see part I), are organized by a range of paratextual means: the body of the text is arranged in three parts, with additional sections including notes and sources, acknowledgments, visual references, and an author’s note. Social discontinuities are registered by a conceptual and actual cartography, both of the city described, and of the narrator’s, and subsequently the readers’ journey through the book itself. In this text, that delineates the locality of Johannesburg in close detail, the fragmented form stresses *Portrait with Keys* as a whole as radically disjunctive in terms of temporality and location. It relates this disjunction to an intimate involvement in the politics of one’s

'place'. The narrator of *Portrait*, 'Ivan', is a walker-writer; the text a series of ambulatory observations travelling through contemporary Johannesburg.<sup>72</sup> Fragments range over actual and conceptual geographies, where the demands of 'taking a place', or constructing belonging, in the rapidly changing post-apartheid urbanity of Johannesburg are ambivalently constructed and maintained, observed and dismantled. Readers are asked both to follow this journey as it takes place, and are encouraged to construct their own ways of travelling through the text and the city it details. The social is marked through an embodied, spatial practice, walking through the city, and the experience of reading is akin to a mnemonic mapping.

In an additional and final section, 'Itineraries', the text is refigured as it ends, grouping the fragments into what Vladislavić terms an 'index [which] traces the order of the previously published cycles and suggests some other thematic pathways through the book' (2007a: 195);<sup>73</sup> directions, ways through, maps; suggestions for re-readings of the book's fragments that emphasizes their role, and the readers' own reorganizations of them, in knowledge and narrative production. Through these means, Vladislavić opens the conventional topography of the 'creative autobiography' and of the non-fiction category, emphasizing the transformation in the boundaries that map its form, as well as destabilizing conventional expectations of the form itself. This kind of 'generic migration', as I will illustrate, travels well in terms of identifiable market conventions of what can be recognized as a 'postcolonial literary', whilst keying into and complicating ideas of the literary 'touristic consciousness' that Brouillette identifies in her study (2007: 17-18).

In *Portrait* Johannesburg is 'no more than a mnemonic' (33), on which '[t]he township is written in longhand across the printed page of the white city' (64). Metaphors of space and of construction collide in linguistic forms shot through with materiality, markers of belonging in the city that regularly reference language and writing. The self-reflexivity evident in this idiomatic style registers a sense of accountability for South Africa's segregationist past, and anxieties about the

---

<sup>72</sup> I will refer to 'Ivan' to distinguish between Vladislavić, the writer of *Portrait with Keys*, and his creative non-fiction, semi-autobiographical narrator-construct.

<sup>73</sup> Further parenthetical references to page numbers from *Portrait* in this chapter are taken from this second Portobello Books edition (2007a), unless otherwise indicated.

possibility of navigation and travel through a city in change and in crisis. Markers of memory, of the past city, reveal its palimpsestic layers: the ‘pentimento’ and the ‘tomason’, terms from ‘the jargon of art history’ in Ivan’s description (89), are central to this end.

A ‘pentimento’, Vladislavić writes, ‘is a place where the painter ‘repented’ or changed his mind, revealed with the passage of time as the concealing paint ages and becomes transparent’ (89). This is exemplified by the creation, then whitewashing of a Ndebele mural painted on the side of a house in Ivan’s Johannesburg neighbourhood as the house is put up for sale. Interleaved by the layers of the text ‘keys’ that surround this particular narrative thread, Ivan witnesses and comments on the creation of the mural: in key ten (26-28), in which it is ‘bravely optimistic’ suiting ‘the early nineties perfectly’; its covering and ‘concealing’ in key 40 (60-61), by a man in white overalls, ‘hacking into the pattern, obliterating it with extravagant swipes of the roller’ (60); and his knowledge of the original Ndebele painting in key 66 (87-89), remaining ‘under a thick lemon-yellow skin’ as a ‘secret mural’ (88), always only a potential and personal pentimento.

Similarly, Ivan observes Johannesburg’s ‘tomasons’, a term ‘coined’ by Japanese artist Genpei Akasegawa to ‘describe a purposeless object found in a city street, [...] a thing that has become detached from its original purpose’ (163). These ‘peculiar, pointless’ things (162) observed on Ivan’s walks – a short pole in Roberts Avenue that is the subject of key 123, (162-164); or a Johannesburg speciality, the ‘tomason of access’, vanished gateways (174) overlaid by the stringent closures of increased security measures (key 131: 173-174) – surface ‘a hidden history of obsolescence’ in the city, ‘stumbl[ing] right out of the present’ on the ‘edges’ of Ivan’s neighbourhood (164). The seen and found material details provided by the city’s tomasons and pentimentos work together to anchor Ivan’s ‘fallible memory’ (89), a documentary process of the city that is at once both intimately personal and publicly verifiable: if the objects and fragments of the city that Ivan observes no longer remain in the same form, the form of critical practice does, a process that is termed



as 'a way of seeing and then seeing again' (89; cf. Poyner, forthcoming 2017).<sup>74</sup>

The openness and aestheticization evident in the leveraging of these terms exposes the 'writerly' experience of walking the city, with Ivan the embodiment of 'the latter-day *textual* flâneur' (Graham, 2008: 342).<sup>75</sup> Our narrator, Ivan's writer-walker 'texts' and intertexts, pentimento and tomason-led footsteps and views reflect a recognizably 'European' geography of seeing in his production of memorializing the city, if only, and significantly, to be refracted through the South African localities observed on his 'long poem of walking' (53). Significantly, this geography is both written through the text pieces that make up the book, and made available in their organisation, their placement in relation to each other. As part of this process of 're-seeing' through the specificities of Johannesburg, Vladislavić also insists on the material markers of locality and identity and revisits them in separate 'keys', impressing their structuring value whilst using them to interrogate material social change. Ivan's observations document an experience of a politically altered landscape that is also one of a city riven by crime and precarious existence drawn along new, though still exclusionary lines of socio-economics in the post-apartheid dispensation: the texts' organisation emphasizes continuity through the drawing of narrative threads across the time of its collected fragments and visual snapshots, and blurs the dominance of the single epistemological marker of the moment of change in 1994.

One of the central metonymic images in *Portrait* is that of the photo taken by a journalist from Sweden of Ivan's collection of keys (key 84: 122-123), and the text's advice on the 'first principle of key management...to separate working groups on interlocking rings' (122). Johannesburg is described as 'a frontier city, a place of

---

<sup>74</sup> In introducing the 'pentimento', Ivan discusses Lillian Hellman's book of the same name, in which she takes the process as 'a metaphor for the writing of memoir. The appearance of the original conception and the second though, superimposed within the same frame, is 'a way of seeing and then seeing again.' (89) The quote from Hellman's *Pentimento* is not referenced. Poyner (forthcoming, 2017) filters *Portrait's* revisioning through Walter Benjamin's notion that the photographic image brings past and present to bear upon each other to critical effect, 'dialectics at a standstill' (Benjamin, 1999: 463).

<sup>75</sup> Debates as to whether Vladislavić's narrator in *Portrait with Keys* can be conceptualized in the tradition of the flâneur or not are widely documented; they can be read through and are well indicated in Gerald Gaylard's *Marginal Spaces* (2011) in the section entitled 'Urban Aesthetics', pp. 275-338.

contested boundaries' (173): leitmotifs of walls and gates, locks, anti-theft devices and their keys, the growth of a private security industry, that reflects the unevenness of the conditions of its being, and increasingly stringent measures that intrude into personal, private life, repeat. Key 54, pp. 73-74, is comprised entirely of statistics about theft and security. Key 1 opens *Portrait* by registering the associated threat and violence in terms of home and the domestic space: 'When a house has been alarmed, it becomes explosive' (15); key 138, the last in the sequence, closes by reflecting on an experience of reading in the public library where violent clashes between protesting security guards and police mean the 'air seeping in from outside is still soured with conflict', after Ivan, seeking respite from the 'blur of men and vehicles and gas' is told that the reference section has been closed, 'for the safety of the books', in a lobby that 'looks and sounds like a marketplace', transformed by the chaos of the 'unaccustomed uproar' (182-183). *Portrait* also turns to the development of commodity forms and informal economies in the 'new' Joburg. The language of commercialization attends processes of rupture and change (as in the example of the public library above), and Ivan's textual eye picks up on the language of advertising as it is re-deployed in the city's 'democratization' throughout: street signs advertising alternative off-grid businesses – street-corner hawkers – or provision of services – phone booths for commercial use constructed around an extension cord of a domestic landline trailed across the garden and into the street.

As part of an ongoing critical project aiming to establish 'the now' of philosophies of the street emerging from post-millennial African fiction and to reinterrogate the African city as a site of modern knowledge formation, *Portrait* has become known and hailed as Vladislavić's exemplary 'city' text (Nuttall, 2004; Nuttall and Mbembe, 2008). Writing an urban space that is both characterized by a legacy of colonial and apartheid ways of inhabiting Johannesburg and by contemporary emergent, often contingent modes of being in the city, it is widely regarded as a model of a new, dynamic conception of the African metropolis, what Gerald Gaylard (2011: 6) describes as 'the watershed of African writing as it moves...into the African urban and Afropolitan'. Praising Vladislavić's 'city writing' in *The Restless Supermarket* (2001) as that of 'writing the now' in her 2004 essay of the same name, more recently and specifically in relation to *Portrait with Keys*, Nuttall (2009: 89) has

criticized Vladislavić for envisioning the city in writing that is ‘at times, racially inflected and nostalgic’: more recently still, in her contribution on *Portrait* to Gaylard’s *Marginal Spaces* (2011), Nuttall has refocused this analysis in terms of what she describes as a ‘generational aporia’ in the lack of cross-racial friendships in Vladislavić’s work, a ‘difficulty’ in need of deconstruction (327-337, particularly 334-5).

The contours of this assessment are difficult to evidence persuasively in Vladislavić’s text, but it does tentatively suggest that as a South African white, male writer of a particular generation, Vladislavić’s celebrated city writing in *Portrait* may inadvertently retrench the power structures of minority literature (read ‘white’, in this case), by writing a racial city of the (apartheid) past rather than documenting the beginnings of the cross-racial (post-apartheid, globalized) Johannesburg into its future. Despite this emergent line of critique, in his introduction to *Marginal Spaces*, Gaylard argues that Vladislavić’s work assumes a leading role in the ‘worlding’ of a specifically *South African* literary aesthetic (2011: 11; see Reid and Graham, forthcoming 2017).<sup>76</sup> *Portrait*’s place as a watershed in this ‘nowness’ of his writing of the city lies in the ways that its mapping of detailed local particularities demonstrates a wider geospatiality: ‘the rise of African cities within the growing tendrils of globalization’ (6). These arguments, both of which mobilize Vladislavić’s ‘portrait’ of Johannesburg as an ‘aesthetic project’ with high stakes in the discursive re-interrogation of ‘North-South’ intellectual production,<sup>77</sup> illustrate degrees of tension emerging in the ‘force-field’ between the local and the global. Also exposed are the pressures of documenting ‘the real’ of contemporary African city spaces as they are disseminated into the ‘world’ via a literary product, circulating, as *Portrait* does, in an increasingly globalized market.

---

<sup>76</sup> Gaylard, ‘Introduction’, *Marginal Spaces*, 11. Gaylard here suggests that South African literature and literary studies, no longer constrained by the exceptionality that characterized its production under apartheid, has ‘rejoined world’ and ‘postcolonial literature in the global milieu’ through a postmodern re-aestheticization of content that Vladislavić’s work exemplifies and that the essays collected in *Marginal Spaces* evidence (see particularly pp. 10-11).

<sup>77</sup> See Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge’s ‘Afterword: The Risk of Johannesburg’ to Nuttall and Mbembe (Eds.), *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (2008: 351-354), and James Graham’s critical reading of ‘recent calls to read Johannesburg as an “aesthetic project” rather than a “space of division”’ where he cites Nuttall and Mbembe’s project, in ‘Ivan Vladislavić and the possible city’ (2008: 334).

For Gaylard, it is Vladislavić's attention to 'place-specific' particulars and the marginality of local detail, nonetheless 'dense with long history, bristling with memory' (2011: 7), that allows his writing to travel 'in and through' categorizations of geospatiality and remain relevant, of 'the now', in the political project of deconstructing and renewing these categories. Indeed, Gaylard's conceptualization of the trajectory of Vladislavić's writing as running alongside that of South African literary critique slips through labels most frequently used to amend 'the literary' in critical discourse and, crucially, in that of 'global' literary marketing, that intend to circulate beyond 'the local' whilst territorializing its particulars so as not to 'flatten' them out. 'African literature', concludes Gaylard, is as open 'as any' to interpretative variety; as part of this movement, 'South African literature' has 'rejoined world literature', its 'politically informed historical formalism', a result of its local historical specificities, now asking questions about 'postcolonial literature in the global milieu' (9-11).

This is a persuasive discussion of a literary aesthetic freed from the exceptionality imposed by apartheid, able to take its place beyond those limiting confines and as distinctly 'African'. Yet there is something in its post-national, distinctly Afropolitan rhetoric that exposes a vulnerability around the conceptual travels – Africa, South Africa, World, postcolonial – that Gaylard's analysis subjects Vladislavić's work to. It is to this sliding delineation between 'postcolonial' and 'world', as well as the ambivalence Nuttall reads in the multi-accentual signs of the localities that *Portrait* details I now turn to look at the ways in which its South African urban accrues and collects its anxious meaning as it travels out through the literary market as a global commodity. In its portrait of Johannesburg, it is partly the text's engagement with modes of presentation more conventionally associated with the visual arts and art-history than literary, memoir, or documentary writing that open its contents to a set of strategic market concerns and readings that are troubled by its specific generic and modal migration.

*Portrait* is a text where Vladislavić's interest, as he says, in 'documenting and in urban questions, in city questions' is most accessible, although those interests 'go

back in [his] work right to the beginning' (2010b). Although there are notable articles that observe the 'city form' across his oeuvre, it is *Portrait*, the text that is exclusively focused on Johannesburg's urbanity, taking the city as its subject and which markedly departs from the conventions of form and genre, that tends to provide the impetus for these broader analyses. James Graham's article 'Ivan Vladislavić and the possible city' (2008), for example, begins by tracing the ethical potential of Vladislavić's 'literary Johannesburg' in *Portrait* through critical reception of *Missing Persons* (1989) and *Propaganda by Monuments* (1996a), and readings of *The Restless Supermarket* (2001) and *The Exploded View* (2004b).

Up until the publication of his next novel *Double Negative* (2010), *Portrait* was the most widely 'travelled' of Vladislavić's texts. First published in South Africa in 2006 by Umuzi, the 'local' fiction imprint of Random House-Struik, as *Portrait with Keys: Joburg and What-What*, there followed two British editions, HB and trade paperback in 2006, and a smaller trade paperback in 2007(a), from Portobello Books in London, entitled *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked*. A translated edition was published in Italian in 2007(b), *Johannesburg. Street addresses/Johannesburg. Uno stradario*; followed by a German translation, *Insel Aus Zufall*, a translation of one of *Portrait's* text cycles, 'An Accidental Island', in 2008(b). In June 2009, Norton brought out an edition in the US, under the 'English' title *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked*. A French edition emerged in November of that year, *Cles Pour Johannesburg: Portrait de ma Ville* (2009b), and with a switch of publisher, two further German editions – HB followed by PB – under the original German title, in 2010, as part of a 'metropolitan' series.

On publication, *Portrait* generated column inches, with a resurgence of international interest in preparation for South Africa's hosting of the World Cup in 2010. It remains one of Vladislavić's most widely internationally reviewed literary works, the text that has generated the most interviews with its author, and a focus of concentrated scholarly attention. *Portrait* is taught on various University syllabi, nationally and internationally; the Italian edition is an entirely scholarly one, the only publication of Vladislavić's to receive this treatment, where the text, three 'cycles' of *Portrait* in English, runs alongside its Italian translation, prefaced by

introductory material and translator's note, as well as biographical and publication material (2007b). Accruing the kind of cultural capital James English relates to the mechanics of the literary prize (2002: 109) and that De Kock picks up on in terms of the global-postcolonial shift for the South African literary form (2011), *Portrait* won Vladislavić two highly prestigious awards in South Africa in the same year, 2007: the Alan Paton Non-Fiction Award (established in 1989); and the University of Johannesburg Prize for Creative Fiction in English (established in 2006). Notably, the titles of these prizes also encapsulate the text's cross-genre potential in this accrual of literary-cultural value. The book achieved critical acclaim in the UK, longlisted for the Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize in 2007 (est. 2004), awarded annually to a book best evoking the spirit of a place (nominations by UK publishers only), and for the University of Warwick Prize in 2008 (nominations by members of the University).

At the point of its publication, internationally *Portrait* was Vladislavić's 'breakout' and most marketable, commercially successful text. *Portrait* is also one of the most resistant to any easy accommodation or framing. Michiel Heyns has said that 'it is easier to say what the book is not than what it is' (2006: np). Another of Vladislavić's playfully 'difficult' texts, it eschews realism and the expectations of genre. It is not a novel, or a collection of essays. It is not autobiography, although it does provide 'an oblique self-portrait' of the lived and imagined experience of Ivan in Johannesburg, bringing together friends, family, home, memoir, meditations, snapshots and asides on visual art, writing, and writers, ghosts, gardens, falling, stealing (cf. Umuzi's jacket blurb). *Portrait* is a collection. A highly visual text, it often reads as an 'album' of acutely focused images of the shifting urban space (see Poyner, forthcoming 2017). One of Vladislavić's most self-consciously 'curated' books, it rearticulates its pre-existing set text-pieces in new configurations, also adding new small texts into the orbit of context, all assembled between its covers. Making up a layered, intimate and personal portrait of South Africa's most worldly city, the ways that *Portrait* has travelled out of South Africa belies a set of anxieties between the local and the global in a literary marketplace that demands brand competition in the context of multi-national publication, dominated, as Pascale Casanova illustrates, by the Anglo-American field and its conglomerates (2004).

Travelling across this centralized, market-focused literary field, as production and consumption networks of anglophone literatures are increasingly global in reach, *Portrait* has contended with a literary-critical and commercial environment in which consciousness of the literary brand, in this case distinguished from others as distinctively postcolonial, and the possibilities involved in a transnational industry whose mechanics exist solely in order to sell that brand, has risen. Increasingly in this set of market concerns, relationships between authors and a global and globalized literary consumption network are progressively brought into enmeshed relations with publishers and their marketing machinery. Concomitantly, acts of creative writing are valued, in critical as well as market terms, for their entanglement in global economic processes and market forces. The dictates of a market so defined shift the worth of aesthetic production, measured in terms of their cogence as signatures or brands of authority. Such political parameters around aesthetic production in the literary marketplace register most anxiously in texts in which the label 'literature' is amended by that of 'postcolonial', anxieties that also firmly register the unevenness of the geopolitical structures that constitute the global literary market they must move through.

In this market, the category that is 'the postcolonial' has been actively developed as a niche alongside a general market expansion in the publishing industry. Postcolonial, or 'world,' authors need to justify their financial risk, and face 'the expectation that their fiction should comment on their own locales for a larger, more diffuse audience' (Brouillette, 2007: 8). Recent materialist studies of the market expose these frameworks, and discuss ways in which this larger, more diffuse audience must then be conceptualized, projected, and 'written to' from the site of the 'local', as well as the ways that readers are positioned as tourists in this 'alterity industry', metaphorically travelling the 'other', or even travelling with the other, *as the other*, through literature. In the South African context, as Andrew Van der Vlies' monograph identifies (2007), this international 'story' has developed unevenly, and in a politically charged literary field. Post-apartheid, the already robust local publishing industry has needed to face a number of issues simultaneously: what it is that might make recognizably saleable South African content, if it is no longer

protest; publishers dealing with this 'new' content and the release of the constraints placed on it through apartheid, responsibly reflecting the radical socio-political change of transition, were at the same time dealing with capitulation to the neo-liberal global market, and being viable in the midst of local funding and economic issues surrounding the book; as well as the legacy of uneven development on education and the redevelopment of a local reading public.

If the international marketing strategies of *Portrait* as a material product in this global literary marketplace indicate its commercial success and ability to take a place within it, the anxiety betrayed by these strategies also illustrates the ways in which a particular type of market attempts to domesticate its risks. The categories of the local and the global, in relation to the national siting of the cultural 'now' emerging into a neo-liberal and postnational 'world', variously focus these risks and their migration across transnational concerns. As much as the complexities of Vladislavić's text mitigate marketing strategies, discursive locations through which the text itself is expected to travel, with *Portrait*, this marketing is an ambivalent and uneven process that does Vladislavić, as a 'world' writer or 'postcolonial' brand, a disservice, and it does so on its own terms. In what follows, I trace a 'global' geography of changes to the anglophone product from its first 'local' publication to its marketing in the anglophone, postcolonial literary market 'centres' of Britain and the US. This exploration evidences the ways in which valuation and commercial strategies collect around the text, returning in part to the 'rhetorical accretion' and materialist textual concerns introduced in Part I (Tolar-Burton, 1999; Clary-Lemon, 2015), also drawing *Portrait's* contextual and publication histories through Brouillette's analysis of the self-conscious participation of authors in the construction of a 'niche' postcolonial market that she diagnoses as constitutively and 'fundamentally touristic' (2007: 25).

### **Joburg/Writing/Essay: collecting commercial marks**

The local South African imprint of the transnational publishing house Random House-Struik<sup>78</sup>, Umuzi, ascribe a genre to each of their books in a box below the

---

<sup>78</sup> Now Penguin Random House Struik, a merger completed in May 2013.



barcode on the back cover. The genre given to *Portrait with Keys* is 'Joburg'. Vladislavić says of this: 'it was either that or "Book" – that was my jokey solution. Let the bookshops shelve it where they want' (Dicey, 2006: 39).

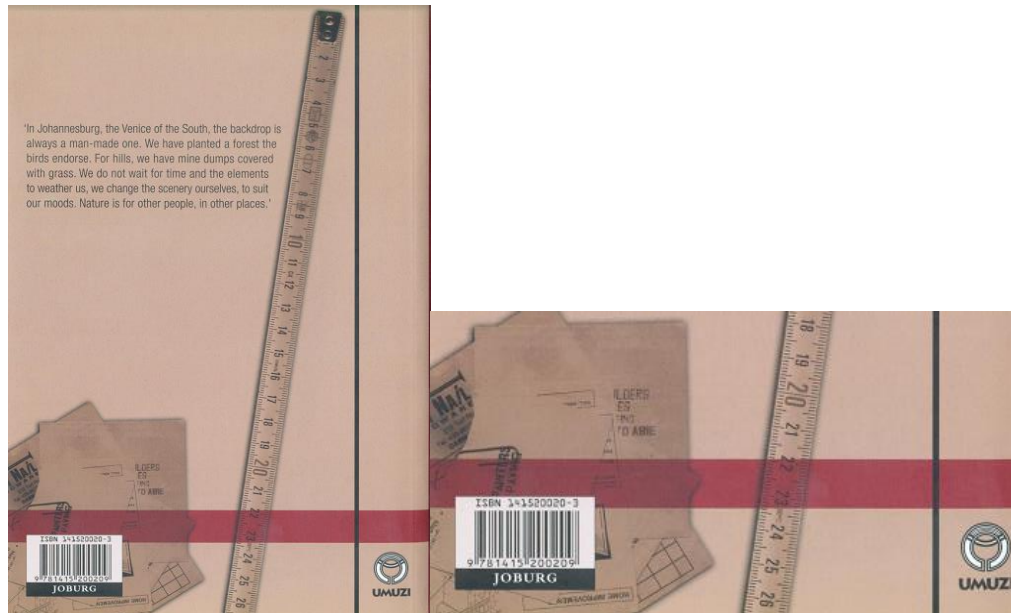


Figure 2. *Portrait with Keys: Joburg and what-what*, Umuzi back cover and barcode detail with the genre ascription of 'Joburg' (2006a).

