What Is the University For?

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ABSTRACT After apartheid, that is, after what some call racism's last word, how does the university institutionalized by the operation of apartheid reason imagine itself as being in and of the world? This is a question that lies at the heart of asking "What is the university for?" It is a question intensified in relation to thinking from the institutional space of a historically Black university. Apartheid's university is the last stand of what the article calls the Kantian university. Race accretes there, reminding us of that condition of university discourse that compels us to think ahead. After apartheid, the South answers to a desire that reaches beyond race as symptom toward a practice of post-apartheid freedom. Race, the article suggests, is perhaps better apprehended as supplement where the inventiveness of the modern university has hitherto resided. Apartheid in this reckoning is a university discourse. This is perhaps where we might set about remaking the university. To this end, the work of freedom threaded through the question of the South may lend itself as an indispensable resource.

KEYWORDS South, race, academic freedom, apartheid, aesthetic education

Return of the South

The ferment over the renewal of the idea of the university in histories of colonization and decolonization often conveys a sense of the university in the South as a destination, not a question.[1] The migratory quality of the discourse that the South potentially names is often neglected.[2] If the migrant is that political subject who leads the way in relinking critical theory and humanistic inquiry in the midst of a cosmopolitanism that is increasingly strained, it does so as bearer of a question of the South that strikes at the heart of the symptom of race in university discourse. Asking "What is the university for?" from within a question of the South may offer a different way of relating critical theory to humanistic inquiry. However, the alignment of critical theory and humanistic inquiry is marred by a seemingly intractable epistemic impasse. By "epistemic impasse" I mean specifically the inability to surpass the condition of race in university discourse. If the symptom of race persists, it is to the extent that its ongoing deconstruction has been forestalled through a

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process of containing the university in the South as only ever a sign of imperial ethnography rather than as critical theory for our times. This, I would suggest, is a process that defers the problematic of race by harnessing a disappointment about its preponderance as a hindrance rather than a condition of university discourse. To understand how race drives university discourse, we may be required to anticipate how it functions to modulate that discourse. Race may be a symptom of the university, but it is also a supplement to university discourse—the source, dare I say, of its invention over two hundred years.

University discourse placed race in the service of nationalism in the nineteenth century, while at the end of the twentieth century it placed knowledge in the service of neoliberalism—but always as a master-signifier.[3] In both scripts of university discourse, we find a wager between the faculties best equipped to serve the reign of a master-signifier of race that has sustained two centuries of the Kantian university. In the Kantian university, I will suggest, race functions as such a master-signifier. In its wider development as a concept, the master-signifier gestures to a node or cul-de-sac in a signifying chain of equivalences. The master-signifier is the last word that justifies the claims or demands contained within a message.[4] There is much to say about the passage of race in Kant from the 1760s to the significantly changed attitude displayed in the 1790s at the time of the writing of *The Conflict of the Faculties*. The intervening education proffered by the French Revolution may have invested the categories of cosmopolitanism and the human race with new possibilities. There may have been a shift from a moral view of cosmopolitanism to one defined by trade and law. While the shift is worthy of further consideration, for our purposes we might say the problem of race for Kant was deposited within the frameworks of *The Conflict of the Faculties*. The Kantian university, by extension, inaugurates a university discourse where race marks and fixes an otherwise unending signifying chain. The Kantian university demarcates responsibilities divided according to a culture of skills and a culture of disciplines specific to university discourse that accrue as a consequence.[5] In the inheritance of the Kantian university, race is the name of a repressed symptom that is subject to appropriation in university discourse.[6]

But what happens when the South works to disclose the trickery entailed in the master-signifier's reliance on university discourse as controlling and containing the excess of race? Might the South hold on to a promise or desire for a university discourse freed from the stranglehold of race upon which its institutional mechanism rests historically? A response to this question surely depends on the critical mode of inquiry that is affirmed through what we today call the "South." Is the South a question of decoloniality (as in Mignolo), development of underdevelopment (as in Gunder Frank), or invention of tradition (as in Ranger, Hobsbawm, Said, Mudimbe)? While each has defined an epistemic claim against an imperial eth-

nography or inspired a partisan discourse in the struggle for liberation, there may yet be a need to inquire into a repressed feature of race as a symptom of university discourse that the South names. To anticipate my argument briefly, the South reveals the extent to which race appears as a symptom of a colonial episteme but functions as a supplement of university discourse. If apartheid was racism's last word, the last of many, as Derrida suggested at the opening of the *Art Contre Apartheid* exhibition in 1983,[7] and if university discourse is entangled in its utterance, then we may need to inquire whether university discourse could conceivably entertain a desire adequate to post-apartheid freedom.

