

# Athlone *in* Mind

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# Between history and apocalypse: Stumbling

by Premesh Lalu

In the contest for ironic titles that defy literal translation, Zoe Wicomb's (1987) *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* must undoubtedly count as a very serious contender. One may be forgiven for hearing in that title a suggestion that it is impossible to get lost in Cape Town, not with the towering Table Mountain to guide one's orientation at every turn. One may, similarly, be forgiven for succumbing to the suggestive title of Wicomb's collection of serialized short stories by misconstruing it as a statement of fact. Wicomb's novelette is anything but an assurance of the ease of finding your way in Cape Town. It is for all intents and purposes a handbook for precisely how to get lost in Cape Town, when getting lost is a matter of course.

At the core of Wicomb's (1987) text is a short story titled "A Clearing in the Bush", set in what is today the Centre for Humanities Research, and which was once the library of the university established by apartheid decree for those classified as coloured. The story is formed around a procrastinating student working on an essay about fate in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbavilles*, and her anxiety about responding to a student walkout over the university's commemoration of the assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd. Leaving the university surfaces as a particular fate that cannot be undertaken without running the gamut of the skollies, who unlike the scholars, cloud the university exits with the whiff of dagga cigarettes. Leaving the university is not a demand to abandon the university, but a desire to occupy it more purposefully, so that we may discover anew the conditions for what in these post-apartheid times is to be called schooling.

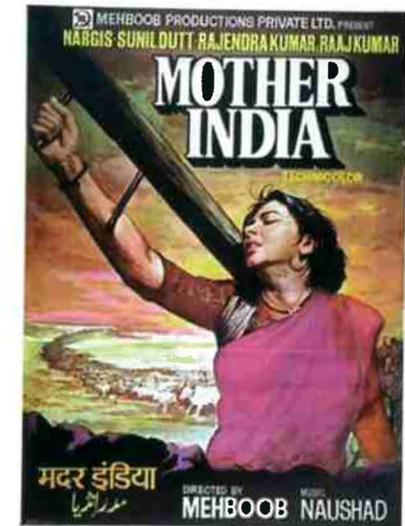
What does it mean to leave the university, only at the risk of getting lost in Cape Town? In what follows, I wish to chart a response that takes/follows two directions. First, I pursue a line of inquiry that holds that to get lost in Cape Town is to encounter that which the city misrecognizes in the scenes of everyday life. By everyday life, I mean the more specific Freudian iteration contained in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) that sees the everyday not as given, but as bearing down on how we theorize the potential for overcoming the divides that apartheid created between mind and city, technology and individuation, and thought and movement.<sup>1</sup> How can we reconstitute the relations of these terms to give us another lease on the post-apartheid?

Second, and premised on the specific understanding of the everyday, I will suggest that to get lost in Cape Town is to stumble upon that which gives to the post-apartheid its most enduring claim to be a discourse that exceeds apartheid. Inscripting a post-apartheid sensibility into debates on public arts may function precisely as a mode of schooling that would bring together aesthetics and politics in an unprecedented form. Such a convergence of aesthetics and politics in a process of schooling reveals another script of technogenesis that places the human in a more proximate relation to life and art, rather than the nostalgia for war.<sup>2</sup> To select this reorientation, I read Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* as an invitation to lose one's way in Cape Town, if only to offer the post-apartheid as a specific concept for which art may prove to be its most powerful supplement.

The name I propose for this supplement is Athlone – a name for a memory of what we forget.<sup>3</sup> That form of forgetting is not only related to the spectre of racial domination, forced removals and economic control that went by the name APARTHEID. Rather a memory of what we forget relates to the unconscious ways in which apartheid operated and was potentially eclipsed, even tricked, in the everyday. It is that memory that is now increasingly illegible and unavailable to the rise of global apartheid. Apartheid on this global scale owes its expansion beyond the geographies in which geopolitics once trapped the workings of racism in Southern Africa to a failure to reorient ourselves to the question of technology. Global apartheid responds to a condition of modern politics that registers a new grammatisation of the world through technological change, but with ever-hardening divides between mind and city, individual and technology, and movement and thought.

To track the unconscious arrival of this thought, to rediscover the flux that marks its arrival in Athlone, I return to a place where unlikely flows once encountered each other in a troubling assemblage of productive sadness. That sadness is perhaps best conveyed by cinema of the tearjerker – films such as Arora P's (1954) *Boot Polish*, Khan M's (1957) *Mother India*, Krishnan-Panju S and Panju R Krishnan's (1957) *Babhi*, Zeffirelli's (1979) *The Champ*, Ashley Lazarus's (1975) *E'Lollipop*, Sabela S's (1975) *U'Deliwe* – that best names a scene reminiscent of the everyday where the surplus peoples of apartheid's forced removals were relocated. Almost always centred on child protagonists, the tearjerker provided a grid of intelligibility for making sense of a range of film genres stretching from Roman spectacles, Christian epics, so-called spaghetti westerns, slapstick comedy and kung-fu films. It rehearsed a scene of the erosion of desire, a numbing of the senses in which the demands of work threatened to overtake any claim to life, setting a history of apartheid and concomitant experience on

the road to apocalypse. In the process, the tearjerker registered mixed emotions that could always be reduced to a state of sadness, as such.