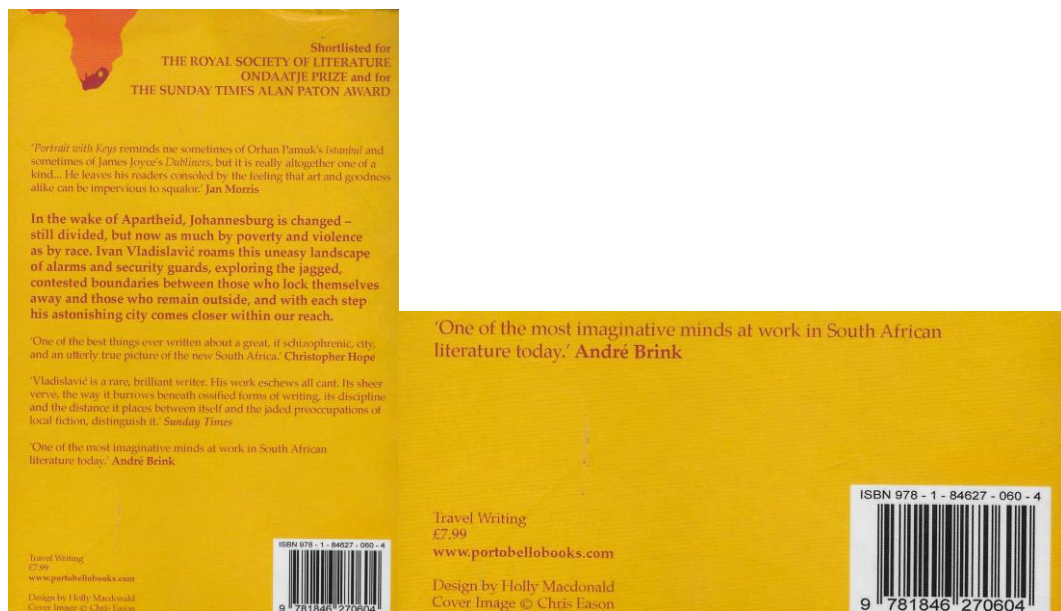


Figure 3. *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked*, Portobello back cover and barcode detail (2007a).

For the UK market, Umuzi's generic ascription of 'Joburg' becomes 'Travel Writing', indicating the ways in which South Africa continues to be consumed, anticipating a projected commodification and reader: *Portrait* was marketed as a travel book,

shelved in the travel section of UK bookshops. Vladislavić was aware of this strategy: “[w]hen they told me it was going to be a travel book, I said to Philip Gwyn Jones at Portobello, “it’s the opposite of a travel book – it’s actually a stay at home book” (2010b). In comparison, the proximity of Umuzi’s newly constructed genre ‘Joburg’ to the barcode – the very mark of the commercial – on the text’s back cover for a ‘local’ audience seems instructive, perhaps a nod to the ‘creative’ of its ‘creative non-fiction’, or an in-joke – a way of protesting the local bookshop’s persistent ‘ghettoization’ of South African literature to its own, short shelf, and to modes of classification associated with gaining purchase on its literary ‘now’.

By Norton’s publication in 2009, the genre ascription has changed again, becoming ‘TRAVEL / ESSAY’, losing ‘Literature’ altogether, and retaining an altered, more distinct form of the travel categorization, separate from but yoked together with the newly designated documentary genre of ‘essay’. Placed, here, on the opposite corner to the barcode, in proximity to the blurb by Jan Morris that situates *Portrait* alongside other ‘worldly’ literary city texts – Orhan Pamuk’s *Istanbul* and James Joyce’s *Dubliners* – the creative of its ‘creative non-fiction’ is erased from its classification.

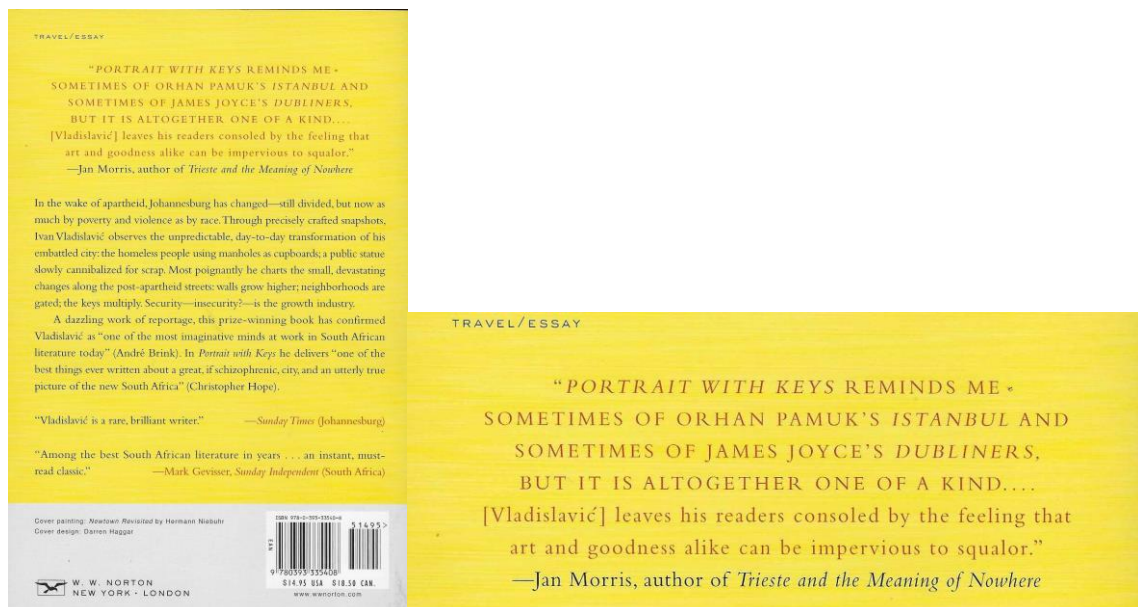


Figure 4. Norton back cover and genre designation detail, ~ *The City of Johannesburg Unlocked* (2009a).

The title the book goes by under its South African publisher also changes for international audiences: the idiomatically 'local' South African English suffix subtitle *Joburg and What-What* becomes *The City of Johannesburg Unlocked* in international English editions. Vladislavić himself is sanguine about this:

They changed the title and that's it – they published the book as it was, which I was happy with actually ... there have been a few editions of it – there's been a German edition which has done somewhat better than the English one and that's been similar with all of them. What all the publishers have done so far is put Johannesburg into the title – which I understand – I get the logic of that. They wanted to make it clear in the title of the book rather than the subtitle that this was a book about Johannesburg. So the French edition also is called *Keys to Johannesburg* to make it clear to readers that that is what the book is about, which is a little more obvious than I would like but I understand the logic of it (2010b).

Yet the 'clarification' of the titles as the product enters the international market, while the content of the book remains untouched, alongside the treatment of its genre ascription as it is marketed into the various locations it has sold to, indicates that as a global product, *Portrait* needs 'unlocking' and accommodation before it has been opened.

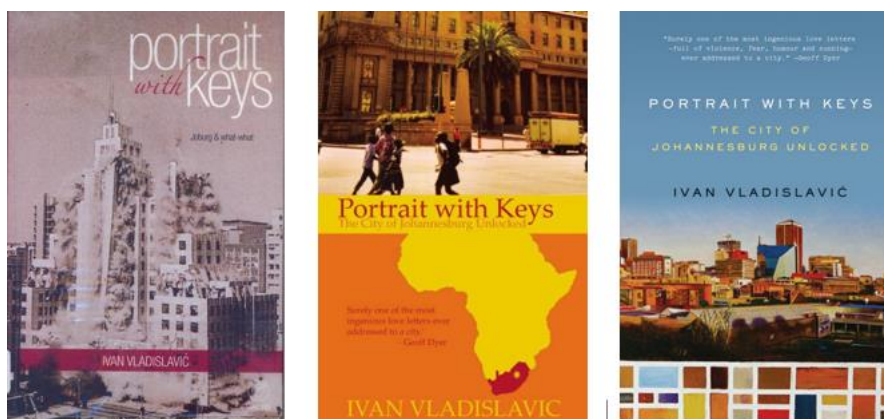


Figure 5. *Portrait with Keys: -Joburg & what-what* (2006a); and *-The City of Johannesburg Unlocked* (2007a and 2009a).

*Portrait's* generic ambiguity and difficulty sees it develop into a documentary travel book. The Johannesburg it describes does not stay at home, and its marketability as it travels depends on that. At the same time, the text is firmly located, its content performing its locality almost fiercely: *Portrait* details Johannesburg, post-apartheid Joburg, as the title and the genre ascription on the 'local' version attests. As much as *Portrait* details and celebrates alternative and creative adaptations of the city, its

alternative maps, it also details a place that is armed, alarmed, violent, riven by poverty and social inequality. Policed by fear as much as by armed security guards, walled complexes go up, as other edifices, solid markers of familiarity in the city, are exploded, disintegrate or come down. A text that discusses the rapidity of change with a compassionate and critical eye, it also insists on an awareness of the legacy of apartheid and from the point of view of a beneficiary of that system, therefore insisting on a confrontational renegotiation of that legacy.

As the lexicon of the city expands, the lexicon of violence and crime does also, and its availability as a destination closes down: this is no kind of travel document. A text that is packaged and commodified in order to travel out, and travels well on that basis, is one that persistently returns to the difficulties of its locality and setting; caught somewhere between its specificity, singularity – the exceptional nature of what it details – and its recognisability, its knowability and sameness – the city – susceptible to the same market forces, detailing the rising wake of the same forces of class and inequality as is found in any global city, and that cultural globality proffers, written from and staking its claim in the global South.

### **‘Stay at home book’**

As this ‘stay at home book’ is modified for international sale, its ‘locations’ accrue meaning, authority and value in their multiple evocations: categories yoking metaphysical and identifiable readerly locales sees Vladislavić’s *Portrait* participating in an international market ambivalently. Invited in to the text as ‘a tourist’ through the ascription of genre and barcodes keys in to the complicit nature involved in a touristic consciousness; in as much as tourism, as a business, depends on marketing the self-conscious understanding of what it is doing and one’s participation in it, so the postcolonial literary field, as part of a postcoloniality industry, generates and promotes this saleability. Brouillette both recognizes this persuasively and adds to discourse that draws attention to the legitimating strategies of an industry which commodifies the postcolonial for Western consumption by investigating authors’ recoding of it. Discussing Graham Huggan’s materialist assessment of the ‘alterity industry’ in his *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001),

Brouillette incorporates into her analysis authors who relate to altering contexts of reception through their own 'authorial self-articulation', explicitly in relation to the construction of the postcolonial author as an exoticized commercial product (2007: 1-44).

After Huggan's frequent references to a global market reader of a celebrated set of cosmopolitan writers in *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001), Brouillette sees the postcolonial author operating in a constructed "niche" market, based on a provocative and cogent analysis of an industry of postcoloniality, and its conscience, as organized around what she terms 'touristic guilt'. Readers of postcolonial fiction consume a truly global commodity, she argues, a commodity which is travelled to the extent that it needs 'little alteration for local consumption' (2007: 25), even, as its consumers are spread across the globe. Brouillette is careful to discuss writers' self-constructions, such as the projection of their authorship and their idealized imagined readerships, in real terms, linking those abstract projections to real-world circumstances and experiences of labour, aspiration, and fear. Authors' modes of understanding themselves as marketable products are seen both via individual author-publisher/editorial relationships and on the wider basis of production/consumption networks, reflected to varying degrees through the content of the textual products themselves.

Authors' attempts to control and construct their own reception through manipulation of content that responds to marketing dictates and machinery is described by Brouillette as a form of strategic exoticism: in as much as tourism, as a business, depends on the marketability of the self-consciousness that circulates within it, so the postcolonial literary field, as part of the postcoloniality industry, both generates and promotes the saleability of this self-generated, self-perpetuating exoticism. This globalizing and de-politicizing strategy is comprised, as she describes it, of a set of literary strategies shared between both producer and consumer, mobilized by both parties to mitigate the guilt she diagnoses in the industry of postcoloniality.

Brouillette states that writers 'are compelled to resist, justify, or celebrate precisely

this aspect of the postcolonial field's arrangement, in accordance with their own circumstances' (4), depicting themselves in the exoticizing tendencies of the 'tourist-reader' as 'a reluctant native guide' (27). This, alongside her premise that the postcolonial author 'has emerged as a profoundly complicit and compromised figure, whose authority rests, however uncomfortably, in the nature of his connection to the specificity of a given political location' (3), is nuanced through a reading of Vladislavić's *Portrait* on its terms as a collection. The fragments which make up the curated body of *Portrait* are the narrator's vision: we travel and observe only through him. The place of the local, as a situated locality along constraining political and economic lines, begins to vie uneasily with the mobility and flux associated with the 'new', 'ethical' epistemologies of cosmopolitanism and/or transnationalism. Each fragment in its own interaction with its surrounding fragments and discourses of fragmentation comments on its own processes, issues of belonging, levels of participation and complicity. Dramatizing textuality and intertextuality, *Portrait* indicates the structuring of borders, border zones and ideological boundaries and the spatio-temporal topographies of performing as a globalized product, linking this to the city itself, the most globalized of the South African cities.

*Portrait*, as a stay-at-home book containing a collection of rapidly shifting localities, themselves in processes of being and becoming illustrates how, in the post-transitional South African context, 'local/s' must be related to dislocation. The accrual of negative value as this product circulates in the postcolonial market betrays an anxiety in the international marketing strategies around it as product, and which the 'newness' of its mode of expression and composition, and its refusal to settle on a single post-apartheid moment, encourages in its very promotion. The text and the picture it draws is a series of sets of small, local texts, involved in and creating the 'enigmatic puzzle' of the tomasons of Johannesburg (163); the writer is collector of observations of a local that is specific and multiple in its newness and shifting internal transitions and migrations, and in its imbricated and potential pentimentos of cultural memory. The reader is positioned in relation to this already abstracted form and cross-genre creation, that of the collection, and is encouraged to re-curate its contents from within its situated logic.

Ronit Frenkel's contemporary work on the 'now' and the novel (2010), is concerned with emergent histories in a post-transitional South Africa that is consistently inflected by its own 'newness'. This does much to counter the dominant designations of *Portrait* in the 'return to the real', as a text that lies beyond the liberal-literary anglophone novel form and its exhausted reception, but that reaches that designation through an effacement of its literary-fictional sensibilities (Twidle, 2012). Viewing the collected text-fragments and their formal contribution to questioning ways of seeing in the post-apartheid city with not only the literary, but also the visual cultural trajectories of Vladislavić's observational pieces in mind, illustrates Frenkel's analysis of the ways that overlaps of cultural forms and, by their nature, the ways in which one transitional period is intimately involved in another, move away from either/or relations.

For Frenkel, as a result, post-transitional South Africa can be both context bound and specific, but also global. Questions of how to resist the presence of a deeply embedded spatial legacy of apartheid emerge through the already curated, 'original' map of the 'local' edition of *Portrait*, which is a global product. As a global product, *Portrait* indicates ways in which this map offers the potential to see and negotiate the spatial practices and power structures of globalization.<sup>79</sup> In its encouragement to read across and through, the spatialities of the localized, small text, *Portrait's* 'keys', are multiply sited, its aesthetic 'now' re-set in motion. The presence of the past – the 'legacy', in terms of rapidly shifting discursive formulations which lie in tension with the prescriptive fixity of colonial and apartheid practices – and the currency of now – of 'presence', particularly in terms of territorialized capital relations – assert themselves. The highly edited nature of its composition makes visible Vladislavić's editorial hand, its 'backroom' locations and multiple presences, recalling this set of movements on the grounds of the conditions of aesthetic and cultural production in post-apartheid South Africa.

---

<sup>79</sup> For further, particularly on globalization as extending the spatial practices of colonialism and the role of the architect in the reclamation of space, see Lisa Findley, 2005: 1-43; esp.24-32.

The implication that the meaning of the transition to democracy is couched in terms of a neo-liberal capitulation to the global market is present in *Portrait*, both in its content and in its marketing. A complex form or a kind of nostalgia then emerges from the book that articulates more about thickening conditions for cultural and aesthetic production that South African writers are required to labour under, as well as the bouncing temporalities of 'perpetual transition' (Brown, in Frenkel et al., 2010: np) in the post-apartheid, postnational 'now' than a homesickness for a past city-space (cf. Nuttall, 2009; 2011). These complexities are not fixable into stable brands.

The book becomes a space in which a literary cosmopolitanism that is particular is produced, both in terms of its geographical location, as firmly emanating from Johannesburg, and in its treatment of worldly aesthetic production: its world-making and imaginative spur are located by Vladislavić's selection processes and in arrangements of sets of shifting and interleaved images; these are documentary, editorial processes, a meaning-making shared with its reader, encouraged in its reading. Vladislavić's translocative and curatorial mode of the text's make-up mitigates the fixity of marketing strategies, discursive locations through which the text itself is expected to travel. There are no literary holidays, or even ethical tours to be had. Even when a book is sold as a guide, it turns out it refutes its categorization, baffling any idea that there is a definitive 'now' or way through beyond the reader exploring their own location in the conceptual map. This is mitigation against marketing as a strategy that insists on static categories in the midst of being and becoming.

Part of this mitigation is also due to the highly visual nature of *Portrait's* literary, written 'keys'. These shifting transformations are mapped through various re-visualizations of the city that insist on the continuity of socio-political issues that both predate apartheid and continue post-1994. As well as its deliberately cross-modal 'mapped' qualities, where the written and the visual unite as crucial to the content's communication, *Portrait* makes frequent reference to local and international visual art and culture, to film-making, exhibition spaces, installations. The aesthetic sensibility, that emerges both through literary and visual art



references, that underpins Ivan's and subsequently our textual 'walks' through the mapped keys of *Portrait's* neighbourhood localities, is organized by the 'Itineraries' section as potential ways of reading-walking the keys through.

The itineraries are a generous gesture, inviting the reader to be complicit in the meaning-making of *Portrait's* many possible routes. Two of the proffered itineraries and maps emphasize the possibilities of an aesthetic and rhetorical cosmopolitanism that is open to the world beyond the book's 'Joburg' cover: 'Artist's book' and 'Writers' book' (195 and 198-9 respectively). In contrast to the 'micro-local' focus of Ivan's ekphrastic wanderings around the city, these two itineraries stand out from the alphabetized list of alternative maps through the text. In the range of cycles and suggested re-sequences, some acknowledging their previous production, publication and reception contexts as made in collaborative processes with visual artists, the 'Artists' and 'Writers' sequences are the only ones to be appended by, and so to possibly become, 'book'. 'Taking place' is characterized both by antecedents and by the constant present of transition available through a mode of curatorial writing that questions modes of seeing and documentary practice, and explicitly invites the reader in to its topographies and critiques.

In this exhibition mode, which concerns the reader with the experiences of seeing, and seeing again, the narrator as curator-custodian of others' materials makes a few key appearances: in Key 49 (pp. 70-1) Ivan describes being left a trunk of papers when Louis Fehler emigrated, one of the writers listed in the 'Writers' Book' itinerary, a 'legacy' in his hands in need of creative re-making; key 50 is a short piece, an experience of being injured while framing Ilona Anderson's exhibition, one entered into the 'Artists' Book': 'if a rim of glass even brushes against the scar those livid colours [of Anderson's paintings] bleed out of my memory' (71).

The gesture of the itineraries, and particularly of these two 'becoming-books', slips the boundaries between text and reader, writer and artist, narrator and curator, opening the text as part of the experience of 'creating' and aestheticizing the city anew. In its opening of the book to its others – to the possibility of writers' and the artists' books it is in dialogue with – *Portrait's* author figure stands in more of a

curatorial role in relation to its portraits of the city, arranged and rearranged across different time periods, referring out to their original publication contexts which begin to emerge as a form of display. This is in keeping with Vladislavić's comment that if a 'narrative thread is as reassuringly solid as a concrete path underfoot', other devices for organising ideas, a list for instance, can be 'porous and soft', illustrating 'the provisional nature of the terrain in which we choose to express ourselves' (2005b: 52).

The marketing of *Portrait* as a travel guide could well be ascribed to its series of postcard-like snapshots of South Africa's worldly city, alongside its encouragement to the reader to travel its pages. But, as demonstrated, *Portrait* is not a tour guide. Curated and written, it places its small moments in positions of contiguity, open to new sets of arrangements, acknowledging the multiple presences and hands that create the book and the aesthetic object. Its literary-visual qualities and mode of working through its content make it akin to a catalogue, of the 'jointness' of his own and others' imaginative cultural production, or of the city as an exhibition space. More than this, it becomes, in this conception, a uniquely open book, analogous to Graham's sense of *Portrait* as detailing a 'possible', ethically open place. This faithful creative and critical non-fiction curatorial practice, the 'long poem of walking' (de Certeau), challenges dominant ways of seeing and social documentary methods. The very qualities that complicate Vladislavić's position in the postcolonial marketplace are the qualities he insists upon in developing a writing position sensitive enough to the conditions of his locale but not determined or foreclosed by speaking *for* it, keeping open fiction's 'endless and indefinable possibilities' (qtd. in Miller, 2006: 139).

## 6. 'Worlding' the virgule: *TJ/Double Negative*

'But first it was Goldblatt who brought this idea of documentary: you don't introduce things like lighting into a situation, that is not documentary, you don't impose your own vision or introduce something that isn't there. If you document, you take what you find.'

Photographer Santu Mofokeng (2010: 14) in conversation with

Corrine Diserens, discussing Goldblatt's innovations in documentary practice in South Africa during apartheid. In *Chasing Shadows*, edited by Ivan Vladislavić.

In 2010, when the pressure of 'documenting' the 'real' of South Africa's 'now' appeared as a requisite for success on market terms, both to maintain a presence in the global literary market, and for the survival of 'SA Lit' (Chapman and Lenta, 2011) and the South African novel, Vladislavić's reputation for subversive play with dominant literary modes and genres was placed under the ironic double pressure of *Double Negative's* publication. Announced as the 'fictional element' of the joint art-book product, *TJ/Double Negative* (Contrasto, 2010), the non-fiction element comprised a retrospective of pre-eminent social documentary photographer and sometime collaborator with Vladislavić, David Goldblatt, drawn from an internationally renowned archive of more than six decades of chronicling Johannesburg, *TJ: Johannesburg Photographs 1948-2010*. The two books, *TJ* and *Double Negative*, were released separately by South African Random House imprint Umuzi some months later, pushing the publication dates from November 2010 for the combined special edition, to May 2011 for the separate books. Vladislavić's novel also had its UK and US release from small, independent press And Other Stories (November, 2013a), introduced by Nigerian-American author, photographer, popular and savvy social media pundit and blogger, Teju Cole (9-14).

