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Loitering: reassembling time in the city-of-the-global-south

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ABSTRACT

One of the most powerfully visible ways in which public space in inner city Johannesburg is ordered is through the material presence of apparently idle young men – a context profoundly linked to the precarious position of young and immigrant men in the post-apartheid economy. For the most part, these young men are regarded with disdain, the objects of fear and anxiety. In the following discussion, based on two years of field research with a group of unemployed young men (between the ages of 15 and 30 years old) who attend a weekly bible study and soup kitchen at a church in the inner city, I demonstrate ways in which these young men structure their daily lives in response to the over-abundance of time. I consider how the act of loitering in public space serves to reassemble the relationship between time and value at the peripheries of the urban economy, extracting value from the apparently idle activity of waiting in the present, but uncoupled from a sense of control over the past and future.

KEYWORDS

Loitering; time-pass; waiting; migration; Johannesburg

I should say that we cannot restrict ourselves to reflecting the existence of visible and measurable times in this way; we must, of absolute necessity, pose the question of the mode of existence of invisible times, of the invisible rhythms and punctuations concealed beneath the surface of each visible time. (Althusser in Althusser and Balibar 1970)

Introduction

In a short essay entitled *The Piccolo Teatro: Bertolazzi and Brecht* Louis Althusser (in Althusser and Balibar 1970) suggests that, parallel to the brief and discontinuous temporality of everyday life, runs the ceaseless rhythm of *invisible* time; that dialectical rhythm forged by the march of industrial capital and which constitutes the stage – the unseen foundation – upon which the prosaic melodramas and tragedies of everyday life play themselves out. The supporting cast of this everyday street theatre are the millions of men and women who inhabit the modern industrial city, and who collectively and largely unawares make up these dominant rhythms of work and routine, even as they fill their personal worlds with their own personal hopes and aspirations. Althusser's discussion has been important

in recognising the temporalities of power in the modern era. But what about those that appear to exist outside of these rhythms? There are some who would seem to fall outside of this conspiracy. In Johannesburg, as in many cities of the so-called “global South” (see e.g., De Boeck 2011; Jeffrey and Young 2012; Mains 2007; Simone 2001, 2008) unemployed young men, whether alone or in small groups, stand at street corners or sit in the shade of apartment-block entrance-ways. Ubiquitously present in the public spaces of this ordinary city (Robinson 2006), they are seemingly insignificant – and indifferent – to the daily rhythms and invisible temporalities of the city around them. Engaged sometimes in small-scale trading (e.g., selling loose cigarettes and sweets), frequently engaged in hustling and gambling or even in petty crime, most often simply killing time (Ralph 2008), these young men expend the majority of the “productive” day following the slow crawl of shadows from one side of the street to the other.

The discussion in this paper is based on field research undertaken between 2011 and 2013 in the inner city neighbourhood of Hillbrow in Johannesburg, as part of the GlobaldiverCities project led by Prof. Steven Vertovec at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (see Vertovec 2015). The aim of that project was to document and account for the emergence of new urban practices in the context of what Vertovec (2007) refers to as *super-diversity*, i.e., patterns of migration that link cities into multiple elsewhere. While the research involved unpacking the multiplicity of different ethnic and national identities as they influenced the public life of Hillbrow, it led also to encounters with other more marginal forms of difference in public space: religious minorities, sexual-identity minorities, drug addiction communities etc. In the process I became engaged with a group of unemployed young men who attend a bible study course and soup kitchen every Friday morning at a church hall on the edge of the neighbourhood. The size of the group varied, from a handful of participants to a few dozen depending on the time of the year, the weather or other opportunities that emerged from time to time in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, over the two years that I regularly attended these sessions, there was a core group of about 20 young men (and a few women, of whom I will speak later) who attended, and who became well known to the pastor and the volunteers who made the soup and sandwiches. About half of these regulars were foreign nationals, mostly from Zimbabwe, but all of them were migrants to the city in the sense that all of them had stories of arrival, aspiration, and of the reality / urgency of the present that did not (yet) match these aspirations.

These 20 young men are but a handful of the hundreds and thousands of similarly situated people in cities across the global South and North – in Hillbrow itself their situation is relatively ubiquitous. All of them survive by hustling, begging, parking or washing cars and occasionally selling cigarettes or drugs (or sometimes even sex) on the streets of Hillbrow. Most significantly, all of them are well aware of the social stigma that their bodies bear: as young, unemployed, mostly male and very often foreign they are frequently harassed by the police, forced to make life-worlds at the interstices of an already diverse neighbourhood.

Thus, in many ways, their mode of survival is marginal and contradictory to the imagination of the urban order. They live off the city’s discarded and abandoned parts, finding means of albeit precarious survival outside of its routines and rhythms. While these young men are pushed to the unseen edge-spaces of the neighbourhood, I argue in this paper that their everyday urban practices – what I term *loitering* – are in fact central to the economic and social life of the city, especially in the global South. I demonstrate here some of the

ways in which *loitering* transforms uncertainty and the over-abundance of time into what Jeffrey and Young (2012) call: “a tense preparedness for action” (641). In so doing, these young men rearticulate, initially at the peripheries of the city but increasingly also at its centre, a relationship between *temporality* and *space* in the production of value, that has long pre-occupied Marxist scholars: i.e., that *value* in industrial capitalism is produced through the colonisation of *time* (e.g., Adorno 1991; Althusser and Balibar 1970; Postone 1993; Thompson 1967). If the modern-industrial city of nineteenth century European capitalism was built on the gradual control of time by the demands of capital, I demonstrate how – in Johannesburg at least – young men structure daily lives in response to an over-abundance of time. These young men are confronted with endless presence, developing ways to extract some value from waiting in the present, but increasingly disconnected from a sense of control over their own past and future. I suggest finally that this refigured relationship sheds some light on the nature and workings of capital in the contemporary global economy. Althusser’s *invisible* temporality is no longer that of industrial labour capital but rather of waiting, of interruption, of endless presence. And the figure of the *loiterer* provides the archetype for this urban condition.

