Premesh Lalu

The Trojan Horse and Becoming Technical of the Human

The pursuit of learning is to increase day after day
The pursuit of Tao is to decrease day after day
It is to decrease and further decrease
Until one reaches the point of taking no action
No action is undertaken,
And yet nothing is left undone.

Bruce Lee

Given all that has been done in memory of the student movement in South Africa, it is surprising not to have had an adequate account of the drives and desires that underpinned the movement of school students for a period of six months in 1985. Historians conclude that students were driven by a sense of "immediatism" expressed in what is called street sociology and pavement politics. However, history encounters its limit in the Trojan Horse Massacre in which three youths were killed in Athlone, Cape Town on 15 October 1985. In scholarly works and documentary films, not to mention memorials, poems and works of art, the Trojan Horse lends itself to ideological prescription rather than attentiveness towards what was at work in the student movement. As a result, we have an event that is returned to the realms of ideology and a memorial that reenacts a scene of violence—as if these were the only games in town to play.

The scene of the Trojan Horse, and the prehistory of that tragic occurrence, is what preoccupied Richard Rive in his novel *Emergency Continued* (1990). The intensity of that novel, currently unavailable on the curriculum of universities and schools on the Cape Flats against which it is set, has recently been brought to the attention of humanities scholars by Adam Sitze in his essay titled "Between Revolt and Study: Further notes on Emergency Continued".[1] Sitze nudges us to ask what we are to do with the idea of "school"—and schole—that seems to have been a specific site of indecision and intensification under the conditions of the permanent emergency of apartheid. In a perceptively brilliant exposition, Sitze asks us what we do with this question in an age when de-schooling is increasingly the modality of neoliberalism, in the age of the internet, distance learning and MOOCS? If *nothing was left undone* in the process of six months of protest and street fighting, might the lessons of that struggle be recapitulated to once again harness a modality of schooling that offers us a way of life, and not a means of subjection?

In what follows, I wish to place the school along the contours of technogenesis, as that which is made rather than received as a means to an end. Placed in a field of technogenesis, the school under apartheid functioned both as a prohibition on learning and an apparatus that lent itself to a memory of the future—by which I mean a tertiary memory following Bernard Stiegler; to mean something akin to the industrialization of memory. More precisely, tertiary memory advances Husserl's concept of retention and protention through a shift in the history of the exteriorization of technics.

The 20th century is the century of the industrialization, the conservation and the transmission—that is, the selection—of memory. This industrialization becomes concretized in the generalization of the production of industrial temporal objects (phonograms, films, radio and television programs, etc.), with the consequences to be drawn concerning the fact that millions, hundreds of millions of consciousnesses are every day the consciousnesses at the same time of the same temporal objects.[2]

For Stiegler, the industrialization of memory lends itself to a problem of de-individuation at one level, and the becoming technical of the human, at another.[3] Here, in the double bind of de-individuation and the becoming technical of the human, we may discover a possibility of renewing our understanding of a technology of the school that was revealed most powerfully in the student movement of 1985 in the area of Athlone, Cape Town.[4]

What we call an event today is described by a name that Athlone shares with the Greeks. In 1985, a horse and trailer belonging to the South African Railways carried death to the streets of Athlone. Militia of police and army hidden in wooden crates enacted what famously became known as the Trojan Horse Massacre. How did this event come to be named in terms of a memory of the Trojans and Greeks, and one handed down to us by a blind illiterate poet through his wonderfully long and meandering *Illiad*? What if the students, the Trojans who, faced the hail of bullets, had through no fault of their own not yet arrived at the lesson dealing with Homer's *Illiad* which describes the war that gave rise to the name of their own massacre? These questions do not belong to history alone. They also belong to art that offers us a name for the memory of the future that endures into the future.

While many attribute the upsurge of student protests in the 1980s to the economic plight awaiting youth under apartheid, there was seemingly something else that was latent in their agency. We may speak of this latency as thought, but that would be insufficient simply because it pits thought against action, in which thought is ultimately, and once again, negated. Neither was it the repressive atmosphere of corporal punishment and authoritarianism that explains the upsurge. What drove the students to action was precisely that which they acted on, namely, schooling.

