

## – MOVEMENT 4. BREATH SIGH TEMPEST: On the Temporal Dimensions of Re-arrangements

THE RE-ARRANGEMENTS COLLECTIVE

### **Abstract**

*The fourth movement explores the temporal relationship between arrangements and re-arrangements, addressing the question of how an obdurate and 'sticky' temporal order may give way to palpable re-arrangement of the ways in which subjects experience time. Eschewing a concern with linear homogenous time, it addresses the processes of re-arrangement by understanding the dynamics of grave events, hauntings of the past, subtly changing rhythms of everyday life, and the force of potential futures in synchrony.*

### **Beginnings: Minneapolis and Atlanta 2020**

In the summer of 2020 and amidst a global pandemic, a wave of protests swept the USA in response to the police murder of George Floyd. The massive outpouring of crowds condemning police violence inevitably spread to Atlanta—the city of Martin Luther King Jr., the 'Black Mecca', styled (perhaps presumptuously) the 'city too busy to hate'. The crowd of protestors claiming their streets may not exactly have had hate in their hearts. There was nevertheless anguish, righteous anger and resentment. More deaths ensued, more destruction, with one site being burned to the ground by angry protestors.

The fire this time was distributed across a crowd unprecedented in its diversity, tenacity and size (McAdam, 2020). Saturated in the affect of solidarity, it appeared—being in that crowd, as one of us (Adeem) was—that the murder of George Floyd had propelled the world into a new temporality. In this new present, no longer would instances of racialized state violence go unnoticed, unanswered and unmourned. The fire spread. It unleashed sympathetic flames that burned to revivify movements with diverse but interrelated foci. Atlantans rose up, demanding that the tattered social safety net be patched and the ritual cultivation of violent anti-blackness redressed.

Indeed, the death of George Floyd precipitated a thousand such movements the world over. The agonizing strangulation of a man's life-breath unleashed a storm of subaltern sighs globally. These sighs threatened to become a force of nature, a global tempest. What appeared as a moment in which the normalization of racial violence was supremely expressive of its murderous impunity paradoxically inaugurated a widespread rejection of that deadly prerogative. This time, the death of a black man, caught on tape and circulated globally, became an n-dimensional mirror in which folks in different situations of subjection around the world saw the reflections of their own trials and tribulations.

Anthropologist Katherine Verdery has studied cases from post-socialist Eastern Europe, demonstrating how, under certain conditions, the materiality of the body of the murdered removes societal bars on re-casting the past. They render possible hitherto unimaginable futures (Verdery, 1999). Giorgio Agamben's (1998) *homo sacer* may be killed to maintain existing and embattled social relations, but this time, the case appears to be different. Some killings may unleash the genesis of new cosmologies, re-arranging rusty relations between objects (Nugent and Suhail, 2021). The murder of George Floyd would function as what Susan Leigh Star has called a 'boundary object', bringing into

play the paradoxical ‘success’ of design that achieves a systematized failure to preserve the life and dignity of some (Star, 2010).

If arbitrary killing expresses the dynamics of contemporary arrangements (Mbembe, 2019), then some killings hold the potential to precipitate *re-arrangements* at scale. How to tell them apart? One way to measure the opening of a re-arrangement, we argue here, is to triangulate—from multiple *spatial* locations—a palpable change in people’s experience of time. The momentousness of the summer of 2020 leads us to ask how to conceive of the temporal dimensions of arrangements and re-arrangements. It remains to be seen whether George Floyd’s murder and the tremor it sent around the world is genuinely a temporal re-arrangement of our collective sense of time. Is it an obdurate and enduring event or a fleeting tremor that may yet recapitulate the past?

The question is fair, though some signs and tendencies are hard to ignore. The pull of a potential future whose aperture was once again revealed by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the summer of 2020 is palpable: from the violence of occupation in Palestine in 1948 to a reckoning with the legacies of colonial pasts in putative procedural democracies in Europe, and extending to postcolonial anxieties in troubled South Africa and Pakistan. The state of the situation is still roiling. Many specters stalk it. The sigh of a multitude may yet sustain a tempest, for the time is *nigh for a re-arrangement of all that has hitherto passed for order*.

This essay attends to that possibility. Our interrogations extend the fungibility of the ‘hold’ (see Movement 1 of this intervention) as a matter of time, to posit a temporal relationship between arrangements and re-arrangements. We do so by examining how certain events have caused a palpable difference in people’s experience of time in the past. We focus on racialized violence and the openings afforded by the multi-local struggles to address it. Specifically, we interrogate the temporal re-arrangements triggered by the killings of two figures that echo across time and space: Patrice Lumumba of Congo in 1961 and George Floyd in the USA in 2020. We quilt the temporal shifts across these past 60 years in spatially disparate locations brought into the fold of re-arrangement: Lubumbashi, Cape Town, Brussels, Karachi, Birmingham UK, Minneapolis and Atlanta.