Over the period of two years in which I was regularly attended the bible study and soup kitchen, I undertook hours of observations, I took hundreds of photographs (photographs were welcomed and even requested by the young men, perhaps as an affirmation of presence), and I facilitated about a dozen focus-group sessions with participants. These focus-group discussions were permitted by the organisers because they could be accommodated as part of a broader programme facilitated through the centre, aimed at providing young people with the tools for taking control of their lives, in a context where many young people are sleeping rough, many are addicted, and health and nutrition problems are common. Most of the discussion groups centred around life-skills, sexual health and empowered sexual behaviour, addiction, returning home and other issues that spoke of the everyday realities of this group of young men. We also discussed variously questions about time: of pasts, of futures, of aspirations and the more prosaic organisation of daily life in the context of unemployment and homelessness. In the following two sections I will discuss these two elements of temporal reassembly respectively: i.e., the organisation of daily life and routine; and understandings of past, futurity and aspiration. But first, I turn to the question: what is loitering?

Loitering as urban archetype

The presence in the public life of the city of idle, young (and often immigrant) male bodies has long been a cause of anxiety for city authorities and urban residents, in colonial and post-colonial societies as elsewhere (e.g., Burgess 2005; Burton 2006; Cooper and Stoler 1997; Maloka 1997; McCracken 1986; Poutanen 2002; Pinto de Almeida 2015). This anxiety is not only due to their threatening bodily presence (despite a long history of academic and policy literature criminalising their presence), but because at a broader level their presence disrupts the imagined temporal and spatial ordering of the city. For example, in South Africa under conditions of apartheid, the exclusion of unemployed black bodies from the visible spaces of the city through the pass-law system was one of the ways in which a racialised urban order was enforced (Beavon 2004; Graham 2007; Mabin 1992a; Posel 1991; Robinson

1992; Wolpe 1972). These experiences echoed those in other colonial and post-colonial societies (see e.g., Legg 2007; Mamdani 1996).

Conversely, the ability to maintain a bodily presence in the city despite this apparent idleness has also been a mechanism through which marginalised and excluded populations have staked a claim to urban life and the urban economy. Keith Hart (1973) demonstrated how the rural poor who moved into the edge spaces of the colonial city, while apparently excluded from the *formal* economy, engaged nevertheless in a range of *informal* economic practices that not only sustained their continued presence in the city outside of waged labour, but also served the reproduction of the capitalist order through the maintenance of a cheap labour pool in the urban areas (see also Moser 1978). In the South African context, informal urban practices of subversion and disobedience allowed blacks to maintain an albeit precarious urban presence in the face of falling real wages and severe state repression in the 1980s, and was a way to sustain resistance to the apartheid regime (Beavon 2004; Mabin 1992b; Robinson 1996). Ironically, in the post-apartheid context this mass of the formally unemployed have not experienced the benefits of economic growth after apartheid, and continue to provide an army of cheap and precarious labour (Barchiesi 2011). Ari Sitas (2007) suggests that these informal urban economies of survival, which characterise many African cities, expose both the exploitative nature of capitalism and the failures of the post-colonial and post-apartheid state to ensure welfare and full employment. In South Africa the official rate of unemployment for those between the ages of 15 and 24 is 51% (according to the Stats-SA website accessed in December 2016). These figures cover only respondents to the 2011 South African Census, and so are unlikely to include foreign nationals living (often without proper documentation) within South Africa.

In the context of such material realities there has emerged a recent literature broadly interested in the phenomenon of *waiting*: i.e., temporal liminality as a structuring condition of urban life in the contemporary city. James Ferguson's (1999) *Expectations of Modernity* is one of the foundational texts in this regard, engaging directly with the affective dimensions of interrupted aspiration in a context of economic decline and state retreat in post-structural adjustment Zambia. But more recent scholarship has highlighted the emergent ecologies of this liminal temporality (Dawson 2014; Gaibazzi 2013; Hage 2009; Harms 2013; Jeffrey 2010a; Jeffrey and Young 2012; Mains 2007; Ralph 2008; Simone 2004). This literature proposes an alterity to the temporal hegemony of globalisation, which assumes progress, speed and connectivity. For many people in what Jennifer Robinson (2006) would call *ordinary* places, neoliberal capitalism is experienced rather as panic, inertia, left-behindness, and simultaneous fear of missing out. Of course, such dislocating experiences are not in themselves new: they characterised the experiences of colonised populations who were violently thrust into, but simultaneously excluded, from a history of European modernity (Chakrabarty 2000), as much as those of the unemployed, the displaced and the precarious in the European metropolises throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century (Jeffrey and Young 2012; Kracauer 1998; Marx 1970). But unlike the "fixity" of nationally, mobilised populations and colonially controlled territories which defined much of the twentieth century, temporal in-between-ness is an increasingly generalised experience of the contemporary global order: the massive increase in migration and mobility in the twenty-first century (Vertovec 2015); the increasing incarceration of the poor, minorities and immigrants in the global North and South (Gilmore 2007; Wacquant 2014); asylum seekers and refugees awaiting permission or opportunities for mobility while stuck in intern camps (Abourahme 2011;