*Double Negative* performs its own set of internal 'generic migrations', parodying its own designations and anticipating their announcements. The novel spans the development of a photographer, Neville Lister, from his years as a drop-out student in the mid-eighties in part one, entitled 'Available Light' (pp. 7-70); in part two, 'Dead Letters' (pp. 73-134, explored in relation to its two letter collections in chapter four of the thesis), we see Neville's return to Johannesburg from London in late 1994 and his reorientation around the newly 'Rainbow Nation South Africa'; and, in section three, 'Small Talk' (pp. 137-204), his growth as an artist photographer in the digital age of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Vladislavić responds to Elizabeth Trundle's query about 'Available Light' and its 'straightforward realist fiction' by clarifying that its 'almost reliabl[e]' realism is 'appropriate to the apartheid years' (2013c: np). In the early years of democracy in part two, 'Dead Letters', the broadly

realist base segues into lyrical, magical flourishes as the dead letters archive of 'Pinheiro's ark' (2010: 128) unfolds its worlds into the reconceptualized national space post-TRC, its magic and generic instability ironically noted by Neville as 'unhealthy in a Latin American way' (133).<sup>80</sup>

The play with generic form is also a self-conscious comment on Vladislavić's own critical reception, particularly of his early texts and being labelled 'a magical realist' after his first novel, *The Folly*, in 1993: '[y]ou may recall that Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* appeared in 1991. For the next few years, publishers and scholars were looking for homegrown African magical realism in every flight of fancy' (2013c: np). In part III, there is a return to the realism of part I as the protagonist, Neville Lister, begins to be recognized as an art-photographer, on the cusp of projection into a global mediascape and the demands of its virtualized, image-laden sites and spaces, by young and savvy art-journalist and blogger, Janie Amanpour (see Graham, 2016: 212). This represents a self-conscious 'return to the 'real' that resonates with Twidle's diagnosis of the positioning of South African literature in the larger sense of global literary exhaustion with the liberal, lyrical novel, and the call for the return of the postcolonial author as national paratext, responsive to the socio-political conditions of the state-of-the-nation's 'now', but self-aware of a globalized and commercially advantageous postnational frame. The genesis of *Double Negative* as a response to a substantial retrospective collection of Goldblatt's eminently collectible work is critical to the ways in which it negotiates the arc of changes in the South African cultural imaginary; to its own rhetorical engagement with documentary practices, public culture, and historiography; and, in its self-conscious registration of genre and form, its announcement of its own negotiations with the altered, expanded market it enters and travels.

### **'Bonded autonomy' and worldly collectability: Goldblatt/Vladislavić**

When invited by Goldblatt to collaborate by contributing text to the forthcoming *TJ*, Vladislavić produced a novel. Goldblatt, in a discussion with Vladislavić and Bronwyn Law-Viljoen,<sup>81</sup> responding to questions about the collaborative process, is

<sup>80</sup> Direct quotes from *Double Negative* cited parenthetically in this chapter are from the 2010 Goldblatt/Vladislavić (Contrasto/Umuzi) edition, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>81</sup> The same interview from Gaylard's collection *Marginal Spaces* is cited earlier in relation to

clear that although he was aware that Vladislavić's response would be fictional, he was, 'completely taken aback' by the initial script: 'it was completely different to anything that I had expected', adding, 'Nadine [Gordimer] and I really did collaborate on text and images in our book *On the Mines* and again in *Lifetimes: Under Apartheid*' (Law-Viljoen, 2011: 341). For this venerable, globally lauded visual documentarian of South African socio-political realities and an experienced collaborator with literary writers, the project with Vladislavić was not-*really*-a-collaboration.

Vladislavić's fictional response to Goldblatt's renowned body of images of Johannesburg defied expectation, producing both a fruitful set of dynamic interrelations between the two works and a set of problems specifically related to the determinedly oblique but nonetheless incontrovertible relationship between them. Notwithstanding the altered expectations and relationship between the two art practices (and practitioners) that Vladislavić's response provoked, not least of the difficulties was the issue of presentation: how to couple the specific publishing demands of a coffee-table art book of photographic work with an accompanying novel, and in such a way as to respect the complex relationship between them in its redirected expectations? As Vladislavić explained in an informal interview with regards to the final design proofs:

...what we couldn't resolve is how to do a novel and a book of photographs together but as a matching set... We were trying to find a compromise size...so that the photographs would be a little bit small and the text would be a little bit big. And then we realised that actually it's very awkward to read a novel that's not the size of a novel – you don't want to actually hold an enormous book when you are reading a novel. And his [Goldblatt's] photographs are so amazing; you'd be crazy not to do them at the proper scale. (2010b: np)

The solution, provided by the South African New York-based designer Cyn Van Houten, was to enclose Vladislavić's novel *Double Negative* within a 'dummy art book' (2010b), so that the two could be packaged and sold together in a limited, first edition joint art-book package.

Even the briefest of descriptions of the joint project *TJ/Double Negative* illustrates

---

'Collectors', *Double Negative's* 'Dead Letters' and Tearle's suspended 'Proofreader's Derby'.

its accretive potential in a world book market, identifiable in the forward-slash between author/s, title/s, and, perhaps less explicitly and certainly more unusually, publisher/s.<sup>82</sup> Rather than the more conventional, relatively comparative ‘and’ or even more closely conjoining ampersand, these forward-slashes unite as much as they divide, evoking the joint work of what they also separate as discrete entities in this instance of cultural production. They are a graphic indication of a tension evident between the collective and collaborative and the singular, or the mark of the individual signature in the authorship of the product. Mirroring the text’s construction and content, each instance of the forward-slash’s joining work builds on a relation of parts to whole; taken together their conjoining function create a broader, wider frame of reference for each part involved in production, expanding contingency and movements between each in potential interrelations. In this light, they bring the languages of visual art, namely photography, and literature, here the novel, together to participate in a more extensive context, one that is explicitly cognisant of backroom activity in the making and production of ‘the book’.

In the case of their joining function between the publishers, the forward-slash indicates sharing in the commercial and market aspects of the aesthetic languages they conjoin, as well as identifying and marking the particular geographies of production: Contrasto are an Italian visual arts publisher based in Rome; Umuzi, based in Cape Town, the local South African imprint of the global conglomerate Random-House (Struik, being its South African imprint, and, as of 2013 after a merger, Penguin Random-House Struik). As well as drawing attention to the porosity between and to the multiple modes and genres the product contains (see Graham, 2016: 203), this is also a pithy reminder of ‘the book’ and ‘the author’, the ‘object d’art’ and ‘photographer’ as products in a global commodity market. These relations exemplify the ‘bonded autonomy’ of joint production through its multiple presences and multiple sites (Naudé, 2014; Vladislavić, 2010b).

---

<sup>82</sup> Fourie Botha, publisher at Umuzi at the time of production of *Double Negative* (2011a), described the ‘difficulties’ of production between the locations, languages, and expectations of an art-book publisher, Contrasto in Rome, and the trade paperback imprint of Umuzi/Struik in Cape Town, making the length and extent, and the unusual nature of the communication and negotiations over the project clear, prior to publication in a personal interview (2010). Vladislavić has talked about the ‘luck’ of finding publishers willing to take on the unusual combination of the books (2011b: 56).

That these interrelations emerge through a close reading of the visual detail of a textual mark is also instructive for the textual fabric of the book product. Profligate in itself on semantic terms, the virgule, or slash or slant or solidus, is a punctuation mark that is used to indicate a choice and contiguity between the words it separates. In *TJ/Double Negative*, Vladislavić's virtuosity with the materiality ascribed to words, often conjuring visual similitudes with textual marks of writing – type, page, book, and more specifically punctuation marks, which come to stand for the wider contexts that surround them and in which they are emphatically deployed to organize and point to grammatical discipline<sup>83</sup> – find their weight through the compelling visual language of the photograph. The texture of Vladislavić's writing indicates its own processes of production, including the power dynamics that may lie behind choices involved in the making of text.

This takes on significance in light of the particularity of the 'joint' product that *TJ/Double Negative* presents. The Vladislavić/Goldblatt project is one in which, as Stefan Helgesson recognizes in his reading of the books, 'it is *through* form, not despite it, that [Vladislavić/Goldblatt] make distinct historical, social and material aspects of Johannesburg apparent'. Going on to describe their product as one made through 'collaboration', Helgesson discusses the significance of the 'exposure of the visual and the verbal *within* the photographs, *within* the novel, *between* photos and captions, and *between* the paratext and the main text' (2015: 54; emphasis in original). As the virgule performs a self-reflexivity in terms of the books' pages, and the material and conceptual translations and correlations between the range of signifying and paratextual processes it asks the reader to make, so it can be read as metonymic of the material contexts the books' pages appear in and through, which are, at the least, unevenly positioned in a global market consuming South African cultural production. It also makes clear the ways in which its metonymic function extends to its marking of the joints of this not-*really*-a-collaborative product, to the hinges between the distinct crafts that contribute to its making and conditions of circulation.

---

<sup>83</sup> Vladislavić's work is dense with these typographical and print referrers which point to deeper, thicker grammars, of socio-economic and geopolitical constructs and the spatialities proscribed by apartheid, where the arbitrariness of 'large-scale political editing' and social engineering can be indicated, often satirically, by the processes involved in literary editing (2010b).

Imbued with this significance, and in the context of the contours of Vladislavić's self-conscious print performances (Helgesson, 2004: 782), the choices which the forward slash represents semantically, and its nether side, contingency, are emphasized. In the highly politicized and localized production of both individual 'authors' of *TJ/Double Negative*, the series of paratextual and interdiscursive relationships in the curiously non-collaborative collaborative product that comes from Vladislavić's mode of working with *TJ* and Goldblatt's archive, emerges more concretely as a response to the unevenness of Johannesburg. The grammatical potential of the visual mark of the virgule indicates a particularly 'worldly' book, relocating Vladislavić's preference for the autonomy possible in the 'joint' rather than 'collaborative' product within these global market concerns.

Van Houten's product design affirms the incontrovertible links between Vladislavić's novel and Goldblatt's coffee table art-book, playing with the value of both by creating a sense of interchangeability between them. Notably, the 'art of the book' (Graham, 2016: 195) is largely accomplished under the visual 'sign' of the title of Vladislavić's text: the spine of Goldblatt's *TJ* is black with white lettering; the spine of Vladislavić's *Double Negative* is white with black lettering, and this negative mirroring continues in the covers – inside and out, back and front – of the two books. Part of the design's success is that it also plays with scale: the novel, although much smaller than *TJ* and obviously less visually rich, is a hidden object inside its own fake art-book; discovering the novel inside this conceit evokes the surprise of having inadvertently worked out a secret, or having successfully played a game and won a prize, having gained access to some secret or otherwise hidden knowledge, the emotional and retail branding 'hook' of 'unboxing', as Graham refers to it (2016: 195).

The cover of the novel, in its secret art-book pre-text, is an image of a small sailing ship ornament, a magnified detail of one of Goldblatt's photographs that appears in *TJ* (2010: 172). This reinforces the 'doubling' of the novel's title through the repeated play with scale, focus, and ways of seeing the composite art-object. This emphasis is part of the commonality, rather than the difference, between the two books that make up the one boxed 'text'. It also serves as a reminder that the many 'texts', the



images, that make up Goldblatt's collected work, and the 'single' article that is the novel form, are inextricably linked and are co-constitutive; grouped together, they are 'exhibited' in the same mode, a limited-edition collector's item as and in themselves, their value autonomous but bonded, individual but co-implicated.

In this unique and multiply conjoined presentation of the object's 'work', the novel presents itself to you as a surprise gift, literally wrapped in and by its context, but also as a detachable, independent object, held in its place by the highly crafted, 'beautifully produced book as object' (Law-Viljoen, 2012: 434). There is an inevitable focus both on the materiality of the book and of the novel as 'art', valued as such as much as for what it may contain. This then emphasizes the whole book object as a collectable, 'a highly fetishizable commodity' and an 'undeniably (and seemingly unashamedly) *sexy* book', knowingly produced for a particular international audience, leveraging the longstanding symbolic international capital of Goldblatt's art exhibition and catalogue contexts (Graham, 2016: 195; 204).<sup>84</sup> The 'secret' of the text is an offering, but it offers privileged access, stressed by the art emphasis on the limited edition joint package, and its price. As a collector's item, *TJ/Double Negative* is a tradable, consumable product that operates within a distinct milieu, a more rarefied context associated with the gallery space than that of the contemporary consumption and marketing of the novel.

Significantly, it is the demands of the 'literary', of Vladislavić's text, rather than that

---

<sup>84</sup> Graham cites Vladislavić's discussion of *Double Negative*'s international publication with Contrasto as having come through Goldblatt's international reputation and personal contacts, adding that, although neither Vladislavić nor Goldblatt has confirmed this on record, it may be reasonable to assume that without Goldblatt's leverage of his own symbolic capital in the world art market, it 'is unlikely that any publisher would have been prepared to carry the risk of a project with such high production costs' (2016: 219, note 9). Law-Viljoen informs this position in 'Sailing a smaller ship', where she clarifies Goldblatt's international standing as an artist, and Struik's investment in publishing his work as demonstrating his diminished financial risk, in a market where international demand is beginning to alter the historically 'hostile' attitude to photography books (2012: 430). Graham goes on to note that Vladislavić was speaking about *TJ/Double Negative* in the semi-formal context of a research seminar and promotional event for the UK publication of *The Restless Supermarket* with *And Other Stories* (2014), their second (UK) title after *Double Negative* (2013). At the event ('The Restless Derby', 2014a), Vladislavić discussed another internationally promoted and co-produced photography book, his latest 'creative editing' project, *Ponte City* (2014), an unusual and boxed photobook by South African Mikhael Subotzky and British photographer Patrick Waterhouse, that includes a variety of textual material and forms and that Vladislavić contributed to as editor and writer, which went on to win the prestigious Deutsche-Börse Photography Prize, exhibited in London, in 2015.

of the 'art' of Goldblatt's photographs, that brings this subject-object relationship into its specific framing. 'Secret', unseen and hidden, tantalizingly accessible, though, to those with the means (and inclination) to purchase it, the original production context of *Double Negative* – a text that spans high apartheid, transition and the post-apartheid 'Rainbow Nation', and the first decade of post-millennial South Africa – places it within several 'local' South African literary concerns for a global or world-literary paradigm. In the glamorous box-set presentation of the novel, *Double Negative*, in response to the retrospective *TJ*, is presented, before reading, as enclosed by the artistic frame of one of South Africa's most globally recognized and respected of practitioners, David Goldblatt, in such a way as it is not parasitic, but is held within. Its appearance begins by openly staging a logic of privileged access, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, what can be seen and taken into hand and what may remain hidden, questions of authority and access. It is fictional text that emphasizes the project's place in this material discourse. In the circle of aesthetic production of South Africa, given the closely related narrative content of both Goldblatt's photographs in *TJ* and the narrativized relationships available in Vladislavić's *Double Negative*, this material 'product narrative', its 'bibliographic environment' on McGann's terms (1985), is wedded to issues of socio-economic and cultural privilege.

Given the history of the spectacular status of images of the radical inequalities of South Africa on the global stage, attention should also be drawn to the time span of Goldblatt's retrospective, 1948 – 2010, and Vladislavić's choice to follow the chronology that *TJ* suggests through the novel's tripartite structure. *Double Negative's* exploration of the authority involved in image-making in South Africa revolves around the relationship between two photographers, Saul Auerbach, the eminent social documentary photographer of apartheid who inadvertently 'fathers' Neville's career in photography. Initially, Neville falls into commercial photography in London, 'without a splash' (144), and after his return to South Africa in the democratic dispensation, slides quietly into the role of an art practitioner. Auerbach has, in the intervening time and after South Africa has 'rejoined the global community' become 'collectible. The experts were beginning to say he was more

than a photographer; he was an artist' (2011a: 113).<sup>85</sup> Auerbach is recognizably a foil for Goldblatt, a presence never explicitly drawn, but rather 'summoned like an ancestral spirit' (O'Toole, 2011: 76). This comment on the aesthetic valuation and collectability of the social-documentarian photographer's work in the post-apartheid opening of the global art market gestures to this 'ancestral' relation in the making of 'the book'. In the process, the complexities of inheritance, complicity and privilege, located by Goldblatt's own liberal self-positioning through his photographic practice (2011: 348-9), are renegotiated in the novel as part of the 'joint' art-object product and its entry into its global market.

Goldblatt's output is predominantly rooted in the apartheid era, through which he built a reputation as one of the country's leading social-documentary photographers, his images renowned for their eloquence, humanism, and explicitly non-propagandist portrayals (O'Toole, 2002; see also Mofokeng, 2010). As part of the intellectual and artistic circles of the leading white liberal literary and artistic elite – *TJ* is dedicated to Nadine Gordimer, Lionel Abrahams and Barney Simon (2010: np) – and through his corporate and commercial work, primarily as photographic editor and creative director of *Leadership* magazine in the 1980s, Goldblatt leveraged his position to publish and encourage the work of younger documentary photographers: he participated in the *Staffrider* Exhibitions, organized by the left-wing organisation Afrapix; he raised funds to set up the Market Photography Workshop in 1989.

With the unbanning of the ANC and the lifting of the cultural boycott, Goldblatt became one of South Africa's most internationally celebrated photographers, winning a number of prestigious international prizes, the first in 1995 (see *TJ/Double Negative* slip-cover, 2010: np). Represented by the commercial Goodman Gallery based in Johannesburg, his work now exhibits and is collected privately and in some of the leading galleries and museums in the world, the immediacy of the documentary gesture giving way to the status of historical art-document, the

---

<sup>85</sup> See Graham (2016: 209-214) who builds an argument for the project's international success around the worldliness and Bourdieusian symbolic capital of Goldblatt's career, particularly the reissue of the local archive of *Some Afrikaaners Photographed* (1973), as *Some Afrikaners Revisited* (2007), and its revision for a global market.

accumulation of meaning in the repeated display of his photographs central to ongoing public deliberation about the cultural role of his practice (Bester, 2015; Diserens, 2001; Goldblatt, 2012).<sup>86</sup> Summoning ‘the spirit’ of Goldblatt’s career and biography through *Double Negative*’s evocations of the artist-photographer in the character of Auerbach, as well as to the accreted, collected value of the artist’s labour, Vladislavić progressively draws attention to the producer of the work into the frame of the product’s commodity nexus. In Auerbach’s inadvertent fathering of Neville’s career, Neville’s eventual self-wearing into his own photographic practice in post-millennial South Africa concerns an image-making that is exclusively interested in remaining on the outsides of his subjects and with a respect for the hiddenness of private life. Through the evocation of the ‘real’, embedded into the fiction by these multiply referential means, the work of the novel calls attention to its own career and imbrication in a global, normative economic logic, and the retreat from the spectacular, both of apartheid South Africa, and the celebrity status of the South African artist-figure.

With its small scale, embedded degrees of both secrecy and hiddenness in the art-book packaging of the novel, the kind of consumption network the coffee table book inscribes in its international circulation can also be seen as germane to the specificities of the white South African liberal context, a position that Vladislavić insists on interrogating. The tropes of seeing and confronting authority and privilege in South Africa remain in focus throughout *TJ/Double Negative*, tropes which resound with Sarah Nuttall’s exploration of the ways in which confronting one’s ‘whiteness’, prevalent in autobiographical writing in the 1980s and 1990s, was to confront, in some way, one’s ‘secret’ life (see Nuttall, 2009; esp. 14). Ways of seeing and the limits of representation are stretched in the bewildering antinomies that proliferate between the representational practices of photography and writing. There is a synchronous attention placed in one of the novel’s many double negatives, on confronting the ways in which one is *seen*, and particularly how one is produced and made visible as an artist. In this case, the artist-writer figure is a photographer,

---

<sup>86</sup> See ‘Timelines: David Goldblatt’, SA History, available online at: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/david-goldblatt>; and Goldblatt’s biography on the Goodman Gallery’s website, available online at: <http://www.goodman-gallery.com/artists/davidgoldblatt>

working with the indexicality of the image and issues of ‘sending out’ its pictures to the world. These questions inform the problematic aesthetic figuring of what Vladislavić speaks of as ‘the common dilemma of wrestling with privilege and passivity’ (2011: 348) in the radically uneven imbrications of modern Johannesburg, as the text accrues meaning in the interstices between fiction writing and the documentary image, and the self-conscious production of the South African ‘now’.

The product’s ‘textualizations’, its accretive embodiment, and ‘socializations’, the stories of its circulation and reception, meet presciently in and through its initial production (see Van der Vlies, 2007: 9), especially in its relation to what Casanova has called the ‘world republic of letters’ (2004), and the economies of centralized consecration of cultural production, between Johannesburg and Rome. With Van Houten’s design, the buried or enveloped nature of the ‘collaboration’ and the various forms of labour surrounding Goldblatt’s collected, re-curated body of work in *TJ* are emphasized. This emphasis clearly contributes both to the marketability and the artistic realization of each of the works as collected-curated together (see Graham, 2016). It also indicates the ways in which Vladislavić’s not-really-collaborative methods trouble any smooth acceptance of this positioning and any hierarchies of form, and may make ethical comment on both, if not all, ‘strands’ of the project. Proprietary rights are highlighted as they begin to be opened in common. What emerges is an intimate relationship between language, power, property and authority, as well as that between ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’, realism and documentary practices.

### **Mediated surface: rearranged referents – *Contrasto*, *Umuzi*, And Other Stories**

...because a photograph is a flimsy thing when you compare it to the world...  
(*Double Negative*, 152)

The relationship between Auerbach and Neville is set in motion around two images that Neville witnesses the older Auerbach shoot one day in 1980s apartheid-era Johannesburg, and one ghostly negative blank, a photo not made due to the light fading. The two images that are made become classic portraits of Auerbach’s. Neville becomes preoccupied by these images taken by ‘the great photographer’, going on to

pursue them and revisit the sites of their making. He simultaneously bears the 'pressure of [Auerbach's] calculating eye' (42) throughout the development of his own career as a photographer in the dizzyingly altered post-apartheid Johannesburg he returns to. These images, as they are textually represented, come to question the interstices between the representational modes the novel evokes, and therefore who might own the right to speak, or more broadly to signify, and the ethics of aesthetic production in a changing society that appears beset by legacies and to reassert old norms.

The 'trespass' of Auerbach's entry into people's private spaces, in the enforced separation of apartheid is powerfully described in the creation of an image of a backyard shack dweller, Veronica Setshedi and two of her babies in the mid-eighties, 'one of Auerbach's best' (54). Auerbach waves Neville back from the Setshedi door, 'like a game ranger concerned for the safety of his charge' (50); their resulting entry to Veronica's home and the compound intimacy of the shot is enabled because, Neville assumes, of their relative status as white men, '[w]e would do as we pleased' (51), as directed by Auerbach: '[d]ialogue was no longer possible: all we could do was act. Respond to stage directions' (52). These issues of the rights of entry and intrusion, privacy, photography and the image return, inverted, in Neville's own later project, 'Thresholders', where the image is always of the home-owner and its exterior; the wall, the typically visible marker of Johannesburg's contemporary urbanity (Helgesson, 2015: 55); and the letterbox, the limited and restricted entry and destination point, one whose significance is ever-receding in the post-millennial period.

With an emphasis on the postal-political point of the suspended archive-collection of 'Dead Letters', Neville's refusal to access private interiors (Helgesson, 2016: 56), to collect neither personal stories nor personal territories, is quiet and principled. It is notable when he shoots an image of the migrant and escapee of the xenophobic violence in South Africa in 2008, Antoine K., for his 'fabulous' and 'prodigal' self-presentation and surface, unwilling to 'hear' Antoine's stories as he tells them: '[e]ven the miraculous tales of endurance are too much for me' (159-162). In the making of this shot and in his growth as an independent artist, he is no longer

situated by recognizably 'Auerbach territory', where the great photographer's images dominate the frame of looking and ways of seeing (43). The landscape of Johannesburg is charged for Neville by the much more personal affective experiences of witnessing 'Auerbach's accidental portraits...more reliable than [his] own memories' (152).

It is not only his acute embarrassment at the privileged access to these processes of Auerbach's making of these shots that Neville recalls, and which appear to inform his own developing art practice. Collected in Auerbach's book *Accidental Portraits*, bought in the Africa Centre during Neville's time in London (111), the two 'accidental portraits', the images of Auerbach's that Neville continues to circle around – the first, 'Veronica Setshedi and her children Joel and Amos', as the long Auerbach caption begins in his book *Accidental Portraits* (111), and the second, 'Mrs Ditton among her bruised artefacts' (112), as Neville describes her – are recounted vividly and at length in Vladislavić's precise first-person prose.<sup>87</sup> Reading *TJ/Double Negative* as a joint project highlights the desire for text to comment directly on image, a process already subverted by the explicitly fictionalized form of the novel. The photographs that are 'displayed' by Neville's descriptions are not the result of any straightforward ekphrastic relationships: the actual, 'real' visual referents of Goldblatt's images are not those described by Vladislavić's text.

