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Lauren Beukes's Post-Apartheid Dystopia: Inhabiting *Moxyland*

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Abstract

This article reads South African science-fiction writer Lauren Beukes's first novel, *Moxyland* (2008) set in a futuristic Cape Town, from the perspective of Lindsay Bremner's notion of "citiness"-- or how cities produce the modernity of the subjects who inhabit them. The novel is remarkable for its dependence on the social geography of the South African city. This article charts Beukes's resolutely mobile focalizers as they negotiate the spatial itineraries and technologies of governance in which they are embedded. It explores how Beukes's futuristic urban setting fuses punitive forms of digital technology with the biopolitical regulation of social relations in an unsettling reprise of the apartheid groundplan. My reading positions *Moxyland* in relation to discussions of African city textualities--a critical rubric introduced by Ranka Primorac in this journal--the better to explore how the novel makes history of dystopia.

Key Words post-apartheid literature, citiness, biopolitics, HIV/AIDS, dystopian fiction, apocalypse.

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South African City Textualities

Lauren Beukes's first novel *Moxyland* (2008) rapidly established her as a South African science-fiction writer with an international readership—a status confirmed when her subsequent book *Zoo City* won the prestigious Arthur C. Clarke Award for science fiction after its publication in 2010.¹ For all Beukes's global reach however, her first two novels are uncompromisingly local. Each is remarkable for the extent to which the narrative depends on the social geography of the South African cities she depicts—whether the Cape Town of the dystopian *Moxyland*, or the Johannesburg of the gritty *roman noir*, *Zoo City*. The urban landscapes represented in each work are deeply stratified, their social divisions policed by means of the futuristic mobile-telephone and digital-culture technologies of *Moxyland*, or vividly bounded by the animal familiars who literally sit astride criminalized populations in *Zoo City*. The author's heightening of performances of being-in-the-city, through the figures of the pedestrian, the commuter, the photographer, the activist, the security guard, the migrant worker, the refugee, the addict, the prostitute, among others, is a hallmark of her poetics. Marginal figures, recognizable incarnations of contemporary refugees, street children, the urban poor, inhabit the detritus of cities which resolutely segregate them.

Emergent criticism of Lauren Beukes's fiction in South Africa has begun to treat the distinctiveness of Beukes's poetics in terms of its relation to the genres of global science fiction. Cheryl Stobie has examined *Moxyland* and *Zoo City* from the perspective of the “critical dystopian novel,” “cyberpunk” and “slipstream” (2012), while a recent review of Beukes's latest novel, *The Shining Girls* (2013), by Ashraf Jamal has directed attention to the categories of “speculative fiction” or “social science fiction” (2013). Both *Moxyland* and *Zoo City* show thematic affinities with the “genre to come” that Evan Calder Williams has termed “salvagepunk” on the basis of an analysis of British and North American popular culture (2011: 31). Salvagepunk, Williams tells us,

is animated by “a radical principle of recuperation and construction, a certain relation to how we think those dregs of history we inherit against our will” (2011: 31). His larger theoretical project set forth in *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse: Luciferian Marxism* (2011) illuminates yet another dimension of Beukes’s writing: its apocalyptic dimensions.²

Williams differentiates between “apocalypse” on the one hand, and “crisis” or “catastrophe” on the other. Unlike “crisis” which he sees as properly cyclical in nature, or “catastrophe” which he defines as “end without revelation” (4), Williams invests “apocalypse” with a secular redemptive force as an “end with revelation, a ‘lifting of the veil’” (5). In his account, the apocalypse ruptures the structure of the given order precipitating “the ceaseless struggle to dismantle and repurpose, to witness the uncanny persistence of old modes of life, and to redraw the maps and battle lines of the sites we occupy” (9). Williams’s project pivots on the understanding that “the world is already apocalyptic and that there is no event to wait for, just zones in which [. . .] revelations are forestalled and [. . .] sites where we can take a stand” (11-12). Williams’s replacement of apocalypse as “temporal event” with apocalypse as “spatial organization” (9) in relation to his corpus of popular cultural forms is particularly resonant for a consideration of Lauren Beukes’s fiction. Her futuristic depiction of urban South African landscapes intuits what is radical in this cultural salvaging of images of apocalypse, this apocalypse-as-salvage. It does so, moreover, *avant la lettre* of Williams’s critical intervention. My reading of *Moxyland*, seeks to prolong the spatial turn associated with this repurposing of apocalypse. But it does so in the interest of addressing the *local* overdeterminations of Beukes’s post-apartheid novel.