In Athlone, the school had effectively become a zone of suspension. It resembled an interval, not too dissimilar to the interval associated with the language of cinematography.[5] In that space of interval that broke the venomous repetition of habit, the motion picture was a window on an ever-constricting world. The motion picture produced assemblages that exceeded the technology of subjection of apartheid. In a place where transport was a middle class luxury, the bioscope offered a ride.

But movement also produces collisions. 1976 occasioned such a collision to the extent that a major student revolt converged with the arrival of television in South Africa. Television arrived in May 1976, on the eve of the Soweto student protests. The earliest images broadcast related to the confrontations between students and police in Soweto. Gradually the cinematic interval disappeared. The programming of the televisual abolished the time interval in the visual field, only to dilate the image of space.

Long before the structures that housed the bioscope were turned into a grammar of despair and consumption housing bottle stores, banks and supermarkets in the wake of apartheid, the bioscope teemed with life. Films such as The Trojan Horse, Spartacus, Enter the Dragon, and The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, filtered the senselessness of apartheid. The Trojan Horse may have been invented by the Greeks through epic poetry, and Rome may have put down the rebellion of the slave army of Spartacus, Enter the Dragon may have uncannily affirmed subalternity, and The Good, the Bad and the Ugly may have called into question the limits of binary thinking. We cannot know for sure. What we can say is that in Athlone, the mythic, legendary and the heroic threaded through the moving image of the bioscope. Much has been said and written about the Trojan Horse Massacre and its memorialization.[6] Perhaps, not enough has been said that would release us from the trappings of the speed of the operation that changed the course of history for the students. Yet, in all the ways

the Trojan Horse is memorialized, what is unclear is the extent to which the killings resulted in a process of de-individuation—a process where the very psychic apparatus fell upon a scene of impulses disconnected from desire.

The memorial that marks the site of the Trojan Horse killings recalls something of the compunction to mark time that was lost to the compression. It has been criticized for over-emphasizing the role of the perpetrators of state violence. Today the plaques depicting the stories of the mothers of those killed, written in their own handwriting, have been removed. Lurking in the lukewarm reception of the memorial is perhaps a reason for the way in which it repeats the story of a drive without a hint of desire, of nostalgia for a dilated space but not the interval that may have offered a different direction for the idea of the school. The image, notwithstanding the criticism, is a familiar one for Athlone. It replays the motif of the film poster that once adorned the edifice of the cinema that in Athlone, as elsewhere in South Africa, went by the name "bioscope." If this appears as an interpretive leap, it is only because the Trojan Horse Memorial returns us to the stasis that once dominated the compression of time we have come to know as Athlone, and which is recalled not only as a memory of the past, but a memory of that which must be repeated—namely, war.

This is a mode of technogenesis of which we may need to remain fearful. For the human thus folded into the machine is only ever a technical becoming of the human that is a compression of movement, of uncontrollable speed, and undulating sadness. This at least is how we may select to read Willie Bester's unsettling sculpture, *Trojan Horse III*, as a cautionary tale of precisely that operation which folds the human into technology, making technics a part of the industrialization of memory. Like the ancient Greeks who folded the human into a war machine, Bester's work warns against a practice of memory that is the condition of teletechnics, with surveillance, threat, control, mobility and death rolled into an indistinguishable scene of unending battle.

Returning to the interval: Let us consider an event four years after the Trojan Horse killings, in which Coline Williams and Robbie Waterwitch were killed in an ambush orchestrated by the state security apparatus. The story of their deaths has become legendary on the Cape Flats, not least because death was brought about by similar means of dirty tricks and ambush that had delivered the Trojan Horse to Athlone's streets. In their memory, the space beyond the magistrate's court today carries a statue of Robbie and Coline. Coline glances back, suspiciously looking over her shoulder as if to recognize the scene of interpellation. Robbie walks confidently abreast.