To the extent that a desire adequate to post-apartheid freedom is implied in a concept of the South, it might yield a critical perspective on race when discerned from its purely geopolitical coordinates established in the wake of the wave of decolonization in the 1960s. These coordinates continue to inflect the moniker "South" in more recent strategies of decoloniality. Consider how references to the South have come to frame decolonization as that critique of coloniality that calls attention to the dark side of modernity.[8] Born of a specific predisposition to what its leading exponents name as a corrupting cosmopolitanism of postmodernism and postcolonialism, decolonial critique set its sights on shifting the biography and geography of knowledge.[9] As an overarching principle of the university in Africa in general, decoloniality may possibly prove insufficient for unraveling the legacies of race that appear to have gained greater currency at the institutional site of the modern university, especially as it is overcome by rapid technological change. Perhaps the demand for decolonization threatens to prematurely foreclose a misrecognized symptom of race in university discourse that the question of the South may reveal. Is it possible that decolonization limits how we apprehend the problematic of race under new conditions of accumulation and changes in technological temporal objects? Might we not see race as more than a problem of globalization or imperialism? Have shifts in technological resources and, by extension, university discourse, altered the very problematic of colonial racism? However we come to reason through these epistemic knots, it seems clear that decoloniality does not entirely exhaust the question of the South or the critique of race.

The South, as I hope to argue, is that supplement that may lend itself to a model of freedom in which the memory of a past marked by an order of race and a *technē* of invention stakes out a claim to a university discourse. The South returns us more purposefully to the unresolved idea of freedom specific to university discourse forged in the midst of the anticolonial struggles and Third World nationalisms that brought it into being. It marks that interstitial not merely as an intervention, but as a possible site of invention.

Beyond the way in which the South often overwhelmingly resonates as a geopolitical descriptor entangled in a critique of the development of underdevelop-

ment, it may also prove important to recall Derrida's suspicion of the North/South binary in his reading of Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. From Derrida we learn that the South is not merely a supplement that lends itself to an exercise of addition or subtraction in defining global economic inequities. The question of the South as supplement gestures towards an overwriting that for all intents and purposes also produces a condition for reading the latent potential of the South. The South, then, is not a deficit but a vital source of renewal not only of university discourse but of the very idea of invention that it enables.

Derrida was perhaps unexpectedly calling attention to a specific problem when he pronounced apartheid to be racism's last word. Apartheid recalled not only the history of race but also a biopolitics of the future in which race would be increasingly entrenched in a university discourse bound to governmentality. If the South helps to name this problem, it might also serve to name the problem of global apartheid and the desire for post-apartheid freedom. As supplement, it recapitulates the spirit of invention by which the university may exercise a freedom specific not only to the end of colonialism, but also to the end of apartheid. The South, by extension, names not simply a discourse specific to the university, but a discourse of race specific to university discourse. In each affirming foundation of university discourse — culture, reason, development, decolonization — the function and condition of race is repressed in the name of a mode of reasoning that carries with it the promise of an end to race war.

At stake here is the very justification of academic freedom as a compromise between state and public responsibilities, that which brought the Kantian university into being at the turn of the nineteenth century. The struggles against fascism and colonial rule in the twentieth century undoubtedly contributed to an overwhelming sense that the condition of race in university discourse was threatening to explode. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the contract that brought the Kantian university into being showed demonstrable signs of stress.[10] At the same time, in 1948 university discourse gave way to the convergence of two terms, *apartheid* and *cybernetics*, terms that gained currency in academic circuits, redefining the racial excess of the Kantian university's twentieth-century disciplinary distributions of race, and throwing the very compromise entailed by that distribution into disarray.

At one end of the spectrum, the liberal critique of apartheid would lead to an effort to reestablish the contract on academic freedom with the state not only in South Africa, but also in the United States, where it served as a source for a Supreme Court ruling on academic freedom in 1948. Speaking directly to the underestimation of the problem of the law, Adam Sitze traces the central problem in the academic freedom debate to the US Supreme Court ruling and the legal opinion provided by Justice Felix Frankfurter in 1948, the year that also marked the onset

of a state project of apartheid in South Africa.[11] Sitze outlines how Frankfurter's judgment drew extensively from the statement on academic freedom produced at the Universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand that served as a response to apartheid's segregationist policies in higher education. Proclaiming itself bound to a concept of academic freedom in keeping with the tradition of liberalism that gave rise to the university, the English-speaking university failed to see that its disavowal of apartheid did little to alter the discourse of race with which it had become entangled. This, Sitze shows, is a blindness that forecloses a critique of the very conditions of race on which the university came to settle.

