

A research project by Tammy Langtry & Talya Lubinsky with vocal composition by Gabi Motuba and vignette by Amie Soudien

The Sanctuary of the Appointed Time

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Stone from the Table Mountain quarries in Cape Town, South Africa was mined by enslaved people since the beginning of slavery in the Dutch Cape Colony in 1653. With these stones, the city's colonial buildings were constructed, cobblestone roads were paved, the Rhodes Memorial statue was carved and even the shoreline of the Atlantic coast was extended. But, when visiting the sites of the quarries today, no signage or reminder of the violent circumstances of the stone's extraction is visible. Rather, the various disused quarries now function as a rock climbing practice wall, a shooting range and an informal settlement for unhoused people.

The quarries remain a present absence in the mountain. The physical matter, no longer part of the earth, was extracted by the labour of enslaved people who had also been removed from their places of origin in locations across the Indian Ocean and the African continent, including Malaysia, India, Angola and Madagascar. Centuries later, in 1968, the Apartheid government forcefully removed descendants of indigenous and enslaved people from their communities in the centre of the city, on the narrow strip of land between the mountain and the sea. These compounded legacies of extraction and displacement are the very substance from which the city is constructed, and shape the material, spatial and economic logics upon which it continues to operate.

The tent-like structure follows the contours of those parts of the mountain that are no longer there. The 'hole' in the landscape is inverted, turned upside-down, creating a canopy overhead. This temporary shelter is a place of listening, to literally and metaphorically be inside of the loss, the absence and the extraction that is embodied by the quarries. This is not to hark back to a time before colonialism and enslavement, when the mountain was whole, rather it gestures towards the impossibility of refilling the empty space in the mountain. We invite you, the audience, to stand inside of the void, now made visible, in the shape of what is no longer there. We invite you to be present to the lack of archival records, public consciousness, and political and financial reparations to the descendants of those who forcibly made the mountain into the stone that would build the colonial city.

The contour map has been interpreted as a graphic score by singer and composer Gabi Motuba. The undulating lines of the concentric rings indicate shifts in pitch or volume. The sound piece, titled 'Sounds defined and forged by way of the hinterlands, borders and limitations' gestures to the present absence of the quarries. Sound waves resonate and reverberate in space. The shape of the quarry thus creates the conditions for what sounds will emanate from it.

As Black people we ask "uxoisa ngani?", with what are you apologizing? Because Ubuntu holds that Ukhuhlwala, paying sorry with your mouth. Ubuntu holds that Ukhuhlwala, paying reparations for injuries caused to others, is indivisible from Ubuntu's, the restoration of injured relations. Ubuntu demands costly forgiveness: you cannot receive forgiveness without giving something up as an act of your contrition.

For the mountain, unlike the sea, was outside the control of Cape Town's authorities and elite inhabitants. Fearsome lights, remarkably shaped stones and baboons who raped people on the mountain were all recorded by visitors who repeated local stories. Moreover the mountain was the place of the town's refugees and potential enemies. A real danger was the presence of runaway slaves, whose fires could be seen from the streets of the town, a constant reminder to Capetonians of their vulnerability. The presence of escaped slaves was well known, but pursuit was dangerous, since the hunted men could hide themselves among the rocks and stone their pursuers to death.

But that Other, the one that must be excluded not only from the physical space of the suburb but also from the narrative of what forms the suburb politically, socially, and economically, is not made non-existent by using the mountain range to cut the suburbs off from their counterparts. It exists and resides on the other side of the mountain. The question then is, what does the suburb not want to face? What is it that the narrative and the physical arrangement of the suburb exited to the other side? I am asking this simple question because it is important to emphasize that those exited compose Cape Town's majority. The answer to this question is not "the poor," but "the majority". Therefore, to fence off against the majority of the people, at least a mountain range is needed.

The mountain range holds a unique geographic position, as it sits on the central strip of the Cape and divides the land into two protected districts of Sea Point, Green Point, Camps Bay, the City Bowl, Gardens, and Table View, amongst others. On the other hand, the middle and upper-class suburbs that reside in between the ocean and the mountain, namely the well apartheid architecture and its accomplished racialised inequality has located on the imposed space of the Cape Flats, and

Further Reading

As soon as I stepped foot on the Amsterdam, an indeterminate fear flooded my body. I was jumpy, fragile-feeling and to counteract my unsteadiness, I shuffled around delicately as if I might fall over. It was as if I was being haunted. (Or was I doing the haunting?) This visceral reaction was flummoxing. Knowing so little about the ship itself, I did not come to the experience with any deeper knowledge, besides of course, extensive research on the generalities of the VOC empire. Prior to this visit I was not apprehensive. In fact, I was openly curious – and desperate, I now realise – for some human connection to this past. Perhaps, I thought, being on this ship might unlock something. Stepping inside, just below deck, the ceiling was low, and the interior cluttered with sailing rope, and what seemed like empty crates to offer the impression of a working ship. At one end, a virtual reality experience was advertised; an experience I was not willing to explore. The hold was one floor below.

In the hold, like upstairs, the hall-like room was filled with crates and barrels. The entire space tipped gently from side to side, reminding me that we were indeed on water. At one end, the ship's curved wood swooped dramatically upwards, protected by a pane of Perspex or glass.