The magistrate's court has notoriously become the target of the attention of the two operatives in descriptions of their fateful deaths. Yet, in a broader optic, the space of the memorial brings into view the bioscope that once was, placed immediately ahead, across the street where the sculpture stands, in a building that is today the Government Department of Communication and Information. Once it was home to the Kismet Bioscope, a name that, when translated, gives us recourse to that which remains to be said about the spectre of death in Athlone. It is a word that has its beginnings in Arabic (its root *Qasama* means to divide), into *Qisma* (meaning division, portion, or lot), and with the rise of the Ottoman Empire the word entered Turkish as *Kismet* (meaning fate or destiny). From here it was deposited in Hindi, Farsi and Urdu, retaining its Turkish inflection, before travelling to Athlone where it had simply come to mean "the bioscope". That at least is what is left of the memory of the future, a scene of desire which shares in the fate of re-schooling, and in the process, re-tooling. The student movement of 1985 was nothing of the order of a schools boycott. It was a desire for a return to an interval, in a space of intensity in which the compression of time diluted and dilated space, giving the students a mode of communication, with little prospect of advance. What the bioscope shared with the school was a different conception of the interval, one that promised a non-sectarian future in place of the difference marked out by the interval of apartheid.

Notes
1 Adam Sitze: "Between Revolt and Study. Further notes on Emergency Continued" (2014).
2 Cf Bernard Stiegler: *Technics and Time, 2* (2009), 106.
3 This of course is an unfortunately truncated rendering of a systematic elaboration that deserves to be read at length. See Stiegler, ibid., Chapter 3.
4 See Heidi Grunebaum in *Memorialising the Past* (2011), 105-106, addresses precisely this problem in her consideration of how the memory of Robert Waterwitch and Coline Williams often erodes lives beyond the event of their untimely deaths at the hands of apartheid security forces.
5 Trinh T. Minh-ha: *Cinema Interval* (1999).
6 Sabine Marschall: "Commemorating the 'Trojan Horse' Massacre in Cape Town. The Tension between vernacular and official Expressions of Memory" (2010). With the recent removal of the bronze plaques containing the narratives of the mothers of those killed, we may have to reconsider the idea of vernacular expressions that Marschall identifies in her suggestive essay. See also Gary Minkley and Phindi Mnyaka: "Spears, Warriors and a victorious Past. Visuality and the post anti-apartheid heritage Complex," http://sitemaker.umich.edu/politics.of.heritage/files/minkley__mnyaka_visuality.doc.