In a thought-provoking essay on Melodramatic Politics, M. Madhava Prasad (2001) invites us to consider the ways in which melodrama sustained and elaborated nationalist formations in non-western societies in the aftermath of the Second World War. Allied with realism in contradictory and supplementary ways, melodramatic narratives often departed from what Peter Brooks' (1976) *The Melodramatic Imagination* describes as a particular historical moment in the West, where melodrama accompanied the rise of capitalism. In its genealogy outside of this formation, the Bollywood films popular in the bioscopes of Cape Town of the 1950s, which included Raj Kapoor films such as *Boot Polish*, offered a narrative that allowed for an expression of powerlessness. Bollywood films, together with an subtitled film, Krishnan-Panju S and Panju R Krishnan's (1957) *Bhabhi* (a remake of German director Franz Osten's 1938 film about the injustices faced by young widows), drew vast numbers of non-Hindi speakers to the Gem and Avalon cinemas



in Woodstock on the eve of forced removals from District Six. Like their successor, *Mother India* (1957), these films secured foundational moral claims about family that underpinned a nascent nationalist spirit, if not a subliminal critique of the experience of apartheid's excessive policing of desire. The epic melodramas of India filtered into the bioscopes in Cape Town at the same time as Christian epics. This cinematic oeuvre, which later found resonance in Athlone in the wake of apartheid's project of forced removals, competed with Hollywood's melancholia to reveal a sense of other people's suffering, but also bringing into being consciousness that would reveal apartheid as a specific object. This coincidence is not inconsequential in the post-colonial world. Neither is it without precedent in the space of underdevelopment. But the time may have arrived for revisiting the melodramatic, and to query it as a script that only enables questions of powerlessness. If what follows marks a departure from this script, it is to the extent that it asks how this trope of sadness, rather than simply recording the violence of apartheid, may also serve as a resource through which we might contemplate another concept of the post-apartheid.

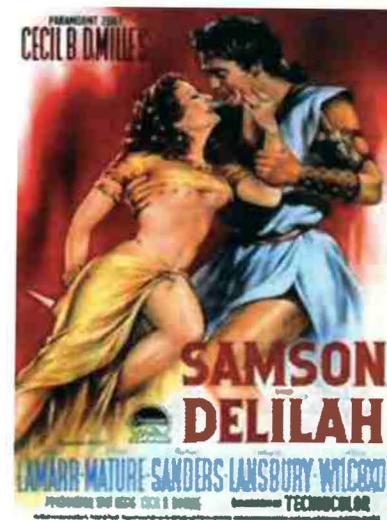
What then makes Athlone, Athlone? Once a place of cinema, politics and music, Athlone is now an abandoned site of public arts, a site reduced to a memory of apartheid's atrocity, in a city that accords it the status of a place, but not a space. No political thinking, it seems, is readily attributed to the fires and passions that once burned there. And the legacies of its writers and intellectuals are mostly rendered inconsequential and trampled in the process. Apartheid planners carved up Athlone into racially designated group areas. In its initial imagining, the place would have been earmarked as a native township by the local state. By 1948, with the advent of Nationalist rule, a tussle between local and national interests, one economic and the other political, resulted in the area being a destination for the thousands removed along

the base of the Table Mountain range that cuts along the Peninsula. Today, the angry divide of the former garrison city now pits this space of apartheid's social engineering alongside the design capital frenzy of those who live at the foot of the mountain. Yet, it is precisely in apartheid's wastelands that a struggle for ideas once burst through the barriers of race to produce an all-too-brief glimpse of what could be possible after apartheid.

Given the relations of proximity that enabled the transgression of race and class barriers established by the apartheid state, and the accidental nexus of the school, cinema and jazz club as sites of exchange across the angry divide, Athlone emerged as a complex formation, a crossover space that deepened the divide internal to the racial designations of apartheid, pitted against a setting apart of townships along racial lines. From the perspective of her Langa High School, Sindiwe Magona shows the intricate relations of cinema, school and movement that had come to envelope Athlone and its surrounds from the 1950s onwards. In Magona's *To my Children's Children* (1990, p. 72), she writes of this overlapping consciousness:

High School students were more sophisticated. When they played truant, they went to the cinema, in Athlone, a predominantly coloured and Moslem neighbourhood, three or four kilometres away. Except for the films brought to school by the Road Safety Council, or the Christian League, or another wholesome organization like that, I had not, till I was about to start teaching, been inside a movie house. I had only heard titles like "The Robe", "Zorro", "The Girl Can't Help It", "The Ten Commandments" and others. The most exciting film for me until age eighteen or nineteen was "Samson and Delilah", and I had seen it at school.