Vladislavić has been candid about his process in relation to the authoritative sign that Goldblatt represents as a social documentary photographer of South Africa's realities: '[i]t would have been quite easy to get absorbed by Goldblatt's enormously powerful body of work – and not in a positive way. I had to try and write something that would have its own power and weight, that would hold together and have its own integrity, and not be sucked into the photographs as some kind of feeble commentary' (2011: 344). The result is a set of fictionalized descriptions of images based on Goldblatt's selections lent to Vladislavić from his archive. Vladislavić kept

---

<sup>87</sup> Vladislavić has been surprised to be 'caught out' in the referential similarity between his description of the image of Mrs Ditton, wallowing in the lap of the 'clenched fists' of the chair of her 'ball and claw suite' (described on pp. 63-66 of *Double Negative*) and Goldblatt's image, captioned 'A woman in her parlour, Bezuidenhout Valley. November 1973' (in *TJ*, 2010: 203). See the 'Double Exposure' feature interview (Van Niekerk, 2011).

these images ‘in the corner of his eye’ (2011b: 55) and let them surface through memory as he pursued his own fictional project.

In *Double Negative*, this processal response to Goldblatt’s own curated selections becomes a mediated, absent ekphrasis, inscribing in the complex figurations of loss and ephemerality a re-doubling of the image’s inherently doubling potential, summoning the simultaneous presence and absence of Goldblatt in the broadly realist fiction. With and through Neville we consume the photographs through descriptions inspired by images taken by Goldblatt, described in the textual real as having been taken by Auerbach: in art-books, as is Neville’s first contact with them (26; 31; 54; 69); hanging on the wall ‘like a painting’ in his uncle’s house (25); and through the gallery space (122-127). These images and ‘the detailed captions that were a feature of Auerbach’s books’ (122), are so convincingly rendered in terms of Goldblatt’s practice, there is a tendency to look past the fiction and attribute them to existing somewhere in Goldblatt’s oeuvre (O’Toole, 2011: 76).

What is true of the ekphrastic description of the Veronica Setshedi image that Helgesson so aptly pinpoints, that it is produced because of the conditions of white male privilege the novel describes while it enables our response to that which the same white male privilege blocked from view (2015: 58), is true of each of the ekphrastic photographs we ‘see’ and ‘hear’ through *Double Negative*. As Vladislavić displaces Goldblatt’s images for his own/Auerbach’s, the authority of the documentary/fictional text we hold is also subject to indeterminacy. As much as it disturbs boundaries, each body of work, image and text, each signifying practice, retains its integrity as a separate body.

Vladislavić’s mapping of indeterminacy onto the absences that his use of mediated ekphrasis presents us with references something of the ‘ungovernability’ that Ulrich Baer attributes to text’s interpretive instability.<sup>88</sup> Doubly unstable, these images are not ‘real’; in ‘reality’, they have never existed. Vladislavić wills us to ‘read’ these indeterminate, ungovernable ‘photographs’, these collected and multiply curated

---

<sup>88</sup> Although Baer discusses the interrelations between trauma and the photograph, the notion of ‘ungovernability’ extends to all photographs.



surfaces, to respond to them in their own right, as having a separate life from the narrative. As fictional, multiple surfaces they are both inextricable and at a remove from Neville's first-person voicing of them. Afforded their own status as productive of cultural meaning, in their unavailability, they remain outside of the narrative process that, in effect, produces them. Akin to the experience of 'seeing again' through *Portrait's* itineraries, working through both texts to find the possible interconnections between Goldblatt's collection in *TJ* and their encoded appearances in Vladislavić's novel, draws the viewer-reader into new possibilities in rearrangement and recontextualization. These possibilities are provided by the fiction, by the text's fictional 'real', commenting on the potential opening and hospitality of both forms of expression and representation in details.

These are, then, intensely self-reflexive gestures in terms of textual production. As well as highlighting the inability of representation to fix reality, or truth-tell, this call for us to see what is not actually accessible, unavailable to us in light of what has come before, disturbs the expectations around truth-telling and the 'taker' or creator as authenticating presence (Hesford, 2004: 107). The power and authority of photographs and the photographer in relation to the novel dramatizes the space of the 'old romance of the artist' (Sontag, 2002: 39), where photographs, particularly art photos are taken as 'pieces of reality, more authentic than extended literary narratives' (Sontag: 74). Here, the 'pieces of reality' are subsumed as the artist-figure as authority is troubled by the textualized multiple surfaces of inscription that the novel's insistence on its medium, fiction, puts forward. The accrual of value as these ungovernable texts circulate in differential networks of valuation and consumption within the novel, and with it the political implications of the attribution of value, of 'collectability', to documentary 'truth-telling discourses' such as photography and the photographer, are foregrounded and undermined, opened to a doubling and resulting contingency.

For Vladislavić, there were a set of explicit strategies in play to counter the recognisability and referential indexicality of Goldblatt's work: 'Most fiction simply obscures its origins. What this project hopefully does is make the connection to the field of references more obvious, more conscious...So writing consciously alongside

a very powerful, recognizable body of work makes clear what writers are doing all the time' (2011: 354). In this process, accountability and commitment come to the fore. Fields of references are made visible through fictionalization and reverse ekphrastic description, selection and narrativization. Responses to the submerged images of *TJ* are thereby paradoxically foregrounded as they are hidden. Processes of reading and narrativization also surface. Interpreting the interstices between the photography and fiction, between these two signifying practices, carries the very risk that Vladislavić's process gets around, and indicates the problematic nature of looking to this project for any structures of reliable or authoritative interpretation. Interpretive possibility is re-sited, and its echo of responsibility and responsiveness to 'the now' (c.f. Twidle, 2012: 9) suspended across multiple readings of the book's many constituent surfaces and contextual arrangements.

The illustrative mode, or of some kind of commentary, which any narrative reading of *TJ*'s photos alongside *Double Negative* necessarily leans towards, is exactly what Vladislavić's process of keeping the photos both in sight and at a remove and the resulting novel itself resists. Simultaneously, the joint project and Vladislavić's mobilisation of its hermeneutic desire to map the possible relations between the fiction and Goldblatt's photographs sets up for the reader what the novel's indirectness submerges. Whilst one's own processes of selection and meaning-creation are dramatized in these processes, they also illustrate the provisionality of these relationships. Reading is sustained by the ethical relationships that emerge between the representational genres. Modes of representation cohere and disturb the surfaces of each other's practice. As Law-Viljoen states, 'photography is read in the light, or even as fiction, and the novel is read in relation to the usual 'burden of truth' that has always been the province of photography' (2011: 351). The images are set in motion by a literary process, and vice versa, extending the curatorial sense of re-presentation in new 'arrangements' to both.

Vladislavić's working method, and the resulting final literary product, offer comment about any hierarchy or priorities of form. Marlene Van Niekerk describes the success of Vladislavić's response to Goldblatt's select archive in *TJ/Double Negative*: '[t]he more one studies this work as a whole – the novel and collection of

photographs – the clearer it becomes how carefully the elements have been positioned, handled so as to render inexhaustible the resonances and connections; the reflections and mirrorings between the text and photographic series and captions’ (2011: np). I read the possibilities of the hermeneutic desire that Vladislavić’s sidelong relationship to the images of *TJ* sets up as a generous gesture; like the ‘Itineraries’ of *Portrait with Keys*, the gesture is a curatorial one which, I agree with Helgesson, should necessarily remain limitless and endlessly open to the futures its inexhaustible gestures set in motion (Helgesson, 2015: 59).

The processes of the non-ekphrastic ekphrasis, the non-collaborative collaboration, request an occupation of the interstices between the representational practices, and between all the possible surfaces of inscription that they collect, ‘real’ and ‘imagined’. Like the ‘Itineraries’ section of *Portrait with Keys*, although more oblique and intimating a less tangibly directed topography, in the mediated ekphrasis of *TJ/Double Negative* there is an invitation to participate in an imaginative remaking of ‘text/s’, somewhere in between documentary and fiction, between *TJ* and *Double Negative*, as both become subject to the loosening of the ‘real’ and the documentary. As with Neville’s interaction with the dead letters of Pinheiro’s ark, authority is multiple, open and possible; at the same time, it is risky and undecidable, placed in an active suspension. There is a simultaneous registration of the care for the work of others, in this case Goldblatt’s, and a sidelong creative possibility that opens its terms; again, this is not a linearity or genealogical relation, but is a respectful self-positioning that questions its own English-speaking, liberal aesthetic and political grounds as it hinges with and mobilizes them. At the same time, as we watch Auerbach’s images circulate in an increasingly globalized economy of exhibitions and books, which turn South Africa’s past into a consumable object, the ironic critique the novel performs lies in its exposure of these processes; as we consume the ‘joint-fiction’, we consume Auerbach through Neville, and as Neville begins to negotiate his own positioning in a globalized marketplace, directing our attention to our relationship with the work and its producers, and their concatenating doubles.

In this circulation and mobilization of the documentary gesture, as it is involved in the production of the marketable artist and the South African aesthetic product it

appears in, 'responsibility' for the 'real' of the 'now' is joined and multiple; the conjoining function of the virgule also extends, albeit virtually, to a position somewhere between the creative and interpretive: notably, to reception, and to the reader. I close this chapter, then, with a reflection on the ways that this mode of working is re-positioned by the standalone novel, *Double Negative* without its boxed joint presentation, and in relation to the accretive marketing concerns between the Umuzi (2011a) and the *And Other Stories* (2013) publications. It, like *Portrait with Keys*, accrues meanings as it travels its marketplaces and alters its terms of cultural authority, as well as in Vladislavić's negotiations of the white anglophone authorial position. As the standalone novel uncouples the narrative from the absent, ekphrastic and submerged references to Goldblatt's collection of images, its line of critique about the difficulties involved in voicing South Africa in a global market take place more firmly in the site of the novel and the writing itself. Unlike the fate of *Portrait's* generic ambiguity as it takes place in the world market, *Double Negative's* marketing as a standalone novel, means it becomes a less risky and more 'worldly' book as it is published internationally, partly because this occurs in the hands of a press whose commercial concerns need not delimit its trade function.

Umuzi's 2011 publication, although sporting the modest Umuzi logo and advertising *Double Negative's* literary awards on its front cover,<sup>89</sup> remains faithful to the book's original context and its 'homegrown' collaborative spirit. The cover image, the black and white small sailing ship, a detail from one of a series of Goldblatt's photographs included in *TJ*, 'On the landing of the Docrat home before its destruction under the Group Areas Act, 20<sup>th</sup> Street, Fietas, 1977' (2010: 172) remains, the same as the cover of 'dummy art book' in the boxed joint product, embedding the forced removals under apartheid as an immediate focus. The title strip that runs across the centre of the cover image remains too: '*Double Negative: a novel*', a clear differentiating mark from the photobook, strictly unnecessary in the standalone product.

---

<sup>89</sup> In 2011, *Double Negative* won the M-Net Literary Award, one of South Africa's most prestigious literary awards for writing in any of the officially recognized languages; and the University of Johannesburg Prize for South African writing in English.

The back cover changes, from the blank of the joint book to reference the novel, as the 'fictional companion to David Goldblatt's book of Johannesburg photographs titled *TJ*'; Van Houten is credited for the design. In its interior space, what remains within the novel's covers from Van Houten's boxed product are the visual marks of the 'echoing spaces in between' the three parts of the novel, which arose directly from Vladislavić's thinking about South Africa in the mid-eighties after a chance encounter with the social historian Jonathan Hyslop at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, on seeing the 2005 revival of Malcolm Purkey's play *Sophiatown* (1986/1994/2005):

[W]e discovered that we'd both been at the original opening night... After this conversation, I found myself thinking actively again about the mid-eighties, when South Africa was under a state of emergency and apparently sliding into civil war. In the space of just twenty years, apartheid had been dismantled and a hopeful democracy established, and already disillusionment with the new order had set in. The eighties were vanishing behind a smokescreen of myth and forgetfulness (2013: np).

Structured around memories and returns, preoccupied by histories and the passage of time, *Double Negative* includes a complex set of attempted retrievals, artistic and archival, and both personal and public, which go on to close their lens on custodianship, with the deadened surfaces of Pinheiro's letter collection opening out like snapshots (2011a: 131-132), and the ethics of their 'thickly fingered' handling (Cohen, 2014) attendant to those of ownership and privacy in the demotic everyday. This temporal arc, that of Pinheiro's 'ark', traces the novel's tripartite structural focus on the history of the demise of apartheid and its 'echoing spaces in between' (Vladislavić, 2013: np), arising directly from Vladislavić's thinking after the discussion at the Market Theatre, impressed by Van Houten's text design and format, retained in the Umuzi product.

Each section has its own half-title page, its own echoing 'cover,' with a black thumbnail rectangle square at its fore edge, designating and bookmarking each echo space. Just visible when the book is closed as ghostly repeated refrains of receding dark lines, each echoes the initial half-title and the title leaves of the first two pages at the book's opening, indicating division held together by their similitude,

structured by the cover. Each section's end and beginning (designated by these bookmarks) are separated further from the main body of the text by blank leaves either side and between them. Each time we begin a new section, openings are recalled. These 'gaps', absences, enforced emptiness, are also moments of stillness that enforce a stopping, a slowing that requires a particular form of attention, of looking, emphasizing the critical challenge of interpreting these echoes and respecting their spaces without 'writing into' their silences, as well as an internal coherence and continuity across the temporal, and (largely) chronological span that *TJ/Double Negative* covers.

And Other Stories' presentation of the novel in 2013 is stripped of these previous references to Goldblatt's images, to Van Houten's design, and it does not mention *TJ*: it offers a worldlier product in terms of a global literary market. Pared of the 'joint' references the 'local', the 'Johannesburg double pairing' of *Double Negative* with *TJ* as the basis on which it travels into the world, is less significant than its 'finely written...vibrant' prose, its communication of human experience, its openness to a conception of world literature as 'world-class writing', in And Other Stories' parlance, that resonates across national frameworks: 'How', the back cover blurb concludes after relating the specifics of Lister's relations with Johannesburg, 'to live when estranged from your birthplace?'

And Other Stories is a small, UK-based grassroots not-for-profit enterprise. Running on a collective model that is also 'ecologically and ethically minded', titles are funded primarily through reader subscriptions: every subscriber receives either two, four or six titles a year and in addition, their name is printed in the back of an individually stamped first edition. The core of the And Other Stories' output is works in translation, suggested by reader groups, something Amanda DeMarco of Publishing Perspectives (2012: np) has dubbed 'editorial crowd-sourcing' and welcomed in an industry notoriously poor on market research. The press has been credited for Vladislavić's recent visibility in the world market (Flannery, 2013; De Kock, 2014; Jackson, 2015). This may be at least in part attributable to their leverage of the symbolic capital accrued by the combination of the legitimacy of the aims and set-

up of the small press itself, and their decision to frame Vladislavić's novel with an admiring introduction by Teju Cole.

Globally lauded Afropolitan and hip Nigerian-American art historian, writer, and photographer, Cole's award-winning novel *Open City* (Random House, 2012) shares a 'walking-the-city' focus with Vladislavić's psychogeographic urban text, *Portrait*. The kinds of circulation and prestige that Cole and other authors marketed as 'African' from the Global North, attendant with larger mainstream publishers – the culprits of the exoticism of Huggan and Brouillette's competitive market concerns – have yet to take up Vladislavić's work. His US publisher, with a close co-operative relationship and concerns with *And Other Stories*, remains Archipelago Books, a Brooklyn-based, not-for-profit publisher, whose tagline, 'dedicated to promoting cross-cultural exchange through international literature in translation' and 'to contemporary and classic world literature', could well describe *And Other Stories'* own manifesto and mission, and whose editions of Vladislavić's books have an art-object focus in design and format.<sup>90</sup>

The distinctive *And Other Stories'* first-edition aesthetic means that this *Double Negative* is uncluttered. The *And Other Stories* choice to produce trade paperbacks with French flaps retains a subtlety, as their gently layered revelation of information reflects the novel they bracket: the front flap has an unintroduced, unpaginated quote from the novel that impresses both the acute elegance of Vladislavić's prose and the novel's unflinching look at the altering processes of recording the fraught status of 'truth' in the post-apartheid space; the back flap is reserved for bios and books, Vladislavić's followed by Cole's; absent are the usually ubiquitous author-headshots; there are no images of Johannesburg, South Africa, Africa, so often marshalled in marketing 'African' products (see the Portobello cover of *Portrait with Keys*, 2007a, figure 5, pg. 200). Cole mentions Goldblatt, but brackets the 'real life cognate' in the context of the value of 'every worthwhile first-person narrator', to amplify Vladislavić's 'expertly rigged' foils and the skill of his fictional control. Cole,

---

<sup>90</sup> See 'About' at <https://archipelagobooks.org/>. Archipelago have published *The Folly* (2015); their publication of *The Exploded View* is due for release in March 2017. Neither are illustrated but both make a feature of their square format and cover art.

also a photographer, pinpoints Vladislavić's facility as a writer with the clarity of expertly timed snapshots, quoting the novel to highlight the driving concern with the visual, with history and memory, as the one of its primary concerns: 'With a language as scintillating and fine-grained as a silver gelatin print, Vladislavić delivers something rarer and subtler than a novelization of experience: he gives us, in this soft, sly novel, 'the seductive mysteries of things as they are'' (10).

In the *TJ/Double Negative* edition, Vladislavić's mediated ekphrasis wills all the 'real' South African surfaces of Goldblatt's photographs, along with the tangibility of their accreted local political-cultural memory access points, into the fabric of the fiction. These localized images are multiple, intervening in the narrative present at different times, at different rates. The documentary past is, in this presentation, not simply a singular part of the narrative of unique instances, located in a specific place in time, albeit qualified and at least once-removed by its fictionalized status; it is also manifestly plural. If in the attractions, the 'sexiness', of the *TJ/Double Negative* project we hold in hand a transnational, worldly, highly crafted book-object, mobile in its conjoined interdiscursivity, limitless in its imaginative un- and remakings and movements between the art and literary worlds, these movements are produced in relation to the 'Transvaal Johannesburg' of the 'non-fictional' part of the project, *TJ*, the prefixed car number plate code prior to the region's renaming to Gauteng in 1994. They are significantly anchored to the locality of this shibboleth of time and space, indexed by Goldblatt's images, subsumed and fictionalized as they may be by Vladislavić's working method. Commenting on South Africa's 'now', the *And Other Stories* edition works differently. Leveraging a different set of affiliations, it is, in its Afro-urban, and in its Afropolitan mobility granted by international literary-star Cole's involvement with a small UK publishing house, a more specifically literary than cultural work. *And Other Stories' Double Negative* becomes a novel involved in networks of exchange and intertextual translation, transnational and mobile affiliations and marketing, reaching for the kind of conditional universalism advocated by more open, networked or planetary approaches to comparative literature, stressing the global as facilitating its local. It is a book perhaps best described as a text of 'world literature', but of a 'homegrown' generically multiple sort, its generic migration resisting the anxiety of a conglomerate driven expanded



world market.

### Collected-curated

With the inclusion of visual art and the oblique but incontrovertible acknowledgment of visual artists and art practice as intrinsic to his own creative, written one, Vladislavić's *Portrait* and *Double Negative* become open and hospitable books. Simultaneously, as they negotiate what Vladislavić has recently referred to as 'the surprisingly enabling anxiety of influence' (Van Schalkwyk, 2014: 8) through the development of their curiously non-collaborative collaborative voice, they register their co-implication in processes of cosmopolitan, Afropolitan 'art-worldly' travels, revealing the commodification and commercialization that the global 'artworld' makes visible. They also both register the paradoxical ambivalence of entering the global literary market as shifts from national modes of identification of participation in a postcolonial model of a 'world republic of letters' to the contradictions of a cosmopolitan, worldly desire to read across national boundaries and languages, and its simultaneous co-option in a normative socio-economic logic (Graham, 2016). Commenting on economies of collectability, value and prestige by working with and through visual culture, and the synchronicity that the layers of images and textual 'snapshots' afford, (cf. Helgesson, 2016 on *TJ/Double Negative*), these books, acknowledging antecedents in ways that are both playfully and troublingly interdiscursive, call on the absent 'text' to interrogate the authority to speak.

Referring laterally to other contexts, readings and reception contexts, other modes of significance to their own ways of operating within book production as they narrate them, these books operate on intersecting lines between fiction and non-fiction. Their performativity lies here, and in their gestures towards the visibility, of seeing and being seen, of the cultural texts they incorporate, albeit in their absences, through their narrativized prose. In this curatorial mode, they act as exhibition-book 'products'. Their accreted fragmentary texts and surfaces mobilize a series of documentary gestures to answer to the call to the realism demanded by their contemporary moment, whilst side-stepping the 'return' to the responsibility that this requirement proposes for writing from the South African locale. Acknowledging other modes through their self-reflexive narration, these long-form prose-fictions

both assert and suspend the authority of their narrative voice in a series of agile, covertly custodial generic migrations.

Committing to the persistence of the past in their multiple surfaces that they hold and collect, in their juxtapositioning, accretive logic, they trouble linearity and the retrieval of genealogies and histories. They each reveal a mode of negotiation of aesthetic and political fixity and positioning in a series of self-reflexive acknowledgements of what has been enabled in the anxiety of influence through incorporation, and comment on the fictions that marketing categories produce. Troubling distinctions between the private, individual (invisible) spaces of reading and the public, collective (visibility) of the market, the spaces of sales, their epistemologies are situated and ambivalent, taking place. In their handling and holding, curatorial modalities, these texts mitigate fixity, a fluidity that also inscribes the difficulty of accommodation on local and global market terms. Drawing on Vladislavić's own rejection of his 'post-apartheid writer' and 'Joburg guy' labels (in Thurman, 2011), the multiply accretive possibilities and accrual of value evident in the constitution of both *Portrait with Keys* and *Double Negative* as they move through the shifting marketplace resists the foreclosure required by its commodity logic.

## **Conclusion**

### **collecting: sideways**

The significance of visual culture and its reflexive textual employment as a critique of representational practice is evident throughout Vladislavić's work and career, from the early stories collected across the ephemera of the 'littles' during apartheid 1980s, to the travelling 'snapshots' of Johannesburg in a global literary market attuned to the dynamics of the global Afropolis and 'hungry' for 'the new real'. The importance for Vladislavić of 'small stories' (1996b: 3), and what Gerald Gaylard has coined as Vladislavić's 'marginal spaces' (2011), lies in their performative fragmentariness, and in what they can offer us in terms of processes of becoming, as Vladislavić says, accustomed to 'marginality ... something that makes no claim to completeness' (1996b: 3). Vladislavić's writing engages the little 'scraps' and 'drek' as marks of reflexivity (see Poyner, forthcoming 2017). The small, minutiae, the composite and collected, the multiplicity available in these narratives expose the faultlines of the spectacular and the self-enclosures of the monumental (Gaylard, 2011; and Poyner, forthcoming 2017). Multiple, dialogic and resisting the 'single story', this is a mode of working 'sideways', harnessing the mobility of the fragmentary, writing across and with attention to the between, emphasizing connective and lateral networks as they travel across, rather than texts as discrete discursive events.