In literary studies of late, contemporary African literary texts have served to host various interrogations of the spatiality of the African city. My reading of Beukes unfolds in dialogue with some of the major thematic strands that attach to the exploration of “African city textualities” as the latter rubric has emerged from a special issue of this journal, guest edited by Ranka Primorac (Primorac, ed. *African City Textualities*). *Moxyland* explicitly interrogates urban social

transformation; exchanges between the city and textual networks; the city as a locus of violence; and the orientation of the city text toward the future—all issues that Primorac singles out as constitutive (“Introduction,” 2). Through revisiting such concerns, I want to foreground what urban theorist Lindsay Bremner terms “citiness,” or the means whereby cities produce the modernity of the subjects who inhabit them. For Bremner, the category is framed by its performativity. Citiness “is not a property of cities,” she states, “but rather something that they do, something that occurs relationally between a city as a physical, spatial and social entity (topography, climate, buildings, thoroughfares, history, modes and relations of production) and daily life” (42). In the discussion that follows, I will interrogate the manner in which the protagonists’ negotiations of citiness both intersect and counter the biopolitical regulation of space in *Moxyland*.

City Archives: Phenomenological and Intertextual

Moxyland satirizes what Beukes has termed “a corporate apartheid state” (“Interview,” n.p.): a regime that maintains rigid social divisions on the basis of class rather than race. Privilege here depends on belonging within the corporate milieu. The plot weaves together the lives of four young urban protagonists in a restless and relentlessly volatile set of intersections whose intricacy I cannot reflect in full. Kendra, Toby, Tendeka and Lerato alternate as the first-person focalizers of the narrative. Kendra, an aspirant artist illicitly uses analogue cameras to capture Cape Town on spools of old film. Yet for all her melancholic idealism, she has been co-opted by the corporation, and is injected with immune-enhancing nanotechnology that literally brands her as the ambassador of the “Ghost” soft beverage to which she becomes addicted (Beukes 2008: 1-3). Toby, young, white, bored and disaffected, stands in cynical counterpart to Kendra whom he befriends. He is a flâneur for the digital age, his interiority a mere reflex of the screen he wears. The “smartfabric” of his “BabyStrange chamo coat” broadcasts images, but also records them for his video blog (13). Driven by a mixture of ennui and self-promotion, Toby collaborates with Tendeka, a black homosexual

anti-corporation activist, in orchestrating violent acts of symbolic resistance to the corporation in the name of the disenfranchised. Tendeka is a “Struggle revivalist” in Toby’s dismissive judgment (11), a “Mr Steve Biko-wannabe” (13). His violent disruptions of the corporate order will be facilitated through the complicity of Toby’s friend Lerato, a former “Aidsbaby” (107) who has succeeded in climbing the corporate ladder. These acts of subversion include scaling a corporation billboard in order to hack into its content (72-75); the literal hacking to pieces of a genetically modified art installation with all-too-real pangas (135-37); and the instigation of a flashmob “pass-protest” demonstration (141, 156-74) whose consequences reveal Tendeka to have been manipulated, unknowingly, by the very corporation he has sought to oppose.

Despite their differences, Beukes’s protagonists all inhabit the achieved urbanity of the post-apartheid metropolis. In this respect, they strongly resemble their young real-world counterparts depicted by Sarah Nuttall as they stage what Nuttall terms the “right to be urban in the present” (“Stylizing the Self,” 92)—a right historically denied black South Africans under apartheid. Consequently, citiness might in itself be said to stand here as one marker of the so-called “post-transitional” South African text (Frenkel and McKenzie). The novel cannily *circulates within*, rather than merely depicts, the flows of consumption, transaction and exchange that the city offers.³ Its pointed emplacement in contemporary youth culture shows affinities with other satirical performances in South Africa, ranging from Conrad Botes and Anton Kannemeyer’s *Bitterkomix* of the early nineties to the provocations of the contemporary “Zef” counter-cultural band, *Die Antwoord*. Yet for all its purchase over what Achille Mbembe and Nuttall term “the now” (27; see also Nuttall “Stylizing the Self”), Beukes’ novel perpetuates elements of a much older popular cultural form—the melodrama—which itself maintains robust ties with urban settings and their representation.