A heady mix from epics, heroic counter-insurgency films and musical comedies,



Magona's list of filmic encounters gives us reason to pause. What Magona possibly hears about film titles is not given to us in this excerpt from her writing. Perhaps, it was a sense of instruction in moral education, a lesson in language, a call to resist the drudgery of her own life under apartheid or a song that perhaps drew together the strands of her consciousness, and which prompted the act and style of writing in the first place. Something, we may be certain, was heard, if not seen, judging from her recollection. Perhaps, it was Ella Fitzgerald's "Cry me a river", performed by Julie London in *The Girl Can't Help It*. In the opening segment of the film, Tom Ewell pushes up against the sides of the edge of screen, expanding the optic to introduce the innovation of cinemascope, which allowed for an expansion of the optic of cinema screen. He then calls to the minders of the store to transform the black and white image into a spectacle of life-like colour. Technological advancement is crucial for how the film will play out the scene of music and memory. The technological feat is repeated again when an intoxicated Ewell removes a record from a sleeve bearing the title Julie is her name, places it on the record player, retreats to pour himself a drink with "Cry me a River" echoing in the adjacent room: until Julie London appears as a spectre whom Ewell, darting from chamber to

chamber, is unable to escape.

What unifies Magona's inheritance to her children's children is the temporal object of apartheid that she names Athlone, and from which she draws her memory of cinema. A normative construction of apartheid awaits the reader who misses the myriad of crossovers that her narrative permits. Apartheid, in that normative memory, is seemingly given to us in advance, as a version precisely of apartheid, in which apartheid functions as a Freudian repetition compulsion. The limit of this reading is reached by conflating memory and perception as a way to explain why apartheid endures as an object. But this, as phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl



would have once suggested, is an approach that reduces the question of consciousness to naturalism. In setting apart perception and memory, phenomenologists may have given us an understanding of what may be at stake in the critique of the persistence of apartheid.

That apartheid appeared to us in the past as a temporal object enveloped in a fantasy of race and class difference does not mean



that it should appear precisely in that way in the future. In reading Magona beyond the normative constructions of memory, now unfortunately set along the dangerous path of the very self-destruction against which she writes, we may be called upon to shift the way in which apartheid will appear in the future, so that at the very least, it may sustain a concept of the post-apartheid.

Put differently, we might say that our consciousness of apartheid does not only rest upon that which is retained from the experience of apartheid, but how we imaginatively select from the image-consciousness of apartheid, another concept of apartheid, to echo Derrida, as a watchword. While this cannot, as I will show, entirely be realized within a Husserlian schema, it might prove productive to return to that schema's rendering of the problem of memory and perception. To ask that we attend to the spectre of apartheid that haunts the post-apartheid is also to ask whether we might set both on a course other than apocalyptic drift.

If apartheid is a spectre that haunts normative memory in the post-apartheid, it may recently have once again revealed itself in an instance of stumbling on Athlone. Once again, giving us reason to pause, and to contemplate what has become of the dread of APARTHEID, a poster in a side street of Athlone recently announced a series of religious lectures that connect the local and the global at the speed one now readily attributes to a Google search:

- The following topics will be discussed:
- Dajjal and his fitnah
  - Gog and magog and their mischief
  - The final hour and its terror
  - Death and what happens thereafter
  - The ruh and its eternal bode
  - Life in the grave and its realities
  - Resurrection and our state
  - The final destination - Paradise or Hell-fire

The illegibility of the lecture on "Gog and

Magog and their mischief" seems to be the missing link in a narrative of death and salvation. To who did these proper names – Gog and Magog – belong? With a little googling, we learn that Gog and Magog are names associated with the New Testament and the Quraan, also Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as Persian literature. Gog and Magog were the foundations of a mythology given to us as individuals and geographic regions, demarcating the cartographies of the medieval world.

Unsurprisingly, the story of Gog and Magog is a rather quaint, if distant, reference to mark the contemporary sense of the apocalyptic in the religious idiom of Athlone. Given the long history that carried these two figures into modernity, the appearance of Gog and Magog in Athlone in 2014 is not entirely unprecedented.<sup>4</sup> In medieval Europe, William Gerritson tells us, "the tradition of Gog and Magog represents the myth of an evil people contained somewhere in the East which one day will break loose from its confinement and wreak havoc all over the civilized part of the world" (Gerritson, 2011, p. 18). Gerritson (2011, p. 18) suggests that "stories of this type have two things in common: they explain how people in question came to be shut in and how one day they will succeed in breaking out". For Gerritson, the combination of elements from the Alexander (the Great) legend and Ezekiel's eschatological prophecy produced the phantom of Gog and Magog that would continue to haunt the global imagination for many years.

Before it became a name for the supernatural, Gog and Magog underpinned the cartographic, historical and literary imagination of the medieval world. In Persian literary traditions from the 10th- to the 12th-centuries, Gog and Magog, according to Seyed-Gohrab et al. (2011, p. 106), "endorsed the general idea of the enemy and of the barbarian in the medieval Iranian world". Seyed-Gohrab (2011, p. 106) notes that while

'several accounts say that Gog and Magog are vegetarians and even harmless to human beings, their wild nature, cannibalism, feeding on serpents and carrion are generally foregrounded' in Persian literature of the time. However, he notes that the rendering of the myth was not entirely eschatological until the spread of Islam, when Gog and Magog were recast as Yajuj and Ma'jij in North Africa. There the myth bolstered eschatological renderings found in the Biblical prophecies of Ezekiel, enhancing the repertoire in which Gog and Magog would warn of the apocalypse, not of the past, but of the vanishing present.