We refer to these *temporal* locations as modalities of the ‘hold’. In Movement 1, we surmised that an arrangement is a particular kind of ‘hold’ that both mimics and alters more familiar institutional forms: arrangements take a *hold of* subjectivities that structurally resist ‘radical’ re-arrangements. Yet this still leaves the question of how we should view temporalities that arise from this self-same arrangement, with its ability to immobilize and eviscerate subjects, which might nevertheless end up engendering a cruel though portentous birth.

In addressing this question, we consider holds as temporal zones that emphatically punctuate the unfolding of historical processes within the intensity and gravity of an ‘event’ (Badiou, 2007). The event as we conceive it is the transformative, re-arranging modality of the temporal hold. It is not contained within the hold, but born of it, a broader horizon unleashed in and from the location of the hold. From this follows the *timelessness* and obduracy of an event’s aftermath, a potential future that haunts synchrony, intuited and anticipated by a ‘timely subject’. As we suggested in the first movement, temporality entails the rhythmic intersections of those arrangements that ‘stick’ and those that do not. Temporality is the domain of endurance and imposition, where injury and emancipation can be inextricably entangled in synchronic experience. Even when situations are deferred or approach their end, their ‘aftermaths’ exert force in synchrony. Some rhythms hum away in the background—waiting for sensitive ears to catch the tune beyond the loud thumping woofs pre-arranged to drown them out.

Re-arrangements as a ‘matter of time’ hover between the perceptible duration of stability and ephemerality. For *our* subject, this entails a range of responses that may become tactical moves born of necessity or strategies of endurance. Arrangements, as we

have noted, may ‘hold’ as well as ‘hold up’ their subjects. Some may play with temporal arrangements having a sense of time, while at the same time they are themselves played with imprecise rhythms, transitioning between what wants to continue being and a new time that insists on becoming.

The problem presents itself thus: arrangements sometimes become visible only as they shift over time when their stagecraft becomes apparent. Usually, this ‘apparition’ becomes palpable exactly when the dynamic of attempting to recapitulate the status quo is at loggerheads with the retroactive forces of potential futures. Therefore, it is impossible to ascertain ‘at the moment’ in any positive way (as opposed to reflection or reflectiveness) where one may locate a ‘re-arrangement’. Arrangements are constantly morphing, tending either toward a full re-arrangement or the recapitulation of time (the-past-in-the-present). Our solution is this: identifying re-arrangements depends on how the subjects who witness these temporal apparitions experience time. We draw on how such subjects recognize and signify their emplacement in arrangements. Alain Badiou’s meditations inform our conception of time, being, and event (Badiou, 2007). As such, the movement from arrangement to re-arrangement hinges on the temporality of the Badiouian event. We translate this esoteric schema into a modular social-scientific frame that allows us to grapple with the gravitational pull each of us is experiencing in the ‘hold’ of this moment.

In our consideration of temporality, we have broken the transition from arrangement to re-arrangement into four acts: *change*, *event*, *aftermath* and *rhythms*. Across these four acts, temporality becomes the domain where the convergence and divergence of what happens to and with ‘agency’—vis-à-vis the subject—tends toward resolution. We have devised these acts in conversation with a storied, multidisciplinary epistemology that contends with the question of temporality. The influence of thinkers such as Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze and Walter Benjamin should be evident. Learning from those who have gone before us, we understand time as neither linear nor an empty container of human things; we understand it as a parameter of play. At certain scales of encounter, time becomes discrete and granular; at others, it functions as a variable of measurement while being both a condition and a by-product.

If arrangements and re-arrangements ‘are a process of living *through and with* conditions that simultaneously prolong and alter a polyrhythmic response system’ (Movement 1: xx, 2023, this issue), then the protocols of living may stick or fall apart at any time. The shift in these protocols is precipitated by the gravitational pull of events, where a potential future is realized by ‘sensible subjects’ attuned to the shifts of time, shepherding re-arrangements. The struggles of the racialized other and the dividends afforded by ‘black death’ in the age of racial capitalism and empire have long been systematically ‘invisibilized’ (Trouillot, 1995). At the same time, however, they have affected our collective experience of time—arguably ever since Toussaint L’Ouverture humiliated colonial France. We here mark how spatially disparate locations between 1961 and 2020 are brought into synchrony by the gravity and weight of the deaths of two black men.

### **Change: Brussels 2021**

Arrangements are a collection of rhythms, as various objects-in-arrangement execute a number of sub-routines. However, some of these sub-routines also hold the potential for re-arrangement. As noted in the introduction (Movement 1), somewhere in the interstices of their putative *prima facie* arrangement, objects are representationally overdetermined in their structured form. This is especially true when they are considered *in synchronic time*: while the future may hold the potential for radical difference, at the point where it is *not* (yet) the thing itself, synchronic representations may offer no discernible trace of this potential future.