In *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Peter Brooks traces the emergence of the melodrama in eighteenth-century French theatre before turning to some of its later literary incarnations. Brooks

isolates the “melodramatic mode” which exists as a popular literary substrate within the literary canon, showing how the melodrama takes on a particularly urban cast in the work of Honoré de Balzac. For Balzac, Brooks argues: “The world is subsumed by an underlying manichaeism, and the narrative creates the excitement of its drama by putting us in touch with the conflict of good and evil played out under the surface of things—just as description of the surfaces of the modern metropolis pierces through to a mythological realm where the imagination can find a habitat for its play with large moral entities” (4-5). Pressure exerted on the textual surface seeks to unveil the “moral occult” in the terms Brooks suggests, that is to say, a repository of values which is both fragmentary and desacralized (5). The terms of this analysis usefully allow us to position Beukes as working within the broad ethical manichaeism of melodrama. While her villains are often the stuff of a knowingly ludic pastiche, she nevertheless takes villainy very seriously--as do her protagonists, anti-heroes one and all. But if, in Brooks’s account, the realist or naturalist text exerts pressure on the city—as setting—to provide a saturation of meaning that serves the binary ethical conflict of the melodramatic mode, Beukes’ urban(e) reprise of the melodramatic imaginary has something different to teach us. Here, the naturalist text does not so much exert pressure on the city, as in Brooks’s account of melodrama. Rather, *Moxyland* allows us to explore the manner in which *the South African city* exerts pressure on the narrative, despite the attenuated realism of this dystopian novel.

This is in the first instance a matter of the hospitality that Beukes’s first two novels display towards the cities we know her to inhabit, or to have inhabited. Beukes, resident in Cape Town, has also lived in Johannesburg. She sets the itineraries, flows, and blockages of these two South African cities to work in her fiction. She is able to do so through recourse to an extra-textual archive: one that is autobiographical in a narrow sense, and phenomenological in a wider circuit. Beukes is an actor in the settings she describes. A lived knowledge of their workings deposits a certain epistemology of the South African city between the lines of her fiction. Beukes knows the city

outside the text the way we all know cities--through the proximity of body-to-body in movement through space, a constant if tacit and always provisional calculus of engagement (see AbdouMalik Simone, 74; Gary Bridge 73–76).

Beukes does not shrug off knowledge of these phenomenological traces of her relations with the city when she sits down to write. On the contrary, certain lived archives of the city survive the non-mimetic deformations of other deictic coordinates of the represented world, whether in *Moxyland* or *Zoo City*. Beukes's thematization of the city—as a central device of her poetics—exists in a continuum with her own digressions at street level, her “walking in the city” in Michel de Certeau's familiar use of this term (91-110).⁴ Specifically, Beukes's rendering of her peripatetic urban characters in *Moxyland* seems to operate in terms of the tactical logic which Michel de Certeau ascribes to city-dwellers in general. Kendra, Toby, Tendeka and Lerato of *Moxyland* are resolutely *mobile* focalizers in this work. As the characters improvise “pedestrian enunciation[s]” in Nuttall's resonant phrase (*Entanglement*, 40) in order to evade a repressive spatial hegemony policed by digital technologies, they recurrently turn their attention to aspects of a city that is never merely the passive backdrop against which their stories unfold. The relations of proxy that exist between Beukes and her characters do not have to be fully extrapolated or totalized in order to see her as providing us with an oblique phenomenology of the city.

The archives that inform *Moxyland* are, however, as much textual as they are phenomenological. This is a necessary consequence of its status as a novel. So it is simultaneously necessary to claim that the “city”—understood as a specifically *textual construct* this time—also shapes Beukes's narrative. The literary and cultural constructs which have accreted around the South African city can themselves be said to achieve intertextual density at certain junctures leading to the emergence of literary topoi (from the Greek *tópos*, or place) that sediment and disclose the past of the city. This intertextuality is not a matter of borrowing, or of direct allusion, so much as the reworking of discursive constructs that circulate within a larger cultural imaginary.⁵ An analysis

of *Moxyland* keyed towards city textualities might thus profitably begin by noting how it refuses the dialectic of surface and depth that has dominated literary—as well as sociological or historiographic—constructs of the South African city. This dialectic has been dominant, I would suggest, precisely because writing on South African cities has been so preoccupied with Johannesburg, whose geology as well as social history makes it an exemplary site for such speculations. In their important co-edited volume *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall hold that the “dialectic between the underground, the surface and the edges is, more than any other feature, the main characteristic of the African modern of which Johannesburg is the epitome” (17). Beukes is not indifferent to this choreography of surface and depth, which arguably stands at the very core of her second novel, set in Johannesburg (see Bethlehem, “Inhabiting Dystopia”). In *Moxyland*, however, the hermeneutics of depth are refused in the interests of repeated interrogations of surface economies and flows.