Beyond its religious moorings as a metaphor for evil and apocalypse, the myth of Gog and Magog functioned to caution against mischief, to contain mobility and ensure that the psyche did not stray too far from religious idiom. In every manner of speaking, it references the scene of not getting lost in Cape Town – of not finding a way to orient the senses, of danger, and why Athlone, named in honour of the Earl of Athlone, a British colonial official who inaugurated the National Gallery in Cape Town, and whose portrait now dangles in the hallowed halls of the Mount Nelson Hotel, is the name for a memory of that which we forget.

What doors might the story of Gog and Magog open on the way to getting lost in Cape Town? Stated differently, how are scholars of the humanities to account for stumbling on the everyday, stumbling upon a memory of that which we forget, and how might such a scholarly project mark a difference from an everyday that is for all intents and purposes already given and known in advance as history or apocalypse?

Before Gog and Magog came to settle scores between history and apocalypse in a lecture in Athlone, they traversed the landscapes of medieval cities, the mythology and subjectivity of Europe, Asia, North Africa, Persia and the Middle East. There, in distant

lands, scholars identify their appearance in a mythic formation that would locate the cartographical shifts of the middle ages at the limit of worlds only just encountering each other. To be forthright, Gog and Magog are names that solidified in war, discourse and colonial conquest. Gog and Magog would travel through history, from Marco Polo to George Bush, forming an axis on which the Mercator map of the 1500s and the notorious axis of evil pivoted. By all accounts, the cartographic inscription of Gog and Magog would function as a code for what in the modern world we would come to know, but not recognize, as race. William Gerritson observes that in the medieval and early modern western traditions, the story of Gog and Magog "reveals an archetypical fear". (Gerritson, 2011).

Myth, like travelling theory, can only ever arrive in the present in a stripped and degraded form. So it is in Athlone, where a cartographic notion was deposited in the 21st-century as a forewarning or bad omen. That omen is best anticipated in the ways in which subjects of the everyday have lost their potential to inaugurate a concept of the post-apartheid. In its banal, if esoteric invocation in Athlone, Gog and Magog were conscripted to a narrative of stasis, that very conundrum that had so troubled the Greeks and their philosophers many centuries ago.<sup>5</sup> In so doing, the story surreptitiously opened the way to return to the everyday, betwixt and between history and apocalypse – between faded dreams and pending gloom.

Disclosing that which lay repressed in the imagination of those forcibly removed from the slopes of Table Mountain to the desolate and wind-swept Cape Flats where Athlone was located, Gog and Magog laid claim to those chasms between mind and city, individual and technology, and movement and thought upon which apartheid was founded. For all intents and purposes, these levels of demarcation reduced the everyday to the needs of the bureaucratic machinery



of apartheid, producing in their wake the very condition of stasis. Reading into this genealogy, we might say that the apocalyptic had a longer career in Athlone; one that dated back to the early days of apartheid, where it brushed up against the spectre of a technology of population control and population registration.

Gog and Magog arrived long before the advent of the religious idiom in Athlone. Slipping in through the darkness, they filtered through a scene of projection in which the cinema was given the name 'bioscope'. Similar to Lacan's unconscious watching over the past, in this scene of projection, the bioscope functioned as a memory of what Athlone repeatedly forgot. In the space of the bioscope, desire, violence, identification, and melodrama co-convened with scenes of wonder and fulfillment, also presented as education.

Far from being entirely given over to an occasion for romance, the bioscope was often also as murky as it was dark. Cinema thugs, not unlike those in Suharto's Indonesia of the mid-1960s, surfaced in the streets of Athlone. The gangs that would notoriously haunt the Cape Flats, as a surrogate police force of apartheid's decentralized control, would carry names such as Americans, the Firm, the Hard Livings, often stylized through cinematic images. Police on the Cape Flats would appropriate the names of American film icons from Hollywood gangster and war films to crack down, often violently, on political opposition. One Barrie Barnard, nicknamed the Rambo of the townships in the 1980s, together with Dolf Odendaal from the Mannenberg Sub Joint Management Council in Athlone, extended the lives of film icons in 1985 to taunt local residents and instigate violence on an unprecedented scale. Adopting the McEwan Oil Spot Strategy of fomenting war and extending state hegemony from the USA, the figure of Rambo loomed large for police forces in the townships of Cape Town, as they plundered, maimed and killed in the name of law and order. Identified

in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reports for making common cause with gangs on the Cape Flats to kill specifically targeted anti-apartheid activists, the ominously named anti-riot squad borrowed their alter egos from the moving images of Hollywood's sprawling Cold War narratives. In Athlone, therefore, the Cold War was fought not only within the apparatus of apartheid, but also in smoke-filled rooms of the kind in which Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) was holed up – on the screen of the bioscope.

That the apocalyptic gained its foremost expressions in the Cold War scripting of films can be gleaned from the triumphant posturing of gangs on the Cape Flats. A pervasive anti-communism and anti-nazism converged to supplement schooling that warned of the perils of the East. But the filmic was often a site of inversion, so much so that films about Germany and the Second World War raise questions about practices of naming. The great jazz musician Adolf Brand, later Dollar Brand, and still later, Abdullah Ibrahim, once accidentally shared a first name with a notorious figure in world history.