The Belgian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, or Commission Congo) was promulgated in Brussels in 2020 after the summer of Black Lives Matter protests, teetering on the precipice of change in both these registers. The Commission hinged on a reckoning with Belgium's sordid colonial past in the Congo and accelerated toward a different, hitherto 'impossible' future. However, the *form* the Commission acquired was always weighted against a re-arrangement, as powerful elements sought to recapitulate the *status quo ante mortem*. Indeed, Belgium's colonial history is baked into the country's landscape, socio-cultural institutions, and what is politically permissible today. The tentacular reach of history informs a continuity between colonial 'pasts' and the ongoing extraction and exploitation of resources, bodies and cultures in Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Traces of violence and violations are extant in street names extolling colonial legacies and resound in the copper of statues and the gold of their moldings, informing the physical and cognitive architecture its residents inhabit. The temporality of this arrangement is that of the 'longue durée'. Yet, like other arrangements, it also *holds* (see Movement 1) other provisional, transitory, obdurate and evolving rhythms, which make it subject to shifts, breakages and punctuations.

Commission Congo constitutes such a punctuation. The Commission was instigated in the summer of 2020 (thus marking the anniversary of the DRC's independence) in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, the ripples of which reached Brussels in the form of a ten-thousand-strong BLM demonstration. The Belgian parliament responded by hastily setting up the preliminary phases of the Commission. If the conjuncture of a global event had accelerated time and amplified an atmosphere of discontent, the staging of a truth commission sought to congeal that movement in time.

The particularity of Belgium's political landscape is that, being a trilingual country (with Dutch-, French- and German-speaking communities), decision-making power is distributed at three scales: the federal, regional and (linguistic) community level. Any attempts to govern must take stock of these divides and perform a perpetual balancing act of logistical and ideological compromise. The current government and parliament reflect this: after the political crisis of 2019–2020, which saw Belgium operate for a year without a government at its helm, compromise took the shape of a pluri-vocal 'Vivaldi' coalition of seven ruling parties, which together cover most of the country's socio-political spectrum. The decision to set up a TRC was a concession reached by those political parties that understood the popular demand for a response—any response—to the current moment, but which couldn't agree on a standard definition of words for framing the exercise. As a result, the Commission's form—its procedural, institutional and public dimensions—suggests that it was conceived as a public spectacle to be a demonstration of both repentance and atonement, that would forestall any fundamental reworking of Belgium's relationship to coloniality and its afterlives.

The everyday rhythms of instigating a TRC to examine the country's colonial past are tentative. The Commission may even be stalling by design. More than two years since its launch, Belgians are still waiting for the publication of the preliminary report, which will map out the Commission's full remit. Public hearings, debates and meetings can only take place beyond the virtual realms of the pandemic once the report is published. But the task of writing it fell to an incompatible group of 'experts': academics and legal professionals selected by each of the seven governing parties to reflect their political interests. In the struggle to find consensus or a standard definition of where and when the colonial past might be located, the panel has already demanded several extensions to its deadline, resulting in almost two years of delay. This need for consensus is both the condition for the TRC's existence and the reason for its (near) infeasibility.

In both this and its concern with ‘truth’ and ‘reconciliation’, the Commission directly invokes others before it, especially the South African case. It also summons previous attempts at transnational restorative justice, such as the commission of inquiry into the assassination of the DRC’s first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, set up in 2000. That attempt signally failed to assign accountability for the Congolese politician’s murder, and its failure haunts subsequent attempts at ‘reconciliation’ with Belgium’s bloody footprint in the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda.

The Commission engages with these haunting arrangements of colonialism even as multitudes call for the ‘decolonization’ of minds and institutions. Whereas the temporality of coloniality endures, that of the Commission is the interval of a chrysalis: it is pregnant with a potential transformation. While many liken it to the failed Lumumba Commission, which amounted to a bureaucratic re-shuffling of the status quo, others hope that it could bring a re-arrangement to bear after all. The Commission thus continues to oscillate on the cusp of change, at times pulled toward the entrenchment of existing conditions and at others signaling a future conceived in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter summer.

Today, many hold their finger to the wind, hoping to sense how the scales will tip. For those keyed into the Commission and its potential, the moment holds a dull tension: it is filled with caution, aspiration and anticipatory disillusionment. This wait is not passive, and it entails a willful invitation to something otherwise, a call to potential futures to come and populate the now. It requires a work of anticipation that orients the present toward (historically) unlikely temporal pathways, where a specific *reconciliation has already taken place*, and truth has been realized. Commission Congo, then, holds within its temporal fold history’s aborted re-arrangements, shifting orders and aspirations for new arrangements. Even in the warped space of the Commission, a just future may still prevail and participate in the tussle for its becoming.

