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Melancholy Mapping: a 'Dispatcher's Eye' and the Locations of Loss in Johannesburg

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Abstract:

Johannesburg has been described variously as an elusive, genreless, blank, even self-cannibalising city. Without refusing such rhetorical play, this article seeks to secure a mode of urban analysis that attends to the city's material losses as well its more conceptual elisions. In so doing, it engages the critical potential, in particular, of melancholy, establishing through this concept not just an affective condition or a psycho-spatial categorisation, but a way of mapping the city. Through analysis of Mark Gevisser's *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* (2014), this article follows his self-styled 'dispatcher's eye' in its efforts to navigate those spaces in the city otherwise erased from the city's self-image. In particular, it finds important precedence in Ranjana Khanna's (2003) notion of a 'postcolonial melancholia', as well as interventions by from Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin, as it elaborates upon the imaginative as well as political claims made available by such a melancholy mapping of Johannesburg.

Key words:

melancholy   cartography   apartheid   Johannesburg   memoir

Article:

Introduction: Cartomania, or a 'Dispatcher's Eye'

For the writer and biographer Mark Gevisser, Johannesburg's Old Braamfontein Cemetery stood for a long time—as it still does for most—as little other than a void in his urban consciousness. Even from the belvedere he once occupied at Wits University, Gevisser confesses in *Lost and Found in Johannesburg: a Memoir* (2014) that he never really noticed its existence in the middle distance. It was an absent presence, a nominal *khôra* of the city lost between the din of the M1 highway that flanks the cemetery's eastern edge, the grime of the vast railway sidings to the south, and the comparative tranquillity of the University buildings that preside over its northern border. This, despite the fact that it had been 'a landmark of urbanity' ever since Gevisser first invented the childhood game, named retroactively Dispatcher, around which his memoir of the self in the city broadly turns (Gevisser 2014: 47). The game itself is little more than an imaginative exercise in urban route-planning, albeit one regularly thwarted by the incongruities of the 1970s *Holmden's*

street guide that, as a young boy, he would use to plot his journeys. Beginning from his home in Sandton, the 'bucolic new dormitory town' figured on page seventy-seven of the guide, the writer recalls how he would trace possible paths to familiar locations like his grandmother's home in Hillbrow or his school in Victory Park, as well as numerous other addresses drawn arbitrarily from the accompanying Johannesburg Telephone Directory. By way of what he calls his 'dispatcher's eye,' Gevisser reports how he was able to make endless imaginative incursions into those spaces of the city that, in reality, he would find cordoned off as both he and the apartheid regime matured (2014: 42).

That the Old Cemetery in Braamfontein, situated favourably on page three of the *Holmden's*, served as such a stable wayfinder in these games of Dispatcher makes its subsequent recession from Gevisser's topographical hold over the city somewhat surprising. But the general fact of its absence is not alone all that noteworthy. Johannesburg was and, to a disquieting degree, still is a space patterned by elision, oblivion and disorientation. Indeed, ever since its very foundation on a triangle of *uitvalgrond* (unused ground) in 1886, the city has been cast in its generative rhetoric as a blank space—or, at least, one punctuated by regular instances of blankness. For example, one of the earliest maps of Johannesburg, published by A. P. Tompkins in 1890, envisioned the budding mining town as the colonial city yet to come. Less a navigable articulation of a built reality, this document was, as the visual artist William Kentridge puts it, more a projection 'through imagination,' a writing of a blankness into being (see Gevisser 2012: 105). By troubling extension, however, Tompkins' map also wrote many extant spaces into oblivion, refusing to admit, for instance, to the informal settlements of black, Coloured, Indian and Chinese workers already then established on the immediate edges of the town. In this, Tompkins' map has contributed to more than just a cartographic abstraction; it has also helped condition a space in which even Johannesburg's Old Fort, a notoriously brutal colonial prison complex overlooking the downtown region, was long reduced to a 'kind of absent center,' a place of violence forcibly forgotten from the city's self-representation—that is, at least, until its redevelopment in 2004 (Gevisser 2008: 318). And if we accept that Johannesburg remains constituted by this disfiguring link between imaginative speculation and material disregard, then the Old Cemetery's failure to make an enduring mark on Gevisser's urban consciousness makes the site more the rule than the exception.

Where the Cemetery distinguishes itself, however, is in its stubborn arrangement as a cipher for the formerly strict racial stratification of the city around it. In this, the site's public neglect has not been matched by an administrative one. In fact, Gevisser is struck upon his eventual visit to the Cemetery in search of the graves of his forebears by the 'voluptuous beauty of the place.' The 'paved pathways and statuaries, war memorials and mossy tombstones, lawns and low stone walls and handsome redbrick crematorium' are all, he notes, 'meticulously kept by the Johannesburg Parks Department' (Gevisser 2014: 48). That, at least, is the story for the white, southern section of the cemetery. At its northerly edges where the black residents of the city are interred, Gevisser stumbles across only a 'few derelict mounds and a forest of blue gums' (2014: 48). Not even in the thin, densely tenanted strip reserved for Jewish graves that runs like a 'buffer zone' down the length of the site does he

encounter anything like the same ornamental display (Gevisser 2014: 48). In this, the Cemetery's enduring formal disparity, the writer discovers a troubling elegy to the racial injustice upon which the rest of the city long prospered. Even in grief, the anxious hierarchies of apartheid and, before that, colonial rule appear not only to have prevailed but also prospered. And in upholding this spatial separation across racial and ethic lines, the Old Cemetery reveals as much about the city's structural stagnancy under democracy as the site's broader anonymity threatens to conceal. Indeed, hiding in plain sight, this memorial to the divided city reflects something of the paradox of Johannesburg's contemporary constitution: open to, and yet persistently evasive before, any attempt to map its regularly absented structures of violent control.

