

PREFACE

In July 2014, the Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism (JWTC) and the Seminar in Experimental Critical Theory (SECT) of the University of California at Irvine convened on the theme of Archives of the Non-Racial. Beginning in Johannesburg, speakers and participants undertook a two week long bus journey across South Africa as they travelled through and lingered in sites dense with anti-apartheid histories. The works below offer diverse meditations on the encounters that took place on and off the bus, as participants grappled with the implications of the non-racial in South Africa and beyond. There is also an archive of all the talks kindly hosted on the [UCHRI YouTube Channel](#).

The concept of a “mobile workshop” was first articulated by Leigh-Ann Naidoo. Drawn partly from her ongoing research on the politics of pedagogy in the works of Steve Biko, Paulo Freire and various movements dedicated to disentangling the power/knowledge knot, she earnestly strove to translate it into a viable intellectual program. In this quest, “the bus” acquired a particular valency both as a metaphor for a form of knowledge-in-motion and as a creative device that speaks to historical experiences of displacement (the ship during the Middle Passage; the freedom ride bus during the Civil Rights movement in the United States).

Following Michael Warner, we can also think of the bus as a moving public; a mobile, enunciative space that unsettles and synthesises the physical and discursive terrains it traverses. In light of this, we have conceived of this Volume as an Exhibition, which has allowed us to suggest the genealogies, strategies and futures of the non-racial as “entry”, “interpellation” and “circulation”.

Some of the works presented here are intimate reflections in the form of diary entries and poems, others

draw on the potency of the image, while still others seek to frame the debates in essayistic terms. Guided by the curatorship of SA Smythe, the works collected here affirm our engagement with the non-racial as both intellectual, political and affective.

This Volume is dedicated to Leigh-Ann Naidoo.

Megan Jones & Achille Mbembe

Editors

THIS VOLUME

This volume of **The Salon** is an attempt to capture some of the spirit of “Archives of the Non-Racial”, the Mobile Workshop organized in 2014 by The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism (WISER-University of the Witwatersrand) and the Seminar in Experimental Critical Theory (SECT-University of California at Irvine).

Designed in the manner of an Exhibition, it has been curated by Ayana Smythe, in collaboration with our editorial team. It is itself an archival piece along with many others that have been produced in the form of vignettes, texts, images, sounds or videos by the participants themselves.

The Workshop was premised on the assumption that historical struggles against racism have contributed to a deepening and universalization of some of the key normative pillars of modernity, most notably freedom, democracy, and equality. Commitments to defeat racism have largely been underpinned by some version of the “human” and the “common”.

By the 19th-century, the “non-racial” emerged as an intellectual, political, and ethical category, assuming a variety of interpretations. Indexed to different intellectual, political and social contexts, at times the non-racial has stood for the idea of “a shared humanity”. At others, it has gestured towards the idea of “abolition”. Sometimes it has meant the erasure of “difference” and its substitution by “sameness” alongside the commitment to a set of universal moral principles. During the struggle against Apartheid, in particular, it became a motivating force in global politics.

Abolition, colorblindness, racelessness, postraciality, anti-racism, anti-Apartheid, Black Consciousness – the range of investments is signaled by the fact that

the non-racial itself is ambiguous. It oscillates between ignoring race (and so the structures of domination in its name) and conceiving socialities outside the frame of the racial.

Discourses of post-raciality have circulated widely in the attempt to signal racism’s past, at once reordering racial expression and racist articulation for the current moment. In places such as Brazil and South Africa, renewed debates on reparations, empowerment and historical accountability have sought to undo the legacies of racism.

The Workshop spanned two intensive weeks of lectures, seminars, public events, exhibitions and performances. Participants travelled to significant critical sites in the history of South Africa’s notoriously racist past and its long-centuries of struggle against racism from the Freedom Charter, Treason and Rivonia Trials to Constitution Hill, from Black Consciousness and labor struggles to political resistance, the end of Apartheid and its aftermath.

They spent long hours and many days in a bus. From Johannesburg, they went to Swaziland and Durban. Moving through huge swaths of the former homeland of the Transkei, they visited Qunu, the burial place of Nelson Mandela. They then proceeded to Ginsberg, the resting place of the Black Consciousness founder, Steve Bantu Biko before travelling to Cape Town where Angela Davis gave a memorable public lecture attended by hundreds of people.

At each site, conversations were convened that explored the histories and legacies of racisms in these particular places, posing these histories in relation to broader conversations about the post-, non-, and anti-racisms across relational global contexts.

The Johannesburg Salon