Many in Brussels at this temporal threshold hope for a shift, for the Commission to herald a spectacular ‘decolonial’ re-arrangement, but are nonetheless mindful that others, armed with bureaucratic know-how and legalistic formulae, labor to maintain the status quo. They understand that, caught in this tug-of-war, the Commission itself may be fizzling out. This could reverberate throughout Europe, inciting other nations to reckon with the makings of their empires. It could give birth to a new transnational arrangement and recalibrate relationships between Europe and Central Africa. It may even address the systemic racism that structures the lives of Afro-descendants in Belgium. Or it could disappear in the flow of a news feed, a stream of information that tweets it away. It might appease some yet vex and fail many.

### **Event: Karachi 1961**

What is an event? Let us begin with what it is not: the coup d’état in Pakistan that brought Field Marshal Ayub Khan to power in 1958. Military coups are endemic to the postcolonial rentier state, and military dictatorships metastasized from dynamic developments across endogenous and exogenous scales in nascent postcolonial arrangements worldwide. Their etiology lay in the continuation by another name of the relations of production of the age of empire.

For Pakistan (plagued by several such coups), at one scale these movements reveal themselves in the interplay between colony and metropole, labor and globalizing capital, and cold-war dynamics. At the other, a putatively young polity confronts its anxieties about state formation, postcolonial nation-building, and how to synthesize and articulate a range of diverse social arrangements that were sedimented over millennia before being violently disrupted by the European colonial powers and their bastard child, the postcolonial nation-state. The temporality of such early postcolonial states was driven by contradictory impulses: one toward gathering, collecting and classifying; the other toward rending, bleeding and disordering.

At the same time, these anxieties were also played upon by the liminal figures of the rising educated nationalist elite: doctors and engineers—men, for the most part, onto whose very beings were projected the contradictions attending the arrangement. These timely subjects could harness the moment and guard its rhythms against complete entropy. They could do so by being figures out of time, a ‘class apart’, and model citizens in whom the ‘state’ could invest. Thus, this first martial junta had a curiously ambivalent attitude toward students in the nascent nation-state of Pakistan.

Emblematically embodying these contradictions were the cohorts of communist medical students attending the prestigious DAO Medical College in Karachi, Pakistan’s (then) capital city. On the one hand, the authoritarian regime saw in this cohort the future of the nation they were trying to forge by force; on the other hand, they were concerned about the sensibilities and troubling proclivities of these students toward progressive internationalism. The military state tried to discipline the miscreants by tethering them to the idea of the nation under the sign of the state (Lutfi, 2008), but it was the students’ imperative to have their practice informed by a commitment that did not recognize these boundaries. The former was interested in reproducing the extant temporal arrangements and the violence and depredation it incited; the latter anticipated the promulgation of an impossible future exerting its force in their present. The event that propelled the timely rendering of the impossible into the possible and the re-arrangement of time itself came from another place: Congo.

The event itself: the day dawned in red hues of blood as Patrice Lumumba, the charismatic prime minister of Congo, was apprehended and then assassinated by imperialist agents. Historian Pedro Monaville (2019) has argued that the birth of the ‘global Sixties’—much revered and maligned as the last age of revolution—was inaugurated by the blood of Patrice Lumumba in February 1961.<sup>1</sup> His murder sent a shiver of upheaval around the world, kindling the flames of anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian movements. It electrified the civil rights activists in the United States—heard emblematically in clashes along the streets of Harlem and in front of the headquarters of the United Nations. It energized internationalist revolutionary movements in Latin America, black intellectuals in the Caribbean and Great Britain, and empowered youth movements across all continents (Jewsiewicki, 1999; Ali, 2015; Monaville, 2019).

Young doctors and medical students at the DAO Medical College, who had recently formed a chapter of the progressive National Student’s Federation (NSF), were shocked and outraged. They immediately called on students and workers to launch protest marches and gather in public meetings to voice their anger at the Pakistani junta’s continued reliance on the United States and European colonial powers. The call began in Karachi and was echoed in Dhaka, Lahore, Sylhet and Peshawar. In the east of the country, a prominent English-language newspaper aligned with the regime criticized the students for caring more about the fate of a mere ‘African’ than order in the city.

The British-Pakistani political activist Tariq Ali, who took part in the protests, recalls students being further enraged by the open racism and cronyism of the media. Hundreds and thousands of young people carried banners that read ‘Long live Lumumba!’, ‘Death to UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld!’, and ‘Down with imperialism!’ and chanted anti-imperialist slogans. Interviewed later, Ali recalls how most students who marched that day did not know who Lumumba was, where Congo was located on the map, or the extent of Belgian brutality (Ali, 2018). And yet the word Lumumba resonated like a talismanic mantra, a word of power.

1 Although the assassination of Patrice Lumumba was carried out on 17 January 1961, his death was not made public until 13 February. See <https://face2faceafrica.com/article/the-chilling-details-of-patrice-lumumbas-assassination-and-how-he-was-dissolved-in-acid>.