Behind this clear barrier were wheels of cheese – plastic casings, most likely – almost comically stacked upon one another. Seeing this, I realised that stencils of rats had been spray-painted on the sides of some crates. My mind flitted briefly between descriptions in *Roots* (Haley, 1978), to Dionne Brand, to Homegoing (Gyasi, 2017), to *Venus in Two Acts* (Hartman, 2008). The diagrammatic illustration of human bodies filed beside one another, to capitalise on space. I felt nauseous. The cavernous hold with its hard floors and absence of natural light was no fit place for a crowd of people.

This was made more evident by seeing the sailors' quarters and the captain's cabin, the sailors' mess and surgeon's quarters. There was a dining table for the captain and crew. For the crew: bunk beds, tables, blankets; the cook's kitchen with provision for a coal fire. The captain's quarters had a small four-poster bed, a kist for personal possessions, and large windows facing the open sea, complete with an en suite toilet. The very structure of the boat reinforced its hierarchies and the amenities (and lack thereof) reflected who was and was not human. Out on the ship's deck, a young father enthusiastically showed his son the wheel and later, they peered together over the ship's edge, overlooking the harbour. It all felt grotesque.

With institutional efforts to reappraise the Dutch legacy of slavery, museum visitors' eyes are directed towards the black figures playing supporting roles to Dutch protagonists in 17th and 18th century paintings. Inside the Het Scheepvaart Museum (much like the Rijksmuseum) short paragraphs beside portraits, nature scenes, and still lifes provide a touch of context for the recurring, far-flung tropical locations; the reasons for seafaring and inferred; the human cost of the operation. The skin upholding the splendour of the so-called Dutch Golden Age is gently, tentatively pulled back; obfuscating its bloodiness under sumptuous silks, crystal, recently shot poultry, barely dead crustaceans, and lemon rinds.

For me, the replica of the Amsterdam less effectively conceals old-world carnage. I get the impression that for many Dutch people, however, the VOC ship elicits a sense of pride as opposed to dread. In his research on the attitudes and beliefs conjured up by the so-called Dutch Golden Age, art historian Simon Schama describes the Dutch ship as a symbol of the state and the church "the superfatted cargo vessel became an emblem of the fatherland itself" (1987a, p. 31), and its skipper, both prince and bishop, leader and pastor: a true godly captain" (1987a, p. 33). Undergirding this sentiment is the Dutch triumph over the ocean, besieged as they were by catastrophic floods that wiped out entire towns in the 14th and 15th centuries. The memory of these disasters "conditioned the sixteenth-century Dutch to regard themselves as ordained and blessed survivors of the deluge" (Schama, 1987a, pp. 34–35).

How then, to figure the grandeur and heroism of these ideas alongside and against the accounts of the people chained below the deck of this national symbol of pride?

Amie Soudien, 2024. Vignette from PhD Thesis: 'Always looking': visual and artistic explorations of the living legacies of enslavement in South Africa. p.61-65

Said's worldliness communes with Edward Glissant's tout-monde or "mondialité." It is a worldliness of a relationship to the land, ancestors, elders, and siblings that Gazans, and all Palestinians, inhabit. The fight for, live for and, unfortunately, die for. The definition of worldliness demands us not to be abstract, but to be both poetic and concrete. It is a worldliness that millions in the street now are fighting for alongside the Palestinian people. Edward Glissant teaches us to consider how poetic texts summon to the surface material realities and experiences in which we live together globally—in relation to a shared and co-created, albeit asymmetrical, world of exploitation, violence, and genocide, as is happening now in Gaza, and also, creativity, beauty, and defiance.

I want to argue that the comrades I have worked with in the student movement are not so much mad as they are time-travellers. Or rather, that their particular, beautiful madness is to have recognised and exploited the ambivalence of our historical moment to push into the future. They have been working on the project of historical dissonance, of clarifying the untenable status quo of the present by forcing an awareness of a time when things are not this way. They have seen things many have yet to see. They have been experimenting with hallucinating a new time.

To trace racial matterings across the category of the inhuman, and specifically the traffic between the inhuman as matter and the inhuman as race, is to examine how the concept of the inhuman is a connective hinge in the twinned discourses of geology and humanism.

Intended both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling. The conditional temporality of what could have been," according to Lisa Lowe, "symbolizes apply the space of a different kind of thinking, a space of productive attention to the scene of loss, a thinking with twofold objects and methods of history and social science and the matters absent, entangled and unavailable by its methods.

Saidya Hartman, 2008. "Venus in Two Acts," Small Axe, vol. 12 no. 2.

Sara Bekhorl, 2020. Segregation, Inequality, and Urban Development: Forced Evictions and Criminalisation Practices in Present-Day South Africa. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

Nigel Worden, SPACE AND IDENTITY IN VOC CAPE TOWN in *Kronos*, 1998/1999, No. 25. Pre-millennium issue

Panashe Chigumadz UBUNTU: A BLACK RADICAL DEMAND FOR REPARATIONS published in *Funambulist* October 25, 2023

Stephen Sheehi, "Theory as Stone" from: PALESTINE NOW in *Social Text* Online, January 25, 2024

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