

## Entangled Temporalities and the Age of the Necrocene

Françoise Vergès

In the Global South, entangled temporalities (pastness, presents -plural- and futures -already lived in past and present) question a temporality tied to the belief that things will *necessarily* get better. They must get better! The future of humanity is at stake! But what is this « better » time made of? What are its colours, its taste, its contours? In contrast, what are the dreams of entangled temporalities made of? Françoise Vergès will try to answer these questions looking at wasted bodies and lands, cleaning, caring and curing.

## Remembering the Future (Just) Past: Utopia, Nostalgia, and Redress in Early Postapartheid Fictions, Reconsidered

Andrew van der Vlies

“Modern political consciousness is [...] essentially schizophrenic”, Lorelea Michaelis (1999) observed in an essay published twenty years ago but still bracingly compelling; “we are either political and beyond disappointment,” she writes, “or disappointed and beyond politics.”<sup>ii</sup> In 1999, the year of her essay’s publication, South Africa transitioned from the one-term presidency of Nelson Mandela to an uncertain future that would end up being more socio-politically unstable than hoped for during the first five years of the new democracy. At this very moment, several of South Africa’s most engaging writers published books that treated, in fascinating ways, what David Scott (2014) calls “the irreversibly lapsed time of our former anticipations of political futurity.”

I want to revisit a handful of these texts—J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and Breyten Breytenbach’s *Dog Heart* (both 1999), Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story* and Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (both 2000)—to ask what theoretical and methodological insights into our ongoing, complexly entangled understandings of agency, history, and temporality, they offer, viewed from the vantage of their first publication in that curious cusp-time between the collapse of the Soviet Union and 9/11, and the rise of the discourse of the ‘War on Terror’. “The Not-Yet-Conscious”, writes Ernst Bloch (1959 [1986]), “is admittedly just as much a preconscious as is the unconscious of repressedness and forgottenness”; “by no means subordinated to the manifest consciousness of today,” it is rather “the preconscious of what is to come, the psychological birthplace of the New.”<sup>iii</sup> Of what were these texts “not-yet-conscious”, and of what do their thematic and formal treatments of memory, struggle, and utopia continue to speak?

## Return to History as an Aesthetic Invention: How East European Authors Seek their Ways Out of the State of Collective Emergency

Ilya Kukulín

1992 saw the publication of Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man*, which claimed that world history, conceived of as a series of conflicts, should end after the fall of communism. In his reflection, Fukuyama, according to his own explanation, was drawing on the concepts of Georg Hegel and Alexandre Kojève; however, the image of ‘the last man’ had travelled to his work from Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and Nietzsche, with his critique of historicism, was one of Hegel’s most radical opponents.

Fukuyama's book caused a major discussion; many critics would disagree with its argument, pointing out that Islamic fundamentalism or the crisis in Yugoslavia refute the idea that history has 'ended.' Today, Fukuyama's book is perceived rather as a Cold War monument. Post-9/11, several authors stated that this event is a direct testimony to the errors of Fukuyama's concept, in particular, his belief in progress. In the following years, at least two books with 'the return of history' in their title were published – one by Robert Kagan (2009), another by Jennifer Welsh (2016).

However, for some Eastern European countries (at least, for Russia and Belarus) but also to an extent for China, present times could be called 'the end of history' since the governments of these countries are trying to keep the *status quo*, blocking any changes and increasing the level of state repression. In this context, one of the strongest types of utopia is, however strange that might sound, the possibility of *individual life in history*. Returning to history, for Russians and Belarusians, is not a nightmare but a hope. This talk will consider how utopia is 'returning to history' and how the drive to historicize what is happening are reflected in the poetry from these two countries.

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## Bios keynotes

**Françoise Vergès** is a public educator, writer and activist in anticolonialist and decolonial feminist struggles and a cofounder of the association Decolonize the Arts. She is currently curating The School ~~La Colonie~~ Nomad "Fragments of Repair" in Paris in connection with franco-Algerian artist Kader Attia's show in Utrecht « Fragments of Repair » in partnership with bak Utrecht. Her latest publications in English, *The Wombs of Women; Race, Capitalism, Feminism* (2020) and *A Decolonial Feminism* (2021)

**Ilya Kukulín** is a cultural historian, cultural sociologist, and a literary critic. He is an Associate professor at the School of Philological Studies, National Research University Higher School of Economics (NRU HSE), Moscow. He is a Senior research fellow of the International Center for the History and Sociology of World War Two and Its Consequences (NRU HSE). His monograph *Machines of Noisy Time: How Early Soviet Montage Became a Method of Unofficial Art* (Moscow: New Literary Observer, 2015) was awarded with the Andrei Bely Prize in the nomination "Studies in the Humanities." He is a winner of several prizes for literary criticism: the Prize-Grant of the Academy of Contemporary Russian Literature for young authors (2002), the International Bella Prize for the best article on poetry of the year (2017), and the "Furious Vissarion" Prize in the nomination "For Special Merit" (2020). A collection of

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his essays and articles on poetry *Breakthrough to an Impossible Connection* was published in 2019. His most recent book, *Guerrillero's Logos: The Project of Dmitry Alexandrovich Prigov* (in press, 2021), co-written with Mark Lipovetsky (Columbia University), discusses the works of the well-known poet, artist, and theorist of art in a broad historical context of Russian unofficial art and Russian postmodernism.

**Andrew van der Vlies** is Professor in the Department of English and Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide, Australia, and Extraordinary Professor at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. He is author of scholarly articles and chapters on South African literature, visual culture, gender studies, and print culture, as well as the books *South African Textual Cultures* (2007) and *Present Imperfect: Contemporary South African Writing* (2017). He is editor of *Print, Text, and Book Cultures in South Africa* (2012), Zoë Wicomb's *Race, Nation, and Translation: South African Essays* (2018), and co-editor of *South African Writing in Transition* (2019). He is currently working on a new critical edition of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and co-editing a number of essay collections with collaborators in the UK and South Africa.