This article sets out, in part, to explore how Gevisser navigates this internal contradiction, especially as it has sunk not just into the city's material foundations but also its more conceptual underpinnings. For in writing his memoir of the self in the city, Gevisser also discloses the ways in which his own identity has been regularly disrupted by Johannesburg's own confounding constitution—something that has not disappeared with the advent of democracy. Indeed, kindled by a rising theoretical investment in the city as extemporaneous and historically unmoored, this representational truancy has accrued such a mythology that it appears to have wholly overwhelmed Johannesburg's contemporary imagination of itself. For instance, recent accounts of the city like *Blank_____: Apartheid, Architecture, and After* (1998) and *Johannesburg: the Elusive Metropolis* (2008), which each turn around readings of the nonfigurative, have worked to nourish similarly abstractive works of literary and visual 'urbanography'. Most notable amongst these are Ivan Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys* (2006)—a 'guide to Johannesburg that is not a guide at all' (Goodman 2009: 225)—and, more recently, Bettina Malcolmess and Dorothee Kreutzfeldt's *No Not Place: Johannesburg, Fragments of Spaces* (2013)—a similarly disruptive collage of essays, short stories, poetry and photography that insists on the discontinuity of the city. To follow the ambition of these works, however, would be to think of Johannesburg as a place largely immobilized before its own obliterative self-analysis, and, by extension, to reduce Gevisser's disoriented search for a sense of self in the city to yet another instance of this more general elusiveness.

Without presuming to undo altogether this tendency, I want to suggest that in the endless incursions, both actual and imagined, made in *Lost and Found*, Gevisser gives representation to precisely the city's obscured and obscuring sense of itself. At least, in the writer's self-styled 'cartomanic' encounters with his hometown, he alights upon many of those locations that sustain this dematerializing rhetoric (Gevisser 2014: 103). But rather than succumbing before it, his dispatcher's eye works, via a mapping of the self, to figure in locations like the Old Cemetery, the Old Fort and the Sandspruit river an account of Johannesburg that otherwise escapes from its own contemporary imagination. As such, my ultimate aim in this article is to elaborate upon the type of cartographic expressions of loss, personal as much as environmental or spatial, that a memoir of the city like *Lost and Found* makes possible. In Gevisser's dispatching of the self across Johannesburg, I find at work a mode of mapping that makes legible the gaps and tears in the 'urban fabric', not by suturing

them but by dwelling despondently upon their manifest emptiness, their insistent will to insignificance and erasure. And it is in inaugurating this peculiarly melancholy mode, as I cast it, that Gevisser's memoir opens out the alternative possibilities for reading the muted, inconsolable remains of the past in a city that works otherwise to elude its own unjust historicity.

Locating the Self in the City

In approaching this melancholy mode, it worth noting from the outset that Gevisser actively signals something of Johannesburg's constitutive play between presence and absence in the generic framing of his text. At first glance, to be 'lost and found in Johannesburg' denotes a journey of self-discovery typical to biographical modes like the *bildungsroman*, albeit one progressed by revelatory encounters with the urban environment rather than its social or moral equivalents. But upon closer inspection, this gesture towards the conventions of life writing also introduces something of the disorientation that the text's urban setting similarly mandates. Indeed, Gevisser's memoir begins with a moment of prolepsis, anticipating the violent attack with which the narrative and the writer's own life in the city eventually concludes. In this temporal disorder, it is immediately clear that Johannesburg does not indulge any such a progressive mapping of its own biography. It is a space that is neither fixed, nor even all that consistently intelligible; Johannesburg 'is not the city I think I know,' remarks Gevisser early in his account (2014: 22). To be lost and found in this volatile urban environment, then, is to oscillate inexorably between the legible and illegible, the actual and the fantastical, to inhabit each space synchronously but separately. It is to engage in a cartographic exercise that, to follow Gevisser's own speculative explorations, is dependent upon the ineluctable 'elusiveness' of the city (2014: 21). At least, this is how the writer asks us to imagine the city as it emerges through his contingent mapping of the self—an embodied act of cartography that plots the regularly divergent routes adopted by his white, liberal, middle-class, Jewish, homosexual identity. For unlike many urban memoirs, in which the familial, the spatial and the architectural all coalesce to enable the writer to 'feel myself as I am, the city as it is,' Johannesburg and Gevisser consistently fail one another in this respect (Gornick 2015: 170).