The metaphor of collection, the necessity of changed relations of its contents to context and, perhaps more significantly for this study, the requisite of handling, caring for, and in the process remaking of its materials, begins to open these concerns in their interrelation. Produced from, and about a place where acts of looking and of being 'seen' are fraught with archives of unequal power relations, and where the aesthetic market, of art and books, is one increasingly of a mobile, elite or niche constituency (Law-Viljoen, 2012), Vladislavić's prose fictions consistently work from within and through both mediums, occupying them in a way that engages

their points of overlap and thickening the experience of both. Often playful, typically interdiscursive, Vladislavić's deployment of the multiple text, and his handling of the materials of others, is a mode of creative rearrangement, taking on the responsibilities of this remaking, and extending beyond production and consumption networks (see Skotnes and Hamilton, 2014). Devolving the authority of a single, 'romantic' artist figure competing for consecration from a centralized market (see Naudé, 2014), Vladislavić's 'joint' voice fosters what Graham Riach (2014: 93) calls a 'community of practice': a way of 'working collectively that upholds the individual importance of each contributing artist, while making something greater than the sum of its parts'.

In the development of this mode of literary production, Vladislavić employs a practice of working in response to contextual and documentary prompts, and both found and given source materials, collecting the 'small texts' of *drek* and what-what, material and observations, and holding others' photographs and images, 'in the corner of his eye' (2010b). Returning to them after extended periods allow sideward accruals of meaning. They are 'kept', cared for and held, integral but indirectly addressed, thereby centralizing the textual focus of Vladislavić's own literary-fictional processes. In the resulting literary products, the element of the joint process that inspired the writing, and that may be extant in the first 'joint' publication context, is not straightforwardly reproduced, made visible, or traced. This is the case with Vladislavić's dual-signed products with artists and curators indicated by the virgule, and can be seen in the working processes of his texts that are bibliographically referenced by paratextual means. In an international textual market, this comments on ownership and acknowledgement, as well as obliquely referencing the different strategies and decisions involved in these forms of thickly embedded aesthetic production. By using strategies that embed these contexts within his own work and oeuvre, nonetheless, Vladislavić evokes the fitful possibility of plenitude and presence.

Recalling the ethical possibility of the restless non-closure and non-destinal openings of Vladislavić's alternative 'postings', this development of this sideways look and non-collaborative 'joint' working practice is metonymic of the ways that,

throughout his career, Vladislavić's work has been, as he describes it, 'nudged into new territory by the proximity of other visions and approaches'. Acknowledging the 'joinedness' and selectivity, the reflexive care and dispatch necessitated by these processes, Vladislavić goes on to articulate the ways that his authorial hand is relocated by this proximity: 'another body of work, with its own forms and preoccupations, creates a kind of obstacle in the smooth flow of my own interests. One has to both incorporate and exclude the influence of the other work, and this takes one in surprising directions' (2011b: 58).

In the publication histories of Vladislavić's work, a territory left open, often explicitly, readers are invited to explore these surprises in the exposure of previously unacknowledged dimensions of the relationships involved in acts of creative production. This is a reciprocal ethic that then extends to his own labour, both as a writer and as editor and publisher, as part of the conditions of its production. Rather than the relative fixity of meaning attributed to the permanence of text and the book, Vladislavić's cross-references move sideways to illustrate the potential for contingency and lateral developments of meaning in networks and overlaps. In each instance, artefacts and found objects, photographs and materials, as well as the methods of their production and the sites through which they move and are dispatched, resist being posited as any kind of singular, self-contained subjective articulations, but rather, and through their implicit requests for multiple reading, offer themselves as palimpsestic 'well-stocked archive', to borrow a phrase from Shane Graham (2009: 3).<sup>91</sup>

This aspect of Vladislavić's work is inclusive and transformative. This stands in an ambivalent relationship to the marketable figure of 'the artist', and extends to decisions taken in terms of the publication contexts which he obliquely submerges and cross-references across his oeuvre. Considering the rhetorically accretive potential of the cultural formations that are acknowledged by these expanded discursive communities, bringing these links to light not only illustrates the ways in which Vladislavić's texts are reworked for and by their new contexts and publics, but

---

<sup>91</sup> Graham discusses the challenge for writers in positioning the TRC in such a way as it can continue to be transformative and positive, rather than memorialized as part of the liberation 'moment'.

also insists on the contemporary relevance of Vladislavić's inventions and re-inventions, what the Paraguayan novelist Augusto Roa Bastos has called 'a poetics of variations' (qtd. in Nogueira, 2010: see 106-7).<sup>92</sup> The ethics of these poetics invite an archival approach, one that reads for unique textual moments and emergences in discursive spaces, and one that is attentive to their multiply intersecting, shifting contextual networks. Reading across (Procter and Benwell, 2015), or laterally, provides a useful formulation to consider this mode of working across local and international overlapping sites. These intersections can then be seen to mitigate unidirectional literary flows in a global literary market that calls for an authority nexus of a lone authorial figure competing for a readership, a community of readers also entangled in the market terms of cultural capital dictated by these contingencies. Inviting a reading sideways, in the mode of looking round an exhibition, Vladislavić's interdiscursive collected texts begin to sidestep these terms.

As a conclusion is, in essence, a destinal affair, starting somewhere near the end of Vladislavić's 'joint' practices, thinking back through their significance for the texts explored through this thesis, I begin this concluding section by initially alighting back on *Double Negative*. As Vladislavić's most recent novel in the simultaneous market demand for a 'return to the real' and for the redefinition of the liberal novel form, *Double Negative* draws its focus to the conditions of its own production, consumption and translocative possibility. As a marker of Vladislavić's emergence as a 'world writer' (And Other Stories; Windham-Campbell, 2015), this, his most recent novel, accretes traces of recollections and remakings that exploit the processes of curation as a writing-seeing practice, imbricated in a world-making that is both particularistic and embedded in collective, affiliative socialities. As a text that illustrates the significance of the built environment of Johannesburg, as well as

---

<sup>92</sup> In the prologue to the second edition of his short story collection *Son of Man* (1982), Roa Bastos sketches a definition of the 'poetics of variation': 'A text...does not crystallise at a time and forever or vegetate like a plant's dream. A text, if it is alive, lives and becomes modified. The reader varies it and re-invents it during each reading. If there is creation, this is its ethics. The author also, like the reader, may vary the text indefinitely, conserving its original nature and enriching it with subtle modifications... This poetics of variation that subverts and animates 'established texts' forms palimpsests... every author should proceed to apply the ethics of the poetics of variations. S/he does it anyway, although s/he does not intend it, from one book to another in such a way that the last version is exactly, like the turn of a circle, the negation of the first one' (qtd. in Nogueira, 2010: 106-7).

its aesthetic representation in visual art and the expanding gallery spaces of its display, the exhibition text, and the catalogue, its criticality of nostalgia and the fictions of futurism are focused through the visual. The novel insists on the intractability of multiple material surfaces in the post-apartheid present, and attention to the arenas in which these surfaces are evaluated and become entitled.

These are concerns evident from his early writing gathered in the 'little' magazines of the 1980s, registered in different ways and opening to different moments in each of the texts' 'small' collections in focus in the thesis throughout. In *Double Negative's* references to a series of previously made joint products, literal and figurative, they are also registered by the product of the (contentious) contemporary 'South African novel'. We are referred to them as collectively socialized and interlinked, a community of texts-in-process and revision from within the covers and bounds of the book. In the importance of space and interlinked geographies, and the negotiations of visibility of 'the public', state, and the private, the frequent gestures made by the text's multiple addresses leaves these territories and possibilities for national identification open.

Following these gestures troubles the already uncertain narrative rendering of generic and literary periodisation, whilst retaining the microlocality and commitment to South African realities for which Vladislavić's writing is known. As well as a literary fiction, *Double Negative* can be read for an alternative inventory, that enables the reader as a selective, juxtapositional curator of the work it holds, pointing to the intertexts that lie between the documentary and the literary-fictional, between the exhibition text and the textual product of prose fiction. Troubling the place of the 'book' in the marketplace, Vladislavić's concern with gathering, or 'playing', together accesses both co-constitutive microlocalities and cosmopolitan worldly possibilities through this reflexive sidestepping across and through others' grounds, and its leveraging of the subsequent sets of textual socialities.

Beginning to consider the imbrication of Goldblatt's photographs as submerged ekphrastic references in this book, Vladislavić's latest novel, it is worth starting with a note on the career of an early short text cycle, 'An Accidental Island (Street

Addresses, Johannesburg, Second Cycle). The cycle was commissioned for a catalogue of Goldblatt's 2001 retrospective exhibition entitled *fifty one years: David Goldblatt*, a body of images of the everyday experiences of the architectonic structures of the unequal South African space, a major international display and exposure of Goldblatt's work to a global art-market. Curated by Corinne Diserens and Okwui Enwezor, and produced by the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), the catalogue includes, along with Vladislavić's 'An Accidental Island', short essays by J. M. Coetzee (on the South African pastoral and landscape), and Michael Godby, Chris Killip, and Nadine Gordimer (on Goldblatt's working life and oeuvre). Vladislavić's is the most evidently 'literary' section, presenting its observational fragments about Johannesburg through a first-person narrator: neither Vladislavić's nor Coetzee's texts directly reference Goldblatt's images, which are nonetheless firmly wedded to all the text in the catalogue, and through Coetzee's and Vladislavić's pieces, the cultural production of 'place'.

Further embedding these lateral networks of the textures of South African print-cultural production and Vladislavić's place in a 'community of practice' (Riach, 2014), the interconnections in the relationship between Goldblatt's photographs, the literary imaginary, and the production of the South African locale, Diserens's introduction to the book, 'Shifting perceptions of reality', cites Vito Acconci on the creation of public space. She goes on to talk about Goldblatt's ability to make 'us see and understand better a country of great complexity where extremes often meet' in relation to Njabulo Ndebele's essays (Diserens, 2001: 5). Ndebele, a literary critic and cultural commentator who, as part of the emergent and urgent criticality under apartheid, took public space in the complex multi-racial inclusive ethos of Ravan and *Staffrider* magazine in the course of Vladislavić's tenure at the Press.

James Graham notes that Enwezor's contribution to the volume places Goldblatt's response to the dilemma facing the representation of the conflict that, in Enwezor's words, 'passes for the everyday in South Africa', in an 'already (double) negative' (2016: 203). Goldblatt's published works, suggests Enwezor, are part of an uncompromising project that refuses to provide consolation (203). Graham's argument, that in the later publication of Vladislavić's novel, *Double Negative* (2010),



Neville adopts a 'cool, postmodern attitude that reconciles him to a life lived on – or rather *with* – the surface of things', then relates an ethical punctuation of Neville's need for consolation through 'surface' to the possibilities found in the interdiscursivity between the *TJ/Double Negative* project, and, in particular, the strategies of the novel that invite the reader to create new associations between the books. This chimes with my own argument in chapter six of this thesis, 'Worlding the Virgule', regarding the strategies Vladislavić utilizes to make visible the connections between the two projects. My sense that the significance of Vladislavić's response to, and rendering of photography and visual media as a sideways look in Neville's turning away from the documentary gesture, coupled with the creative possibilities of a writing aesthetic of self-consciously curated, collected text pieces, registers the ethical possibilities of fiction more emphatically. This reading also retains a relationship between 'surface' and privacy, that cedes into Neville's self-conscious negotiations with liberalism, his white privilege, and queries proprietorial relations explicitly through aesthetic production.

These relations of ownership and incorporation are premised in my argument that Vladislavić's strategies of curatorial writing group South African cultural production according to commonality rather than difference. The focus is drawn to textual aesthetic networks that work across translocal and transnational flows, but that enable the possibilities of fiction in the local space. Many of Goldblatt's images of Johannesburg and the Transvaal cross from the 2001 retrospective to the exhibition and art-book *TJ* in 2010; both *Double Negative* and *Portrait with Keys* recall and work through Goldblatt's photographic archive as they are placed firmly in relation to it. Simultaneously, Vladislavić's own archive emerges through these sets of interrelationships, as the publication histories become visible. They are available as multiple series of curated collections, in the histories of Vladislavić's involvement in print-cultural production, working with, through, in, and alongside inherited materials, cognisant of but not appropriating new locations of emergent aesthetics.

The first of the short text cycles to be published that make up *Portrait with Keys* appeared in the Judin/Vladislavić co-edited exhibition text, *blank\_Architecture, apartheid and after* (1998), a conjoined role, as with the earlier Oliphant/Vladislavić

editorial signature on *Ten Years of Staffrider* (1988). For Vladislavić, *blank\_* was the single most important editing project, intensely immersing him in a wide range of urban issues for an entire year (2013: np), and when ‘the writing [of *Portrait*] really began’ (2006a: 209). On the terms of a collected, curated text, *blank\_* is an extraordinary archive of a book, an extensive anthology of written and photographic essays from a range of diverse disciplines.

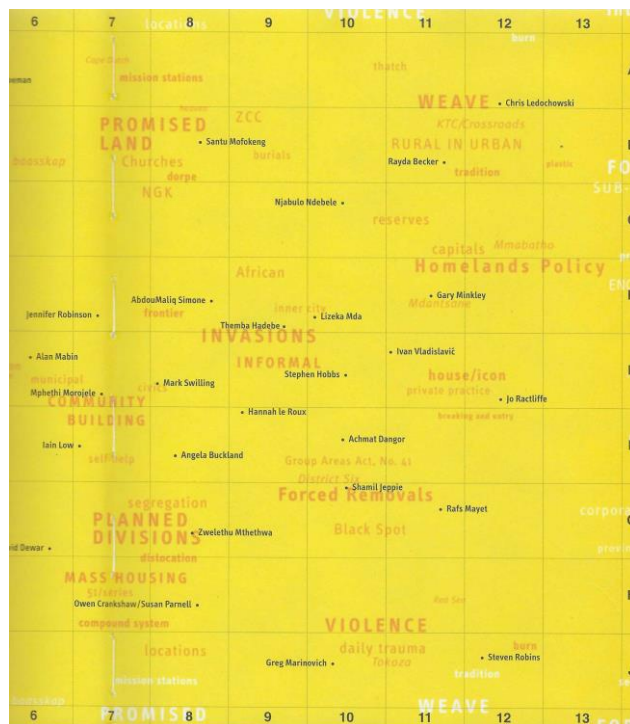


Figure 6. ‘Contents’ maps/pages, *blank\_ Architecture, apartheid and after* (1998: np).

Produced on the occasion of the 'South African Seasons', a year of exhibitions and activities on South Africa in Rotterdam, and the exhibition 'blank\_\_' in the Netherlands Architecture Institute, Rotterdam (16 December 1998 to 30 March 1999), it is an international book that pushes at the politics of South Africa defined from its complex, multivocal *inside*. , Illustrated with three hundred archival images, architectural drawings, and photographs, addressing the complexities of the deep structures of divisive spatial planning and architectonic politics of the South African urban space Arresting visually, it exceeds the necessities and informative proscription of an exhibition catalogue, its boundaries and generic context and form opened, largely, due to the editorial choice involved in its organization. Having its origins in a conceptual map, an attempt 'to represent key architectural concepts in geographical terms, in the context of apartheid and thereafter' (np), *blank\_\_* has been overlaid by a grid structure: the frontmatter is replaced by a set of conceptual 'Directions' and the index replaced by 'Positions A to Z' (see figure 6 above).

Vladislavić's text cycle included in *blank\_\_* 'Street addresses, Johannesburg', develops his longstanding experiment with the connective properties of the fragment and the specificities of the local space. The cycle precedes a set of Goldblatt's images, entitled 'Offices', photographs later included in *TJ*. A method of working across prompted by the contingencies of writing on newly curated series, retrospectives or other bodies of collected images, and exploiting the overlapping topographical connections of their geographies and thematic concerns for his own practice was cemented during Vladislavić's commission by Roger Palmer for *Overseas*, the exhibition catalogue for the retrospective of Palmer's work at Salzburg's Galerie Fotohof in 2004. In the process of writing the commissioned text-piece, 'City Centre', which also appears in *Portrait with Keys*,<sup>93</sup> Vladislavić 'developed a way of working with the visual elements and then assembling a sequence of supporting pieces, to go with the photographs – not commenting directly on the work, but creating something that would have some sort of interesting connections' (2010b). As Vladislavić puts it, it was then 'by chance' that the conceptual artist Joachim Schönfeldt approached him

---

<sup>93</sup> The itinerary for this cycle (2006a: 206) reads: 'City Centre (L) 115, 116, 117, 118, 120, 121, 122, 123, 125, 126, 127, 128, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135, 136, 137, 138'. Vladislavić categorizes the journey through this cycle, as with 'Street Addresses: Johannesburg', 'L' for 'long'.

with a set of photographs of visual works he had produced, ‘illustrations for an as yet unwritten text’ (qtd. in Vladislavić, 2004a: 9. See also Schönfeldt, 2004: 9-12).

Not a proposal for a collaboration but ‘a kind of sympathetic interaction’ (2004a: 13), Vladislavić ‘allowed [Schönfeldt’s images] to become part of the furniture...[receding] into the half-light of the imagination where texts and images – read, seen, dreamed, forgotten – are composted into raw material for fiction’ (2004a: 14). Vladislavić originally anticipated that his written response to the images would be ‘epigrammatic’ captions, ‘a few short, lyrical lines that would lend themselves to display’ alongside the images in a gallery or a catalogue (14). Yet in response to Schönfeldt’s photos of his embossed and layered images, ‘miniaturised and flattened out’ (9), Vladislavić produced a full-length fictional work, *The Exploded View* (2004b).

The early structures of the working relationship that produced *The Exploded View* are similar to those that produced *Double Negative*. Schönfeldt’s commission was born of a fascination with the relationship between text and image, his queries around the perceived muteness of images, as well as the significance of context and histories, and a desire to reverse the orders of precedence between writing and illustration (see 2004: 9-12). Although the commissions evolved from the different relationships between the art practitioners and their bodies of work, and their sympathies with Vladislavić’s writing, Schönfeldt, like Goldblatt, had expected text from Vladislavić that would comment on but ultimately be at the service of displaying the images (Schönfeldt, 2004: 12). There were similar issues of presentation and display between the collected images and the long-form of Vladislavić’s novel, that in the case of the joint product *TJ/Double Negative* have been resolved by designer Cyn Van Houten.

As a result, the ‘sympathetic interaction’ that resulted in *The Exploded View* was extended to Andries Oliphant, the writer and academic whose joint editorial signature in Oliphant/Vladislavić produced the *Ten Years* anthology of *Staffrider* for Ravan. Oliphant’s role in the Schönfeldt/Vladislavić experiment was to ‘consider the illustrations and the book of fiction together, and decide subjectively which

illustration had generated which portion of the text' (Schönfeldt, 2004: 12) for an exhibition entitled *The Model Men* (2004). The exhibition catalogue includes short reflections on the process from Schönfeldt, Vladislavić and Oliphant, with a short standalone extract from *The Exploded View*, as well as the miniaturised, flattened out reproductions of Oliphant's linkages between the paintings and text fragments as they were exhibited. The catalogue extends the 'bonded autonomy' of the multiply joint, creative processes the exhibition makes extant in the genesis and creation of the literary-fictional work. Oliphant's choice to display selected extracts of Vladislavić's book as oversized captions for Schönfeldt's full-sized paintings, visualizes the connections and concatenating chains between their signifying practices (see Oliphant, 2004), projecting this levelling of the divisions between the two aesthetic modes out and onto the exhibition walls.



Figure 7. Pages from *The Model Men* exhibition catalogue (2004a: 14; 15), showing Vladislavić, Schönfeldt, and Oliphant's workings. Catalogue courtesy of Ivan Vladislavić.

Proffering the illusion that an enormous book has been opened out, 'exploded' into the gallery space, playing interdiscursively with scale and modes of looking, Oliphant sizes up the literary text and alters the relationships of and in reading it. Even in the flat, bound pages of the exhibition catalogue, the accounts of these joined processes of production remove the book from the intimate orbit of possession, of holding it in hand, to the embodied experience of the book as multiple, of moving through the book-as-exhibition, being guided through the selected, fragmented bits of its pages, and the repositioning of its origin, acquisition, and production.

This set of movements follows the logic of the collection (cf. Stewart, 1993), specifically contextualized by curatorial practices of visual art in the gallery space.

In each of Vladislavić's texts in focus in the body of this thesis – from the short story collection, the anthologies, magazines and catalogues that Vladislavić has participated in as editor and as writer, to the long-form prose-fictions – collecting and custodian impulses characterize Vladislavić's portrayal of white South African lived experience and its built environment. Rearrangements of 'small' texts – stories, letters, photos – into suggestive new interrelations comment on their contexts of production and processes of cultural memory. They display the inherent ambivalence of the collection's simultaneous gesture towards cohesion and its disruption, revealing a persistent concern of the relationships between text and image – writing and ways of seeing and being seen – and the ethics of a custodial or curatorial impulse in questions that arise around the responsibility of handling other's materials as a mode of textual production.<sup>94</sup>

This mode is also tied to negotiations of being 'placed', as new arrangements necessitate new geographical and topographical concerns. Unlike the *TJ/Double Negative* project, and unlike the retrospective recall of the original publication contexts we see in *Missing Persons/Flashback Hotel* or *Portrait*, after *The Model Men* exhibition, the novel and its 'pre-illustrations' in Schönfeldt's paintings lived an entirely separated kind of private life: aside from the limited print-run of the original exhibition catalogue, there is no written reference to the joint process. Although *The Exploded View* is dedicated to Schönfeldt, Umuzi's jacket text instead refers to other projects as it anticipates the publication of *Portrait with Keys*: 'For the past few years [Vladislavić] has been preoccupied with a series of short texts on Johannesburg, some of which have already appeared alongside photographs by David Goldblatt and Roger Palmer' (2006a: np). This has given *The Model Men* and its early expression of Vladislavić's cooperative, joint work a particularly local and ephemeral mark in its process of becoming 'book', reminiscent of the energies of the 'small' self-instituting sites of little magazines, with a concentrated expression of content to context.

Both Schönfeldt's paintings and Goldblatt's images that are part of their products

---

<sup>94</sup> See Hamilton and Skotnes' 2014 volume, *Uncertain Curature*. Their Introduction to the volume discusses the custodial in these terms in light of a range of the essays included in the anthology that focus, primarily, on visual culture and museum practices in post-apartheid South Africa.

made in concert with Vladislavić appear in the international product of *blank\_* (catalogued in sections B3 and D4 respectively), alongside Vladislavić's text, 'Street addresses, Johannesburg' (section E11 of *blank\_*). The contextual mix of Vladislavić's short text cycles and Goldblatt's images, both concerning altering ways of viewing the city, then has its echo in *fifty-one years* (2001), with the cycle 'An Accidental Island', which provided the title of the German edition of *Portrait with Keys*, translated by Thomas Brückner: *Johannesburg. Insel Aus Zufall* (2008b; see also 2010c).



Figure 8. Joachim Schönfeldt, 'Silence!'. *blank\_* (1998: B3, 66-67).

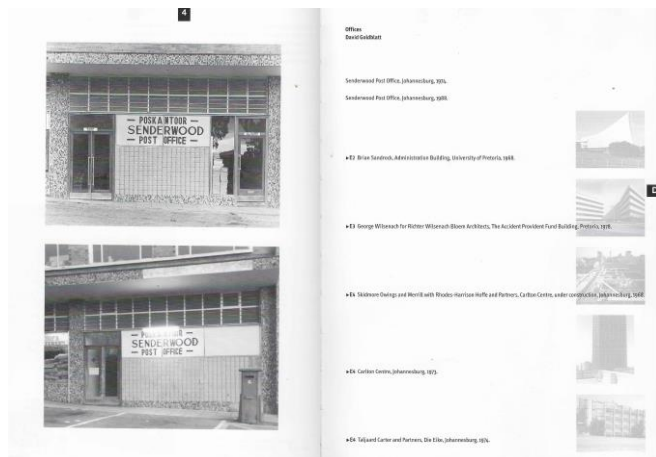


Figure 9. David Goldblatt, 'Offices'. *blank\_* (1998: D4, 144-145).