Student agitations in Karachi in 1961 were among the first public demonstrations in total defiance of the draconian martial law regime of Ayub Khan, and at the height of his power too. As masses of 'mischievous miscreants' poured through the streets of the capital chanting 'Long live Lumumba!', the police were taken entirely by surprise because they did not understand what Lumumba meant, nor that students would be prepared to defy martial law for this. Crowds in the city of Lahore congregated around the US Consulate and chanted against both empire and capital. The protest reached a frenzy as the police stood by, bewildered, and the importance of the moment heightened. The mood of a decade was setting in, though no one knew it yet, but perhaps it could already be intuited. By the time the crowd dispersed, the land had taken on a new hue.

The crowd had declared itself. Lumumba's last breath had breathed a tempest that would envelop the crowds of urban Pakistan, who were shouting for an end to the military dictatorship. Now the police understood the meaning of Lumumba. This upheaval was the first spark in a struggle for democracy that over the next decade would be led by some of those young people in the crowds that came out for Lumumba. That struggle would not only bring about the ignominious end of the dictatorship in 1971, but also the promulgation of Pakistan's first constitution in 1973, and the energies unleashed would augment the struggle for the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 as well.

The event, as we conceive it, remains out of bounds to historicism, which—tacitly adhering to the specter of liberalism's telos-driven linearity—remains agnostic to the retroactive forces contained within the synchronic unfolding of an impossible future. Historicism effaces any externality that does not fall within the ambit of temporal arrangements, and it posits the certainty of its rationality. As such, it cannot provide a durable theory of change nor move beyond describing inherent relationality (see Suhail, 2022). In short, historicism represses futures, and its logic is internal to the dynamics of the arrangement that recapitulates itself as universal and inevitable. Nevertheless, as Lumumba shows, the force of an event can neither be pegged to nor exhausted by the inherent relationships of its spatial location. The event belongs to the order of the real rather than the circumscribed space of the symbolic (Copjec, 1994). Thus, arrangements can be seen as a particular orientation of objects in the symbolic order, determined to occlude the conditions and libidinal investments by which they came to be so arranged.

The sensible subject is sly to the con. For us, the sensible subject of history moves toward a re-arrangement of political power by realizing itself as a collectivity: the crowd. The crowd here is posited as both agent and signification of a temporal re-arrangement. Rather than a *realpolitik* articulation of grievance—to which the crowd 'belongs'—in the metonymic naming of Lumumba the crowd declared itself, painting emancipatory horizons outside of the linear and homogenous time of the nation-state (Benjamin, 1968).

The meaning of Lumumba's death was not fixed for all time in February 1961. Certainly not by Brussels, nor by its local agents that conspired to recapitulate the arrangement governing colonial relations of domination and extraction. In effect, Lumumba's killing became a powerful signifying event for anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles. His death was the event that shifted the temporality of postcolonial modernity, and it haunts the present still. The dissolution of the murdered Lumumba's earthly remains by empire prevented the localization of the killing to a grave, reducing the terrible act to the immediacy of its context. The event became owned by Southern struggles worldwide, precipitating re-arrangements, grafting hitherto dormant connections, and enabling agentic functions in diverse polities, communities and times.

### Aftermath: Cape Town 1961–2021

In 1961 South Africa left the Commonwealth. As Lumumba's body is dissolved in acid by the comprador junta in DRC, Verwoerd and the architects of apartheid are popping champagne. They are celebrating, having laid the groundwork for an exemplary arrangement of racial injustice whose form continues to echo from Ferguson to Palestine. A linear timeline connects this arrangement in the 1950s through a series of Acts. Perhaps the notion of temporal 'movement' is illusory here, as each of these 'acts' functions as the notarized punctuation of apartheid and settler colonialism. We can hear the rubber stamps hitting the page, see the smug satisfaction at each whump of bureaucratic certitude, and imagine the violent classification and calcification of life put in place through absurd, baleful and banal policies.

Lumumba's ghost arrived and was already present, haunting the clinks of champagne glasses through the weight of potentialities he inaugurated through his death. Inspired in part by Lumumba and fueled by the rage of his murder, amongst many others, the 1960s saw the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement and the shaping of anti-apartheid politics worldwide. Yet it will take another thirty years before Nelson Mandela is freed and legislative democracy becomes a reality. The struggle opened up by African nationalism and the tradition of a strong, confident and terrifying struggle for self-determination and sovereignty in sub-Saharan Africa as solidified within the figure of Lumumba reached a stage of completion when the temporality of apartheid was finally overturned in the 1990s. In 1995, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established, which would be echoed in 2020 in Brussels with explicit reference to Lumumba's Congo after the killing of George Floyd.