At the other end of the spectrum, Norbert Wiener's introduction of the concept of cybernetics was concerned about the further industrialization of computational technologies that necessitated a discourse on control and communication in the animal and the machine.[12] At the same time, cybernetics would work to establish university discourse as a distinct model of freedom shaped by the flows of information upon which social worlds would come to rest. In his later work, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, published in 1950, Wiener traced the etymology of the word *cybernetics* to the Greek *kubernétés*, or steersman and governor. As a new interdisciplinary science of the university, cybernetics was an affirmation of complex information systems. Wiener writes: "The needs and complexity of modern life make greater demands on the process of information than ever before, and our press, our museums, our scientific laboratories, our universities, our libraries and textbooks are obliged to meet the needs of this process or fail in their purpose. To live effectively is to live with adequate information."[13] But cybernetics was also a science that lent itself to war and to what Wiener called "the cancer of creative narrowness and feebleness." Beyond his strident antimilitarism, Wiener was concerned with the erosion of the creative impulse that threatened not only human desire but scientific invention as well. If information was simply appropriated by a second industrial revolution, or employed toward more efficient and therefore devastating conditions of warfare, then the automation would reduce all labor that competes with it to the condition of slave labor. When slave labor functions as the sign of race, then race is that which is repressed in the passage of information from individual to machine. Wiener's concern with the potentially corrosive effects of complex information systems in higher education can be gleaned by his address to the university:

> Properly speaking, the artist, the writer and the scientist should be moved by such an irresistible impulse to create such that even if they were not being paid for their work, they would be willing to pay to get the chance to do it. However, we are in a period in which forms have largely superseded educational content and one which is moving to an ever-increasing thinness of educational content. Thus the earlier stages of creative

work, whether in the arts or the sciences, which should be properly governed by a great desire on the part of students to create something and communicate it to the world at large, are now subject instead to the formal requirements of finding a Ph.D. thesis or similar apprentice media.[14]

With the entry of apartheid and cybernetics into the vocabulary of university discourse came an increasing subjection of academic freedom to new technologies of communication and control. A new infrastructure of memory was in the process of being assembled, through a reconstitution of the relationship between human and machine. As Wiener put it, "The information received by the automaton need not be used at once, but may be delayed or stored so as to become available at some future time: this is the analogue of memory."[15] A strategy that seeks to defend academic freedom as its own justification, such as that which appears to have engulfed current debates on academic freedom in the North American academy, neglects the ways in which cybernetics intervenes to alter the terrain on which the debate unfolds. When threaded through the achievements and appropriations of cybernetics, debates about academic freedom appear to have resurfaced as the watchword for race. Like Frankfurter's judgment, the academy in the North may be required to return once again to the South, where the outcomes of a liberal defense of academic freedom have proven to be no match for the consequences of racial engineering and information systems. If apartheid is that remainder of the South through which we proceed to unravel the legacies of race in university discourse, the opportunity may present itself to expand the concept of freedom beyond juridical precedent and technological progress. Academic freedom of the kind upheld in the name of liberalism is destined to disappoint. The question of the South may be a vital one for renewing a concept of freedom that exceeds the claims made on the grounds of the Kantian university's compromise. In its place, it may institute an ethic of desire, memory, and play linked to a form of creativity strong enough to invent a situation of unprecedented historical opening.

The South, we may argue, brings the Kantian university's contract with the state and its publics to a crisis. To the extent that post-apartheid freedom might enable a return to the source of academic freedom, it draws attention to the technics by which the university practices academic freedom and what desire the South brings to bear on that practice. Unfortunately, the deconstruction of race that on occasion had been discounted at the institutional site of the liberal university was already underway in that contract between the university and the state established after the Second World War.[16] In the midst of an apartheid that shows up all too often in the contemporary world as a biopolitics of the future, a university discourse attentive to the desire for post-apartheid freedom may enable an attitude toward the problem of race, not too dissimilar to the attitude demanded towards

the Enlightenment, in the renewal of a justification of academic freedom.[17] If the humanities prove indispensable to such a renegotiation, then critical theory and humanistic inquiry may find common cause in the work of the supplement of race at the heart of university discourse.

The University For …

If critical theory is the stitch that attaches the humanities to the university, how might it lend itself to understanding the work that the supplement performs in the idea of the university, beyond its literal meaning of additions and subtractions? What would be the work of a university that would surpass a concept of knowledge formed around additions and subtractions?[18] Critical theory, insofar as it is responsive to these queries, is less about carrying on a tradition than about a way of doing things with our neoliberal times. Juan Obarrio has probingly asked whether the South is capable of being posited as a new *pharmakon*, as the very condition of indecision and *aporia* that invites critique and renewal.[19]

As supplement, perhaps the South answers to a very precise question: "What is the university for?" For some, the South conjures a sense of immediacy and urgency that demands an accelerated intervention. This can be seen in the heightened demands for decolonization across many higher-education institutions, especially in Southern Africa, Europe, and the United States. For others, a rethinking of the university through the perspective of the planetary demands a deceleration if the South is to function as an intervention on a planetary scale. Both attitudes speak to a worry about the enveloping technocratic drift of the university, in which the humanities, at best, are seen increasingly as prostheses connected to the body but disconnected from the central nervous system of the university. Detached and thus re-sutured as an appendage, the humanities are reduced to a reflexive movement with little or no purchase on deciding the direction in which the university may be headed. This, however, does not constitute the entirety of the discourse on the university, especially when we consider how critical theory was born along the fault lines of the conflict of the faculties in which the humanities had become embroiled. The South bears witness to the potential opened up by critical theory, which intervenes between the sciences and the humanities in the name of the university.