Landau and Jacobsen 2004); the urban precariat waiting for social services (Bénit-Gbaffou and Lama-Rewal 2007); the rural destitute waiting for remittances from family members working in the city (Gaibazzi 2010); the disenfranchised youth who have given up waiting for promised change (Dawson 2014). Many young men and women in the twenty-first century find themselves stuck in wasted time and endless youth, seeking advancement through the over-accumulation of dead-end educational certification, feeling “surplus to requirements” and unable to invest into or take up the responsibilities of adulthood (Dawson 2014; Jeffrey 2010b; Mains 2007). Under such conditions, migration becomes a very real prospect for young people looking to secure livelihoods in the contemporary global economy. But these moments of temporal and spatial rupture are frequently interspersed with – or stalled in – periods of waiting of unknowable duration (Gaibazzi 2010).

One trajectory of this broader literature on waiting focuses on the emergent urban micro-practices through which those stuck in the limbo of waiting negotiate their lack of agency. Michael Ralph (2008) minutely analyses the everyday practice of what he terms “killing time” through the ways in which young men in Senegal fill the endless day, demonstrating their frustrated masculinity through brewing strong tea. Hannah Dawson (2014) discusses what she calls the practices of “deliberate waiting,” as unemployed young men in Johannesburg carve limited social agency from the dysfunctional social and urban form, e.g., through occupying street corners. Yet while they are in this way politically conscientised, they are nevertheless constrained by their “stuckness.”

The discussion in this paper draws on, and contributes to, this generative literature. But whereas both Ralph and Dawson understand these practices in relation to an abandonment by the institutions of the post-colonial state (and hence as a critique of the contemporary political economy), I am here concerned with how these emergent urban practices and rhythms begin to reassemble the social, the economic and the *bio*-political in the city-of-the-global-south. In other words, while the literature on waiting defines a terrain or context within which many individuals are confronted with exclusion from the hegemonic rhythms of the global economy as it circulates through different places, I am interested to understand the ways in which alternative rhythms and temporalities begin to be assembled. In doing this I draw on the idea of *loitering*, both as an embodied practice and a heuristic device (Buck-Morss 1986). The discussion on loitering contributes to this literature by demonstrating how practices of loitering serve to reassemble the urban form through subverting and exposing the hidden rhythms of the city.

Despite its ubiquitous presence in many cities, there is not a great deal of academic writing on loitering as an embodied and spatial practice. Where it has been written about, it is the subject of work undertaken in the disciplines of criminology and urban planning, most of which tends to understand loitering in terms of anxiety and antisocial behaviour (see e.g., Bird et al. 2005; Rai 2011). Susan Buck-Morss (1986) has used the term loitering to encompass a range of these supposedly “anti-social” and “unproductive” urban activities through which the marginal and the precarious are able to survive and sustain some kind of presence in the city: hustling, begging, petty trade, prostitution. This is similar to what Bayat (2013, 33) calls the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary:” i.e., the ways in which the marginal majority navigate the precarity and (dis)connection of the globalised economy through informal and ulterior practices of survival, and even social reproduction. Loitering, in this sense, is an embodied practice; one which emerges from conditions characterised by waiting and temporal uncertainty, but which acknowledges the human endeavour that is

directed towards durability. More specifically, loitering implies a durational occupation of public space – a street corner, a pavement, a park bench – in such a way that appears (and is performed as) disinterested and idle, but which is always watchful and always present (Dawson 2014; Jeffrey and Young 2012; Simone 2004). Loitering is about the endurance of the body in the present, the ability to remain present for an unknown duration in the hope of an uncertain and precarious future. And in this way, I want to suggest, it prefigures not the marginal detritus of the city, but its fundamental character.

Reading Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (2002 translation), Buck-Morss (1986) looks to the marginal characters of the urban fringes “whose existence was precarious economically in their own time (...) and socially across time because the dynamics of industrialism ultimately threatened these social types with extinction” (Buck-Morss 1986, 101–102). For Benjamin, the archetypal character was the *flâneur*, that heroic narrator of Baudelaire's nineteenth century Paris who through his imagination “could transform the fleeting and trivial (...) into images and narratives that expressed the essential qualities of modernity” (Jiang 2011, 284). But in 1930s Paris the *flâneur*, now out of place in the industrial city, is made extinct in the present

by exploding into a myriad of forms, the phenomenological characteristics of which, no matter how new they may appear, continue to bear his traces as *ur-form*. This is the truth of the *flâneur*, more visible in his afterlife than in his flourishing. (Buck-Morss 1986, 105)

Such individuals were not part of the rhythm of factory time, but neither were they the privileged beneficiaries of abundant leisure time – a luxury afforded only to the rich: “The *flâneur* is not the aristocrat: not leisure but *loitering* is his trade” (Buck-Morss 1986, 111; emphasis added). Nor does the *flâneur* necessarily embody a disposition of refusal: Benjamin is careful to disavow the revolutionary potential of the *flâneur*, who chooses to disengage the city, but not as an act of political solidarity. Pinto de Almeida (2015) has argued that unlike Benjamin's archetypal urban perambulator, the loitering body in the colonial city was severely circumscribed in its movements, so that loitering did not equate movement to a form of freedom but to a careful orchestration of tactical subversion. And in the post-colonial city the *loiterer* is not threatened as a social type, but rather quite profoundly as a material body (Mbembe 2004). In fact, loitering is the most likely urban role many young men and women in cities across Africa will inhabit for significant periods of their adult life.