Surface Economies

I am a crumpling façade. (*Moxyland*, 2008: 223)

The second paragraph of *Moxyland* depicts the segregated corporate line, the “underway” that serves the city of Cape Town. The exposition defamiliarizes the known urban setting: its mimesis is explicitly fictive and futuristic. The simile is prelude to a second simile that allows us to identify Kendra as the source of the paratactic interior monologue of the first paragraph: “Like me,” the passage continues. “Art school dropout reinvented as shiny brand ambassador. Sponsor baby. Ghost girl” (1). The phrase “ghost girl” uses a conventional denotation to evoke the fantastic. But it is immediately literalized as Beukes wrenches it into a new context. Kendra is about to be injected with immune-enhancing nanotechnology that will mark her as the ambassador of the “Ghost” brand of soft beverage. The logo will be written in her flesh, although to the extent that the verb carries

historical meanings including “to score, incise, carve, engrave with a sharp instrument” (see Joss Marsh, 261), it is misleading. The commercial sign will not so much be inscribed on an antecedent surface, as thicken the legibility of that surface. “None of the signature goosebumps of an LED implant blinking through the ink of a conventional light tattoo,” Toby will observe of Kendra’s logo. “Cos this isn’t sub-dermal. This *is* her skin.” (*Moxyland*, 15). Throughout the novel, the observing gaze will alight on surfaces which do not conceal an occulted interiority just out of reach, as it were. Here as elsewhere, *Moxyland* will persistently defer the gratification of the depth charge.

The protagonists of the novel align themselves phenomenologically with the compulsion of surfaces. Toby is particularly instructive here. A gamer, he wrenches the category of “skin” out of its South African overdeterminations and into the lexicon of digital culture. His coat hints at this retooling. Its “smartfabric” transmits images (“close-ups of especially revolting fungal skin infections, 18-century dissection diagrams and, for a taste of local flavor, a row of smileys” [11]),⁶ but also harvests them for his video blog (“My streamcast is called the Diary of Cunt [. . .] Your weekly round-up of Toby’s astounding life: good drugs, good music, sexploits with exceptionally beautiful girls, regular skirmishes with the motherbitch, and, most recently, some para-criminal counter-culture activities [...]” [13]). Toby’s prosthetic sheath reiterates the surface-to-surface economies of urban space in the novel. It is a variant on the billboards that serve the informational relays of the city, and that will serve as sites of resistance on the part of the disenfranchised as the plot unfolds. The Cape Town of *Moxland* is a skein of intersecting planes, flows, circuits and skins: organic and manufactured, digital and analogue, visible and invisible. It welds sovereignty—and spatiality—to technologies of governance.

Technologies of Governance

One of the most compelling aspects of *Moxyland* lies precisely in its imagining of the triangulation between sovereignty, spatiality and technology.⁷ Beukes has transposed the racial stratifications of apartheid into an economic register, as many argue that the neoliberal post-apartheid state, itself, has done. The dispossessed—the urban poor who inhabit slums reminiscent of apartheid townships, or the inhabitants of “the Rurals”, segregated and AIDS-ridden—still seek access to the city in a Beukes’s deliberate evocation of the spatial injustice that was apartheid. The struggle over “the right to the city,” never articulated in these terms but congruent with H nri Lefebvre’s intervention (*Writings on Cities*, 147-159), forms an important strut of the novel.

The cellular telephone has a special part to play in this regime. It is the mobile phone which regulates inclusion within the body politic in *Moxyland*, enabling both social and economic liquidity. Thus disconnection is tantamount to social death: “You can’t play nice by society’s rules? Then you don’t get to play at all. No phone. No service. No life” (17). The cellular telephone service is allied to what Foucault might term “disciplinary” power (REF). But it also allows the corporate sovereign to impose corporal punishment of a distinctly penal order, administering electric current to “defuse” offenders. “It’s like shock therapy, you know,” Tendeka says, “dampening down excitable behaviour, frying our brains, flattening us out, so we’re all unquestioning, unresisting obedient model fucking zombie puppydog citizens” (*Moxyland*, 27). From the vantage point of critical geography, we might stress how the mobile phone affords or blocks access to *discontinuous enclaves*—the latter produced as a precise *consequence* of the social relations of inclusion and exclusion that the phone itself polices, whether these are ethnic, class or gender relations. It is all to the point to emphasize that the technology does not float above material divides imagined as being embedded in pre-existing spatial configurations, because space, H nri Lefebvre has long since taught us, is itself always constituted within networks of social relations (REF). Rather the technology facilitates a certain configuration of social relations that produces the