Names also sometimes converged with the misfortunes of black soldiers who fought against fascism in the Second World War on the side of the Allies, only to be subjected to the apparatus of apartheid on returning to South Africa. Occasionally, William Edward would be born from a newsreel celebrating the visit of the Royal family, or a Sophia to honour Sophia Loren, or a Sean to chart the way to a future Bond. While this practice remains unclear and untested as fact, these coincidences are worth contemplating. What is clear is that the cinema of the Cold War served as a resource for that which lay behind practices of name formation in a racialized setting. The purveyors of apartheid would not blush with shame at having produced such a despairing psychic condition. Yet, they may necessarily have remained oblivious of the gift of the moving image in

renaming apartheid.

The bioscope was a medium for communicating the apocalyptic in Athlone. In fact, the first films that appeared in Athlone belonged to the epic genre, which included William Wyler's *Ben Hur* (1959) and Cecil B DeMille's *Ten Commandments* (1956). The rise of apartheid converged with the distribution of seventy Hollywood films between 1948 and 1953, many of which extended apocalyptic sensibility with through the idiom of religion. This was followed by the first film in colour that replayed the story of Gog and Magog as two robots working in a secret nuclear facility in the Nevada desert in the USA. Programmed to accompany leading military scientists planning to travel into space to better spy on enemy states, the robots are taken over by an enemy plane that seizes their mechanisms and turns them against the USA. As serendipity would have it, a poster accompanying the film immediately makes legible the heightened panic through which technology appeared as a scene of insecurity and indeed apocalypse during the Cold War.



How then does the relation between religion, technology and politics play out in the space of a discourse of the humanities attentive to the task of exceeding the scripts of apartheid?

If Athlone is a memory of what we forget, a memory that foregoes history to presumably face the apocalypse conveyed via politico-religious idiom, it may be because we failed to anticipate the ways in which an apartheid city attempted to rearrange relations between the individual, social and technology. If Gog and Magog represent anything other than the paranoid structure of racial feeling in the context of an inherited racial formation, it may be that that myth exacerbates an already accreting condition of stasis. The time may have arrived for reassembling the terms – technology, individuation, movement and thought – to garner some momentum towards making visible and legible the outlines of a concept of the post-apartheid.



If becoming technical drives what we might imply by the human condition, how can the post-apartheid serve as its most enabling potential?

The bioscope was more than the idiomatic expression of apocalypse and stasis. While shot through with ideological presuppositions, it was always also irreducible to the instrumental reason that defined much of the cultural industry of the 20th-century. Cinema, we might say, functioned as a technology that not only mimed but eclipsed the techniques of subjection inaugurated by the grand ideological postures of the 20th-century, not least of which were the fantasies of apartheid bureaucrats engaged in a Cold War of their own making. The bioscope, I



will argue in what follows, marked Athlone in ways that preceded the rise of apocalyptic sensibilities, even when it aided the formation of apocalyptic sensibilities in the long run. Perhaps, the cinema offered passages for the flow of desire that could produce not only violence but also sensation. Unlike, say, the emergence of cinema in Ethiopia, which was initially associated with the Devil's house (Yeseytan bet), in Cape Town, the bioscope (as it was renamed to suit local articulation) carried with it a proclivity towards confronting a political condition of stasis (Tamene, 2014). The male-centred genres that defined the moving image were crucial indicators of the reading of the formations of political discourse in South Africa. Yet, notwithstanding this hyper-masculine limit, the queered subject of cinematic movement, like the Cantonese opera that gave us the kung-fu films of Bruce Lee, would not lift the veil of sadness, but mask it ever more deeply.

To the extent that bioscope parodied the violence of the state, it lazily replayed a scene of stasis that approximates what the Greeks might have thought of as civil war. Nicole Laroux (2006) offers us a persuasive argument for extending the meaning of stasis that would keep watch over something like the past of violence and warfare, without succumbing to its catastrophe. We may read this as asking those who write on histories of violence and war to think beyond the stasis given to us in the filmic language of the Cold War, towards a conception in which reconciliation does not displace mourning, but enables it instead. Several crucial moves in Laroux's *The Divided City* prove indispensable for relating how such an extension of meaning could be achieved. By genealogically disaggregating the term stasis, Laroux (2006: 104) tells us that it enters the Greek lexicon as a term associated not only with motionlessness but more specifically kinesis, movement or agitation. In other words, for the Greeks, stasis contained a double meaning that ultimately settled on the idea of movement at rest.

Thus disaggregated, Laroux suggests that we take one step beyond this political and philosophical rendering of the idea of stasis, by extending it to account for the symmetry sought by the Greeks in the word stasis, rather than the explosive qualities often intended by the habits of dialectical reason in our own times. To inaugurate such a meaning, she asks us to consider how it was that the notion of division operated in the Greek political and philosophical lexicon: first as warfare, and second, as an arena of thought in which the very ambivalence of the first produced a sense of what was shared, though not held in common.