Unlike the melancholy that has set in with discussions about the tasks of the university in the Global North, the South admits to two ways in which the *for* in "what is the university for" can be parsed.[20] On the one hand, in those words we hear a question about what the university is supposed to be doing now, and, on the other, we hear a question about the university's standpoint. With the emergence of a new scripting of the university in the image of capital and its drive to accumulation, the question of what the university stands for seems to take precedence over

the question of what the university ought to be doing now. The demand is not to reverse the order of these questions but to realize that the opportunity exists in the South to study both senses of the question "what is the university for?" in their very simultaneity, and at whatever speed. In such simultaneity, the university may open itself to a future in which it more searchingly requires its students, faculty, and workers to think ahead by asking what we should be *desiring* at the institutional site of the university.

What I would suggest is that if we attend seriously to the simultaneity of the two senses of the question "what is the university for?" we may find that the South offers us an opportunity to set to work on the interstice between immediacy and duration.[21] We would be remiss if we did not think of the university as more than an institution that preserves the best of what we have learned for the greater public good. The task of preserving tradition and serving the public good are perhaps the competing demands that underwrote Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). For Arnold, as Qadri Ismail suggests, culture is that epistemic object of the nineteenth-century British university whose study will have had a practical benefit—will have been a public good—while also revealing the world by availing it to knowledge and colonial conquest.[22] Culture as the condition for the remaking of a nineteenth-century Euro-US episteme is, Ismail notes, indelibly saturated with Eurocentrism.[23] The nineteenth-century university that upheld the Euro-US episteme may have inadvertently formed its discourse not only on the basis of the ideals of liberalism but on the very racial scripts of culture that sustained the justificatory structure of colonialism. With the subsequent passage through two world wars and a century and more of anticolonial struggles, not to mention the difference established between Englishness and Irishness in Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, the inscription of culture as distinct but necessary for the idea of race in the marking of national difference permeated the very universalism that establishes the modern university. This genealogy of culture, threaded through the difference that race permits, would leave the university uncertain not only about what it ought to be preserving, but also about which public it ought to be serving.

The university to the ends of nationalist narration is perhaps to be approached less as a question of simply putting knowledge in the service of the public, as with a university bound to the developmental agenda of the post-independent state in Africa, than as a space for inventing the unprecedented.[24] It is the potentiality of the unprecedented that we often hear in the aspiration for a renewal of university discourse and a reorientation of the institutional project of the university. The desire that permeates that space relates explicitly to the anticipation of inquiring into what we should be desiring and whether it is possible to find an alignment between what we *should* desire and what we should *desire*. Stated differently, can the South offer a new perspective on the relation of responsibility to freedom?

Unfortunately, in the two centuries that have given shape to the modern university globally, the sources of alignment between what is obliged by the university and what is desired of it have often been collapsed into a singularly discernable ideal for which race would mostly function as a discreet and repressed supplement: culture, reason, development, or, more recently, decolonization. Each reorientation of the idea of the university thus conceived has proven inadequate to the task of aligning that which is demanded of the university and desire. Mostly, this inadequacy is revealed in a reductive rendering of the supplement of race as that which we add and subtract from university discourse. The university of the South is not averse to this reductive tendency.

The Reinvention of the University

In Africa, the postcolonial university has been required to be particularly inventive in light of the fact that its emergence coincided with the post-independence period. What we frequently understand by invention at the institutional site of the South unfortunately often reiterates an older script in which the university is required to negotiate between local and global demands and pressures. That is a familiar story that encounters the even more familiar antidote of decolonization and national development in the struggle to constitute universities in the wake of colonial rule in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Universities, generally, have come to be judged by the measure of their success in achieving this mediation. The results have been less than salutary, especially when we consider how judgements based on the measure of knowledge in its local and global reach increasingly came to rely on statistical metrics that are integral to sustaining the culture/race complex of the university.

In South Africa, for example, the legacies of apartheid have meant that the debate on the university has centered on questions of racial redress, atonement, and access—each important in its own right, but not sufficient to sustain the idea of the university. This provisional status can be seen in how the reliance on culture has been significantly diminished as the nation-state to which the university once owed its emergence turns to development, innovation, and entrepreneurship to discover the sources of its contemporary narration. In a context such as South Africa, where apartheid established segregationist education by way of what it constituted as cultural and racial difference, the post-apartheid nation-state appears to no longer rely on a university discourse of culture for its legitimation.[25] Instead, it has left the university to fend for itself in unraveling the intricacies of a racial formation that historically defined the epistemic contract between the university and the state.