Goldblatt's images, themselves in a series of 'cycles' in *blank\_*, that can be traced across these two publications into *TJ: Johannesburg Photographs, 1948-2010* (2011), include photographs of: the iconic Hillbrow Telecommunications Tower, formerly the JG Strijdom Tower, Johannesburg's 'very own Bow Bells' in Aubrey Tearle's

recollection in *The Restless Supermarket* (2001: 19); and the Senderwood Post Office, with its racially coded separate entrances in 1974, and the single, common entrance of the same shop-front in 1988, illustrating a concern with state telecommunications systems and cultural relay. Coupled with the reference to 'competitive proofreading' in *Double Negative*, a 'sport' Neville imagines as an extension of citizen-journalist Janie Amanpour's set of self-promoting activities, the 'text' pieces, photographs, allusions and intertextual tissue, and their 'artists', fictional and external to the books, are unfolded in their interconnective tissues, becoming significantly detachable but held in relation.

This connective tissue between books and projects is provided in *Portrait's* own conceptual map (2006a), the 'Itineraries', where *blank\_* is credited as locating Vladislavić's 'Street addresses' first (1998: section E11). Through *Portrait's* own urban itinerary, the numbered index of the short fragments that make up the cycle<sup>95</sup> map a journey across the book's pages, indicating the spread and the location of each individual text-fragment whilst encouraging the reader to conceptualize the 'route' through and beyond the single situation of the book. The small collection of text-pieces that make up 'Street addresses' are numbered in *blank\_*, although the order is linear, and sequential. *Portrait's* later publication and inclusion of other cycles sets these pieces as individuals, rearranged in a different order, and into a different motion in the manner of an exhibition. Linearity and the containment of historical moments, as well as the contextual construction of epistemological markers begin to open and shift. These acts of 'seeing and seeing again' encourage reading akin to processes of curation, looking and looking again.

In an echo of the concerns with futurity and the gallery space that my reading of the Lok/Vladislavić comic-book of 'Tsafendas's Diary' as it sits in the multi-modal experimental pages of *Staffrider* in 1988 brings into view, the text 'pieces' that find their collective belonging in *Portrait* come to be 'displayed' there, more explicitly self-referencing the curatorial selection and reordering processes than those conventionally associated with the 'literary', linear object of the book. In the differing

---

<sup>95</sup> The cycle's itinerary (2006a: 207) reads: 'Street addresses, Johannesburg (L) 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 25, 26, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 38'. The 'route' has been classified as 'L = Long'.



arrangements, or 'routes', offered by the concerns of each of the different books they are viewed in, the variations the cycles present see them curated in a similar fashion to the images they are connected to, as they each – author/text, image/artist, creative fiction/documentary – appear in these multiple publication contexts. Translocative and dislocative, there is an intimation of lateral, non-linear engagements and movements across. This encourages an embodied sense of reading as the kind of 'crab-step' sideways Tacita Dean has spoken of when keeping the past and the future of a complex subject in view (in Butcher, 2011: 173). The possibility of processal, ongoing ways of reading unfolds and reopens what may simply look like established relationships, legacies and inheritances.

Referencing the significance of architectural, spatial-material forms and the frequency of their structural metonymy for Vladislavić's prose works from within the texts as you read, there is an invitation into a hermeneutic game of tracing the histories these suggestive cross-allusions tease at, how other's work, predominantly the visual image, has appeared in and through their successive contexts of reception, as well as how they appear/surface in Vladislavić's texts as he cross-references his fields of influence. These cross- and self-referential instances of publication, particularly when acknowledged by Vladislavić in the very medium they are written into, envision, as much as specific 'field[s] of influence' of others' works (Vladislavić, 2004a: 13), broader fields of references and groupings of localities of the rapid alterations of the South African space. They also indicate a temporality that is structured around returns, but returns which then project into a context that is ethically open to potential change, avoiding fixity and nostalgia, counter-responding to its different moments and surroundings, and looking to an altering, shifting future.

These opening, unfolding temporal structures of return not only reference the significance of history, but that of the materiality of textual production, and the multiply embedded potentials of reading those materials. As the fragments and cycles of the text remain, they reflect the persistence of the structural divisions of apartheid in the post-apartheid city, as much as they indicate an epistemological itinerancy. As content shifts and cross refers self-reflexively, an almost parodic

Barthesian game emerges that both self-effaces and foregrounds the significance of the authorial figure. This response actively involves the reader in the processes of altering content in relation to context, suggesting initial nudges to set them spinning but not overly concerned with where they might end up. It is a collaborative gesture, beyond the bounds of the book, actively seeking participation. Yet the initial readings, images, buildings, itineraries, photographs remain and are autonomous as self-contained works, 'authored' by the individual artist, architect, writer, editor in a curatorial mode, shared by a community and commonality open to *praxis* and becoming.

Although we are frequently invited to, it is not compulsory to trace Vladislavić's archival-curatorial games, and nor is it necessary to read what frequently emerges in the correspondences between the 'real' and 'fictitious' worlds that Vladislavić's book-histories relate. They do, however, begin a self-reflexive opening of the book, not only referring out beyond its bindings and form, but to its increasing worldly visibility as product in these shifting relocations of the 'author' or maker of a text's meaning. Consider, for example, the injunction from the protagonist of *Double Negative*, who, referring to the venerable photographer and recorder of apartheid South Africa, Saul Auerbach, addresses the reader to 'go ahead and google him' (25). The joke, of course, already draws in the significance of the book as product and contemporary conditions of reading, as well as that of contemporary tele-technological marketing conditions for the 'global' author: the more review space and interest generated for the novel itself, the more likely one is to find returns on your google search for 'Saul Auerbach'; a click-away are those for 'Ivan Vladislavić' and, so, another sidestep to the real-life counterpart of Goldblatt as a globally recognized artist.

One of the first google search returns for the 'Saul Auerbach' search term is an article by Shaun de Waal in South Africa's *Mail & Guardian*, partly written about *TJ/Double Negative* but published so shortly after the product's release that it was too soon to review the novel. It does, though, briefly discuss the relationship between the two books, *TJ* and *Double Negative*, mentioning that its 'well-educated readers won't need reminding that another Auerbach, Erich, wrote a seminal work on artistic

representation called *Mimesis*' (Sean de Waal, 2010: np). Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* is a work of literary history that focuses on realism and the everyday in literary writing (1953), redefining a canon that specifies its cultural location. The inwardly self-reflexive 'concatenations' of the rendering of Saul Auerbach, who bears more than a passing resemblance to Goldblatt, doubles the ways that the photographer's reputation as a 'realist' or documentary chronicler of apartheid precedes him, in fictional and historical terms. And on google, not so many clicks away is another Erich Auerbach, a foremost journalist photographer and the official photographer of the Czechoslovak government in exile during the second world war.

There is a referencing out of a fictional mode, a cross between the fictional and real in 'Auerbach' and this injunction to move beyond the authority of the narrator/author of the text you consume, away from the reading of the book itself. If you have read Vladislavić's *The Loss Library*, in which Vladislavić reflects on eleven stories that he 'imagined but could not write' (2012b: 7), which has the effect of absencing 'the author' from the writing as we read it, you will also recognize the suggestion to 'Google him' as the last sentence of the story 'The Last Walk': this time the reference is to the Danish explorer Peter Freuchen at the end of an essayistic reflection prompted by an image of the dead body of the Swiss writer Robert Walser. 'The Last Walk' is one of three of Vladislavić's stories from *The Loss Library* (2012) that also appear alongside expatriate South African artist Abrie Fourie's photographs in his 2011 monograph *Oblique*, with 'The Loss Library' and 'The Cold Storage Club'. "Google him," reads a poster currently pasted on walls across parts of Berlin', writes art critic Sean O'Toole of the promotional material for Fourie's exhibition in 2012: 'Rendered in big white letters on black, the statement...includes a small asterisk attributing the quote to Ivan Vladislavić' (O'Toole, 2012b: np). The Writers' and Artists' 'Books' of the itineraries of *Portrait with Keys* are recognizable and come to be extended. Their anglophone maps are reopened through contextual means and cartographies of aesthetic production that acknowledge a worldly translocative series of geographies.

The instruction to 'google' here, rather than referring the reader out and away from the authority of the text, refers across to other of Vladislavić's short texts that have additionally appeared in a variety of different books and contexts, alongside other media, with other voices, and embedded in and referencing a recognizably local/global range of geographies, placing South Africa in the 'world'. Vladislavić's works, even those which have never been written, actively and self-consciously participate in a life beyond their immediate context, embedded multiply. Accessing new global technologies as another surface of inscription in a different media scape illustrates a canniness in terms of his own self-positioning, and serves as a reminder of the inequality of access in the rise of mobile, global teletechnology, as well as the instability in the relationship between information and reception and the South African socio-political context. This practice questions assumptions about shared knowledge and geopolitical power-structures of knowledge production, at the very point when Vladislavić embeds various of his projects intertextually, referred to in a chain of privileged literary and art world trajectories and publics.

In the rise of the teletechnological networks that Janie Amanpour's interactions with visual media represents, these questions of access and privilege in manifestly unequal socio-political experience surface during one of *Double Negative's* instances of the negotiations of memory and time in the post-apartheid space. Lister, then a still nascent artist-photographer, asks Janie what she 'makes' of Auerbach, the established social documentarian. Specifically referencing the selection from his image archive included in Goldblatt's *TJ*, she replies that she is 'not a believer': '[t]hose people of his standing around in their gloomy houses like pieces of furniture... The whites are the worst, excuse me. I can hardly bear to look at his early stuff. It makes me feel claustrophobic, like I've been locked up in some museum no one visits any more' (157). Choosing instead to believe in the obliquity of an 'S. Majara' (156), she tells Neville, 'I profiled him last year for the *News*... Everything he said about his work sounded plausible and yet suspect, as if he'd found it in an article by a shrewdly hostile critic. That's a line from my piece by the way. These days I can't help quoting myself' (156).

In a meta- and intertextual self-referencing manoeuvre, through the submerged

reference to Goldblatt through Auerbach, this makes direct reference to the conceptual artist figure of Vladislavić's earlier novel *The Exploded View* (2004b), Simeon Majara. In Neville's discussion with Janie, where the visual artist/photographer speaks with the journalist/interviewer, it is Janie that quotes herself, referencing a fictional character of Vladislavić's creation, referring to another work which came about through the same processes of working with visual material. In *Double Negative*, a novel that emerged from a non-collaborative collaboration with visual artist Goldblatt, by mobilizing a set of fictional photographers and reviewers, cultural producers and their gatekeepers, Vladislavić makes a direct reference to a conceptual artist, S. Majara, also conceived of in his fictional work, *The Exploded View*, therefore also making reference to the project between Vladislavić and 'real life' conceptual artist Schönfeldt, which produced the not-quite-a novel in parts, *The Exploded View*.

'Curiouser' and 'Curio-user'. 'Curiouser' (2004b: 99-155), Simeon Majara's section of four in *The Exploded View* functions as a piece of art-criticism in miniature in entirely fictional form. Majara is an artist whose work attempts to renarrativize global atrocities: *Curiouser and Curio-user* is a project involving an enormous cache of African masks and curios, 'the face of Africa' (102), objects that he transforms by various, inevitably violent means, 'sawn into pieces and reassembled as monsters' (145), liberating them, and their conventionally continent-bound ascribed register, as he re-forms them into works of art (cf. Gaylard, 2006: 71). In his cameo in *Double Negative*, Janie goes on to describe his latest project, *Curious Restitution*, to Neville:

"He grinds curios into sawdust and reconstitutes the dust as wooden blocks. There's a whole undercurrent about mincemeat and butcher's blocks and what have you, but it isn't heavy, you know. He makes these abstract assemblages of the blocks, almost like children's toys, that fit together so beautifully you'd think they were made in a lab, like those 3D drawings in resin, and then he takes them apart again and carves them into new curios, which are so much like the originals even the people who made them wouldn't know the difference" (2011a: 158).

Majara's appearance in *Double Negative* serves to remind us of the point that *The Exploded View* makes: the contemporary visual art world is freeing in its model of

global affiliations, but is also overly commodified in terms of flattening local particularities for marketing purposes. Majara's project 'Curiouser/Curio-user' in *The Exploded View*, is both a portrait of a conceptual artist who defines himself and his own work in a global art context, and an analysis of a globalized art world in its problematic relationship with the African masks and curios it makes use of, the relationship between subject and object, subject and commodity, critiquing the identitarian politics that adhere to questions of the constitution and evaluation of 'African art' in the transnational context.

Within *Exploded View*, the project is drawn into comparison with Damien Hirst's 'pickles' (126). This suggests, even if by reputation alone, Majara's accommodation in and by global capital, and an appropriation of a socially committed, avant-garde position by a mainstreamed capitalist culture, leading towards a self-serving practice and collectible cult of celebrity (see Stallabrass on Hirst, 1999): *Curiouser* sees Majara 'turning into a little business' (125). From the fictional, and intertextual, sites of the two novels made in relation to visual art and with visual artists, Vladislavić again interrogates the developments of the available space of the aesthetic. These texts point up the limits of market concerns, to the vulnerabilities of textual and other cultural production in the liberalisation of the market and modes of circulation and consumption. They simultaneously reference the generational gaps in the experience of art's relation to politics in the differing understandings of post-apartheid South Africa via the older Neville and Auerbach, and the younger Janie and Majara, each set in the international context of the competitive centrist marketplace, or 'world republic of letters' (Casanova, 2004).

The mention of S. Majara in *Double Negative* serves to include the earlier project of *Exploded View* and rehabilitate its different voice, displacing the authority of either Auerbach or Lister as the sole models for cultural producers, both white English-speaking South African males. Quoting itself, quoting itself, it references inwards, layering and embedding voices across projects, daring those in the know to the familiar hermeneutic game of excavating for meaning across and between them. The resolutely fictional references to the 'hidden' or 'submerged' voice of the real sets out a problematic ethical relationship between the two, questioning the point of the

beginning of narrative and issues of cultural memory. It also refers out, beginning to further 'world' the text by indicating a global art market and South Africa's cultural and economic capitulation to that market. In *The Exploded View*, Majara provides a portrait of a 'worldly' innovative conceptual artist who defines himself and his own work in his habitat and context, and is therefore more in control of his own destiny in the new dispensation: in *Double Negative*, Majara is set up against the artistic models of Auerbach and Neville Lister as the younger, shrewder artist of the 'now'. In surfacing these multiple perspectives within a global context, the book as product comments on its own participation in this 'worlding', entering the global market of capital relations with the attendant other forms of cultural production that its pages hold and accrete.

By rehabilitating a voice, already at many removes, Vladislavić makes *Double Negative* a new context of reception for previous work, and for a project process of 'bonded autonomy' already initiated in the making of *The Exploded View*. Vladislavić reminds us, not only of the ongoing 'work' of writing and creating, but also of the processes of reception and interpretation; that new contexts open previous ones to critique, and the meaning shifts of contextual alteration, drawing attention to the how and when of the migratory border crossing potential of 'text' in multiply valenced contexts of reception. In the rapidity of change that characterizes the South African post-apartheid urbanity that Vladislavić's work is concerned with, this is salient. Epistemological change moves into the spaces of the book, destabilizing the singular, authoritative reading and mitigating fixity. This includes the marketing of the work into any particular brand, such as post-apartheid, postmodern, realist or documentary, commenting on the placing of his own work in these marketing genres and critical frames.

The imprint of various roles and institutional sites Vladislavić has occupied within his work create multiple sites and spaces within the texts which register as variously entangled literary countersignatures and hospitable responses to others' work. Contexts and inherited traditions that emerge from within Vladislavić's prose fiction unsettle the cultural authority attendant in writing South Africa from a position of privilege as a white, anglophone male. Focusing this strategic suspension of the

cultural authority that literary production necessitates through acts of collecting – text collectors and collections – I have argued for an accretive logic and a curatorial mode that exhibits a paradoxical relationship of Vladislavić’s work to the self-contained integrity of the book. Intensely localized, but a globally recognizable gesture, collecting – text/s, influence, connections, and processes – figures as a world-creating and world-absorbing activity (c.f. Suresh, 2016). With an attendant ethics of remaking and a nimble poetics of variation, displaying care in attending to the value of the ‘small’, Vladislavić’s gatherings point to localisation, institutions, and the responsibility involved in related ‘backroom’ activity.

By ‘re-reading’ and collecting previous texts in the new, Vladislavić performs a writing that is a specific, and sidelong, curatorial activity, reorganizing events, unhinging history’s continuity by exploiting the potential of the marginal, small text, as a series of events closer to Thierry de Duve’s paradox of events to be hung on a wall (1978: 109) than those conventionally understood as parts of an ongoing construct or sequential history. In the resulting ambiguity of actuality, the activity of writing is closer to a metier of the curator, a sense of the display and care for the work of others that invites the viewer/reader to participate, and that is multi-sited as well as multi-temporal.<sup>96</sup>

Amongst *Double Negative*’s creative negotiations with multiple surfaces of inscription and ekphrasis are two appearances of the ‘angel of history’: in part one of the novel, the angel hovers over the university drop-out Neville sometime in the mid-1980s, as he is interrogated, along with Auerbach, about the ‘duty’ to protest apartheid by the English journalist Gerald Brookes (34-42); in part three, Benjamin’s angel returns, as Neville reviews a photograph he has just taken of the ‘fabulous’, ‘prodigal’ ‘Antoine K’ (158-162). In the narration of Neville’s image-making, like the narrated ekphrastic ‘telling’ of the dead letters, and what we ‘see’ or ‘hear’ of Auerbach’s images, our view is dictated by Neville’s restricted first-person narrative present. It is dated by Antoine K.’s insistent telling of the ‘the scale of his suffering’,

---

<sup>96</sup> This analysis owes to Jean-Paul Martinon’s linking of Stéphane Mallarmé’s aborted project for a quasi-eschatological artwork consisting of a series of 2-hour multi-sensory, unscripted popular melodramatic events, aiming to expose ‘thought thinking itself’, to some in the gamut of issues facing curators today (2013: 2-3).



and 'the night last year when a mob armed with knobkieries and golf clubs had driven him out of his shack in Alex... They had brought tyres and petrol and threatened to burn him alive' (161).

This reference to the violence that spread through South African townships from Alexandra in 2008, dubbed the 'xenophobic riots', an event highly compressed in the narration as Neville tolerates Antoine K.'s telling in order to get his shot. It alludes in its compactness to two cross-temporal texts of visual culture: the iconic image of Walter Benjamin's angel of history – or rather, as Neville notes, 'Klee's Angel, strictly speaking' (37), so insisting on the material context of Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*; and, in referencing the threat of 'necklacing' in 2008, Vladislavić recalls the 'viral' photograph of the 'burning man', Mozambican immigrant Ernesto Nhamuave. Murdered during the riots, his was an image 'eerily reminiscent of the internecine battles that grabbed headlines in the years leading up to the collapse of apartheid' (Hickel, 2014: 103), that prompted an intensification of criticism and scrutiny of the neoliberal post-apartheid ANC dispensation, radical inequalities in the socio-economic circumstances, and the failure to deliver basic service provision.

The echo chambers between the mid-eighties, states of emergency South Africa and its late 2000's neoliberal dispensation, which these images in their allusive juxtaposition potentialize, collect the restless, interstitial, processual openings of Vladislavić's cross-referenced assemblages and modes, and draw across the time-frames that have been the focus of this thesis. On both occasions, the 'Angel of History' is referenced, in particularly striking visual terms, in relation to aesthetic, cultural production, just before Neville witnesses Auerbach taking his 'accidental portraits', and as he reflects on the image he has made of Antoine K. On both occasions, for both Neville and Auerbach, image-making and the ethics of photographic practice in the face of the violence of Johannesburg is drawn into an explicit and negative relation to storytelling: on both occasions the 'storyteller' role required of their photographic practice by the journalists is renounced by the two photographer protagonists, Neville (177) repeating to Janie Auerbach's phrase to Brooks, 'I'm not a storyteller' (46). Separated by the decades of transition, both photographers refuse the role of international spokesperson, turning away from

and, so, displacing the desire for the social documentary gesture and the return to the real.

In *Double Negative's* ekphrastic rendering of the Angel of History, the angel, like the 'prodigal' migrant Antoine K., at risk of xenophobic violence in the neoliberal South Africa of 2008, looks sideways, 'from the corners of his eyes' (162). Vladislavić's (more properly Benjamin's, more properly Klee's, more properly Neville's) angel 'sees' the redoubling and accumulation of the surfaces of a catastrophic past, but from an angle. A figure of suspension, and for Vladislavić of the sidelong view, Vladislavić's careful ekphrastic rendering of Klee's painting offers a highly suggestive image for thinking through a mode of writing and authorial self-positioning I identify throughout the thesis. Vladislavić's curatorial mode of care for the collection registers the roles, institutional spaces, and abiding interests that occupy his work and that have been my focus. Encouraging us to the crab-step and the sideways look, this mode of writing the South African space from the site of privilege performs and negotiates an accretive logic that does not set the local against the global, or determine historical linearity through the marker of the 'post-'; but is a particular form of world-making, acknowledging a place in history through the possibilities of its remakings, inherent in the 'small' text and its invitations to join in reading through its workings across.

## Bibliography

- Abdalkafor, Ola (2015). *Gayatri Spivak: Deconstruction and the Ethics of Postcolonial Literary Interpretation*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Abrahams, Lionel (1980). 'The Purple Renoster: an adolescence'. *English in Africa*, 7:2, 32-49.
- Abrahams, Lionel (1984). *Journal of a New Man*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker.
- Abrahams, Lionel (1987). Interview with Michael Chapman. 'Poet, novelist, critic, publisher, human being'. *English Academy Review*, 4:1, 143-152.
- Abrahams, Lionel (1988a). *Lionel Abrahams: A Reader*. Patrick Cullinan (Ed.). Johannesburg: Ad Donker.
- Abrahams, Lionel (1988b). 'Concerning Sesame'. *Sesame*, 10: Winter. Renoster Books: Johannesburg. 2-3.
- Abrahams, Lionel (1992). Acceptance speech for the 1987 Thomas Pringle Award for Poetry. In Andrew Foley, 'A sense of place in contemporary white South African English poetry'. *English in Africa*, 19:2, 35-53.
- Altman, Janet Gurkin (1982). *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun; Breckenridge, Carol A. (2008). 'Afterword: the risk of Johannesburg'. In Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (Eds.), *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*. Durham: Duke University Press; Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 351-354.
- Attwell, David (1993). *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Attwell, David (1993). 'Review: *Exchanges: South African writing in transition* by Duncan Brown and Bruno van Dyk'. *Research in African Literatures*, 24:1, 144-146.
- Attwell, David; Attridge, Derek (Eds.) (2012). 'Introduction'. *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1-18.
- Azoulay, Ariella (2011). 'Archive'. Trans. Tal Haran. *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*. Available online at: <http://www.politicalconcepts.org/issue1/archive/>
- Baer, Ulrich (2002). *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*. London: MIT Press.
- Bal, Mieke (1994). 'Telling objects: a narrative perspective on collecting'. In John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting*. London: Reaktion Books. 97-115.
- Barnard, Rita (1993). "Imagining the unimaginable": J.M. Coetzee, history, and

- autobiography'. *Postmodern Culture: Journal of Interdisciplinary thought on Contemporary Cultures*, 4:1. Available online at:  
<http://www.pomoculture.org/2013/09/25/imagining-the-unimaginable-j-m-coetzee-history-and-autobiography/>
- Barnard, Rita (2004). 'Bittercomix: notes from the post-apartheid underground'. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103:4, 719-754.
- Barnett, Clive (1999a). 'Constructions of apartheid in the international reception of the novels of J.M. Coetzee'. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25:2, 287-301.
- Barnett, Clive (1999b). 'Deconstructing context: Exposing Derrida'. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 24:3, 277-293.
- Barris, Ken (1990). 'Fiction of Ideas. Review *Missing Persons*'. *Southern African Review of Books*, 3: 6, 6-7.
- Barris, Ken (2010). 'The politics of originality: Reading Ivan Vladislavić through J.M. Coetzee's early fiction.' *Contemporary Literature*, 51:2, 283-309.
- Baudrillard, Jean (1994). 'The system of collecting'. In John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting*. London: Reaktion Books. 7-24.
- Baudrillard, Jean (2005). *The System of Objects*. Trans. James Benedict. London and New York: Verso.
- Bawa, Ahmed; Herwitz, Daniel (2008). 'South African universities in the tumult of change'. *The Africa Issue* [Special issue]. *The Journal of the International Institute*, 15:2, 11-14.
- Benjamin, Walter (1999). *Illuminations* [1968]. Trans. Harry Zohn. London: Pimlico.
- Bennington, Geoffrey (1990). 'Postal politics and the institution of the nation'. In Homi K. Bhabha (Ed.), *Nation and Narration*. London and New York: Routledge. 121-137.
- Bester, Rory (2015). *Writing Photography's Archive of Apartheid: Theories and Methods for Understanding the Work of David Goldblatt*. (Unpublished PhD dissertation.) University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
- Bethlehem, Louise (2001). 'A primary need as strong as hunger: the rhetoric of urgency in South African literary culture under apartheid'. *Poetics Today*, 22:2, 365-389.
- Bethlehem, Louise (2014). 'Lauren Beukes's post-apartheid dystopia: inhabiting *Moxyland*'. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50:5, 522-534.
- Bethlehem, Louise (2014). 'Achieved professionalism: *The Columbia Guide to South African Literature in English* and *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*'. *English in Africa*, 41:1, 155-179.