There is of course an (other) politics to loitering, in that it encompasses all those supposedly “unproductive” activities through which the marginal and the precarious are able to survive and sustain over a longer period some kind of embodied presence in the urban economy. Certainly, the livelihood strategies of the young men with whom I undertook the research that informs this paper barely sustain a presence in the city: especially in winter, their numbers on the streets of Hillbrow dwindle as many of them make their way back to families in rural parts of the country, who themselves may not be able to sustain these extra numbers all year round (see e.g., Gaibazzi 2013). Nevertheless, I want also to avoid a dismissal of these marginal practices as somehow insignificant or superfluous to the contemporary city-of-the-global-south by virtue of not being conventionally *productive*. On the contrary, I maintain that such activities – of hustling, begging, card-playing and occasional petty trading, what Buck-Morss (1986) refer to collectively as *loitering* – constitute a set of urban practices that are characteristic of (and which have much to say about) the contemporary city: i.e., endless readiness in the present, while caught up in global trajectories of migration and neoliberal capitalism. The projection of so many immediate anxieties onto

these loitering bodies betrays deep anxieties about the precarious reality of the contemporary global economy. Experienced by many of its inhabitants through tenuous access to public resources, high unemployment in the formal economy, casualised and infrequent labour opportunities, the explosion of informal and illicit economies, high rates of migration and transience, and livelihoods forged through tactical circumventing of the *imagined* social order (De Boeck 2011; Landau 2012; Simone 2008), the marginality and peripherality of the loitering body marks it as the archetypal subject of the contemporary city.

In this section I have suggested that loitering is an increasingly archetypal urban practice in, especially, the city-of-the-global-south, because it betrays the contingency and partiality of the global economy. I suggested, in particular, that the presence of the loiterer in public space disrupts the temporal order of the city. In the following two sections I want to focus on two such ways in which this happens: (a) through turning the abundance of time into a structured series of practices of *constant readiness*; and (b) through the abandonment of what Jane Guyer (2007) calls the hollowed-out *near future*, and investment into what I call an *elsewhere* future.

(Un)structuring the present

For much of the nineteenth and twentieth century the temporality and rhythm of social life in the modern city was progressively organised according to the rhythm of industrial production (Adorno 1991; Postone 1993; Thompson 1967). Even leisure time was not outside these rhythms (Adorno 1991), but a segment of time apportioned for the purpose of recuperation (and increasingly also of distraction) from the terminal rhythms of the factory clock. Ilze Wolff (2014) has demonstrated this need for temporal recuperation in her discussion of the *55-minute hour*, whereby the South African textile industry during apartheid forced workers to take a five-minute break every hour, a system that was actually designed to increase productivity through decreased on-shift fatigue and work down-time. Under such conditions, as time is measured less in terms of human activity or natural cycles, and increasingly in terms of the abstract divisions of hours and minutes, Moishe Postone (1993) argues that time becomes the value-forming substance of capitalist exploitation: i.e., that value is produced through extracting people's time. And although the governmentalisation of colonial societies was only ever incomplete and partial (see e.g., Mamdani 1996), nevertheless even the rural and "traditional" spaces on the edges of colonial control were increasingly spaces of scarcity as especially young men were forced to go to industrial areas to find livelihoods. John and Jean Comaroff (1987) describe the ways in which colonial and apartheid capital functioned to effectively dispossess colonised people of time (see also Cooper 1992; Cooper and Stoler 1997). Making a distinction between *work* and *labour*, they argue for a distinction between time as imposed and time as lived: between the shift-time of the mine (labour) and the cyclical rhythms of traditional life and personal effort, expended towards the reproduction of self, of family and community (work). Under apartheid *work* was an increasingly impossible temporality to inhabit, the idle domain of the expired body after a (much shortened) lifetime of *labour* (see e.g., Beavon and Rogerson 1980; Mabin 1992b; Mamdani 1996; Robinson 1996).

How, then, do we understand this context, inhabited as it is by the archetypal figure of the loiterer? In a context of massive unemployment, these young men and women seem surplus to such imagined industrial rhythms, not exploited by but excluded from the factory clock,

their endless time valueless and superfluous (Mbembe 2004). Their corporal and mortal labour is effectively unexploitable in an economy of cheap, temporary and precarious labour – a reality so present that they will often eschew the piece-meal opportunities for waged work in the hope of better opportunities further down the line (see e.g., Mains 2007). Like Comaroff and Comaroff’s madman, or Benjamin’s flaneur in 1930’s Paris, eliding in their impending extinction the possibility of authentic self in the capitalist city, the loiterer signals not freedom from the invisible temporalities of the city – not the possibility of escape from its the terminal rhythms – but his expulsion from it.