Doubtless, from a certain standpoint, styling this indeterminacy as a failure risks devaluing some of the imaginative and individual possibilities permitted by such an interpretive posture. Indeed, as noted above, Gevisser is by no means alone in ascribing to Johannesburg an essential, even invigorating elusiveness. For Kentridge (2016: 14), too, the city's 'shifting surface is as stable as it's ever going to be' and, it seems, as stable as the artist would prefer. And, in this, both echo something of the affirmative claims that Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (2008: 25) make for the elusive as a term 'to unfix rather than fix the meanings' of a city still negotiating its peculiarly splintered encounter with modernity. To this extent, then, there remain relatively compelling reasons to tolerate, if not necessarily further corroborate, this faltering, fragile account of a space also liable at any point to collapse abstractly and actually into the voids mined beneath its surface. But as a mode through which to map the city, such an elusive conceptualisation also threatens to displace as much as define Johannesburg, particularly when it comes to its still active history of division

and control. Not only accepting the fact of its representational elusive, but instead making it determinative, is also to risk capitulating before the city's own potentially obscurantist ambitions. It is to overlook the politics of abstraction also at work in its stubbornly unequal spatial order. For whatever the claims of democracy, Johannesburg remains a city divided, with an 'intra-racial inequality' taking over from the strict inter-racial separations of apartheid (Crankshaw and Parnell 2004: 350). And it is this complicity between the urban imagination and the city's abiding divisions, an otherwise furtive one made tangible in the spaces mapped beneath Gevisser's peculiar dispatcher's eye, that I want to stress. For the elusive, when deployed at the level of the conceptual, also threatens to extend, not end, Johannesburg's inherited injustice, sustaining a violence that works by denying all that escapes representation.

Of course, it is not as simple as rejecting this interpretive posture. A city born so singularly upon the logic of exploitation, avarice and opportunism has much to conceal. And it has become artful in frustrating any compulsion towards self-disclosure, even after its long chapter of racial segregation has supposedly come to an end. As such, Gevisser's memoir of the city is nothing if not also a record of this established and, in many ways, enduring division. For instance, the urban dispatches around which the earliest chapters of *Lost and Found* turn—like his teenage impulse to transgress into the 'modest little triangle' of Hillbrow, or his explorations of 'the mythical territories of Bez Valley and La Rochelle'—all work to confirm the apartheid city's limits if only by way of their extraordinariness (Gevisser 2014: 125-7). In fact, it is precisely the 'thrill of transgression' that, in part, sustains his dispatcher's eye, pressing the writer to 'cross[…] the impermeable boundaries that were set around the life of a white suburban boy' (Gevisser 2014: 103). And yet, the facts of his upbringing also evidence their own imaginative restrictions. 'There was a line I never crossed,' Gevisser admits: 'I never went into a township' (2014: 127-8). For many years, Johannesburg remained to him a 'closed city,' a place in which, even to his dispatcher's eye, there remained ineluctable gaps (Gevisser 2014: 9). And despite the many games of Dispatcher played in city in the years since, such gaps in the 'urban stitching' appear to have refused democracy's suturing. Even now, Gevisser laments, '[t]here is always a suburban wall, […] a palisade fence, an infrared beam, a burglar bar, a thick red line, between the city I think I know and the city that is' (2014: 21).

To this extent, whatever the freedoms envisaged under democracy, it is also clear that as a subject of biographical inquiry Johannesburg's contemporary 'fortressing' has ensured that the city remains as resistant before any such a hermeneutic enterprise as it did under apartheid. As Martin Murray (2011: 18) describes, 'the steady multiplication of barriers, walls, and impediments […] that have sprung up across the Johannesburg cityscape has carved the urban landscape […] into enclosed enclaves that shield authorized users from the wanted intrusions of the uninvited outsiders.' These ever more immobilizing and isolating barriers are not just physical but, as Murray's analysis confers, operate equally at the level of the social. This is nowhere more evident than in the experiential divide between the predominantly white middle classes walled up in the northern suburbs and those many black workers who make daily sorties into these 'aseptic […] nonplaces' from the city's 'bustling,

open, noisy' townships (Lipman and Harris 1999: 729). Whatever the economic exchanges that accompany these temporary incursions, Johannesburg remains in myriad other ways a place closed off from itself, even still.

Acknowledging these shortcomings ensures that the task of mapping the contemporary city, even via the self as Gevisser attempts, assumes a vitally political hue. It is also ensures that any such activity remains a particularly fraught one. For like the Old Braamfontein Cemetery, much of the city's inherited injustice remains out of sight for all but the most intrepid of its cartographers. To map spaces in which erasure and disavowal operate in disquieting consort with the city's own elusive aspirations necessarily demands a type of *apophatic* schema.[i] Without refusing Johannesburg's many discontinuities, wilful or otherwise, any troubling of its correlative elusiveness must, I suggest, turn around a mode of cartography that figures this pattern of elision and amnesia at its representational core. This is in no way to reify such losses, but to call attention to the ways in which these absented features continue to dictate the cityscape and its future possibility. It is in responding to urban loss in this, its most inscrutable and irredeemable of forms, then, that Gevisser's peculiarly melancholy mode of mapping proves itself most adept.

Towards a Melancholy Map

Adopting melancholy as the premise for an exercise in cartography necessarily extends what has become a well theorised technology of power far beyond its typically Foucauldian inheritance. Indeed, in attempting to locate and spatialize loss, this type of recessive mapping of the city threatens to escape altogether the territorial claims upon knowledge and control that reside at the nominal heart of this representational machinery. Reaching, as, in part, it must, towards the psychoanalytic, however, this melancholy mode quickly encounters another equally freighted theoretical tradition. Indeed, Freud's hold over much modern interpretation of melancholy and its constitutive role in the formation of the ego is not only definitional to the point of critical rapture but, at first sight, stands at some distance from the type of urban analysis proposed here. This is not to say that his foundational essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' does not provide important lessons for our understanding of the self-reviling, often violent, internal inscriptions that melancholy precipitates. As Freud (1917: 246) puts it, in melancholy 'the patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable.' This results from an unconscious incorporation, rather than active dissipation, of the feelings of loss that necessarily flow in all moments of grief. Melancholy distinguishes itself, then, from the 'normal course of mourning' by virtue of its attack upon the subject's 'self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment' (Freud 1917: 244). Proceeding to read urban space by way of this unconscious incorporation of loss and the resultant drift towards self-assault, while potentially productive in accounting for Johannesburg's tendency to violent erasure, necessarily requires careful deliberation. This is no more so the case than in the field of cartography, where the surface and visibly bounded space, rather than impenetrable depth, are what count.