Taking our cue from Laroux's reading of the way reconciliation, harmony, conflict and division played out in the Greek city state, we might find a reason to think about Athlone beyond terms of a history of space internally divided into zones of exclusion and inclusion in the city. We may also return to a condition in which that narrative is exceeded by virtue of the stasis that is for all intents and purposes another way of thinking the city. Subtle though this distinction may be, it bears repeating at least in relation to how it is that Athlone is that which memory represses, politics abandons and knowledge demarcates into the convenient truth of inclusion and exclusion. Athlone is part of the conflict that mars the political discourse that has now emerged as nothing short of the name 'global apartheid'. Beyond that receding horizon of conflict lie, what was desired in every utterance of the word freedom? Stasis then is not a dead end, not if we loosen the grip of politico-religious determinations that persist in the genealogy of the city. As Laroux (2006, p. 24) puts it, stasis is the deep wound in the body of the city. Then again, it may also be the site of its most productive rethinking. It is to that rethinking of the city that Athlone offers itself.

Athlone is the name given to a division, but not of the order drawn from apocalyptic religious formation or the politics of factionalism.

That divide between religion and politics produces the stasis of civil war. The divide that Athlone calls forth is between the memory that the city must forget on the one hand, and on the other hand the consequences of a technogenesis that offered movement over motionlessness. It is the divide that ensues from contemplating movement at rest. As a discourse that divides, this is a division that apartheid would not allow to be reconciled as it mobilized gangs to support the authority of the police and army on the Cape Flats in the 1970s and 1980s, and allowed the cinema to operate as an alibi for state violence. This paper seeks to exceed the divide in thought – between a memory that is forgotten and the technical becoming of the human – that Athlone names in order that we might look again at where the city reveals a potential for movement.

To the extent that one stumbles on Athlone through the obstacles encountered in the moving image, there is always a compulsion to catch oneself in the act of falling. If motion is accorded a place in the archive of the humanities, whether of historical documents or canons, may require a lesson in aesthetic education. The humanities thus conceived as aesthetic education may offer productive ways to think through the problem of determination that has bedevilled the reading of race as a technology in itself. In the argument of this paper, it is precisely the moving image through which Athlone is raced that needs to be rethought. Before falling on a standard definition in which the bioscope causally determines consciousness of race or resistance to race, we may have to ask how the bioscope articulates with schooling – a movement at rest specific to an aesthetic education.

In much of the discourse on the problematization of apartheid, the school is viewed as the state's most explicit ideological apparatus. This is especially so considering the ways in which Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall" emerged as the signature

tune of the student movement formed around the Committee of 81's solidarity schools boycott with the Fattis and Monis workers, the Wilson Rowntree workers and the Red Meat boycott in Athlone in 1980. The music would reappear in 1985, following its banning, via Allen Parker's *The Wall*. In these circumstances, and drawing on earlier struggles of the 1970s formed under the banner of Black Consciousness, the school emerged as exemplar of apartheid's ideological project. Much of the critique of school as ideological apparatus extended views of the school as a technology of apartheid's making. This is perhaps one way to explain the rise of the extensively contested and widely debated slogan "liberation before education" that emerged at the height of the 1985 schools boycott.

Needless to say, if apartheid externalized technology to deepen population control, it effectively placed the question of technology beyond the human, out of reach of human experience, where it was to be confronted as an instrument of oppression. To this end, the struggle against apartheid repeated a concept delivered to it by apartheid: that technology was that which had to be confronted as a specific instance of exteriorization. The burden of this exteriorization of technology haunts the post-apartheid to the extent that it cannot envisage consciousness without reliance on instrumental reason. If the post-apartheid threatens to emerge as a biopolitical manifestation that is more, or less, efficient than apartheid, if the faith in technology as instrument of change or as target of critique is what defines post-apartheid time, it is because technology was unfortunately wholly exteriorized in the critique of apartheid. Such a predicament leaves little space for the work of art in the formations that ultimately unravelled the tyranny of population control that was apartheid.

As the divided city leads us to the stasis of civil war reminiscent of the narrative of Gog



and Magog, might there be another way to conceive of the post-apartheid that produces yet another concept of technology, one that presents itself as different to a symptom of the death drive? I believe there is, if we are prepared to thread Athlone through the cinematic memory in which it was primarily produced. Consider Abdullah Ibrahim's discourse on memory, image and music that may have suggested itself in the critique of apartheid. In *A Brother with Perfect Timing*, a 1987 film by Chris Austin, Ibrahim reflects on Mannenberg, both a name of a place in Athlone and a musical composition, which uncannily replays a discourse on the repressed aspects of the critique of apartheid with which I propose to proceed in this paper. Speaking from exile, he tells us:

Duke had perfect timing. Timing is arriving at the right point at the right time, with a minimum of effort. In Mannenberg, Basil Coetzee, the tenor saxophone player, told us a story: Imagine a Saturday morning in the township . . . I mean you've never seen so many children anywhere in your life than on a Saturday morning in the township . . . children, people going shopping, cats, dogs, chickens. So here these two guys ambling down the road, have a little . . . whiff . . . taste. Now these brothers have perfect timing. The moment of perfect timing crystallizes in everyone focusing on this moment . . . (Austin, 1987).

In the scene of the film that accompanies Ibrahim's rendition of the Coetzee story, we are drawn to an image of two brothers walking down the street sharing in the pleasures of the green, but not the gold. As they amble, a little girl, skipping, enters the frame, passing from behind, immediately into the path of a car:

Without losing a beat he just scoops the girl up, puts her down on this side (on the right), takes the joint from the other hand and back in front and there we go . . . perfect timing man, master musicians (Austin, 1987).