Of course, the Northern industrial city of the twentieth century does not reflect the temporalities and rhythms of the contemporary city-of-the-global-south (see e.g., Robinson 2006). The experiences of migrant labour (Wolpe 1972) and differential modes of rule (Mamdani 1996), the temporal insecurity of the informalisation of labour during the commodity boom in post-independence (Hart 1973), the ravages of structural adjustment (Briggs and Yeboah 2001) and experiences of de-modernisation and debt in its aftermath (Ferguson 1999), and the rhythms of waiting and exclusion in the contemporary neoliberal economy (Dawson 2014; Jeffrey 2010a; Ralph 2008) all make the contemporary city-of-the-global-south far more variegated and complex. Yet part of this assemblage is the particular histories of partial, racialised and discontinuous processes of industrialisation and de-industrialisation, especially so in the case of Johannesburg, such that the contemporary city can be read as a rich and at times chaotic intersection of rhythms (see e.g., Nuttall and Mbembe 2008). I suggest therefore that the loiterer is oppressed not by the structured time of the factory; but the *un*-structuring of time of the neoliberal economy. Certainly, many young men in Johannesburg’s inner city eschew fleeting opportunities of precarious and casualised labour for the promise of more lucrative (though mostly elusive) opportunity. Daniel Mains (2007), for example, has demonstrated how cultural attitudes about masculinity and age among unemployed young men in Ethiopia mean that young men are often reluctant to take jobs that they would more readily take as migrants in other countries. In Johannesburg, even young immigrant men are conscious of the opportunity costs of casualised labour (Dawson 2014), a reminder that a day of low-paid labour might provide so meagre and marginal a livelihood that one would rather go hungry altogether. And although for many of these young and unemployed men fantasies of the future include gainful employment, for most this is articulated as business success wrought from entrepreneurial nous, or even fame procured through music or poetry or preaching, rather than the expectation of becoming lawyers, doctors, teachers or other such “respectable” professions that characterised a Fordist urban imagination. This is perhaps understandable: the education required for such professional careers is well outside the life-worlds of these young men; starting a business or a church is a more direct route out of poverty and precarity.

Yet despite this recognition of the temporal un-structuring of the contemporary city, time, timeous-ness and temporal regularity haunted the conversations that I had with many of them. The young men who attended the soup kitchen and bible study sessions had a very keen sense of the hours of the day – and the power of time over their lives. Despite their personal difficulties, it was starkly apparent that this particular group of young men have a very strict adherence to – and consciousness about – what Postone (1993) might call *abstract* time. And as much as their everyday activities may be seen as the result of an over-abundance of (unproductive) time, their perception of time is in fact not arbitrary – although as I will attempt to demonstrate, it is for the most part ritualised.

Friday morning bible study and soup kitchen is a regular commitment. At every session, the starting time was constantly reiterated: 10 am. In two years I do not recall the rusted and razor-wire-topped gate being opened before half past ten, but nevertheless the small group would wait. Latecomers were locked out of the church-yard once everyone was let in, as were anyone on drugs or drunk. The pastor told me that this was about instilling order and routine in the lives of these young men, and a sense of responsibility and sobriety, and getting them to understand consequences – a very Protestant ethic, but one that is pervasive in such contexts (Becci, Burchardt, and Casanova 2013). The beginning of each session begins with a roll-call, a ritual that is methodically and solemnly observed. Names are called and ticked off in an old ragged notebook, the duty of calling names and ticking off being passed each week to a different person. It is a seemingly pointless performance of routine, but one which was meaningful in its iteration rather than its substance. Many of those in attendance are not on the roll, some because they are first-timers, others because they come infrequently, others because they prefer to remain quiet or marginal in the group. There are frequent absences, and people discuss in great detail – sometimes for several minutes – where someone might be, whether someone has information, whether they went home, got arrested, had some opportunity for work etc. So the ritual has more to do with regularity, with asserting a shared and mutual existence, of noting down when a body otherwise regarded as superfluous is in fact missed, their absence a cause of concern. It is a defiant gesture of existence – of presence – in an everyday life of seeming inconsequence.

Of course, the majority of the week is not spent in such routine. Yet despite, or perhaps in order to make bearable, the endlessness of time, the young men at the bible study and soup kitchen express a very precise organisation of the hours of the day. Over the course of several focus group sessions, we worked with the young men on several participatory mapping exercises to map out the spaces of the city. In this process, we also focused on the organisation of time, because in fact time was an important element of everyday life – mostly in the sense of being present (or absent) at the right moment. The day begins early: they were adamant that they must wake at 6 am. It was summer when we had this particular discussion, and the sun rises several hours later in winter time, but the sense of being early was important. One must be ready for the day, although there were many provisos suggested: being too sick to wake seemed a common occurrence, and this meant one was dependent on the goodwill of friends to eat that day. As unpredictable as their lives are, this proviso is significant: it is not uncommon to be sick when living on the streets or in the abandoned infrastructures of inner city Johannesburg, especially in the winter. Nevertheless, there is strong recognition that waking early is important as a livelihood strategy and a routine that refuses the realities of unemployment and precarity – whether or not one in practice abides by this norm or develops some internal justification to renege. The city wakes early, and will not wait for anyone who is late, even if one's main activity is to wait.