highly repressive spatial order. Thus Tendeka's and fellow activist Ashraf's tortuous passage through the streets of Cape Town (25-29) following the brutal defuse-disconnect imposed on Tendeka that has marked him as *spatially* disenfranchised, affords a lay critique of spatial regulation. "The worst is confirmed," observes Tendeka, "when we get to the entrance to the D-line underway stop on Wale Street and my phone won't scan. Or, rather, it does scan and blocks me outright in response to the police tag on my SIM, to the tremendous amusement of the leisure-class kids overdressed in their ugly expensive clothes" (25). To the extent that we attend to the protagonists own negotiations of the spatial itineraries in which they are embedded, our reading of the novel facilitates the emergence of a contingent critical pedagogy of space that can be articulated alongside more traditionally literary critical concerns.

Such a pedagogy might track the essentially *political* degradation of space that can be read off the deployment of the mobile phone as a technology of governance in *Moxyland*. This technology not only attacks the unruly subject, who like a latter-day avatar of apartheid's "disqualified person"—the abjected non-white body—stalks the grid of spatial disenfranchisement as Lindsay Bremner so eloquently explores (Bremner, 167). Rather it also corrodes what dissident Israeli intellectual, Ariella Azoulay, terms "the fundamental principle of shared public space"—that is to say, "the fact of its being open to passage, free of violence, and shared by all in accordance with regulated consensus" (151). Azoulay writes in response to the political deformation of Palestinian space under the Israeli Occupation.⁸ Adopting her insights for the purposes of this discussion, we might position the sovereign—who is ethno-nationalist in the Palestinian context; and corporate within the parameters of Beukes's novel—as an architect who intervenes in shared space to block the circulation of "disqualified" subjects, to recall the apartheid lexicon. The deformed spatial regime of Beukes' dystopia reminds us that the architecture of destruction may well deploy components that do not belong within the order of built form. D. F. Malan knew this well. The passbook was never extraneous to the degradation of space in apartheid South Africa.

As a kind of digital passbook, the armed cellular phone renders infringement and retribution simultaneous; closes the infinitesimal gap that the passbook left open between the policeman and the black South African subject, or between the apartheid state's interpellation of the racialized body, on the one hand, and incarceration or the extraction of labor which followed as the consequence of "pass offences," on the other. That the passbook ghostwrites Beukes' representations of a segregated corporate-apartheid state is no coincidence. *Moxylant* draws much of its humor and some of its frisson from the friction it maintains with the apartheid past. Mr. Muller, the ageing photojournalist whom Kendra seeks out for his analogue photographic talents lives in "District Six" (*Moxylant*, 59)—one of many areas in the novel named for their apartheid-era associations. The very plot of *Moxylant* playfully restages the novel of resistance whose "rhetoric of urgency" constituted the dominant of apartheid-era literature (see Bethlehem, "Rhetoric of Urgency). But Beukes conforms neither to the hermeneutics of depth implied by this topos, nor to its valorization of canonical literary forms. In fact, her treatment of resistance is better seen as congruent with the strategies of the comic book.

In a suggestive reading of superhero comics, Phillip Thurtle and Robert Mitchell suggest that the comic book is able to "explore the consequences of anomalous events before they pierce the horizons of social awareness." More particularly, they claim, "comic books explore the anomalies that emerge from the very real differences in the scales of an industrialized society on the one hand, and the scales of embodied experience on the other" (269-70). According to Thurtle and Mitchell, it is in their depictions of disaster, in particular, that comic books are able to foreground a "logic of anomaly" (269) denaturalizing the "packaging" of flows that underpin industrialized society (281-285). In *Moxylant*, Tendeka, operates precisely in accordance with the logic of the comic book, or equally the computer game. He and his fellow activists scale a billboard in order to hack into its content, in a sequence that repeatedly foregrounds their embodied vulnerability (72-75). Like his operator, a character known only as "skyward*," Tendeka is attuned to the subversion attendant on

disrupting the flows of information that constitute the post-modern city: “the city is a communication system,” exhorts skyward*, “we’re going to teach it a new language” (*Moxyland* 97, lower-case in original). Tendeka’s eventual bombing of the city makes disaster of disruption, suspending the packaging of the city and its services, Thurtle and Mitchell might claim, to lay bare the “industrial-sized mediations” (REF295) that ordinarily make the city habitable.