Nonetheless, there has been a notable shift in recent years amongst cultural geographers towards the unconscious as a tool for recalibrating space. Described tentatively, even reluctantly, as a 'psychoanalytic turn' by the likes of Steven Pile (1996) and Felicity Callard (2003), this emergent criticism has begun to discover in Freud the significance that a trope like repression hold in the production of space. Callard (2003: 307), for one, makes the case for a geography that upholds centrally within its analysis such Freudian items as 'impotence, loss of agency and […] lack.' Such terms are, she maintains, vital in challenging the 'politically idealistic' foundations from which so much socio-spatial critique begins, foundations that consistently prioritise progressive transformation without ever considering the operation of intransigence, inertia and compulsive repetition also at stake in the spatial imagination (Callard 2003: 300). What Freud demands, by contrast, especially in his contemplation of melancholy and its pathological attachment to loss, is an appreciation of those unseen and unseemly, but still animate, aspects that necessarily inform the visible surface. In extending this analytic posture towards a city like Johannesburg, these claims provide opportunity, albeit guardedly, to assemble a more general critique of the city's abiding tendency toward amnesia and self-annihilation. As such, reading the city psycho-spatially may well help account for the way Johannesburg adapts, even unconsciously, to its absented, overlooked and forgotten topographical features; how it is beholden before those sites and spaces of injustice that otherwise appear to escape the city's own imagination of itself.

Doubtless, the specifics of this psycho-spatial analysis are further complicated not just by Freud's distance from Johannesburg but also his status as colonial thinker. Indeed, postcolonial critiques of Freudian theory, like similar such criticism of the Western metropolitan centres within which psychoanalysis first flourished, are long and serious. However, more recent work by Ranjana Khanna, who deploys Freud to develop a broader analysis of 'postcolonial melancholia,' has proven useful in reorienting this theory into an irredeemable and, thereby, insistent call for the 'unworking of conformity' and a 'critique of the status quo' (2003: 15, 23). In Khanna's hands, Freud's theory of melancholy proves less an articulation of some attenuated and individuated grief, and more a site for staging the inconsolable psychogenic and spectral remains of colonial injustice. 'Melancholia becomes the basis,' she argues, 'for an ethico-political understanding of colonial pasts, postcolonial presents, and utopian futures,' one that refuses to dim before the ameliorative logic of 'progress' (Khanna 2003: 30). In its refusal to mourn and thereby release the present from the colonial past, then, this postcolonial melancholia is, Khanna continues, the charge that upholds the 'psychical damage performed through colonialism,' transforming its 'unknown, inassimilable, interruptive' affective ends into an enduring 'call for justice' (2003: 24).

While Khanna's analysis is figured primarily at the level of the nation-state, I want to suggest that it may be applied with equal interest to the spatial dynamics of a postcolonial city like Johannesburg. For in figuring melancholy as an insurgent attachment to the past, Khanna helps to recast the city's contemporary elusiveness not in terms of what Nuttall and Mbembe (2008: 26) name positively as its 'self-stylization,' but rather as a refusal to dwell upon its ongoing and inassimilable history of injustice. The abstractive surface of the city

comes to signify less a space cut free from any determinative history and more a place that insists on amnesia and abstraction as a consolation of sorts. But, as Christopher Lasch (1978: xviii) once put it, 'a denial of the past, superficially progressive and optimistic, proves on closer analysis to embody the despair of a society that cannot face the future.' And it is against this tradition of denialism that melancholy and, more particularly, I suggest, Gevisser's melancholy mode of mapping Johannesburg appear to work. Far from refusing the city its will to forget the past in the name of an optimism for the future, his dispatcher's eye dwells upon those locations that work to manifest this latent feeling of despair and enduring loss, even despite themselves. Under melancholy's affective rubric, those readily forgotten, generally anonymous spaces of the city, places like the Old Cemetery, are also the locations that give the clearest expression to Johannesburg's abiding, irrepressible history of injustice precisely, if also paradoxically, because of their recession from the contemporary imagination.