A similar worry may apply to the way an explicit call for decolonization lays claim to a new intellectual foundation for the university. While it would be

impossible to imagine a university discourse that is not always already in a process of decolonization, there is something more that is being claimed when the demand for decolonization presses toward an identity of the university. Here again, we need to ask how the ideal of a decolonial university represses that aspect of race as an organizing dynamic of university discourse even while avowedly claiming to be undercutting such a racial dynamic institutionally. Decolonization, not unlike the university of culture, ultimately recalls the indecision of the university torn between its local and global pressures. Much has been said about how the main intellectual project of the postcolonial university was driven by the proposal for decolonization.[26] In fact, in South Africa, university administrations and academic departments have been increasingly pressured to respond to the demand for decolonization as a project of the politics of knowledge production, but not as an elaboration of the desire for knowledge.[27] Most have responded inadequately, not for want of trying, but because the impulse toward decolonization is accelerated from within the disciplines of memory and aesthetics that have been significantly neglected over the years.

In a larger frame, the rise of twentieth-century anticolonial nationalist movements on either side of European fascism has produced a philosophical revision and revival of humanism and democracy. With it, the formative ideas of race that drew on the histories of slavery and colonialism seeped into a new synthesis of memory and aesthetics in the form of mnemotechnics. Henri Bergson was a key figure to recognize and identify a vitalism necessary to counter the slide into the technological determination of race. It is no accident that one of the major currents of anticolonial thought was the one produced by the Négritude movement, which was, as Souleymane Bachir Diagne tells us in his reflections on Senghor's poetics, deeply influenced by Bergsonian ideas of intuition and vitalism.[28] Famously themed "a humanism of the twentieth century," Léopold Sédar Senghor's Négritude, or Tigritude as it is caricatured, is often hastily dismissed. But this dismissal overlooks the fundamental question of how the memory of the violence of race and the aesthetics of postcolonial desire were cast in terms of a shift in temporality brought about by the expansion of technological resources. What Bergson enabled was a reading of the university where the question of memory had passed from the humanities to the machines of the scientific disciplines. It is within this shift that we can find the current anxiety about the speed with which the contemporary university operates. In response to this speed, Bergson sought to restore a concept of vitalism that would return us to the principle of intuition.

Fascism ruptured this search for a Bergsonian reorientation, which was resurrected by Gilles Deleuze in the 1960s under the heading of Bergsonism, a way to think about how memory and aesthetics may be stalled in their slide into technological determinism. Yet, as the Négritude movement suggests, the humanism

proper to Bergsonian thinking emerged as a forceful intellectual current in anti-colonial nationalist movements as they sought to rediscover the sources of emancipation and liberation in a reconfigured world picture. This, too, as we know all too well, was a project eclipsed by the ideological conditions of the Cold War that enveloped a first wave of decolonization.

It is unclear whether more recent calls for decolonization will result in yet another critique of the pitfalls of national consciousness that Fanon articulated in his debate with the purveyors of Négritude in the 1960s.[29] This was when African states underwent their first wave of independence. Neither is it entirely clear that decolonization will exceed the limits of apartheid's inheritance, let alone the capacious target of neoliberalism that appears to have defined various standpoints in the university. In fact, there is nothing to suggest that decolonization will unmoor the referent of centuries-old racial formation from the grip of power. However, since decolonization calls attention to an epistemic impasse in a postcolonial predicament, it paves the way for risking certain decisions about the future direction of the institutional site of the university.

Yet the sources of race in university discourse lay elsewhere. Beyond its implication in the history of colonialism and the struggle against it, university discourse has functioned to harness technology, memory, and an ethics of the self.[30] Race nevertheless lurks in reigning ideas of culture, reason, development, and decolonization, often surreptitiously inflecting mission statements about serving the public good, cultural cultivation, or social progress and social justice. If race persists in and through university discourse, it is perhaps as a consequence of the rearrangement of its technics rather than as a consequence of the grand declarative statements that purport to confront the problem of race, but only ever achieve its repression.

The University after Apartheid

The rearrangement of the university in the South to which I am calling attention is particularly apparent in its reworking undertaken in the aftermath of what Derrida called racism's last word: apartheid.[31] In South Africa, ignoring the work of university discourse sustained through technological and mnemotechnical resources would amount to fundamentally misrecognizing a pernicious symptom of apartheid, not to mention the university.[32] The beginnings of this condition of race in university discourse to which apartheid responds may be tracked back to the association established between Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid reason, and the Leipzig school of psychology in the 1920s.[33] Established as a school of holistic psychology, the Leipzig school set itself against the Kantian tradition, which sought to give center stage to reason. Anne Harrington offers us a genealogy of the Leipzig school, with which Verwoerd was affiliated, that sets it apart from Gestalt

theorists in Berlin.[34] Harrington suggests that the Leipzig school charged the Gestalt theorists with neglect of the "pre-logical," irrational role of feeling and will in experience, and accused them of a lack of Germanness and of superficiality, liberalism, rationalism, Americanism, and soullessness.[35] The Leipzig school helped to resolve the Kantian university's *aporia* by risking a decision in the direction of behavioral psychology, and, later, Nazism. Apartheid lay latent in this resolution, awaiting an end of the war to fulfill the mission of a university discourse unfolded by fascism to eviscerate what Gestalt theory had been accused of. What the Leipzig school achieved was to place the human in a specific relation to technology by denouncing a tradition of thought that treated the lives of animals "mechanistically." The Gestalters did not anticipate that race was very much a latent potential of the Kantian university. It would be revealed precisely as Nazism laid claim to the holism specific to the Leipzig school.