As we have already noted, Tendeka’s opposition will prove to have been manipulated by the corporation itself. His instigation of civil protest has disastrous consequences. In a manner reminiscent of the “purple rain” tactics of the South African security forces under apartheid, protesters and would-be gamers drawn into the fracas at the Adderley Street underpass (a location named for its real-world counterpart) are sprayed with the M7N1 Marburg virus.⁹ They must report to police vaccination centers or face death. Tendeka will succumb to the virus, but not before attempting to create a spectacle of his martyrdom. He enlists the cameras on Toby’s coat, and the assistance of Lerato, the corporate programmer sympathetic to the cause.

“[...] Can your friend hook us up? Lerato?”

‘To what?’

‘Remote link-up. So we can transmit your coat’s cameras to the billboards? The city is going to bear witness’” (217).

The metonymic connection created here preserves Beukes’s tacit understanding that the agency of her urban protagonists is indivisible from the material channels as well as the modes of apperception afforded by the city.

Ghostly Futures

Beukes is too canny a writer to allow the spectacle of resistance to be fully consummated in what remains, after all, a dystopian novel. Lerato is “turned” by the corporation which, we learn, has instigated the insurrection in the first place to achieve a kind of surrogate catharsis (230). Toby does not, in fact, broadcast Tendeka’s suffering (226). The activist dies gruesomely in his company (234-35). Kendra, whose nanotech implant has enabled her to recover from the Marburg virus, is eliminated by her Ghost sponsors. But not before she has had sex with Toby who survives in possession of exclusive footage “on the untimely and grotesque death of a terrorist. / Or a martyr. Depends on who’s paying” (236). As the novel draws to a close, the surface economies it projects increasingly pivot on forms of viral replication and, indeed, of contagion that are far from merely digital.

It is, in fact, primarily through its deployment of contagion that *Moxyland* unveils the biopolitical dimensions of the hypervigilant spatial regime that it depicts. Foucault teaches us that biopower consists in the hold that power maintains over the right to sustain life and to administer death—at the level of populations. He introduces this theme in the last section of *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, where he writes: “One might say that the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death” (138). Foucault’s later oeuvre makes explicit the degree to which biopower mobilizes categories of race in order to exert discriminations which are, in the most profound sense, always a matter of life and death (*Society Must Be Defended*, 239-263). Racism intervenes where biopower exercises the right to deny life. Thus, for the later Foucault, racism is primarily “a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what lives and what must die” (*Society Must Be Defended*, 254).

At first sight, *Moxyland* seems to bypass the racial determinism of the apartheid era, to the extent that its allegory of “corporate apartheid” targets the neoliberalism which Thabo Mbeki’s

regime entrenched in the newly democratic South African state (William Gumede, 91). But the plot-line associated with Lerato, the bearer of neoliberal values in the text, enables us to revisit the biopolitical overdetermination that is the residual *tint/teint* of apartheid in this novel. Lerato travels to work in Gabarone with “a minor chest infection” (*Moxyland*, 35). This inevitably makes her the object of biopolitical surveillance when she attempts to return home. “It’s no surprise when Customs pulls me aside at OR Tambo international, ready to slam me into quarantine with the rest of the medical refugees in the camps converted from hangars” (36). This sequence reveals the HIV virus to regulate the spatial regime established by the Corporation: “When the uniform at the counter asks me for my immune status,” Lerato reports, “I snap ‘I think you’ll find *my company* does regular, Health-Dept approved screenings,’ and slap down my Communique exec ID, which has the intended effect” (37). Biopolitics emerges when Lerato coughs. Or when she prepares to write advertising copy (“*[Your baby] really needs all this goodness in a way that’s palatable to her still-developing immune system, that she can readily absorb, especially when it comes to HIV antibodies—*,” 78, italics in original). The regulatory force of biopolitics comes into play, I would argue, precisely under the sign of the *longue durée* of apartheid itself.

Moxyland invites us to engage in historical recursion to the extent that Lerato’s back-story is that of the HIV/AIDS virus. Lerato, “Aidsbaby”-made-good, has fought her way out of the orphanage operated by the apartheid-era parastatal electricity utility, Eskom, which the novel bitingly terms her “parent company” (108). She recurrently chafes at her siblings’ attempts to memorialize her dead parents. “We tried to do a pilgrimage a few years ago [...] But two days before we were set to leave the govt announced a new round of quarantines, which made travelling into the Ciskei impossible” (106, abbreviation in original). The expository sub-plot associated with Lerato introduces historical continuity into the temporal rupture created by the futurism of this allegory. This has everything to do with the invocation of the apartheid-era Bantustan known as the “Ciskei” which we have just referenced, and similar so-called homelands.

