



## Acknowledgments

In the early 1990s, Carol Breckenridge, then editor of *Public Culture*, suggested that the journal run a special issue on Africa. When we were asked to edit it, it quickly became clear to us that producing such an issue without a profound reinterrogation of Africa as a sign in modern formations of knowledge would have little value, both for *Public Culture's* readers and for us as editors. Instead, we thought that what was needed was a gesture of defamiliarization capable of providing the reader with a sense of the worldliness of contemporary African life forms. To undertake this gesture of defamiliarization, there was no better scene or site than a late modern African metropolis. We believed that a critical rereading of Johannesburg could help to shift, if only partially, the center of gravity of traditional forms of analysis and interpretations of Africa in global scholarship. We also hoped to show that when it comes to “things African,” it is possible to move away from the fascination with the horrors of a seemingly static world and to rehabilitate our curiosity while also insisting on this virtue as a necessary hallmark of a truly global academic project.

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