In 2012, South Africa was rocked to its core when the South African Police Service (SAPS) opened fire on protesting miners demanding a living wage. Thirty-four miners were killed, 78 injured, and hundreds more arrested: what became known as the Marikana Massacre laid bare the failure of the TRC meta-narrative of reconciliation and repair. Three years later, in 2015—after 21 years of the inadequate dismantling of inequalities—students across the country (many of whom had started convening in response to the Marikana Massacre) retaliated, and #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) was born, with the ghosts of Lumumba and Biko standing nearby. #RMF expressed itself through multiple forms of occupation, physically taking over universities and replacing lecture halls with critical forums, reading groups and spaces of resistance, solidarity, sanctuary and dissent. Students read and debated voraciously. They called for the decolonization of education, equitable labor practices, and free and accessible education. They demanded reckonings, re-arrangements and the repairs promised by liberation, the TRC and the failed attempts at a democratic transition.

A critical act by #RMF involved the toppling of the statue of infamous colonist Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town by protesting students, which catalyzed discussions about monuments worldwide. During Black Lives Matter protests around the globe, particularly in the European metropole, the monumentalization of history in violence and the people who perpetrated brutality were placed center stage. In the event, Rhodes took a dive, and a makeover in many parts of the British colonial world ensued. The echo of South African students was infused worldwide in the aftermath of George Floyd's death.

Where the formal processes of 'reconciliation' may have failed, other forms of truth and retaliation have emerged, some more reconciliatory than others. In 2021, 18 months into the COVID-19 pandemic, former freedom fighter turned state official and ex-President Jacob Zuma was jailed for contempt of court and obstructing an investigation into corruption under his watch. Soon, both Durban and Johannesburg were brought to their knees. For three days, chaos reigned. Initiated by strategic, politically motivated attacks in different parts of the two cities by forces calling for Zuma's release, the moment was overwhelmed by unanticipated energies brought into



play by *force majeure*. The putative inchoateness and, at the same time, the intense magnitude of the popular response erupted and exceeded the limits of the political stratagem. Thousands of people emerged onto the streets, looting shops and destroying ‘private’ property. Their targets were not reducible to a calculated putsch against racial capital, and they targeted not only large malls but also small family-owned businesses and spazas.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, as neighborhood militias took to the streets—armed to the teeth with guns and centuries of racism and rage—over 200 people were killed, some in racially motivated hate acts and others just because they got in the way, even as ‘state’ officials got out of the way. Here we see how the ‘half-baked’, hesitant and provisional arrangements that attempt to modulate interactions in Phoenix, KwaMashu and other proximate townships both endure and dissipate as they are ‘pulled’ back and into political subjectivities that are both more abstract at the level of ethnicity and individuated at the level of personal grievance.

The social contract guaranteed by the post-apartheid state palpably ruptured and revealed itself to have perhaps been false right from the start. All the pieces are picked up after the clean-up, making sense of how the lures, anticipations and aspirations of the past, present and future manifest simultaneously and incongruously. The punctuations often render arrangements visible, producing the necessary conditions for a re-arrangement. For the trace of the initial *jouissance* that became enveloped in the mayhem and articulated as riots is a kind of surplus internal to the event that is not completely explained by the negation of inequity and the violence of the existing arrangement; it is also the ecstasy of a future that made itself felt *at the moment*.

A few days later, a radio broadcast announced that Jacob Zuma had been taken ill and transferred from his jail cell to hospital. He was not feeling very well. Here we see the gravity of the arrangement, the pull of the status quo calling its pieces back into place—a magnet, like non-Newtonian fluid, always trying to find its way back. Even if the form has changed slightly, the substance feels almost intact. However, perhaps we expect too much of an incident that has made it into calendars and Wikipedia entries; it is not where we will see the kinds of ongoing and incremental re-arrangements that would amount to re-ordering, un-doing, or becoming otherwise (Sitas, 2020).

Events may already be in play: simmering rancor needs amplification. Everywhere, artists and activists create (often intimate) encounters, projecting at different volumes and velocities but perhaps having greater impact on people and places than those who make more noise. Many socially and historically responsive artists are grappling with different values, orientations and priorities, working to shift the blind spots and blockages that make the status quo untenable. The ubiquity of colonial and apartheid spatialities and socialities, inter-generational traumas, emergencies, and multi-vocal aspirations for city-ness and subjectivity are inextricably linked to land, labor and urban collectivities.