'Grave Beauty' in Johannesburg and elsewhere

As a lens through which to envision the otherwise unseen, exploitative anatomy of the city, melancholy is not without expressive precedence. Elsewhere, biographers of the modern metropolis like the poet Charles Baudelaire, his most astute and saturnine interpreter Walter Benjamin, and the novelist Orhan Pamuk, for instance, all discover in the unjust conditions imposed by their contemporary urban environments melancholy's allied feelings of loss, abjection and implacability. Of course, Paris at the turn of the twentieth century and Istanbul at the century's end retain acute points of distinction not just between them but also with Johannesburg in its present transition towards an open, democratic form. Moreover, it is worth noting that melancholy is by no means a static, singular feeling that inflicts itself uniformly upon the modern urban sphere. What Baudelaire, Benjamin and Pamuk each disclose, however, is a conception of melancholy in which the psychogenic terrain to which Freud binds the condition meets with the spatial and the social. Without refusing Freud's understanding of melancholy's pathological, often disabling attachment to loss, these writers discover in the condition a deep investment in the modern city's 'failed material' (Buck-Morss 1991: 164). For in its negative interpretation of urban space, melancholy proves itself adept at plotting, as Susan Buck-Morss (1991: 39) puts it, '"life [not] as it was," nor even life remembered, but life as it has been "forgotten".' It prioritises the lapsed features of the city, those imprinted spaces that, to return to Benjamin, are 'what they are here for us […] due to the fact that they in themselves are no longer' (see Buck-Morss 1991: 159). In short, melancholy enables us to dwell within the elusive, the lost, and the forgotten; not to reclaim these negative features but to permit a rare, apophatic mapping of precisely these absented urban forms.

Like his fellow urban biographers, Gevisser is deeply invested in the spatial as well as individual salience of melancholy to his map of the self in the city. Reflecting, for instance, on the affective achievements of *Istanbul: Memories of a City* and Pamuk's account of the *hüzün*, an Arabic equivalent to melancholy, 'that gives [the city] its grave beauty,' Gevisser thinks of his own task in *Lost and Found* as something akin to this mapping of 'life and the history of the city in reverse' (Pamuk 2006: 318, 94).[ii] In an early chapter entitled 'In Search

of the South African *Hüzün*,' Gevisser reflects on the way in which Pamuk deploys the feeling of *hüzün* as 'a plumb line' through 'the city of his birth,' using it to help plot his corresponding 'journey into the self' (2014: 38). To this extent, Pamuk's Istanbul proves an especially productive analogue for Gevisser's own cartographic exercise. Citing the European city's mouldering form and, by extension, its fateful feelings of material loss, Gevisser finds rich precedent for charting the melancholy structure of Johannesburg. Indeed, the 'hollowing out,' as Murray (2011: 87) describes it, of the inner city from the late 1980s onwards has produced a space not altogether dissimilar in its feeling of atrophy to the one found by Pamuk on the crumbling streets of Istanbul.

Admittedly, the specificity of Istanbul and its constitutive *hüzün* guards against too hasty a transliteration. Indeed, as Pamuk and Gevisser are at equal pains to stress, the *hüzün* of Istanbul does not easily travel, if at all, across the cultural and topographical lines separating the ancient Turkish city from a modern urban space like Johannesburg. As Pamuk puts it, Istanbul is 'the very illustration, the very essence, of *hüzün*,' and while it shares some affective qualities with other cases of metropolitan melancholy like the *tristesse* of São Paulo, as described by Claude Levis-Strauss, 'the words and the feelings they describe are not identical' (2006: 84, 91). The difference, Pamuk continues, lies in the fact that:

> [I]n Istanbul the remains of a glorious past and civilisation are everywhere visible. No matter how ill-kept they are, no matter how neglected or hemmed in they are by concrete monstrosities, the great mosques and other monuments of the city, as well as the lesser detritus of empire in every side street and corner—the little arches, fountains and neighbourhood mosques—inflict heartache on all who live amongst them. (2006: 91)

These spatial and semantic specificities notwithstanding, Gevisser is moved still to query whether 'there is a Johannesburg *hüzün*—if I have a Johannesburg *hüzün*'? Unlike Pamuk, for whom this melancholy feeling is everywhere impressed upon him by the city's material ruins, however, Gevisser (2014: 87) is forced to look for it 'somehow, in the relationship between the bucolic gardens of [his] fecund suburban childhood, wooded and green and irrigated, a world of swimming pools and sprinklers, and the harsh bleached landscapes just beyond its suburban walls.' In this, he signals an important distinction between the pervasive, collective *hüzün* of ancient Istanbul and the irregular feeling of melancholy that potentially emerges from the divided, unequal spatial consciousness of a city like Johannesburg. And while it does not prevent him from thinking about what it means to dwell in this melancholy space, to map, like Pamuk, the 'emotional truth' of Johannesburg's absented or elusive topography, it necessarily alerts us to the peculiarity, even partiality of Gevisser's dispatcher's eye (Gevisser 2014: 38).

This partiality is figured most keenly at the level of race. Growing up in a world that has been 'chopped up into a series of discrete maps with no route through,' Gevisser is quick to admit to the disjunction between his own experience of the city and the 'more harrowing' ones of its black residents (2014: 89, 45). But rather than rehearsing the type of 'moral purpose' that so often motivates white liberal writing in South Africa, his dispatcher's eye leads him to find ways of giving form to the urban discontinuities that dictate his own 'internal geography' as much as the more general melancholy topography of the city around

him (Gevisser 2014: 201). In this, I suggest, Gevisser proceeds by way of an alternatively genealogical, navigational and pictorial account, proving himself adept, much like Pamuk, at providing a representational texture for melancholy's otherwise diffuse urban character. For not only does this narrative form unfold through the dispatcher's lyrical eye a vision of the city entombed beneath melancholy's 'black veil'—to borrow from Pamuk (2006: 254)—but, more specifically, it makes available a revealing personal archive of monochrome familial photographs and historical maps. There is vulnerability in adding to his narrative account this non-verbal record and the writer deliberates upon the efficacy of sharing with the reader such intimate portraits of family life. Encouraged by Pamuk, whose *Istanbul* is regularly punctuated by greyscale images of both the city and family life, Gevisser finds himself equally enamoured by the capacity of his personal archive of 'oversaturated Kodacrome prints' to give form to the 'savagely flattening' light of the *highveld* and the melancholy that appears to flow therefrom (2014: 38). Indeed, when it comes to finding a medium through which to capture melancholy's constitutive feelings of loss, photography is, for many critics, the most inherently expressive.