Waking means undertaking the tasks to begin the day: lighting a fire, fetching water to drink and wash, beating others to the lucrative early-morning commuter routes to hustle and beg for money. Of course, the day itself is far less structured, and the focus group discussions moved vaguely through this major part of the 24-hour cycle. For the most part, it is determined by external regularities such as school-closing time, commuters returning home etc. Otherwise, the discussions about daytime were filled with references to different places of occasional opportunity, or different places to stay cool (or warm or dry), or different places to get food (there are several soup kitchens in the neighbourhood, operating

on different days). But in the early morning there are enough regular places to attend and tasks that one must undertake to hold the reality of the unstructured day at bay – as well as being open to the possibility that unexpected opportunities might arise. Later in the evening, domestic routines are urgent and must be adhered to, a regime that ensures food and a warm place to spend the night. Surprisingly to me, the majority of the discussion was on the minute details of these routines – the tasks that need to be undertaken. But the subtext appeared to have more gravity: that by 8 pm (I assume a short-hand reference to darkness, and therefore a shifting timescale depending on the seasons) the young men must be secreted from public spaces, because night-time responds to different and more threatening rhythms.

It was clear from the focus group discussions that the apparently very precise times given were not actually adhered to in most instances: for example, the young men adjust their daily rhythms to the rhythms of the seasons or the weather. The dry, bitterly cold winters of 2011 and 2012, when the majority of the focus groups were undertaken, were particularly tough periods for many of the young men. There are fewer daylight hours, sickness is more common, and the long cold nights hold their own unpredictability. Yet it is not just the rhythms of the seasons and the sunrise that the young men must respond to: livelihoods in the city are only to be had if one is attuned to the other rhythms of the city. And this does imply the tyranny of the clock, if not for oneself then for the rhythms that others adhere to. Working folk, particularly the low-paid and precarious labourers who live in such high-density immigrant neighbourhoods, leave home before the sun has filtered through the cold shadows of the tall buildings, most travelling to the northern suburbs to work as cleaners, security guards and other low-paid jobs. Schools begin at seven-thirty in the morning. Mini-bus “taxis,” the informal transport network of the city, sit in traffic jams en-route to the wealthy northern suburbs at least an hour before the middle-class office workers are waking up and driving to work.

Despite the assertion of routine and reliability – in many ways a performance of bravado in the face of precarity – the most lucrative period of the day is nevertheless spent in the meanwhile, in that *longue duree* after waking and before the domestic chores of the evening. It is in this period, when young men loiter on street corners or in the park, that *abstract* time – the time of the office worker and the school child – becomes most oppressive, precisely because these young men are excluded from it. They inhabit an everyday reality in which time is oppressively abundant. As discussed above, they have time, but very little value. For the most part, theirs is the unstructured and unpredictable time of endless waiting, interspersed by sudden shock: being harassed by the city police, for example, or hearing news of opportunity elsewhere. And it is into this unstructured and unpredictable time that young men must invest their most productive and creative capacity, and their youth.

Ralph (2008) demonstrates the immense craft, yet ultimately futile labour, that goes into what he calls *killing time* in contemporary Senegal among similarly positioned young men in the city. He is, however, very careful to show that a form of agency and self-representation can be somehow roughly hewn; in his example through the almost uncannily refined activity of making tea. Of course, the stigma of laziness is still ascribed to such activities, if not for their lack of gainful employment (something not realistically expected in Senegal) then for their lack of mobility: Ralph suggests that in the absence of full employment, a new economic morality of migration compels young men to leave, even as the reality that many hundreds perish in the process is keenly felt by families that stay behind (Ralph 2008, 24).

Those that stay behind are in some sense the unsuccessful, the pitiable, the unambitious, in an economic rationality that no longer is located in the modernist immobility of the nation state and society. Yet, as Paolo Gaibazzi (2013) has suggested, even those who wait must be mobile, and even those who are mobile wait. Waiting, it would seem, has become a practised art. The practice of waiting, of apparently doing nothing, is not in fact an idle one. It is to these rhythms that these young men must be responsive: a day spent recovering due to sickness which requires a favour from another for survival must be returned somewhere in the future. It is to this *somewhere in the future* that I now turn.

Futurity and fatalism

Laurence, a 23 year old man from Zimbabwe, sells sweets from an upturned box at the entrance to a small park in inner city Johannesburg, monopolising the route from a nearby school into the park. He sets up his stall to coincide with the afternoon closure of school, and hangs around chatting with friends until dusk, when the children finally make their way home and the park reverts to a nocturnal economy. Laurence's stall provides little more than a marginal survival (he makes the equivalent of a few dollars each day, most of which goes to replenishing his stock and buying alcohol), but he is able to pay for a bed in a shared room. Laurence is not selling sweets and cigarettes outside the park because he is uninterested in more consistent and well-paid work; but the possibility to find other more consistent forms of work does not exist for Laurence in any reasonable sense. Laurence engages in the economy of loitering – one in which the present must be albeit barely sustained for the promise of some different future. In winter 2012 Laurence agreed to manage a small kiosk for a woman from Zimbabwe while she collected her child from school. Such tenuous associations of trust (based e.g., on a shared nationality) are common forms of what AbdouMaliq Simone (2004) refers to as *people as infrastructure* in such urban contexts, and are highly precarious. Reports differ as to whether Laurence stole the day's earnings himself or if he was negligent and the kiosk was robbed: nevertheless Laurence disappeared, the kiosk went out of business and the woman was herself forced to return home to Zimbabwe (although several months later she returned and has subsequently reopened her kiosk). The point of this prosaic anecdote is to illustrate on one hand the precarious location between stasis and mobility, between bare survival and something more durable, that the economy of loitering inhabits. Loitering is barely sufficient to sustain economic and biological life – and certainly not more lucrative than formal waged labour (or even petty crime). On the other hand, it speaks to the fatalism of the present, and the arbitrary and contingent opportunity that must be seized, regardless of the bridges burned.