In 2021, an arrangement at the intersection of history, heritage, people, policies and places became a spectacle in an ongoing skirmish around the re-development of floodplain land (currently a golf club), where the future anchor tenant is the transnational company Amazon. Some are compelled by the lure of the smart connected city. Others are less convinced, with different municipal departments holding wildly different perspectives. Civil society holds different positions but is coalescing in an attempt to re-arrange. The Khoi activists are driven by a call to respect and redress the past—as the site has already been declared a heritage site—in one of the first acts of anti-colonial resistance (the Battle of Gorinhaiqua). Housing activists see well-located

2 ‘Spazas’, or ‘tuck shops’, are informal convenience stores and businesses.

land as essential for building houses, not businesses. Being at the confluence of two urban rivers, ecologists are concerned about bio-diversities, losing a 'green lung', and interfering with the floodplain. Some residents are concerned about the traffic the development will bring. Others are quick to support claims for social and spatial justice. In an unusual match, alliances are active and in action. The scuffle is now on the street and in court; it is also elsewhere and 'elsewhen'.

At a recent event, several artists (some of whom had been student activists in the #RMF movement) led the protest through performance, poetry and prayer—summoning ancestors from the past and modeling aspirations of being an ancestor for the future. These activities are simultaneously affective, sensory, political and mundanely pragmatic; they comprise protests, court cases and artistic events. The scars of the apartheid-era Acts are still present in places and on people and their traces can still be found in government policies. Because of the stubbornness of the manufactured divides, the pull of the arrangement is strong in this temporal threshold: the subject experiences the gravity and pull of arrangements that want to stick and endure, but at the same time, s/he feels the contradictory pull of 'the aftermath', of a potential future where a specific re-arrangement has taken place.

Temporalities sit and simmer alongside each other, intertwined and entangled. While the job of the City (capital c) is to order time and put things in place (in both space and time), the city (with a small c) resists, reacts, and in many cases simply goes along for the ride. Fixing histories and heritages in mutable pasts and projecting aspirations and anticipations into the future with a retroactive pull to the present can run the risk of reinforcing the temporal linearities we do not see in the rhizomatic tendrils where time and thresholds interact. These happenings in Cape Town show how an event is both a moment in time and a movement between times, and how the will to re-arrange is both protracted and punctuated. The often-violent event reveals the arrangement, while the long pull to re-arrangement may be suddenly energized by a potential future made visible in the eventfulness and aftermath of an event. The incremental moves toward re-arranging may not happen in formal political forums but rather in artistic, tactical and tactile entanglements at the subjective scale.

### Rhythms: Birmingham 2020

True to a tradition of protest and urban utterance associated with the marginalized (Back *et al.*, 1999), in 2020 a celebrated minority ethnic graffiti artist sprayed solidarity with the BLM movement onto the wall of a local thoroughfare in a bohemian district of the UK's second city. In keeping with his respectful approach to public tagging, the artist, known for blending New York subway graffiti with various global vernaculars, gained prior consent from the building's owner to deface it in what was received city-wide as an act of synchrony with #BlackWashing going on elsewhere. The next day, word began to circulate that the authorities had removed the artwork.

The erasure of a political mural renders it invisible. In so doing, the local state preserves its power to determine *what matters*. This tussle between the authorities and citizens has been a constant in UK race relations, where aftermaths have been marked by palpable anxiety and less anxious alterity, expressed in deepened arrangements of the biopolitical control of everyday life (Gilroy, 2013). These arrangements mitigate against the way space becomes an arena where different lives can touch upon each other, witness and react to each other's everyday performances. This is done in favor of unilateral presumptions of how people should perform, how they should interact with one another.

Erasure is a strategy that also works when it acts upon what is static and representable; it can capture and remove these. A feature of collaborative art projects

is that they are located ‘on a continuum’ with other forms of social, cultural and political activism (Kester, 2011: 37). Thus, the BLM movement and this event revealed that the issue is not just ‘still’ around, but that it can produce a circuit of reactions, evident in contestations around the aesthetic legitimacy of the mural. However, the tension between aesthetic incursion and its erasure also creates a productive site for re-arranging race relations in the city. An enabling factor is the haptic nature of the artwork, which brings the viewer and object closer together (Marks, 2015: 256) so that an underlying story may become apparent. This instance also prompted people to pay closer attention to the local politics of representation.

The conventions that frame race relations in Birmingham follow a logic of coloniality that entertains claims-making based on cultural distinction, leading to the politicization of identity. They reify arrangements that rely on impositions, which are obdurate and face quotidian challenges to their endurance. The tussle at this threshold is undergirded by aspirations for equality, justice and opportunity, while also propelled by a fear of stasis. Because for so long, the promise of freedom of speech has been predicated on tolerance toward minorities. Yet the current moment, which is one of revanchist nationalism, carries several shards of activity that seek to counteract the politics of representation. Space is made for two new ‘black’ employees to become directors of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG), an institution with assets that have never been in the hands of radical others.

Hence, while the streetscape presents a site of contestation, institutions such as BMAG enable *play* (Rancière, 2003) through different sensibilities such as engagement. Space and time are re-arranged through new connections between people and art, brokered through the language of ‘social justice’ as the framing discourse. These new contours aim to sidestep the usual vindication of black urban territory when embodied and represented as aesthetic expression (Keith, 2005), moving instead toward valorizing the ways such territories continuously seek to generate their temporalities, as rhythms of endurance, defiance and improvisation (Simone, 2018).