- Blair, Peter (2012). 'The liberal tradition in fiction'. In Derek Attridge and David Attwell (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 474–499.
- Boehmer, Elleke (1998). 'Endings and New Beginnings: South African Fiction in Transition'. In Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Eds.), *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy, 1970-1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 43-56.
- Boniface Davies, Sheila; Horrell, Georgina (2005). 'Letters home'. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. 41: 2, 135-143.
- Bonner, Philip (1982). *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Botha, Fourie (2010). Personal interview with Katie Reid. Random House Struik, Cape Town. July 24.
- Brooker, Peter; Thacker, Andrew (Eds.) (2009). *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines. Volume I: Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brothman, Brien (1993). 'The limit of limits: Derridean deconstruction and the archival institution'. *Archivaria*, 36, 205-220.
- Brouillette, Sarah (2007). *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brown, Bill (2001). 'Thing theory'. *Things* [Special issue]. *Critical Inquiry*, 28:1, 1-22.
- Brown, Duncan; Van Dyk, Bruno (Eds.), (1991). *Exchanges: South African Writing in Transition*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Brown, Duncan; Krog, Antjie (2011). 'Creative non-fiction: a conversation'. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 23:1, 57-70.
- Brown, Verna (1990). 'Review of *Missing Persons*, by Ivan Vladislavić'. *The English Academy Review*, 7:1, 127-129.
- Bunn, David; Taylor, Jane (Eds.) (1987). 'Editors' Introduction'. *From South Africa: New Writing, Photographs and Art* [Special issue]. *TriQuarterly*, 69, 13-31.
- Bunn, David (1998). 'Whited sepulchres: on the reluctance of monuments'. In Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavić (Eds.), *blank\_\_ Architecture, apartheid and after*. Rotterdam: NAI. C4.
- Burton (Collins), Vicki Tolar (1999). 'The speaker respoken: material rhetoric as feminist

- methodology'. *College English*, 61, 545-573.
- Butcher, Clare (2011). 'Closed-circuits: Mikhael Subotzky & Patrick Waterhouse – *Ponte City*'. *foam magazine*, #27: 'Report', 171-174.
- Butcher, Clare (2013). 'Umbrellas and Sewing Machines'. *Seismopolite: Journal of Art and Politics*, May 15. Available online at: <http://www.seismopolite.com/umbrellas-and-sewing-machines>
- Butler, Samuel (2003). *Erewhon, Or Over the Range* [1872]. Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift.
- Casanova, Pascale (2004). *The World Republic of Letters*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chapman, Michael (1988). 'The liberated zone: the possibilities of imaginative expression in a state of emergency', *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies*, 5:1, 23-53.
- Chapman, Michael (1990). 'Review.' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16:2, 378-379.
- Chapman, Michael (1996). *Southern African Literatures*. London: Longman.
- Chapman, Michael; Lenta, Margaret (Eds.) (2011). *SA Lit: Beyond 2000*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu Natal Press.
- Charos, Caitlin (2008). "The end of an error": transition and 'post-apartheid play' in Ivan Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket*'. *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 9:1, 23-38.
- Chrisman, Laura (2003). *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism, and Transnationalism*. Manchester University Press.
- Clary-Lemon, Jennifer (2015). 'Museums as material: experiential landscapes and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights'. *Enculturation: A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture*. 22 December. Available online at: <http://enculturation.net/museums-as-material%20>
- Coetzee, Ampie (1984). 'Taurus publishers'. *Index on Censorship*, 13:5, 32.
- Coetzee, J.M. (1979). 'Staffrider'. *African Book Publishing Record*, 5:4, 235-6.
- Coetzee, J.M. (1988). *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Coetzee, J.M. (2002). *Stranger Shores: Essays 1986-1999*. London: Vintage.
- Cohen, David William (2014). 'A curator's fingers: photographers, subjects, and the third thing'. In Pippa Skotnes and Carolyn Hamilton (Eds.), *Uncertain Curature: In and Out of the Archive*. Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media. 63-100.

- Cole, Teju (2012). *Open City*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Cole, Teju (2013). 'Introduction'. *Double Negative*. London; New York: And Other Stories. 9-14.
- Collins, Douglas (2002/2003). 'The great effects of small things: insignificance with immanence in critical theory'. *Anthropoetics. The Journal of Generative Anthropology*, 8:2. Available online at: <http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0802/collins.htm>
- Comaroff, Jean; Comaroff, John (2004). 'Criminal obsessions, after Foucault: postcoloniality, policing, and the metaphysics of disorder'. *Critical Inquiry*, 30:4, 800-824.
- Coombes, Annie E. (2003). *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Coovadia, Imraan (2012). 'Political Novels Debate: "We don't need political novels anymore" – Coovadia'. *The Sunday Independent: Books*, June 19. Available online at: <http://sundayindybooks.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/political-novels-debate-we-dont-need.html>
- Cornwell, Gareth (1991). 'Interview'. In Duncan Brown and Bruno Van Dyk (Eds.), *Exchanges: South African Writing in Transition*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press. 14-19.
- Cornwell, Gareth; Klopper, Dirk; Mackenzie, Craig (2012). *The Columbia Guide to South African Literature in English Since 1945*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cramerotti, Alfredo; Martinon, Jean-Paul (2013). 'Whence the future?'. In Jean-Paul Martinon (Ed.), *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*. London: A&C Black. 35-40.
- Cullinan, Patrick (1980). 'Announcement: The Bloody Horse'. *English in Africa*, 7:2, 86-87.
- Cullinan, Patrick (1981). 'Comment'. *The Bloody Horse: Writing and the Arts*, 5: May-June, 3-7.
- De Duve, Thierry (1978). 'Time exposure and snapshot: the photograph as paradox'. *Photography* [Special issue]. *October*, 5, 113-125.
- De Kock, Leon (2001). 'South Africa in the global imaginary: an introduction'. *Poetics Today*, 22:2, 263-298.
- De Kock, Leon (2010). 'Call of the wild: speculations on a white counterlife in South Africa'. *Whiteness Studies: A South African Perspective* [Special issue]. *English in Africa*, 37:1, 15-39.
- De Kock, Leon (2011). 'The end of 'South African' literary history? Judging 'national' fiction in a transnational era'. In Michael Chapman and Margaret Lenta (Eds.), *SA Lit: Beyond*

2000. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu Natal Press.
- De Kock, Leon (2014). 'The SA Lit issue won't go away'. *Mail & Guardian: Books*, August 22.
- Delius, Peter, (1983) *The Land Belongs to Us*. Johannesburg. Ravan.
- DeMarco, Amanda (2012). 'Case study: And Other Stories' "editorial crowd-sourcing" for translations'. *Publishing Perspectives*, September 7. Available online at: [http://publishingperspectives.com/2012/09/case-study-and-other-stories-editorial-crowd-sourcing-for-translations/#.WF\\_dX9KLTIU](http://publishingperspectives.com/2012/09/case-study-and-other-stories-editorial-crowd-sourcing-for-translations/#.WF_dX9KLTIU)
- Derrida, Jacques (1980). *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, Jacques (1982). 'The ends of man' [1968]. In *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Allan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 111-136.
- Derrida, Jacques (1995). 'Archive fever: a Freudian impression'. Trans. Eric Prenowitz. *Diacritics*, 25:2, 9-63.
- Derrida, Jacques (1996). *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression* [1995]. Trans. Eric Prenowitz. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, Jacques (2005). *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Trans. Pascale Anne-Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Dettmar, Kevin J.H.; Watt, Stephen (Eds.) (1996). *Marketing Modernisms: Self-promotion, Canonization, Rereading*. University of Michigan Press.
- Devenney, Mark (1994). 'Democracy, Literature, and Politics'. Proceedings of the University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop, 13-15 July. Available online at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/39666742.pdf>
- De Vries, Fred (2006). 'Joburg's ambiguity mirrored in Portrait'. *Business Day*, September 9. Available online at: [www.businessday.co.za/Articles/TarkArticle.aspx?ID=2221346](http://www.businessday.co.za/Articles/TarkArticle.aspx?ID=2221346).
- De Waal, Sean (2010). 'Three ways of seeing'. *Mail & Guardian*. 7 December. Available online at: <https://mg.co.za/article/2010-12-07-three-ways-of-seeing>
- Deysel, Jurgen Johannes Human (2007). *The subversive Afrikaner: An exploration into the subversive stance of the little magazine Stet (1982-1991)* (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Pretoria, South Africa.
- Dicey, William (2006). 'A Conversation with Ivan Vladislavić'. *New Contrast*, 34:1&2, 39-49.
- Dickson, Barbara (1999). 'Reading maternity materially: the case of Demi Moore'. In Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley (Eds.), *Rhetorical Bodies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 297-325.



- Dickens, Charles (1994). *A Tale of Two Cities* [1859]. London: Penguin.
- Dilworth, Leah (Ed.) (2003). *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Diserens, Corrine (2001). 'Shifting perceptions of reality'. In *Fifty-one years, David Goldblatt*. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona. 5-12.
- Dooley, Mark; Kavanagh, Liam (2014). *The Philosophy of Derrida*. Routledge.
- Driver, Dorothy (1996a). 'Modern South African literature in English: a reader's guide to some recent critical and bibliographic resources.' *World Literature Today*, 70:1, 99-106.
- Driver, Dorothy (1996b). 'Transformation through art: writing, representation, and subjectivity in recent South African fiction'. *World Literature Today*, 70:1, 45-51.
- Dubow, Saul (1995). *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eichorn, Kate (2008). 'Archival genres: gathering texts and reading spaces'. *The Archive of the Future/The Future of the Archive* [Special issue]. *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture*, May: 12. Available online at: [http://www.rochester.edu/in\\_visible\\_culture](http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture)
- Elias, Camelia (2004). *The Fragment: Towards a History and Poetics of a Performative Gesture*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Elsner, John; Cardinal, Roger (1994). 'Introduction'. In John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting*. London: Reaktion Books. 1-6.
- English, James (2002). 'Winning the culture game: prizes, awards, and the rules of art'. *New Literary History*, 33: 1, 109-135.
- Evans, Lucy (2009). "Free to come to grief": the problems of formal freedom in Mark McWatt's *Suspended Sentences*'. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 44: 3, 33-49.
- Fanon, Frantz (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.
- Ferns, Chris. (1999). *Narrating utopia: ideology, gender, form in utopian literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Findley, Lisa (2005). *Building Change: Architecture, Politics and Cultural Agency*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- Flanery, Patrick (2013). 'Double Negative by Ivan Vladislavić - review'. *The Guardian*,

- November 8. Available online at:  
[https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/nov/08/double-negative-ivan-vladislavic-review?CMP=tw\\_t\\_gu](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/nov/08/double-negative-ivan-vladislavic-review?CMP=tw_t_gu)
- Foote, Kenneth E.; Toth, Attila; Arvay, Annet (2000). 'Hungary after 1989: inscribing a new past on place'. *The Geographical Review*, 90:3, 301-334.
- Foucault, Michel (2002). *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [1969]. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fourie, Abrie (2012). *Oblique*. Berlin: Revolver.
- Fraser, Robert (2008). *Book History through Postcolonial Eyes: Rewriting the Script*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Frenkel, Ronit (2010). 'Thinking from the South'. Unpublished panel discussion, 'South Africa in the World', with Duncan Brown, Achille Mbembe, and Sarah Nuttall. Cape Town Book Fair. August 1.
- Friedman, Graeme; Blumenthal, Roy (Eds.), (1998). *A Writer in Stone: South African Writers Celebrate the 70th Birthday of Lionel Abrahams*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Gardiner, Michael (2002). 'Time to talk: literary magazines in the Pretoria-Johannesburg region, 1956-1978'. *Botsotso*, 12, 23-35.
- Garuba, Harry; Michael, Cheryl-Ann; Samuelson, Meg (Eds.) (2010). 'Introduction'. *Global Africa: travels, transfer, transformation - Festschrift for Brenda Cooper* [Symposium]. *Social Dynamics*, 36: 2, 235-238.
- Gaylard, Gerald (2005). 'Postcolonial satire: Ivan Vladislavić'. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in South Africa*, 17:1, 129-148.
- Gaylard, Gerald (2006). 'The death of the subject? Subjectivity in postapartheid literature'. *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*, 11:2, 62-74.
- Gaylard, Gerald (2011). 'Introduction'. In Gerald Gaylard (Ed.), *Marginal Spaces: Reading Ivan Vladislavić*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 1-18.
- Gaylard, Gerald; Titlestad, Michael (2006). 'Introduction: Controversial Interpretations of Ivan Vladislavić'. *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*, 11:2, 5-10.
- Gaylard, Rob (2009). 'Rediscovery revisited'. *English in Africa*, 36:1, 41-54.
- Gerber, David A. (2005). 'Acts of deceiving and withholding in immigrant letters: personal identity and self-presentation in personal correspondence'. *Journal of Social History*, 39: 2, 315-330.
- Gevisser, Mark (1998). 'A Profile of Lionel Abrahams'. In Graeme Friedman & Roy

- Blumenthal (Eds.), *A Writer in Stone: South African Writers Celebrate the 70th Birthday of Lionel Abrahams*. Cape Town: David Philip. 1-12.
- Goldblatt, David (2001). *Fifty-one years, David Goldblatt*. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.
- Goldblatt, David; Vladislavić, Ivan (2010). *TJ/Double Negative*. Rome: Contrasto.
- Goldblatt, David (2011). *TJ: Johannesburg Photographs, 1948-2010*. Cape Town: Umuzi.
- Goldblatt, David (2012). 'Everything was moving: in conversation with David Goldblatt'. Discussion with Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin. 13 September, Barbican Art Gallery, London.
- Gordimer, Nadine (1983). 'Living in the interregnum'. *The New York Review of Books*, January 20.
- Gordimer, Nadine (1988). 'Living in the interregnum' [1983]. In Stephen Clingman (Ed.), *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places*. New York: Knopf; and London: Jonathan Cape. 261-84.
- Gordimer, Nadine (1995). 'That other world that was the world'. In *Writing and Being*. Cambridge, MA; and London: Harvard University Press. 114-136.
- Graham, James (2008). 'Ivan Vladislavić and the possible city'. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 44:4, 333-344.
- Graham, James (2016). 'At home in Johannesburg? Rethinking cosmopolitanism through *TJ/Double Negative*, the joint project between David Goldblatt and Ivan Vladislavić'. *ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 47:1-2, 193-222.
- Graham, James; Niblett, Michael; Deckard, Sharae (2012). 'Postcolonial studies and world literature'. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 48:5, 465-471.
- Graham, Shane (2006). 'Layers of permanence: toward a spatial-materialist reading of Ivan Vladislavić's *The Exploded View*'. *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*, 11:2, 48-61.
- Graham, Shane (2007). 'Memory, memorialization and the transformation of Johannesburg: Ivan Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket* and *Propaganda by Monuments*'. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 53:1, 70-97.
- Graham, Shane (2009). *South African Literature after the Truth Commission: Mapping Loss*. New York: Springer.
- Gray, Stephen (1979). *Southern African Literature: An Introduction*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Grzeda, Pauline (2013). 'Magical realism: A narrative of celebration or disillusionment?'

- South African literature in the transition period'. *ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 44:1, 153-183.
- Groenewald, Lizè; Legge, Francis (2008). 'Foundations of the nation: the Hillbrow and Brixton Towers as figurations of national identity in South Africa'. *International Conference on Case Histories in Geotechnical Engineering*, 4: 1107b, 1-12. Available online at: <http://scholarsmine.mst.edu/icchge/6icchge/session11b/4>
- Guidotti, Valeria (1999). 'Magical realism beyond the wall of apartheid? *Missing Persons* by Ivan Vladislavić'. In Elsa Linguanti, Francesco Cosotti, and Carmen Concilio (Eds.), *Coterminous Worlds: Magical Realism and Contemporary Post-Colonial Literature in English*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. 227-43.
- Gunner, Liz (2005). 'Introduction: African imaginaries and transnational spaces'. *African Studies*, 64:1, 1-7.
- Haraway, Donna, (1997). *Modest Witness @ Second Millennium. Female Man Meets Onco Mouse*. New York: Routledge.
- Hamilton, Carolyn; Harris, Verne; Taylor, Jane; Pickover, Michele; Reid, Graham; Saleh, Razia (2002). *Refiguring the Archive*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Hamilton, Carolyn; Skotnes, Pippa (Eds.) (2014). *Uncertain Curature: In and Out of the Archive*. Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media.
- Helgesson, Stefan (2004). 'Minor disorders': Ivan Vladislavić and the devolution of South African English'. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30:4, 777-787.
- Helgesson, Stefan (2009). *Transnationalism in Southern African Literature: Modernists, Realists, and the Inequality of Print Culture*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Helgesson, Stefan (2015). 'Johannesburg sighted: *Tj/Double Negative* and the temporality of the image/text.' *Safundi*, 16:1, 51-63.
- Helgesson, Stefan (2016). 'Fields in formation: English Studies and national literature in South Africa (with a Brazilian comparison)'. In Raphael Dalleo (Ed.), *Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 159-174.
- Helgesson, Stefan; Vermeulen, Pieter (Eds.), (2016). *Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translation, Markets*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Herwitz, Daniel (2010). 'The monument in ruins'. In Julia Hell and Andreas Schonle (Eds.), *Ruins of Modernity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 232-243.
- Herwitz, Daniel Alan (2012). *Heritage, Culture and Politics in the Postcolony*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Hesford, Wendy S. (2004). 'Documenting violations: rhetorical witnessing and the spectacle of distant suffering'. *Biography*, 27:1, 104-144.
- Heyns, Michiel (2006). 'Book Review: *Portrait with Keys: Joburg & what-what* by Ivan Vladislavić (Umuzi) R125'. *Sunday Independent (SA)*, 16 July. Available online at: <http://www.michielheyns.co.za/documents/Portrait%20with%20Keys%20by%20Ivan%20vladislavic.pdf>.
- Hickel, Jason (2014). 'Xenophobia' in South Africa: order, chaos, and the moral economy of witchcraft'. *Cultural Anthropology*. 29:1, 103-127.
- Hoffman, Frederick J.; Allen, Charles; Ulrich, Carolyn F. (1946). *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hofmeyr, Isabel (2004). *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of The Pilgrim's Progress*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Horn, Annette (2011). 'Reimagining the post-apartheid city: Ivan Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys. Joburg & what-what*'. *TRANS: Internet journal for cultural studies*, 18: June. Available online at: [http://www.inst.at/trans/18Nr/II-5/horn\\_a18.htm](http://www.inst.at/trans/18Nr/II-5/horn_a18.htm)
- Huggan, Graham (2001). *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Hove: Psychology Press.
- Jacobs, Jane M. (2002). *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Jackson, Jeanne-Marie (2015). *South African Literature's Russian Soul: Narrative Forms of Global Isolation*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Judin, Hilton; Vladislavić, Ivan (Eds.), (1998). *blank\_Architecture, apartheid and after*. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers.
- Kant, Immanuel (1855). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn. London: Henry G. Bohn.
- Kauffman, Linda S. (1988). *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Kennelly, Brian G. (2005). 'Beauty in bastardy? Breytenbach on Afrikaans and the Afrikaners'. *PORTAL: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, 2:2, 1-20. Available online at: <http://works.bepress.com/bkennell/7/>
- Kimmerle, Heinz; Oosterling, Henk (2000). *Sensus Communis in Multi- and Intercultural Perspective: On the Possibility of Common Judgments in Arts and Politics*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.

- Kirkwood, Mike (1976). 'The colonizer: a critique of the English South African culture theory' [1974]. In Peter Wilhelm and James Polley (Eds.), *Poetry South Africa: Selected Papers from Poetry 74*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker. 102-33.
- Kirkwood, Mike (1978). 'Editorial'. *Staffrider*, 1:1, 1.
- Klopper, Dirk (2012). 'The lyric poem during and after apartheid'. In David Attwell and Derek Attridge (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 587-686.
- Kossew, Sue (2010). 'Re-reading the past: monuments, history and representation in short stories by Ivan Vladislavić and Zoe Wicomb'. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36.3: 571-582.
- Krabill, Ron (2010). *Starring Mandela and Cosby: Media and the End(s) of Apartheid*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Krog, Antjie (1998). *Country of My Skull*. Johannesburg: Random House.
- Krog, Antjie (2006). 'The cook, the stew and the taster'. *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*, 11:2, 91-96.
- Kruger, Loren (2002). 'Introduction: scarcity, conspicuous consumption, and performance in South Africa'. *Theatre Research International*, 27:3, 231-242.
- Kruger, Loren (2013). *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing, and Building Johannesburg*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kruger, Loren; Watson Shariff, Patricia (2001). "'Shoo - this book makes me to think!'" Education, entertainment and "life-skills" comics in South Africa'. *Poetics Today*, 22: 2, 475-513.
- Law-Viljoen, Bronwyn (2011). 'Interview with David Goldblatt and Ivan Vladislavić'. In Gerald Gaylard (Ed.) *Marginal Spaces: Reading Ivan Vladislavić*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 340-358.
- Law-Viljoen, Bronwen (2012). 'Sailing a smaller ship: publishing art books in South Africa'. In Andrew Van der Vlies (Ed.) *Print, Text and Book Cultures in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Lazarus, Neil (1986-1987). 'Modernism and modernity: T.W. Adorno and contemporary white South African literature'. *Cultural Critique*, 5, 131-155.
- Lenta, Margaret (1988). 'Fictions of the future'. *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies*, 133-145.
- Le Roux, Elizabeth (2015). *A Social History of the University Presses in Apartheid South*

- Africa: Between Complicity and Resistance*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Lionnet, Françoise; Shih, Shu-mei (Eds.) (2005). *Minor Transnationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Lok, Jeff (1988). 'Tsafendas's Diary: The Comic-Book'. *Staffrider*, 7:1, 62-63.
- Loomba, Ania; Kaul, Suvir; Bunzl, Matti; Burton, Antoinette; Esty, Jed (Eds.) (2005). *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- MacLean, Gerald (2000). 'Re-siting the subject'. In Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven (Eds.) *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press. 176-197.
- Marais, Mike (2002). 'Visions of excess: closure, irony, and the thought of community in Ivan Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket*'. *English in Africa*, 29:2, 101-117.
- Marais, Sue (1992). 'Ivan Vladislavić's re-vision of the South African story cycle'. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 4:1, 41-56.
- Marais, Sue (2001). 'Discontinuity-in-relationship: apartheid in the South African short fiction cycle'. In Nahem Yousaf (Ed.) *Apartheid Narratives*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi. 191-204.
- Marais, Sue (2011). "Freeze-Frame?" (Re-)imagining the past in Ivan Vladislavić's *Missing Persons*'. In Gerald Gaylard (Ed.) *Marginal Spaces: Reading Ivan Vladislavić*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 25-45.
- Martinon, Jean-Paul (Ed.) (2013). *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*. London: A&C Black.
- Maughan-Brown, David (1989). 'The anthology as reliquary?' *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 1:1, 3-21.
- Mbembe, Achille (2004). 'Aesthetics of superfluidity'. *Public Culture*, 16:3, 373-405.
- McCloud, Scott (1993). *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Wisconsin: Kitchen Sink Press.
- McDonald, Peter (2009). *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McDonald, Peter D. (2016). 'Instituting (world) literature'. In Stefan Helgesson and Pieter Vermeulen (Eds.), *Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translation, Markets*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge. 39-52.
- McGann, Jerome, (1985) *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory*. Gloucestershire: Clarendon Press.