Such an orienting of the South African university to a frequently misrecognized but constitutive symptom of race has significant consequences for how we think today about the critical tasks of the university in the milieu of global racism—that is, if we agree that apartheid functions as racism's last word and that apartheid itself is a form of biopolitics that is global to begin with. Stated differently, this misrecognized symptom of university discourse threatens to extend the Kantian university of the West, locked as it is in a conflict of the faculties that impresses itself on a rising tide of nationalism through a fear of disciplinary insecurity. Although I will insist as an aside that Kant's *Conflict of the Facultie*s should be read as an ironic text rather than as a manual on how to organize the university, there is a sense in which the partition of the faculties between higher- and lower-order disciplines in the late eighteenth century has persisted as the *aporia* of the modern university.[36] What is needed is a way to cross over this *aporia*, which functions as a constraint on the traditions and desires of the university. The problem is that we lived through the conflict of the faculties believing that race belonged to the inquiry of the humanities and the disciplines of memory and aesthetics, and not to the bio-technological sphere of invention of the modern university, by which memory and aesthetics are increasingly appropriated.

Apartheid is perhaps the last stand of the Kantian university. Fundamental to the project of segregating education and the creation of what apartheid bureaucrats called Bantu education was an experimentation on psychological susceptibility as a distinguishing feature of racial behavior. Against the Gestalt psychologists of the 1920s, apartheid set in place a measure of behavior based on recall and response, a way of inducing an emotional response through an apparatus to determine psychological susceptibility. Situated at the core of the projects of population registration and population control, the university's discourse on race was re-scripted as developmental, behavioral, and ethno-psychological. The university

defined in terms of race under apartheid was identifiable not merely by the unequal distribution of resources but also by determinations of psychological susceptibility of racialized subjects.

There is no doubt that apartheid shared a university discourse that drew inspiration, in form and in content, from a resolution of the conflict of the faculties specific to the Kantian university in the twentieth century. The struggles over and critiques of class, gender, and racial exclusion that the university is gripped by and subject to in its current incarnation are symptomatic of this Kantian legacy. But oppression cannot be fully grasped by virtue of the idea of exclusion. Perhaps inhabiting the institutional space of apartheid's making offers a glimpse into what it means to test the limits of the nineteenth-century Kantian university without surrendering the grounds of the university to the prescriptions of bare-bones economic developmentalism, into which neoliberal restructuring is dragging the university in the South.

What fascism and later apartheid orchestrated was a relinking of the faculties so that the higher disciplines of medicine, law, and theology that were attuned to the requirements of government, along with the lower-order disciplines of philosophical inquiry, were directed toward sustaining a concept of race. The Kantian university was thus turned on its head. Its purported leaning towards a holism of animal and mechanism was shattered by responsibility to a superior consciousness. At its very core, the displacement of Gestalt theory called into play a university discourse aimed at keeping watch over the idea of race — keeping it, that is, from withering away. With the reorientation of philosophy toward the question of technology, the memory of race in university discourse was placed in the service of a technics.

So what, then, is latent in the South that may recharge our perspectives on the critical tasks of the university in our times? It is important to disabuse ourselves of the notion that oppression in the South functioned merely as a politics of exclusion for which the antidote would be greater access and representation. This oppression was less a matter of demanding inclusion on the basis of identity than a symptom of a global dynamic that the West is only beginning to come to terms with. If I were to name it in terms other than those usually supplied, I would say that oppression in the South worked to craft a university discourse in which a mnemotechnics of race enabled a technics of invention. As the problematic of apartheid reveals, without combining mnemotechnics and invention, a system of population control grounded in a discourse of race, class, and gender oppression would be inconceivable. Apartheid, exemplary of such a project coming after colonialism, was global to begin with, not only in the sense of being an experiment in biopolitics that followed the exterminations of the Holocaust. Apartheid re-scripted the discourse of race inherited from Nazism in Europe and conveniently re-narrated the impasse of

liberal trusteeship in former colonies such as Canada, South Africa, and Australia, not to mention the United States and the Middle East. To the extent that apartheid was an exemplary formation of a global biopolitics, it also anticipated neoliberalism as the telos of a degraded concept of freedom. As such, if we translate its operation by way of a Lacanian schema, we might say that apartheid functioned less at the level of the master's discourse than it did at the level of university discourse.[37] Unsurprisingly, the program of urban segregation that unfolded with apartheid in South Africa often corresponded with specific fields of inquiry related to the control of populations. The effect of university discourse is evident not only in the public or private status of universities, but, as apartheid and American segregationist policies attest, in a division at the heart of mnemotechnics.