This collaborative art *moment* becomes an ‘aesthetic re-education’ (Kester, 2011: 59) or a re-arrangement of the aesthetic economy of collaborative or activist art. It is not about the autonomy of the artist or valorizing BLM as the new antagonistic moment—both of which matter of course. Sidestepping this, the tussle with the authorities is folded into a broader social transformation that seeks a decoupling from the majority/minority dynamic found in the zeal for decolonization that has accompanied BLM. This aspirational moment seeks a re-arrangement of lived differences for *all* of the city—imagined in concert with institutions such as BMAG and thus re-framing the relationship between blackness and territoriality.

The forces propelling a re-arrangement of difference seek to position it differently this time: through a provisional, risky arrangement of complicity with the structures of power and transgressions into spaces of ‘white’ liberal sensibility. Long-standing residents of the city who transformed their areas through carefully curated civic action that simultaneously celebrates their communities while seeking to ‘move them on’ stepped up to seek a place at the table of the committee that organized the Commonwealth Games hosted in Birmingham in 2022. Theirs was a newfound optimism, tinged with the opportunism that somehow we might short-circuit the coloniality wired into the spectacle of the Games. Moments like this become anticipated for their potential to inspire a racial re-reckoning, whose antecedents are the racialized, their histories, and the black territories they have made, and which formed an integral part of the Games’ offer to the world.

The moment finds embodiment as a new *surface* (Simone, 2011) of exposure that propels the case for difference with a renewed temporal urge and contingency. It joins together the numerous shards of aspiration and activity scattered around the city,

although in its universal designation it is usually associated with the inner-city as a specific site of alterity. Linking across constituencies of difference—or surfaces—such as neighborhoods, streets and galleries that represent temporal frames of blackness in their own right, it engenders configurations and articulations that—subsumed under the category of fringe or street art—help re-arrange radical black alterity into an illusionary space. The re-arrangement sheds light on the pragmatics of how figures (subalterns) and lines (trajectories from there to here) navigate space. Like abstract art, where the absence of representative form is filled by the embodied and contemplative responses of the viewer/audience, the re-arrangement brings forth calls that are already ‘in the air’.

### Conclusion

This movement brings together disparately located projects of re-arranging the world which were inaugurated, accelerated, brought into relief and revived through the temporal openings afforded by two events: the killing of Patrice Lumumba in the DRC in 1961 and of George Floyd in the USA in 2020. We name these ‘events’ insofar as they have palpably changed the experience of time for subjects across a range of locations.

We attend to the repercussions of these events through emplaced analyses based in the United States, Pakistan, Belgium, England and South Africa. Our shared sensitivity to temporal shifts as we work and dwell in these disparate locations brings them into dialogic proximity. The evidence of temporal re-arrangements offered by these locations is not exhaustive of the effects of these deaths. Other scholars have attested to similar ripples on the streets of the USA, in Parisian banlieues, or amongst the ‘unseen’ black bodies in Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines and Palestine.

However, as the places we write about achieve synchrony, particular aspects of their temporal (re)arrangements are brought to the fore. The Belgian TRC’s unimaginative form (while recalling similar commissions in South Africa) mitigates the aftershock of Lumumba’s and Floyd’s deaths by channeling them into a manageable ‘boardroom’, a move that is ‘conservative’ in that it seeks to recapitulate the present. It highlights moments where the potential for change is heightened yet already forestalled. The recent ‘Zuma protests’ in South Africa offer a glimpse of a re-arrangement that may have capitulated, taking us to the aftermath of efforts to channel change, such as South Africa’s 1995 Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No 34. It is still unclear what the global summer of Black Lives Matter in 2020 will ultimately signify, but it did change the rhythms of street life and class consciousness in Birmingham UK, kindling the *agencement* of racialized subjects.

We have visited each location at different points along a fractured linear (calendrical) timeline over a sixty-year period. This temporality is punctuated by two key events—in 1961 and 2020—that hold each location close in the intimacy of a jointly experienced shift in the experience of time. We have thus structured these unlikely proximities into the temporal modalities of change, event, aftermath and rhythm that articulate and contradict while enabling and disabling ranges of perception and action. Our essay highlights the textured nature of time in its granularity, brokenness and adherence to relativity over linearity. Indeed, we underscore the non-essentialist, non-linear nature of time and the contingent identifications, classifications and potencies available to unpack the temporal thresholds of change. Our explorations foreground the events, rhythmic changes and potential futures that, in their wrestling, shift collective experiences of time. Simply put, the temporal proximity and geographical distances we have explored signify the thresholds at which re-arrangements occur. Re-arrangements that perhaps may hold us up, and hold us together at the end of the world.

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