- McGann, Jerome, (1991). *The Textual Condition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- McGregor, Liz; Nuttall, Sarah (2007). *At Risk: Writing on and Over the Edge of South Africa*. Cape Town: Jonathan Ball.
- McKible, Adam (2002). *The Space and Place of Modernism: The Russian Revolution, Little Magazines, and New York*. Hove: Psychology Press.
- Ménager-Everson, S.V. (1992). 'The Albie Sachs debate'. *Research in African Literatures*, 23:4, 59-66.
- Miller, Andie (2006). 'Inside the toolbox: Andie Miller in conversation with Ivan Vladislavić'. *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*, 11:2, 117-124.
- Mishra, Sudesh (2006). 'Siding with things'. In Timothy Clark and Nicholas Royle (Eds.), *The Future of the Humanities: U.S. Domination and Other Issues* [Special issue]. *Oxford Literary Review*, 28, 103-116.
- Mkhize, Jabulani (2001). 'Literary prospects in 'post-apartheid' South Africa'. *Alternation*, 8:1, 170-187.
- Mofokeng, Santu (2010). 'Santu Mofokeng in Conversation with Corinne Diserens (Part I)'. In Corinne Diserens (Ed.) *Chasing Shadows: Santu Mofokeng. Thirty Years of Photographic Essays*. Munich; London; and New York: Prestel. 9-18.
- Moretti, Franco (2000). 'Conjectures on World Literature'. *New Left Review*, January-February. Available online at: <https://newleftreview.org/II/1/franco-moretti-conjectures-on-world-literature>
- Moretti, Franco (2013). *Distant Reading*. London and New York: Verso.
- Morris, Jan (2006). 'Mean streets'. November 18. Guardian Books. Available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/nov/18/featuresreviews.guardianreview18>
- Morrison, Mark S. (2001). *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Morphet, Tony (1996). 'Ravan: child of a special time.' *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 1 November to 7 November. Available online at: <http://mg.co.za/article/1996-11-01-ravan-child-of-a-special-time>
- Morphet, Tony (2011). 'An extraordinary volume romps in my head' [1990]. In Gerald Gaylard (Ed.), *Marginal Spaces: Reading Ivan Vladislavić*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 22-24.
- Mukherjee, Pablo (2012). 'Ivan Vladislavić: traversing the uneven city'. *Journal of*



- Postcolonial Writing*, 48:5, 472-484.
- Murray, Sally-Ann (1991). 'Telling stories'. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 3:1, 184-192.
- Murray, Sally-Ann (2009). 'Ivan Vladislavić and what-what: among writers, readers and "other odds, sods and marginals"'. *Beyond 2000: South African Literature Today* [Special Issue]. *Current Writing*, 21:1&2, 138-160.
- Mutloatse, Mothobi (1980). *Africa South: Contemporary Writings*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc (1997). *The Sense of the World* [1993]. Trans. Jeffrey S. Librett. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nakai, Asako (2000). *The English Book and its Marginalia: Colonial/Postcolonial Literatures After Heart of Darkness*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Naudé, S.J.; Vladislavić, Ivan (2014). 'In conversation: S.J. Naudé and Ivan Vladislavić', *Granta*, 11 December. Available online at: <https://granta.com/in-conversation-s-j-naude-and-ivan-vladislavic/>
- Ndebele, Njabulo S. (1984). 'Turkish Tales and some thoughts on South African fiction'. *Staffrider*, 6:1, 24-25; 42-48.
- Ndebele, Njabulo S. (1986). 'The rediscovery of the ordinary'. *Journal of South African Studies*, 12:2, 143-157.
- Ndebele, Njabulo (1996). 'A home for intimacy'. *Mail & Guardian*. Two years of transition. 26 April. Available online at: <http://mg.co.za/article/1996-04-26-a-home-for-intimacy>.
- Newman, Judie (2001). 'Jump starts: Nadine Gordimer after apartheid'. In Nahem Yousaf (Ed.), *Apartheid Narratives*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi. 101-114.
- Neumark, Norie (2005). 'Introduction: Relays, delays, and distance art/activism'. In Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (Eds.), *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 2-24.
- Nixon, Rob (1994). *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Nixon, Rob (2012). 'Non-Fiction Booms, North and South: A Transatlantic Perspective'. *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 13:1-2, 29-49.
- Nogueira, Fatima R. (2010). 'Rhizomatic writing in Augusto Roa Bastos's short stories'. Trans. Hortensia Groth. In Helen Carol Weldt-Basson (Ed.) *Postmodernism's Role in*

- Latin American Literature: The Life and Work of Augusto Roa Basto*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 81-112.
- Norval, Aletta (1996). *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse*. London: Verso.
- Nuttall, Sarah (2002). 'The biography of texts'. In Carolyn Hamilton; Verne Harris; Jane Taylor; Michele Pickover; Graham Reid; Razia Saleh (Eds.), *Refiguring the Archive*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Nuttall, Sarah (2004). 'City forms and writing the 'now' in South Africa'. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30:4, 731-748.
- Nuttall, Sarah (2006). 'A politics of the emergent: cultural studies in South Africa'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23:7-8, 263-278.
- Nuttall, Sarah (2009). *Entanglement*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Nuttall, Sarah (2011). 'The invisible city: surface and underneath in *Portrait with Keys*'. In Gerald Gaylard (Ed.), *Marginal Spaces: Reading Ivan Vladislavić*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 327-337.
- Nuttall, Sarah (2012). 'The rise of the surface: emerging questions for reading and criticism in South Africa'. In Andrew Van der Vlies (Ed.), *Print, Text and Book Cultures in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 408-421.
- Nuttall, Sarah; Mbembe, Achille (Eds.) (2008). *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- O'Brien, Anthony (2001). *Against Normalization: Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Oliphant, Andries Walter (1988). 'Comment'. *Staffrider*, 7:1. Johannesburg: Ravan Press. 2-3.
- Oliphant, Andries Walter; Vladislavić, Ivan (1988). *Ten Years of Staffrider: 1978-1988*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Oliphant, Andries Walter (2001). 'Forums and forces: recent trends in South African literary journals' [1991]. In Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (Eds.), *On Shifting Sands: New Art and Literature from South Africa*. Sydney: Dangaroo Press. 91-103.
- Oliphant, Andries Walter (2004). 'Reading the perpetual plurarities in *The Model Men*'. In Joachim Schönfeldt, Ivan Vladislavić, and Andries Walter Oliphant, *The Model Men*. Johannesburg: Wits Art Galleries. 17-20.
- O'Toole, Sean (2002). 'ArtBio: A feature on an artist in the public eye. David Goldblatt.' *ArtThrob*. 64, December. Available online at:

- <http://www.artthrob.co.za/02dec/artbio.html>
- O'Toole, Sean (2011). 'Inaccurate truths: the case of literary fiction as art criticism'. *Art South Africa*, 9:4, 76-77.
- O'Toole, Sean (2012a). 'The evolution of African pulp fiction'. *Mail and Guardian: Books*. December 7. Available online at: <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-12-07-00-the-evolution-of-african-pulp-fiction>
- O'Toole, Sean (2012b). 'The ungrammatical years'. *Cape Times*, July 20.
- O'Toole, Sean (forthcoming, 2017). 'Uncommon criticism: reading Ivan Vladislavić's collected work as art criticism'. In Katie Reid and James Graham (Eds.), *Ivan Vladislavić, writing visual culture, and the globalization of a South African 'artworld'* [Special symposium], *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*.
- Palmer, Roger; Vladislavić, Ivan (2004). *Overseas*. Salzburg: Fotohof.
- Penfold, Greg (2014). 'Ivan Vladislavić: the most famous unknown'. *Leadership*. July 1. Available online at: <http://www.leadershiponline.co.za/articles/ivan-Vladislavić-11579.html>
- Penfold, Thomas William (2013). *Black Consciousness and the politics of writing the nation in South Africa*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation.) University of Birmingham, Birmingham.
- Peters, Wonderboy (1998). 'Re-placing dis-placed/missing persons in Vladislavić's short stories'. *Alternation*, 5:2, 238-250.
- Popescu, Monica (2003). 'Translations: Lenin's statues, post-communism and post-apartheid'. *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 16:2, 407-423.
- Popescu, Monica (2005). *South Africa in transition: theorizing post-colonial, post-apartheid, and post-communist cultural formations*. (Unpublished PhD dissertation.) University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.
- Posel, Deborah (2009). 'The assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd: the spectre of apartheid's corpse'. *African Studies*, 68:3, 331-350.
- Procter, James; Benwell, Bethan (2014). *Reading Across Worlds: Transnational Book Groups and the Reception of Difference*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Putter, Anne (2012). 'Movement, memory, transformation and transition in the city: literary representations of Johannesburg in post-apartheid South African texts'. *English Academy Review*, 29:2, 58-69.
- Rantete, Johannes (1984). *The Third Day of September: an eye-witness account of the*

- Sebokeng Rebellion of 1984*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Reichl, Susanne; Stein, Mark (2005). *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial*. New York: Rodopi.
- Reid, Katie; Graham, James (Eds.) (forthcoming, 2017). 'Ivan Vladislavić, writing visual culture, and the globalization of a South African 'artworld'' [Special symposium]. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*.
- Riach, Graham K. (2014). 'Sticking Together: Ivan Vladislavić's Collage Practice'. *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 16:1, 78-95.
- Rich, Paul B. (1997). 'A new South African liberal conscience?'. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 9:2, 1-20.
- Richards, Thomas (1993). *In the Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*. London: Verso.
- Rosenthal, Jane (2011). 'Ivan in Bite Sized Complexity'. *Mail and Guardian*. November 18. Available online at: <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-11-18-ivan-in-bitesize-complexity>
- Sachs, Albie (1991). 'Preparing ourselves for freedom: culture and the ANC constitutional guidelines'. *TDR (1988-)*, 35:1, 187-193.
- Said, Edward (1983). *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Saint, Lily (2010). 'Not Western: race, reading, and the South African photocomic'. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36:4, 939-958.
- Saks, Lucia (2011). 'A tale of two nations: South Africa, *De Voortrekkers* and *Come See the Bioscope*'. *Ilha do desterro: A Journal of Language and Literature*, 61, 137-187.
- Samuelson, Meg (2013). 'Sea-changes, dark tides and littoral states: Oceans and coastlines in post-apartheid South African narratives'. *Coastlines & Littoral Zones* [Special issue]. *Alternation*, 6, 9-28. Available online at: <http://alternation.ukzn.ac.za/Files/docs/20.3/01%20Sam.pdf>
- Sanders, Mark (2002). *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Sassen, Saskia (2000). 'Spatialities and temporalities of the global: elements for a theorization'. *Public Culture*, 12:1, 215-232.
- Sassen, Saskia (2013). *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Schönfeldt, Joachim (2004). 'Illustrating the unwritten text: *Silence!* and *Roar!*'. In Joachim Schönfeldt, Ivan Vladislavić, and Andries Walter Oliphant, *The Model Men*. Johannesburg: Wits Art Galleries. 9-12.
- Seroke, Jaki (1985). 'Skotaville & the censor'. *Index on Censorship*, 14:3, 38-39.
- Siegert, Bernard (1999). *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*. Trans. Kevin Repp. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Simon, Sunka (2002). *Mail-Orders: The Fiction of Letters in Postmodern Culture*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Sontag, Susan (2002). *On Photography* [1977]. London and New York: Penguin.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1985). 'Three women's texts and a critique of imperialism'. *'Race,' Writing, and Difference* [Special Issue]. *Critical Inquiry*. 12: 1, 243-261.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1990). *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. (Ed.), Sarah Harasym. Hove: Psychology Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1999). *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (2003). *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Stallabrass, Julian (1999). *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s*. London: Verso
- Steedman, Carolyn (2002). *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* [2001]. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Stewart, Susan (1993). *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Steyn, Jan (2012). 'Unlearning the art of getting lost: the fiction of Ivan Vladislavić.' *The Quarterly Conversation*, March 5. Available online at: <http://quarterlyconversation.com/unlearning-the-art-of-getting-lost-the-fiction-of-ivan-Vladislavic>
- Strauss, Helene (2008). 'Squirming white bodies: interracial encounters in Anton Kannemeyer's "True Love" and Ivan Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket*'. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 24:2, 21-44.
- Subotzky, Mikhael; Waterhouse, Patrick (2014). *Ponte City*. Göttingen: Steidl.
- Suresh, Meyur (2016). 'The file as hypertext: Documents, files and the many worlds of the paper state'. In Stewart Motha and Honni van Rijswijk (Eds.), *Law, Memory, Violence: Uncovering the Counter-Archive*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Syrotinski, Michael (2007). *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial: At the Limits of Theory*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Tashjian, Dickran (1975). *Skyscraper primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde, 1910-1925*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Thurman, Christopher (2011). 'I take up my spade and I dig': Verwoerd, Tsafendas and the position of the writer in the early fiction of Ivan Vladislavić'. In Gerald Gaylard (Ed.), *Marginal Spaces: Reading Ivan Vladislavić*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 46-69.
- Twidle, Hedley (2012). 'In a Country where you couldn't make this shit up?': literary non-fiction in South Africa'. *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 13:1-2, 5-28.
- Twidle, Hedley (2015). 'Unusable pasts: life-writing, literary nonfiction, and the case of Demetrios Tsafendas'. *Research in African Literatures*, 46:3, 1-23.
- Van der Vlies, Andrew (2007). *South African Textual Cultures: White, Black, Read All Over*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Van der Vlies, Andrew (2012). 'Introductory: Print, text and books in South Africa'. In Andrew van der Vlies (Ed.), *Print, Text and Book Cultures in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 2-48.
- Van der Vlies, Andrew (2013). 'July's People in context: apartheid's dystopias abroad'. In Brendon Nicholls (Ed.), *Nadine Gordimer's July's People: A Routledge Study Guide*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge. 115-130.
- Van der Vlies, Andrew (2016). "'MÊME DYING STOP CONFIRM ARRIVAL STOP": Provincial literatures in global time - the case of Marlene Van Niekerk's *Agaat*'. In Stefan Helgesson and Pieter Vermeulen (Eds.), *Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translation, Markets*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge. 191-209.
- Van Niekerk, Marlene (2011). 'Double Exposure'. Discussion/interview with David Goldblatt and Ivan Vladislavić. Transcribed by Alessandra Prentice for the *British Journal of Photography*. Available online at: <http://www.bjp-online.com/british-journal-of-photography/feature/2103864/double-exposure#ixzz2grg8Hvjz>
- Van Schalkwyk, S (2014). 'Beyond the boroughs of genre.' *Mail & Guardian*. Friday supplement, 17 October. 8.
- Vaughan, Michael (1982). 'Literature and politics: currents in South African writing in the seventies'. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9:1, 118-138.

- Vice, Samantha (2010). 'How Do I Live in This Strange Place?'. In Paul C. Taylor and Ronald Robles Sundstorm (Eds.), *New Thinking in Race Theory* [Special issue]. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 41:3, 323-342.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1981). 'The periscope'. *The Bloody Horse: Writing and the Arts*. 5: May-June. 8-13.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1985). 'Flashback Hotel \*TYYY'. *Sesame*, 5 (Autumn). Johannesburg: Renoster Books. 14-15.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1987). 'The Prime Minister is Dead.' In David Bunn and Jane Taylor (Eds.), *From South Africa: New Writing, Photographs and Art* [Special Issue]. *TriQuarterly*. 69, (Spring/Summer), 447-453.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1988a). 'The Prime Minister is Dead'. *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies*, 5: 1, 162-167.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1988b). 'Tsafendas's Diary'. *Staffrider*, 7:1. Johannesburg: Ravan Press. 64-69.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1988c). 'The Box'. *Stet*. 5:2 (April). Johannesburg: Taurus. 20-23.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1988d). 'We Came to the Monument'. *Sesame*, 10 (Winter). Johannesburg: Renoster Books. 19-24.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1989). *Missing Persons*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1990). 'A Science of Fragments'. *Sesame*, 13 (Autumn). Johannesburg: Renoster Books. 33-35.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1994). *The Folly*. London: Granta.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1996a). *Propaganda by Monuments & Other Stories*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1996b). Interview with Sean de Waal. 'Pleasures of the imagination: an interview with Vladislavić'. Review of Books Supplement. *Mail & Guardian*, October. 3.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1998a). 'A Story'. In Graeme Friedman & Roy Blumenthal (Eds.), *A Writer in Stone: South African Writers Celebrate the 70th Birthday of Lionel Abrahams*. Claremont: David Philip. 62-68.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (1998b). Interview with Pierre Barbancey. 'Ivan Vladislavić: "Acheter un livre est un luxe que peu de gens peuvent se permettre"'. *L'Humanité*, 23 January. Available online at: <[http://www.humanite.fr/1998-01-23\\_Cultures\\_Ivan-vladislavic-Acheter-un-livre-est-un-luxe-que-peu-de-gens](http://www.humanite.fr/1998-01-23_Cultures_Ivan-vladislavic-Acheter-un-livre-est-un-luxe-que-peu-de-gens)>.

- Vladislavić, Ivan (2000a). Interview with Christopher Warnes. 'Interview with Ivan Vladislavić'. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46:1, 273-281.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2000b). *T'kama-Adamastor: Inventions of Africa in a South African Painting (On the Canvas with Cyril Coetzee)*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2001). *The Restless Supermarket*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2002). Interview with Mike Marais and Carita Backström. 'An interview with Ivan Vladislavić'. *English in Africa*, 29:2, 119-128.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2004a). 'Writing under the influence: *The Exploded View*'. In Joachim Schönfeldt, Ivan Vladislavić, and Andries Walter Oliphant, *The Model Men*. Johannesburg: Wits Art Galleries. 13-16.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2004b). *The Exploded View*. Cape Town: Umuzi.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2005a). Interview with Anne Kellas. 'Ivan Vladislavić in conversation with Anne Kellas'. The ABSA/LitNet Chain Interview Archive. *LitNet*. Available online at: [http://oulitnet.co.za/chain/ivan\\_vladislavic\\_vs\\_anne\\_kellas.asp](http://oulitnet.co.za/chain/ivan_vladislavic_vs_anne_kellas.asp).
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2005b). Interview with Stacey Knecht. 'Interview Ivan Vladislavić'. *The Ledge*, January. Available online at: <http://www.the-ledge.com/HTML/conversation.php?ID=47&lan=uk>.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2005c). *Willem Boshoff. Taxi Series 11*. Johannesburg: David Krut Publishing.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2005d). 'Meeting halfway'. *Art South Africa*. June 1. Available online at: <http://artafricamagazine.com.dedi625.jnb1.host-h.net/2005/06/01/meeting-halfway/>.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2006a). *Portrait with Keys: Joburg & What-What*. Cape Town: Umuzi.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2006b). *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked*. London: Portobello Books.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2006c). 'Interview with Tymon Smith'. *Sunday Times*, August 20.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2007a). *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked*. London: Portobello Books.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2007b). *Johannesburg. Street addresses/Johannesburg. Uno stradario*. Trans. Carmen Concilio, Torino: Tirrenia-Stampatore.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2008a). 'Staffrider: an essay by Ivan Vladislavić'. *Chimurenga* (March). Available online at: [http://chimurengalibrary.co.za/essay.php?id=1&cid=1\\_1,n](http://chimurengalibrary.co.za/essay.php?id=1&cid=1_1,n)



- Vladislavić, Ivan (2008b). *Johannesburg. Insel Aus Zufall*. Trans. Thomas Brückner, Munich: A1 Verlags GmbH.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2009a). *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked*. New York: WW Norton and Company.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2009b). *Cles Pour Johannesburg: Portrait de ma Ville*. Trans. Christian Surber, Nida Surber. Carouge-Genève: Zoé Editeur.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2010a). *Flashback Hotel: Early Stories*. Cape Town: Umuzi.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2010b). Personal interview with Katie Reid. Johannesburg, 9 August.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2010c). *Insel Aus Zufall*. Munich: Suddendeutsche Zeitung Bibliothek.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2011a). *Double Negative*. Cape Town: Umuzi.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2011b). Interview with Paola Splendore. 'Double Negative and Tj'. An interview with Ivan Vladislavić'. *Anglistica*, 15:1, 52-61.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2012a). Interview with Jan Steyn. 'Interview with Ivan Vladislavić'. *The White Review*, August. Available online at:  
<http://www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-ivan-vladislavic/>
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2012b). 'The last walk'. In *The Loss Library and Other Unfinished Stories*. Calcutta: Seagull Books. 5-14.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2013a). *Double Negative*. London and New York: And Other Stories.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2013b). Personal correspondence with Katie Reid. July 2.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2013c). Interview with Elizabeth Trundle. 'In Conversation with Ivan Vladislavić'. *The New School*, New York, December 9. Available online at:  
<http://newschoolwriting.org/conversation-ivan-vladislavic/>
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2014a). Interview with Katie Reid. 'The Restless Derby'. University of Sussex, 23 June.
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2014b). 'A vivid voice: Ivan Vladislavić remembers Chris van Wyk'. *Bookslive. Sunday Times*, October 14. Available online at:  
<http://bookslive.co.za/blog/2014/10/14/a-vivid-voice-ivan-vladislavic-remembers-chris-van-wyk/>
- Vladislavić, Ivan; Naudé, S.J. (2014c). 'In conversation: S.J. Naudé and Ivan Vladislavić'. *Granta: The Magazine of New Writing*. December 11. Available online at:  
<https://granta.com/in-conversation-s-j-naude-and-ivan-vladislavic/>
- Vladislavić, Ivan (2015). *101 Detectives*. Cape Town: Umuzi.
- Wannenber, Alf (1990). 'Review of *Missing Persons*, by Ivan Vladislavić'. *New Contrast*, 71,

82-84.

Warnes, Christopher (2000). 'The making and unmaking of history in Ivan Vladislavić's *Propaganda by Monuments and Other Stories*'. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46:1, 67-89.

Watt, Daniel (2007). *Fragmentary Futures: Blanchot, Beckett, Coetzee*. London: InkerMen Press.

Willis, Ika (2007). 'The empire never ended'. In Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie (Eds.), *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 329-348.

Woods, Felicity (2001). 'Taking fun seriously: the potency of play in Ivan Vladislavić's short stories'. *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies*, 18:1, 21-37.