This is a quality put most starkly by Roland Barthes (1980: 9) when he surmises 'that terrible thing […] there in every photograph: the return of the dead.' Especially true of portraiture and its record of individual impermanence, these momentary flashes of time extracted from the linear flow represent, he argues, a 'catastrophe which has already occurred' (1980: 11). Barthes is by no means alone in ascribing to the otherwise 'flat' dimension of the photograph a morbid temporal plane. In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' Benjamin envisions the photograph as a similarly saturnine *memento mori*:

> The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty. (1970: 228)

Without rehearsing the specifics of Benjamin's argument on mechanical reproducibility, it is worth registering the melancholy aesthetic that he, like Barthes, attributes to portraiture's mortifying transformation. For, elsewhere, the photograph is thought by Benjamin as an entirely evidentiary object, one in which the question of aesthetics, melancholy or otherwise, plays no part at all. Like a 'crime scene,' he argues, images of the modern city reveal 'historical occurrences' rather than personal tragedy. 'Free-floating contemplation is not appropriate' to such urban photography. Instead, he maintains, these images retain a 'political significance,' one sustained by the immediacy of the scene (Benjamin 1970: 228). Of course, this is not a binarism that can be easily sustained. As Benjamin's own writing on Paris, Berlin, and Moscow also attests, the city is not altogether unlike the subject of portrait photography. Whatever the neoteric logic that writes the surface of the modern city, such spaces retain, too, the melancholy shadow of their own future deterioration.

Gevisser make this point with some purpose in his memoir, where scenes of urban life are juxtaposed with traditional family portraiture in an effort to uphold the grave beauty of

each at the very same time as he also reaches out towards something approaching their common historicity. Indeed, as a partial treatise on the melancholy 'logic of photograph[y],' *Lost and Found* includes amongst its chapters some sixty-five images, with the family's extensive photographic archive set alongside various colonial maps of the city and myriad black and white records of city life from renowned photographers including David Goldblatt, Ernest Cole, Bob Gosani and Santu Mofokeng (Gevisser 2014: 109). The result is a carefully curated visual chronicling of the self and the city, one that figures the constitutive melancholy of the writer's genealogical reflection in a dialogue with the developing, but also disappearing, urban environment. Layering the emotional within the evidential, this montage of photographic images appears to encourage an unusual contemplation of the historical significance of the self to the city, one led by a visual pattern of juxtaposition, association, and counterpoint.

Gevisser's account of the Old Braamfontein Cemetery is exemplary in this regard. Couched, in the first instance, as a space bounded by the pages of the *Holmden*'s and represented visually by a detailed plan extracted from a larger, early map of Johannesburg, the cemetery is established initially by way its colonial geography. There is much historical virtue in this cartographic reading, for Gevisser immediately expands upon the racial stratification upheld by the Cemetery's internal arrangement. As suggested already, he discloses compelling evidence of the boundaries set by 'Johannesburg's civic fathers […] in death as in life' (Gevisser 2014: 48). Plotted against this cartographic record are portrait photographs of Gevisser's great-great-grandparents, Zalman and Minnie Blum, both emigrés from Lithuania who arrived in the city early in the twentieth-century. The pair is pictured in formal dress in the year before their death. To the melancholy eye of the writer, they 'could not look more distinguished.' The pair 'exude the confidence and poise of the Jewish bourgeoisie,' he continues, 'pulled into order […] by the photographer's tight composition' (Gevisser 2014: 51). The reproduction of their portraits in such close visual proximity to the map of the cemetery is no coincidence. For, as Gevisser discovers upon his eventual visit to the Old Cemetery, both Zalman and Minnie now rest a row apart from one another amongst the host of other Jewish expatriates that provide for the space's figurative 'buffer' between white and black.

Of course, in the sudden discovery of a family history so close at hand and yet so long neglected, the writer affirms the uncanny emotional attachment that rises up in him, a feeling encapsulated by the inscription fast fading on Minnie's tombstone that Gevisser feels moved to memorialise in *Lost and Found*: 'A woman whose soul was one of a kind / Pure, untainted, supremely refined' (2014: 50). But as he also confesses upon locating the pair, as anything other than memorials 'to the density of Jewish experience in Johannesburg,' they remain largely 'illegible' to him (Gevisser 2014: 50). Spatialized within the segregated form of the cemetery, he finds little of the pride that attaches itself to his description of them in their photographic representation. Amidst this space of abiding injustice, his distant forebears are no less documentary evidence for the violent history of the city than the maps that Gevisser sets alongside their portraits. Holding 'little in their specificity,' the power of their gravestones is registered, instead, by 'their context; their presence among so many others'

(Gevisser 2014: 50). Here, the political and the spatial bisect the biographical axis of his memoir. And despite turning upon saturnine thoughts of his forebears enduring presence in the cemetery, 'eternally weathering the highveld's thunderstorms,' Gevisser is stirred most by their cartographic status: effectively keeping 'the Christian Christians away from the heathen ones' (2014: 54).