In a riveting account of the biopolitical rationality of HIV/AIDS “denialism,” Adam Sitze has charted a history of the virus in South Africa. He cites a variety of sources to suggest that the apartheid government, at the brink of political transition, deliberately failed to prevent the spread of AIDS in the homelands in order to decimate black populations (789-790). But Sitze acutely points out that the “weaponization” of people with HIV/AIDS is properly an *extension* of the sovereign power to let die which he recognizes as “always integral to the necropolitics of the apartheid state” (790, and see Mbembe 2003 for “necropolitics”). The essentially necropolitical function of the Bantustans, as spatial loci of the sovereign power to let die, was not suspended, Sitze argues here and elsewhere, by the transition to democracy in South Africa (see also Sitze, *Articulating Truth and Reconciliation*, 36–37; 47–77). Sitze’s analysis is corroborated by Jonny Steinberg’s important exploration of the effects of the virus on one South African man, resident in the remote Eastern Cape village Steinberg names Ithanga. Meditations on the politics and apperception of space—including considerations such as the distance of patients in remote former homelands from medical clinics, access to informal providers of care, or differences in rural and urban phenomenologies—run persistently through Steinberg’s analysis. The radical co-occurrence of spatial disenfranchisement *and* compromised immunity—in the novel, of course, but more urgently in the society from which the novel has emerged—is a measure of how persistently the two have been linked in the recent history of South Africa.¹⁰

Is it surprising that *Moxyland* is saturated with the ghostly traces of South Africa’s traffic in bodies? Probably not. Here I join Sarah Nuttall who cautions us not to expect the “apartheid symptom” to disappear—whether from cultural practice (art in Nuttall’s analysis, popular literature in mine) or from our critical hermeneutics (see Nuttall, *Entanglement*, 106). So our task now becomes a matter of charting the specific itineraries of our ghosts. Or better still, of charting their futures. Lauren Beukes’s character Toby enables us to do just this. That Toby has survived the Marburg virus is not accidental. His *immunity* is sexually transmitted. It is Kendra’s parting gift; her

addictive Ghostly nano-technological bequest. This denouement should not be underestimated. At a stroke, Beukes effectively repudiates powerful narratives of degeneration that extend between the miscegenatory anxieties of pre-apartheid and apartheid-era writing in South Africa, and the viral taint of blood that haunts the post-apartheid literary archive.¹¹ As Toby takes to the streets again in the final lines of the novel, he opens citiness to a viral resistance whose subversion of the biopolitical capture of space should not be dismissed. The character has been spared in the interests of salvage, we might insist following Evan Williams, rather than salvation. At ground level, Beukes's character lifts the veil on a sensibility that seems to resonate with the *apocalyptic strain* of the contemporary moment. The end has come and gone. There is, to echo Williams, no event to wait for. But equally, no full release from the overdetermination of the past. "I step out of the door into a whole new bright world, feeling exhausted and exhilarated. /And thirsty" (*REF* 236). Toby's *errance*, to use Paul de Man's term; his walking in the grooves of Beukes's language, invites us to imagine the coming into being of a *redemptive* contagion.

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¹ A third novel, *The Shining Girls*, has newly been released in April 2013. Set in Chicago rather than in a South African city, it raises questions about Beukes's engagement with place that are beyond the scope of the present investigation.

² I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this article who directed me to Williams's work. For a perceptive critique of Williams, grounded the analysis of some of the same South African urban landscapes that preoccupy Beukes, see Michael Titlestad 2012.

³ I bought my copy of *Moxyland* in a Goth clothing store in 2008 at Campus Square near the University of Johannesburg. A soundtrack and Moxyland doll, modeled on the multiplayer role-

playing game (RPG) depicted in the novel and crafted by a women's cooperative in Montagu, in the Klein Karoo, South Africa, are available from the website, www.moxyland.com. Communiqués posted on the website advertise Beukes's international marketing appearances, such as her participation in a panel on "The Future of Cities" at WorldCon, Reno, for instance, discussing the challenges facing urban populations around the world and how they translate into interesting story settings" (<http://laurenbeukes.bookslive.co.za/blog/>, accessed 14 August 2011).

⁴ In the interview that concludes the Jacana "bonsela" edition of *Zoo City* ("bonsela": a vernacular South African term for "bonus" derived from isiZulu *ibhanselo*, or gift), Beukes speaks of her journalism as granting her a "pass out of my middle-class comfort zone and into the most interesting part of the city, from the Koeberg nuclear power plant to six-star boutique hotels that play host to popstars and politicians to taking a stroll with electricity cable thieves through the townships" (Interview, n.p.).