Several of the focus group sessions with the young men at the bible study and soup kitchen touched upon these issues, in particular because these young men (despite their bravado) are themselves incredibly anxious and hopeless about their own futures. Despite the expenditure of the majority of their lives in the *meanwhile*, and despite the investment of the majority of their resources into sustaining this meanwhile, it is not into this imperfect present that these young men invest their deepest hopes and desires. And like Laurence, many of these young men are also willing to gamble the present on an unknown future: a stolen day's takings and the rupturing of the endless present for an unknown future. Over several weeks there was a particularly vexing issue that we tried as a group to engage. The issue emerged initially as a question of the compatibility of traditional and religious beliefs

(i.e., whether a belief in forefathers was compatible with a belief in a Christian god), but emerged as a discussion about temporality. Most of the young men in the group profess a strong association with traditional African beliefs around the significance of forefathers to one's present identity. This is exacerbated, perhaps, by their displacement in the city: i.e., by the fact that most young men are immigrant to the city, and struggle to articulate their difficult relationship with "home." In many ways this is articulated in temporal terms: home is both the past, but also an (unspecified) future. So ideas of forefathers are connected to both the past and the future through the idea of inevitable return. Indeed, return is crucial to many young men, but it is often not in the terms imagined. For many it is a cyclical escape, a place to go during winter for a short while to recuperate. But the grandiose return of the successful man is less frequently realised, and the repatriation of the dead is a minimum hope for many of them.

Yet while forefathers may represent the idealised imagination of home, this imagination is disfigured by the messy actuality of everyday life in Hillbrow. Almost all the young men in the session were adamant that they would rather not be addicted, unemployed, homeless, criminal etc. As we have already seen, the soup kitchen serves an important space for these young men precisely because it affirms acceptance and forgiveness (as opposed to many of the evangelical churches which preach hard work and material wealth, see e.g., Wilhelm-Solomon et al. 2017). So while one's forefathers may provide an example of the good and righteous adult man whom most of these young men feel that they are expected to somehow become, more often it is the Christian god (in the figure of Jesus the saviour) that provides a path to the future – that is, one that can forgive the shame of the present. This sentiment was evident in another mapping exercise on spaces of safety. The session broke into a heated discussion about vulnerability and temptation and the need to survive in the reality of the city. Safety was understood less as a question of space and more as a question of time: i.e., daytime (mostly safe) and night-time (mostly anxious), but also past and future. The city – i.e., the present – is precarious and unsafe, but demands survival. The city demands that one operate unethically and immorally, even as one is aware that this is not how one would like to be.

In both these focus group sessions (regarding forefathers and regarding spaces of safety in the city) a disconnect between the past, present and future was clearly articulated. Given that this was part of a bible study session, it is perhaps unsurprising that the discourse which emerged to articulate this disconnect reflected a Christian ontology: the shameful present a fall from grace, but a necessary step towards transcendence. Nevertheless, the discussions highlighted the lived reality of the present for many of these young men, and the very personal dreams and aspirations which had accompanied them from distant elsewhere. That future is always deferred. For those young men who do manage to get themselves off the streets (and there are many more who do so than might be expected) it requires escape from the present, either by going back home (the past) or by gaining a foothold in another part of the city (the almost future). But for most that future is never realised.

The shame of the present (an abiding cause of great anxiety among the young men), allayed partly through ever more fantastical and remote aspirations of the future is generative of a kind of fatalism which I will here refer to as the "next time" economy. "Next time" is a very common spoken gesture on the streets of inner city Johannesburg (and a code quickly learned by the newcomer). It is simultaneously a gesture of dismissal and one of connection, intended on a shifting continuum of cynicism and sincerity. It is usually a

non-threatening response given when a person refuses, or is unable to offer, a small kindness such as a few coins or purchasing a newspaper or a cigarette. Either of the parties in this interaction might offer the gesture by the phrase “Next time, my friend” – suggesting the possibility of a future interaction (i.e., “the next time I come past I will bring some coins;” or “I know you will remember to bring a few coins next time”). While both parties know that this is merely a rhetorical gesture, it nevertheless locates them in a shared present that offers some possibility of a collective and durable social form.