Melancholy Dwellings

While Gevisser's struggles to incorporate this early 'hierarchization of death' into his own internal, familial geography, his visit to the Old Cemetery is not without wider resonance, especially in his efforts to navigate for the self a route through Johannesburg and its disorienting geography (Gevisser 2014: 55). For the sway held over him by the historical, rather than merely sentimental, significance of the Cemetery helps to locate the writer—however tentatively—into this otherwise obscure space and its ongoing pattern of injustice. Like his forebears positioned upon the 'buffer' separating white from black, Gevisser's dispatching serves to find a space for the self amidst those 'in-between' spaces, those seams in the urban stitching. In other words, in crafting his map of the city, Gevisser dwells upon those locations lost between the pages of the *Holdem's*, those pages and places across which his dispatcher's eye was for many years unable to discover a route. This is not to suggest that he is able to recover and make navigable these otherwise blank spaces. Rather that in the melancholy map he fabricates in *Lost and Found*, he at least makes possible their contemplation. And in a city that boasts only 'negative public space,' where few feel safe to linger, and which once made a crime of loitering, it is clear that this type of dwelling, imaginative or otherwise, is no straightforward task (Gevisser 2008: 327). In fact, the negative is the principal terrain across which any such account of Johannesburg's geography is forced to traverse.

For instance, as the narrative departs the forgotten space of the Old Cemetery, the reader is shuttled eastward along Smit Street towards the stratified downtown region, before they then wind up Rissik and around the brutalist City Council buildings towards one of the most emblematic sites in Johannesburg's more general structure of absent injustice, the Old Fort. A prison built originally by convict labour under the direction of then President of Transvaal Republic, Paul Kruger, in 1896, the Old Fort served notoriously for many decades as a space of violent racial discipline. Indeed, 'Number Four,' as the prison complex was metonymically known, has retained the power to 'send shivers down the spine of Joburg' (Gevisser 2014: 120).[iii] Before it was relocated to Soweto in 1987, hundreds of thousands of the city's black population passed through the Old Fort's gates, some for regular acts of criminality, a few for political dissent, but the overwhelming majority for minor contraventions of the uncompromising and punitive apartheid laws imposed upon the non-white population. As such, it provided, for the city's black residents, at least, a fearsome landmark in the apartheid city's architecture of malignant control. And yet, even where its awful reputation precedes it, many others remain incognisant of its particular spatiality, of its constitutive place at the dark, repressive centre of the city. As the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) argued as part of its 2004 redevelopment report, the prison 'is to most an unknown, invisible and unacknowledged place' (see van der Merwe 2013: 577).

Such invisibility is a truth of apartheid violence generally, but, as Gevisser discovers in the photographs taken by Bob Gosani in 1956, it also something perniciously true of the Old Fort. Taken from one of the modernist apartment blocks that tower above the prison, Gosani was able to point his camera directly into the open courtyards below. From here, Gevisser (2014: 122-3) notes, the photographer documented the 'dehumanizing practice of "*tausa*" that took place within the Fort, whereby black prisoners were forced to dance naked in front of each other and the warders to demonstrate that they had nothing hidden up their anuses.' Disconcertingly, this daily ritual was by no means invisible or unknown—as the JDA asserts of the prison more generally. Rather, through the eyes of those white residents in the apartment blocks facing the prison ramparts, it was merely ignored. As Gevisser (2014: 123) puts it, '[i]f Gosani could see what was happening […], then so could all [those…] around the periphery, if they cared to look.' It was, he surmises elsewhere, 'overlooked' in both senses of the word (Gevisser 2008: 508). As such, the erasure of the Old Fort and its brutality emerges less as a condition of the anxious racial hierarchies imposed by Johannesburg's earliest planners, as remains the case in the Old Cemetery, and more as an outgrowth of the moral astigmatism that accompanied the city's longstanding segregation. Both locations share, nonetheless, an absent presence in the city—a variably elusive status that, as Gevisser discovered with the Cemetery, makes them liable to disappear from the urban imagination at large.

The task of recovering the ritual humiliation lost before eyes made unseeing within Hillbrow's vertical enclaves of privilege—'a neat analogy of the blindness mapped by the *Holmden*'s'—was one taken up as part of the Fort's redevelopment by the JDA (Gevisser 2014: 123). Now home to the country's Constitutional Court, the site has been transformed into a vast museum documenting the appalling history of the Old Fort and its auxiliary buildings. Visitors are able to rove through the colonial building, along its ramparts and down into the dark, dank cells of Number Four. Here, they are confronted by traumatic stories from some of the thousands of prisoners confined here over the years. Such a collective defeat haunts the space with precisely the same spectral quality that, to return to Khanna, necessarily defines melancholy's postcolonial form. The site figures, as she puts it, the 'unknown, inassimilable, interruptive' remainder of a past so violent that, in many ways, it cannot be grieved—that is, mournfully incorporated and let go (Khanna 2003: 24). To this extent, the Old Fort might well be read as typical of a melancholy spatiality unable to redeem the past, even as it strives to articulate and make present the injustice inherent therein. But memorialisation and public access (at a price) do not guarantee visibility. Nor do they ensure any wider recuperation of those degrading experiences lost before the indifference of Hillbrow's former residents. And, as if to enforce this point, Gevisser notes how the self-same practice of unseeing still dominates the district, even with the transformation of its once elegant high-rises into overpopulated, informal slums for refugees and illegal African migrants. Rather than apathy, however, it is the fear of xenophobia and arrest that prompts its current residents, according to Gevisser (2014: 165), to '[keep] their heads down.' The assumption is that by refusing to look up and see the city, the city itself will fail to see them, allowing these precarious residents to retain their invisible status and the comparative safety it confers.