⁵ Intertextuality is a term coined by Julia Kristeva in her 1967 reading of Mikhail Bakhtin. It opens a given text up to what Daniel Boyarin terms the "detritus" of previous textual systems so as to lay bare "the traces within the text [. . .] which mark the suppressions, conflicts, and transformations of earlier signifying practices" (662). According to Michael Riffaterre, an intertextual relation is catalyzed when a certain nexus in the text becomes perceptible anomalous or ungrammatical, calling for the restoration of an intertext within whose bounds it is grammatical (2).

⁶ In contemporary South Africa, smileys refer to sheep's heads which are often roasted by pavement vendors and consumed in informal pavement settings.

⁷ My choice of the term "sovereignty" to denote hegemonic authority over territory for the purposes of my analysis of *Moxyland* relies on Giorgio Agamben's spatialization of the state of exception in his identification of the camp as the "nomos of the modern" (1997; see also 1998 [1995], 1999). Sovereignty here is a theoretical construct, a metonym for a certain manner of thinking about

governance. This body of thought proceeds from Carl Schmitt's identification of the sphere of the exception, the sovereign's power to commit to death or to pardon, as the constitutive mark of sovereignty. For Agamben, working from Schmitt's premises, the life potentially vulnerable to emplacement under the sphere of the exception renders sovereignty biopolitical in the Foucauldian sense: "the inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original – if concealed – nucleus of sovereign power. It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power" (1998 [1995], 6). Agamben's further invocation of the "[concentration] camp" as the "biopolitical paradigm" or "nomos of the modern" renders concrete what he calls "dislocating localization" as "the hidden matrix" of the political (1997: 114; 1998 [1995], 175). In Agamben's words, "The state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the jurido-political order, now becomes a new and stable spatial arrangement inhabited by the bare life that more and more can no longer be inscribed in that order" (175). Agamben's conceptual integration of sovereignty and biopower in *Homo Sacer* provides the theoretical rationale for pursuing the intersection of the spatial and the biopolitical in Beukes's corporate regime, as well as in the apartheid state, as this essay unfolds.

⁸ In her recent book, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, Azoulay shows how the Israeli sovereign in the Occupied Territories pursues the mandate of a perverted *fait du prince*, reworking the privilege of intervention for public good in the built environment in order to create a "deformed spatial regime" under the sway of what she terms an "architecture of destruction" (143-156). My reading of Beukes acknowledges the potentially political dimensions of spatial readings of literature for the Palestinian citizens of Israel and the dissident Jewish Israelis who form part of my student body. That repressive spatial orders require technologies of governance makes Beukes' contribution to a critical pedagogy of space highly salient. It is all too possible to enumerate an extratextual inventory of technologies allied to iconic instances of the biopolitical degradation of

space, such as the concentration camp (Agamben); the plantation (Mbembe “Necropolitics”); the mining compound (Mbembe “Aesthetics of Superfluity”); the enclaved locales of the Occupied Territories (Azoulay; Sari Hanafi; Mbembe “Necropolitics”; Adi Ophir, Michal Givoni and Sari Hanafi; Eyal Weizmann). These technologies might include, but are surely not limited to, the fence (Isabel Hofmeyr *We Spend Our Years*); barbed wire (Oliver Razac); the yellow star (Amos Goldberg); the camera (Azoulay); the checkpoint (Daniela Mansbach); the separation wall (David Theo Goldberg).

⁹ For a commemoration of the September 2, 1989 protest where purple dye was used to mark protesters for later identification and arrest, see:

<http://heritage.thetimes.co.za/memorials/WC/ThePurpleShallGovern/>.

¹⁰ The literature on HIV/AIDS in South Africa is enormous. See also, inter alia, Deborah Posel’s prescient early work republished as “Democracy in a Time of Aids,” Edwin Cameron’s crucial memoir *Witness to AIDS*, and Didier Fassin’s *When Bodies Remember*. For an account of the suffering body of the AIDS patient and the city in particular, see Frédéric Le Marcis’s contribution to Mbembe and Nuttall volume, entitled “The Suffering Body of the City”. Neville Hoad’s reading of Phaswane Mpe’s *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* offers an important analysis of contagion, bodily fluids, AIDS and mourning in urban South Africa.

¹¹ The paradigmatic, notoriously racist, exploration of contagion through so called “miscegenation” is, of course, Sarah Gertrude Millin’s 1924 text, *God’s Stepchildren* (Millin 1951 [1924]). To posit a continuity between Millin and Beukes is to prise open the neglected Gothic figurations of South African popular culture, a project in which I am currently engaged.