Let's rewind for a moment. Duke, as in Duke Ellington, and not Duke Ngukwana (the renowned saxophonist from Langa township in Athlone who is named in honour of the first), has perfect timing only insofar as his movement and timing arrive at a point, effortlessly. At the very least, two predicaments overcome in this space of effortlessness. First, the entire scene of Coetzee's story recounted by Ibrahim is destined to result in a collision at the point of arrival. The perspective formed around three seemingly discrete movements (motor vehicle, skipping girl and ambling brothers) are each deliberately slowed to corresponding speeds to produce the conditions for collision. As the movement of the image decelerates, the car accelerates beyond the girl skipping and passes the ambling brothers.

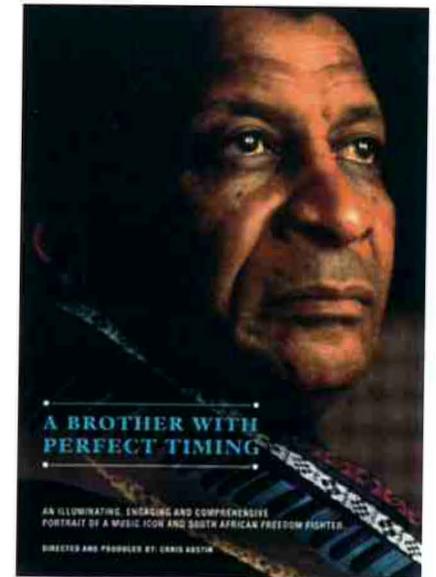
Rather than seeing these as discrete instances of movement, we are given access to a sense of duration underscored by a rendition of "Mannenberg – is where it is happening", a jazz composition for which Ibrahim, Coetzee and Jansen became famous to a generation of anti-apartheid activists in and beyond Cape Town. Duration leads us to a convergence of sound, image and movement into a whole that opens onto another plane in which Athlone, and apartheid, might be anticipated. Rather than stasis, Ibrahim's Mannenberg offers us duration. And while Ibrahim adopts Islam and martial arts as part of his self-styling, these choices insist on what it means to hold onto composition, and by extension, duration.

Edmund Husserl would have felt quite at home in this world, had he encountered this scene from Mannenberg. In the phenomenology of memory as retention or primary memory, perfect timing may be taken to function in his schema, and that of the film, as an effortless unfolding of time as duration – from New York to the dusty streets of Athlone, from sound to image. But, as an instance of recollection, or secondary memory, the filmic rendering

of car, girl and ambling brothers catapults us towards a memory of the future that is a staging of collision. Husserl's recourse to melody effectively separates perception from imagination, so that primary memory, or retention, is pure perception, while secondary memory or recollection is dependent on imagination. This is precisely where we might identify a playing out of a concept of stasis as civil war; and stasis as movement at rest.

Yet *A Brother with Perfect Timing* reaches beyond merely opposing primary memory to secondary memory, dissolving the difference between perception and imagination as distinct operations in Husserl's phenomenology. It achieves this by drawing the viewer out of the wager between history and apocalypse, and into that which underscores a memory of what we forget in the constellation of sound and image in Athlone. Put differently, what underscores duration is the interval of the whiff in Ibrahim's recounting of a Saturday morning in Mannenberg. Replaying the scene, the enduring memory is that which extends beyond the focal point of collision, swopping the point of arrival for arriving effortlessly. While we all expect arrival to be consummated at a point of collision, duration seemingly produces a place elsewhere. If Mannenberg is the name of a place in which collision is destined, its elsewhere resides in the composition of Mannenberg that endures in movement while eclipsing apartheid's time and space.

The central motif here is composition. Ibrahim mentions the formation of the melody that became a signature for many growing up on the dusty Cape Flats. He recounts stepping out of a rehearsal studio kitted with a grand piano and being confronted by an upright piano. He tells how a melody appeared to him, plausible because the upright piano pushes sound back at the pianist. He invites Basil Coetzee to play out a sequence on the saxophone, and finally, they



decide on a bridge that will lead them out of the melody. All along, the technical temporal objects of sound and sight collude to produce a consciousness that takes on the form of cinematographic memory performed in the idiom of *A Brother with Perfect Timing*.

Interpretations that stress the political commitments of Mannenberg too hastily render the composition in the terms of nation or cosmopolitan influence. It too readily falls to the sides of the divide between history and apocalypse, in which the post-apartheid is increasingly seen as a lost promise. In a review of *A Brother with Perfect Timing* in *The New York Times* in 1987, John Pareless writes about the expansive reach of Ibrahim's music, only to insufficiently stress its multicultural foundations in opposition to apartheid, which he describes as expressed by Ibrahim with a quiet determination:

When he left South Africa in the 1960s, Abdullah Ibrahim took Cape Town with him. The city's mixture of African, Arabic, Oriental and European cultures echoes in the music he writes for his septet, Ekaya; there are spirituals, slow-rolling South African marabi rhythms, American jazz (especially Thelonious Monk and Duke



Ellington), African traditional melodies, even the samba rhythms that Mr. Ibrahim traces to Africa (Pareless, 1987).