Conclusion: At the Limits of the Melancholy Map

If this article has been about the violence of the unseen and Johannesburg's inability to overcome its own obliviousness, Hillbrow's contemporary 'blanking' marks out, to some extent, the potentially strategic co-option of this condition by the district's most recent arrivants. In this, Hillbrow also draws out what Freud referred to as the melancholic's 'expectation of punishment'—that is, a tolerance toward, even a self-destructive indulgence of, the very injustice against which melancholy sets itself. By way of conclusion, then, it is necessary to call attention to the secondary, if sometimes also calculated, violence that melancholy as a mode of mapping Johannesburg also threatens to uphold. For while Gevisser's games of Dispatcher are driven by a desire to transgress the delimitations imposed by his identity, these transgressions do not unravel altogether the general fabric of the elusive city. Even as it is disruptive and troubling, his melancholy map is not necessarily a reconstitutive one. In the those gaps in the urban stitching to which he is drawn, like the one separating his family home on page seventy-five of the *Holmden's* from Alexandra Township on page seventy-seven, Gevisser may well be able to chart the otherwise undocumented and intangible exchanges that also pattern the city from below. He may also be able to claim, following his recovery from the violent assault he and two close friends endured just as he was completing the manuscript to *Lost and Found*, to have charted the 'fantasy' that once worked to separate such spaces under apartheid: 'I had made one page of the map. I was home' (Gevisser 2014: 307). But it also seems that whatever the coherence that Gevisser asserts over his own internal geography at the memoir's end, his individuated map remains partial and broadly speculative before the collective topography of the city.

This partiality is no more the case than in the mapping of the sexual, particularly when it come to those seams in the urban fabric that once accommodated not just Gevisser's own homosexual desires but those of the queer city more generally. For instance, in places like the 'boy's room' that annexed many suburban white houses, the non-European dining room at Park Station, and the single-sex hostels reserved for black miners, the writer locates a strategic assimilation of apartheid-era regulations by the city's gay community. For residents of Soweto like Phil and Edgar, two gay black friends who Gevisser has known since interviewing them in 1998, these spaces reportedly provided makeshift 'rooms' for the type of intimacies that were otherwise securely available to the writer himself, as he readily admits, in middle-class suburbia (Gevisser 2014: 187). Like contemporary Hillbrow, the queer spaces of the city subsisted under apartheid by internalising Johannesburg's more general inscrutability. But in Phil and Edgar, Gevisser also admits to the way in which this inscrutability has endured—that is, to the way in which these men have had to uphold, even through the early decades of democracy, the elusive facts of their own homosexual history. Of course, it is only by way of the type of dispatcher's eye deployed by Gevisser that subjects like Phil and Edgar are made even 'queerly visible'—that is, to follow Andrew Tucker (2009: 186), figured as abrasive to, and troubling of, the sexual divisions upheld spatially within the city. But whatever the writer's ability to dwell upon the history of these locations otherwise erased from urban imagination, their melancholy mapping in *Lost and Found* does liberate

them altogether from the city's tendency toward oblivion, at least not in the same precise way that it does for Gevisser himself.

Doubtless, there is more to suggest about the continuities between such queerly visible spaces and the writer's melancholy map of Johannesburg, especially given the importance Ann Cvetkovich (2003), for one, attaches to melancholy and loss for queer politics more generally. I merely gesture toward their connection here, however, in an effort to clarify the compromise between the seen and the unseen, or the lost and the found, from which any such a map of Johannesburg must, it seems, begin. As I have sought to argue in this article, what *Lost and Found* provides for in its melancholy mapping the city is not some recuperative account of the past, however important this task remains. Rather, it helps capture those historical absences and locations of loss that, by virtue of their very elision, have come define the imagination of the city more generally. Without undoing the city's rhetorical blankness, then, *Lost and Found* recognises the ways in which these forgotten and forgetful spaces threaten otherwise to overwhelm the city and its future possibility. Indeed, Gevisser concludes his memoir, in part, by affirming the 'terra incognita […] still there' at the root of the city's self-image. 'It is always there,' he contends, ruefully and, it seems, despite his own concluding sense of cartographic coherence (Gevisser 2014: 207). In this, he confesses, ultimately, to Johannesburg's general intransigence, to its inability to redeem and overcome the many divisions of its past. But this is also the intransigence around which Gevisser's melancholy also collects. For it is only from dwelling upon and within all that has been irredeemably lost that such a melancholy map of the city makes possible its unyielding claim against injustice in the present.

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Endnotes

[i] I use the term apophatic not in its theological sense but rather as a method of interpretation that attempts to figure the city as the site of its own 'unsaying', to follow the term's literal translation.

[ii] There is some confusion as to the subtitle of Pamuk's autobiography. It reads alternately 'Memories and the City' and 'Memories of a City' in the 2006 paperback edition. Faber and Faber list it as the latter, which I follow for consistency. That said, according to Hande Gurses (2011: 87), the former is a more appropriate translation of the original Turkish original.

[iii] Number Four was the wing reserved for black male inmates. The Old Fort housed white male prisoners, while the Women's Goal was segregated across racial lines.