Mnemotechnics and Race

It is in this misrecognized symptom that we can begin to imagine the university reconstituted as one that attends to the redefinition of the critical tasks of the university. The task of the university is to find new ways of connecting the spheres of mnemotechnics and invention through the creative act, or by way of what we might call an affirmative prospect of the becoming technical of the human. This does not preclude the demand for redress, but it does require rediscovering ideas about desire, memory, and play as constitutive elements of education.

A university attentive to the demands of connecting these constitutive elements needs to locate itself within a longer genealogy of the emergence of the idea of the university. As much as universities are thought to advance knowledge, their reigning ideas have shifted considerably over the centuries in tandem with the ebbs and flows of the fortunes of the nation-state. If at one moment the reigning idea of the university was reason, it later emerged as an institution grounded in the concept of culture.[38] Today it is being appropriated by the logic of the market and a prospective future of growing indebtedness for its students and staff. This latest installment of the idea of the university, one which appears to be proliferating globally, is creating a deep sense of anxiety, alienation, and a feeling of proletarianization in which the work of thought is being completely eviscerated.

The university is becoming a hyper-industrialized information machine that is beginning to reveal itself as an "information bomb." What is specific and distinct about the latter development is that the connection between the university and the nation-state has been significantly severed. Rather than viewing this narrative as one of crisis, this may be an opportunity to see how the severing of the relationship between the nation and the university opens up the latter to a sense of worldliness. In contrast to today's hyper-industrialized information machine, the university's uncompromising intellectual sense of itself historically derived primarily from the idealism that brought it into being as a project of the Enlightenment. In the

aftermath of the Second World War, that idealism was reinvented as a humanism of the twentieth century, to which the post-independence university in Africa would lend itself in an overarching project of modernization.

Such idealism contended with the hegemonic formations of state, capital, and the public sphere in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Africa, the birth of the university accompanied the wave of nationalist independence movements that swept through the continent in the aftermath of the Second World War, with the promise of development underwriting its public commitments. And in South Africa specifically, the university was tied more fundamentally to the determinations, intensifications, and demands of a racializing state and class formation. The distortion of the object of race present within the original idealism of the university has been overtaken by the long twentieth century in which the university has become entangled in an even longer process of dehumanization. It has also been overtaken by a rapid expansion of technological objects through which research and teaching are now extensively mediated, resulting in an opportunity to productively reorient the university to the world.

Bound at once to a contract with the state and to a public sphere, the university has had to reinvent its object of study, desperately holding to a pace necessary to the adequate education of students in respect of its reigning idea. It is in the interstice of these opposed social demands that the inventiveness of the university as an institution in the South is most discernible. Rather than being given over to the dominant interests of the day, whether state, capital, or public, the university ought by virtue of its idealism to be true to its commitment to name the question that defines the present in relation to which it sets to work, especially when that question of the present may not appear obvious to society at large. Yet, in naming this question, the university is ethically required to make clear that it does not stand above society.

Today there is growing concern that the university has lost sight of its reigning idea—the demands of radical critique and untimeliness—and all the contests that ensue from claims made on that idea. In the process, its sense of inventiveness has been threatened by an encroaching sense of the de-schooling of society, instrumental reason, entrepreneurial creativity, and the effects of those changes in the technological resources of society that have altered the span of attention, retentive abilities, memory and recall, and, at times, the very desire to think and reason. Scholars around the world bemoan the extent of plagiarism and lack of attention on the part of their students, features that they suggest have much to do with the changes wrought by the growth and expansion of new technological resources. What binds the university as a coherent system is now threatened by the waning of attention and the changes in processes of retention and memory.[39] In these times, retention has been consigned to digital recording devices. Students and faculty are

now compelled to labor under the illusion that the more that we store and the more we have stored, the more we presumably know. This is why theory often appears as the foreigner in the room.

Here again the South may prove fundamental to both memory and invention. The movement that unfolded in the 1980s at South African universities was a statement of force against the cynical reason of apartheid, yes, but it also contained an element of the creative act, the process of inventing the unprecedented, which underwrote every effort at turning apartheid's rationality on its head. It is a version of the creative act that is now threatened by the onset of memory loss. In its place, seemingly more vacuous words have come to take the place of formidable concepts in formation. Words such as *efficiency* and *excellence* now replace more thoughtful and thought-provoking notions of "epistemological access." Where the concept of "epistemological access" generated extensive curricular debate in the 1980s, efficiency and excellence serve as buzzwords with little or no epistemic grounding. And newer scripts of creativity are producing fantasies that may yet prove to be a nightmare for students in the future. The speculative logic of the student as an entrepreneur of the self lends itself to the promise of consumption and fulfillment but at the same time drags students into an impasse of mere functionality. Against this slide into mindless creativity, an older notion of the creative act, like the notion of a work of art that resists death, must surely be a possible concept upon which to constitute a future university. This is a work of art that calls on a people that does not yet exist. This is an idea of the university as that which creates space for the invention of the unprecedented.