I am not primarily interested here in understanding the gesture as a form of social cohesion or conviviality (although see Ye 2016 for a discussion on the concept of *gui ju* as a form of coexistence in Singapore; see also Norton 2015 for a similar discussion on the African concept of *ubuntu*). Rather, I am interested in the idea as an engagement with futurity. Griffiths, Rogers, and Anderson (2013) suggest that if Fordist industrial social relations provided an understanding of the future with reference to its usefulness to the present (what they refer to as the “colonisation” of the future by the present), young migrant men might in fact tend to understand the present with reference to its usefulness to the future, thus making what Jeffrey (2008, 954) refers to as the “curse or burden” of the present more bearable. In this way, the idea (the promise or hope) of a “next time” makes the unrealised possibility in the present moment less intolerable. But as Guyer (2007; see also Thornton 2007; Robbins 2007) perhaps more radically states, the future is not one time. She distinguishes what she refers to as a near-future (the future associated with the maintenance of the present social formation, in the case of most of these young men simply food and clothing) and a distant or imagined future (the future associated with aspiration and transcendence from the present). While the Fordist economic model is built on maintaining the predictability and certainty of the near future (i.e., tomorrow and the next day and so on), under neoliberalism Guyer suggests, the certainty of the capitalist economic growth model has failed to provide such predictability. The near-future has been effectively “hollowed out” (Guyer 2007, 419), leaving the impossible distant future as the only place to emotionally and rationally escape the imperfect present. The young men of the soup kitchen inhabit what Guyer calls “punctuated time” (417), the time of events and incidents, but not of progression and continuity.

In a similar way, Ferguson (1999) speaks about the failure of promised expectations and the psychic rupture that occurs when the ability to think oneself into the near future is abruptly truncated. In this way for Ferguson expectation is not so much the ability to expect, but the inability to restructure one’s aspirations towards an absent or radically adjusted future – or more to the point towards a temporality of the uncertain here and now. Jeffrey (2010a) similarly speaks of the “ruptured futures” of young men, and of the labour that is expended to eschew the fact of the present. He refers to this as a cultural condition of “temporal angst” in which the passage of time haunts the everyday lives of the city’s residents.

Conclusion

How, if the toll exacted on the body and the psyche of the loiterer is so terminal, can loitering be a durable social formation at all? The truth is, for many it is not, and the loiterer is precarious in his own time, just as Benjamin’s flaneur was in his. The figure of the young male body on the street corner, seemingly unwilling to engage in productive pursuits, is a cause of great anxiety in many cities-of-the-global-south, and indeed many cities of the world. His presence has been the subject of police order and control not only because of

his antisocial demeanour, but because his presence threatens the social formation that produces cheap surplus labour. Except that, in the city-of-the-global-south, this body does not make up the unemployed masses. This loitering body – usually black, immigrant and male – has so little value, so little surplus to extract. It is, in these terms, quite literally an excess. The point of this discussion has not been to reclaim from these ashes some form of liberation in marginality and superfluity. The young men who sit on street corners spend a good deal of the days' meanwhile seduced by the trappings of abstract time: of regular jobs, of commodities and objects. And while they dream, the city would seem to pass them by, endlessly productive, endlessly moving forward.

Such an orientation towards the public life of the city is markedly different from those of other urban users, who move through or occupy city spaces in particular ways or at particular times: young women, for example, or the elderly, or working people or school-children. Loitering is also a temporal practice. Loitering takes time, and it takes place within time. What I mean by this is that loitering requires that a body be present for a duration of time. Someone walking down the street is not loitering. However, neither is a small trader who sits on a brick and sells cigarettes strictly speaking loitering – although these two economies intersect. It requires the occupation of public space in such a way that the space is never occupied, but is always nevertheless determining. Loitering is hard work and it takes deliberation. Loitering also takes place within time: what I mean by this is that loitering has a specific temporality. Loitering is primarily a daytime activity, and a work-time activity. It is simultaneously associated with both wasted time on the one hand, and with an over-abundance of time on the other. Time is understood as wasted in the sense that it is spent in unproductive and un-useful ways; it is conversely over-abundant in the sense that those without an apparently productive pursuit with which to fill their time are oppressed by the inescapable of duration (Jeffrey 2010b; Mains 2007). In this way, I suggest that loitering presents a challenge to our theorisation of the workings of the state and to contemporary capitalist formations. It is an activity that takes place in the absence of, and sometimes in the eschewal of, other kinds of work; in a context where surplus labour no longer seeks opportunities to eke out precarious livelihoods, but is rather rendered unexploitable in any way. If, in the city-of-the-global-south young male bodies do not wait to be offered piecemeal opportunities of back-breaking labour, how then do we understand such a curious – and fragile – social formation?

Precisely the point that I want to reiterate in this paper is that orientation towards futures has profound implications for how these young people think about their relationship to place and time. More specifically, it raises the spectre that assumptions of time and value connected to more traditional ways of understanding work and labour (and the distinction between them) can be, and indeed increasingly is, ruptured (c.f. Postone 1993). The loiterer is on the outside of the *modernist-city-of-the-imaginary* because: (a) he does not (cannot) partake in an economy of either production or consumption; and (b) as an immigrant to the city he does not (cannot) claim belonging to that city. And yet, consumption, participation and belonging are increasingly the exception in the *city-of-the-global-south* (Chatterjee 2001). Loitering bodies disrupt the hegemonic rhythms of the *modernist-city-of-the-imaginary* (see e.g., Legg 2007): they inhabit a temporality in which the present is overwhelming oppressive; the near-future unpredictable; and the past and the distant future a place of fantasy and/or escape (Guyer 2007).

Let us return for a moment to Althusser, and the invisible rhythms of the city. What if the melodrama was the time of the clock, if the bodies waking at dawn and hurrying through the streets to work and labour, were the everyday tragedies of the city? How differently might we think about the city if we realised that the dream of the young man on the street corner is in fact a collective dream?

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