All this may indeed be so when the composition is recalled against the political struggles in which it is set, or in respect of Ibrahim's religious and eclectic musical sensibilities. Surprisingly though, this range of intersecting influences omits the ways in which Ibrahim's composition might be thought to function as filmic sound-track. It was after all produced at the time of the rise of the so-called spaghetti western soundtracks of Ennio Morricone in the Athlone that Ibrahim inhabited.<sup>6</sup> The cinematic formed a particular temporal object that mediated relations of sound and image. How else would we explain an early composition by Ibrahim titled "Liberation Dance (When Tarzan met the African Freedom Fighter)" from the album *Africa: Tears and Laughter* (1979) except by assigning to Athlone the flux of the cinematic?

Notwithstanding the claims made about Mannenberg as unofficial anthem of the liberation movement, its name only properly reveals itself in relation to the cinematic construction of Austin's film (Mason, 2007). Its notes and images cohere most cogently in the relation they are given in the filmic text. The point I wish to drive home here is precisely one in which Mannenberg, the name of a composition and place, brings us full circle to the need to consider the memory of apartheid in terms of what Stiegler calls tertiary memory, and which he marks as a specific development of Edmund Husserl's forays into the phenomenology of consciousness. Let us follow Stiegler as he offers his concept of tertiary memory so that we may better locate the impulse in its further conception in the interplay of perception and imagination:

"Recollection" is thus impossible. I have already pointed out why everything is inscribed in advance within the

retentional finitude of consciousness: the fact that memory is originally selection and forgetting. But that in turn means that in all remembering of a past temporal object there is a necessary process of derushage, of montage, a play of special effects, of slowing down, accelerating, etc. – and even freezing on an image: this is the time of reflection that Husserl analyses precisely as such, a moment of the analysis of memory, of recollection's decomposition.

But given that we have also seen that this selection first of all affects primary retention itself, we would then have to say that consciousness is always in some fashion a montage of overlapping primary, secondary and tertiary memories. Thus, we must mark as tertiary retentions all forms of "objective" memory: cinematogram, photogram, writing, paintings, sculptures – but also monuments and objects in general, since they bear witness, for me, say, of a past that I enforcedly did not myself live (Stiegler, 2013: 28).

The distinction drawn here with Husserl is subtle, but consequential. Ordinarily, we would say that consciousness is constructed around two poles: one drawn from the proverbial melody where each note is heard as a perceptual act of retention that makes the object of melody endure; and a secondary memory born of recollection that is the proper domain of imagination. Stiegler wants us to rethink this bifurcation at the heart of phenomenology, to place in the midst of its operation a tertiary memory in which technology is integral to consciousness. In other words, consciousness is that 'post-production room' where the flows of primary, secondary and tertiary memory are assembled. As a cutting room, consciousness provides for a scene of projection and screening that has hitherto had the effect of demarcating the world into an apartheid of the senses.

To the extent that Athlone is a name for what we forget, we may say that its memory is entirely given over to the flux of the temporal object of cinema of the kind encountered in *A Brother with Perfect Timing*. What is revealed here is the technical becoming of the human where, as Stiegler reminds us, "the cinematic effect ceaselessly produces particular consciousness" (Stiegler, 2013: 15). Tertiary memory records a notion of retentional finitude, the locus of which is a technical temporal object – in this case the cinema. Stated differently, and perhaps succinctly, Athlone's consciousness is cinematic. If the cinema defines the structure of memory in Athlone, it does so at the expense of the opposition between a memory that is discretely melodic and one that is insulated in the photographic image. As *A Brother with Perfect Timing* shows, Athlone is a memory that we forget only so that it may be revealed in the mode of the cinematic.

Perhaps soundtrack, rather than anthem or multicultural context, gives us a way to rethink the industrialization of memory that made Athlone, Athlone. Beyond the technology of apartheid, to stumble on Athlone is to discover the cinematographic qualities of its individual and collective consciousness that sounded its political and religious articulations. To stumble on this, Athlone is however also to brush up against the possibilities of forging a concept of the post-apartheid that is more than the sum of the technology of apartheid. It is also to see in the technical becoming of the human, an interval in which the potential for rethinking the relation between the human and technology has offered itself as an instance of recuperating stasis as a supplement to movement, and not death.

The question that remains is whether it is possible to traverse the space of Athlone's cinematographic memory, not to discover the sources of nostalgia and violence, but rather the resources to sustain a critique of apartheid that pushes beyond limits, towards

a post-apartheid future. To achieve this, we may indeed need to skip a note, and stumble on what in Athlone is a story of sadness. If Athlone names this sadness, it is not to recall the memory of apartheid's technologies of subjection, but the technogenesis that once flitted across the screens of the bioscope in a demonstration of the becoming technical of the human.

#### Notes

1. See, for example, Mowitt (2002).
2. I am leaning on a reading of affirmative biopolitics. See Campbell (2011).
3. See, for example, Lacan, J's Seminar 7 from which this formulation on memory is derived.
4. See Kruk (2001: 54).
5. See Laroux (2006).
6. I propose to return to this connection later, with the enabling text by Charles Leinberger (2004).

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