There has never been a more hazardous time to forget to ask "what is the university for?" As Samuel Weber suggests, the university's future resides in cutting both into the future and into established knowledge.[40] All the while, we should hear, in the echoes of the past, the Lacanian imperative to keep desire alive and to remain awake, an imperative that needs to be doubled with a desire that actively opens a future.

The question of our time demands that we ask how to reinvent not only the idea of the university, but the idea of university discourse. We need to think once again about approaches to technology, the state, and the public sphere, and how each gives a view of the desire that now remains repressed in our respective knowledge projects. We need to recuperate the sense of attention and play, and of the creative act as opposed to the banality of neoliberal creativity aimed at mere entrepreneurial activity and false promise. The university committed to the task of realigning technology, mnemonics, and an ethics of the self will prove indispensable for naming our present and finding our way out of those predicaments that threaten to undermine the best of our knowledge upon which the future of our students, faculty, its workers, and the institution of the university rest.

As the university detaches from the nation and its narration, partly through the proliferation of new technological resources, its passage to the universal is being mediated by the recall of a master-signifier for which race has been ready to hand. Once invested with pastoral power by the nation, the university now finds itself precariously wedged in by its established contract with the state and public commitments. Perhaps, as an institution that sets its sights on the invention of the unprecedented, the university may yet offer itself as a site for the realigning of technology, memory, and an ethics of the self as fundamental to a revitalized practice of freedom, a creative work that, for all intents and purposes, is post-apartheid.

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Notes

1. Mamdani, "African University"; Beckman and Adeoti, *Intellectuals and African Development*.
2. The question of cosmopolitanism and race is extensively discussed in Donker, *Texturing Difference*.
3. Brown, "Vocation of the Public University."
4. For a discussion on the Lacanian concept of master-signifier specific to the notion of university discourse, see Hook and Vanheule, "Revisiting the Master-Signifier."

5. I am relying extensively on the work of Kleingeld, "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race," 574. Kleinfeld's argument is that there is a shift in the discourse on race between 1775 and 1795, when Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* was published. The shift gives us an indication of how the containment of a proliferating idea of race was posited as the very grounds of the freedom that underwrote university discourse.

6. A symptom, Lydia Liu suggests, following Freud, is essentially a symbol of ideas that are not present in consciousness but are repressed by strong inhibitions. Liu, *Freudian Robot*, 143.

7. Derrida, "Racism's Last Word."

8. Mignolo, "Global South."

9. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Why Decoloniality."

10. See for example Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*; Mamdani, *Scholars in the Marketplace*.

11. Sitze, "Academic Unfreedom."

12. Wiener, *Cybernetics*.

13. Wiener, *Human Use*, 18.

14. Wiener, *Human Use*, 133. On the question of work and academic inquiry, see John Mowitt, "Humanities."

15. Wiener, *Cybernetics*, 43.

16. The debate sparked by Gayatri Spivak's T. B. Davie Academic Freedom lecture in the 1990s at the University of Cape Town is instructive here. While several interlocutors responded by disqualifying deconstruction from the debate on academic freedom, Spivak worked carefully to argue that "no justification for academic freedom can be drawn from within academic freedom." See Spivak, "Academic Freedom." See also Taylor, "Response to Spivak." For a fuller treatment, see Lalu, "Apartheid's University."

17. Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?"

18. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Specifically, Derrida's work on the supplement may help us to inquire into how writing has recast the idea of orality with which the South is conventionally associated.

19. Obarrio, "University."

20. Mowitt, "Searing," 113.

21. See for example Truscott and Donker, "What Is the University," 25.

22. Ismail, *Culture and Eurocentrism*, 17.

23. Ismail, *Culture and Eurocentrism*, 33.

24. This is a view that contrasts with the views of those who have identified the symptom of the university as one of corporatization. Perhaps, under the strain of the structural adjustments programs of the 1980s, it may prove difficult to identify a corporatized African university, unless by this we refer to the newly established private universities in Africa. See Casarino, "Farewell to the University."

25. Ashforth, *Politics of Official Discourse*.

26. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Emergence and Trajectories."

27. Heffernan and Nieftagodien, *Students Must Rise*.

28. Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy*.

29. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*.

30. Cook, "Techno University."

31. For a discussion of academic freedom and its history in the 1948 US Supreme Court judgment that cites the South African academic freedom statement with the rise of apartheid, see Sitze, "Academic Unfreedom."

32. See, for example, Lalu, "Apartheid's University."
33. Marx, "Hendrik Verwoerd."
34. Harrington, *Reenchanted Science*.
35. Harrington, *Reenchanted Science*, 126.
36. Derrida, "Mochlos."
37. Fink, *Reading Seminar XI*.
38. This is an argument drawn from Readings, *University in Ruins*. A fuller discussion of Readings's genealogy, and the critique it has drawn from scholars such as Dominick La Capra, unfortunately falls outside of the scope of my specific concerns in this essay.
39. See for example Campbell, *Improper Life*.
40. See Weber, *Institution and Interpretation*.

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