Works cited
GRUNEBAUM, Heidi: *Memorialising the Past. Everyday life in South Africa after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. New Brunswick 2011.
LEE, Bruce / John LITTLE: *The Warrior Within. The Philosophies of Bruce Lee to Better Understand the World Around You and Achieve a Rewarding Life*. Chicago 1996.
MARSCHALL, Sabine: "Commemorating the 'Trojan Horse' Massacre in Cape Town. The Tension between vernacular and official Expressions of Memory." In: *Visual Studies*, 25, 2, September 2010, 135-148.
MINH-HA, Trinh T.: *Cinema Interval*. New York 1999.
MINKLEY, Gary and Phindi MNYAKA: "Spears, Warriors and a victorious Past. Visuality and the post anti-apartheid heritage Complex." http://sitemaker.umich.edu/politics.of.heritage/files/minkley__mnyaka_visuality.doc. [accessed 11 December 2014]
RIVE, Richard: *Emergency Continued*. Cape Town 1990.
SOUTH AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION TRUST, *The Road to Democracy: Volume 2, 1970–1980*. Pretoria 1990.
SITZE, Adam: "Between Revolt and Study: Further notes on Emergency Continued", paper presented to the South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar, Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape, August 2014.
STIEGLER, Bernard: *Technics and Time, 2* (translated by Stephen Barker). Stanford 2009. (*La désorientation*, 1996)
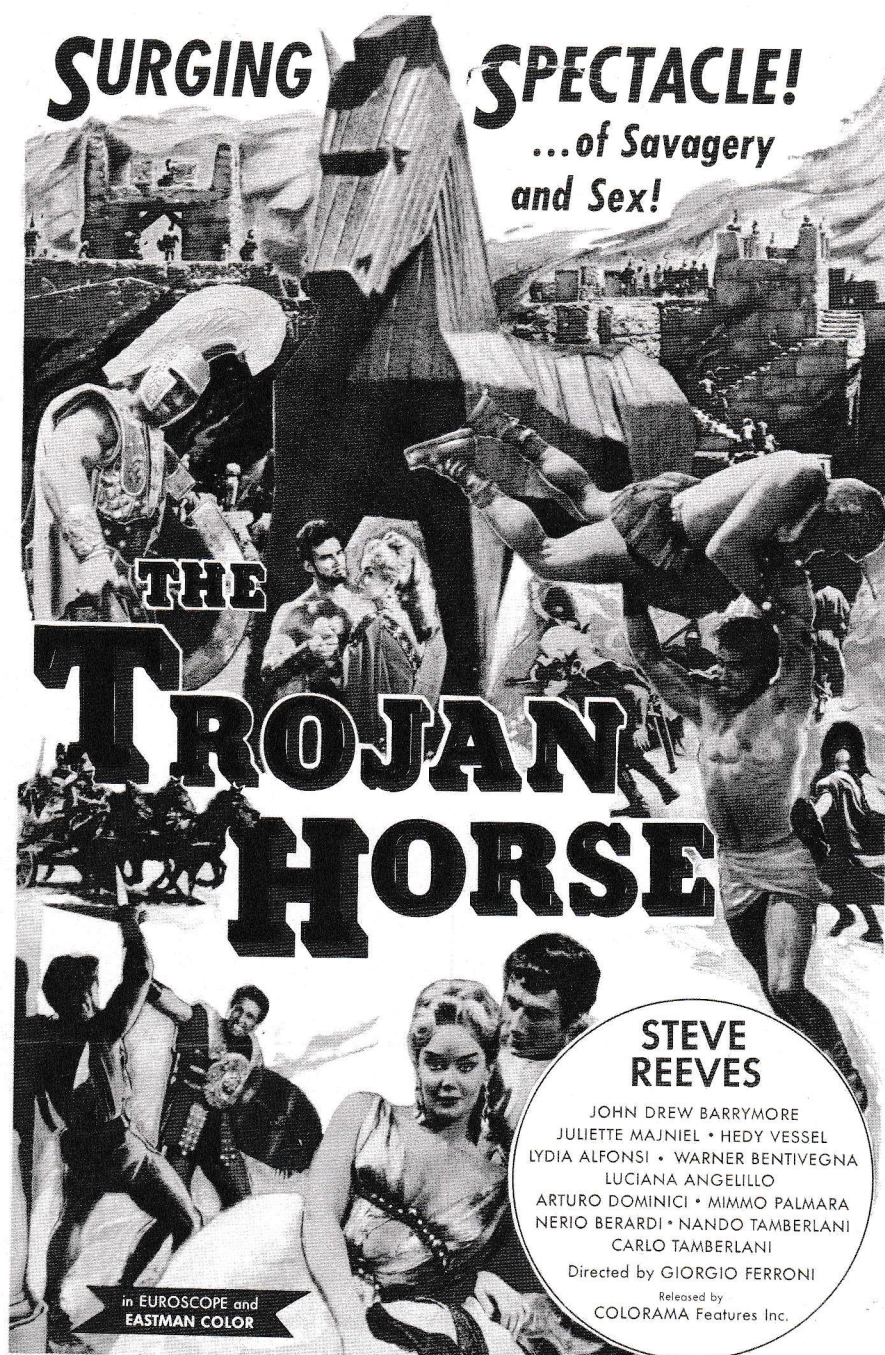
Premesh Lalu, professor of history and director of the Center for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape. Inspired by the student struggles of 1985 in Athlone, Cape Town, where he served as a founding member of the Athlone Student Action Committee, he pursued his studies at the University of the Western Cape, University of Natal-Durban (currently University of Kwa-Zulu Natal), and the University of Minnesota. He is author of *The Deaths of Hintsa: Post-apartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2009). He is co-editor of *Becoming UWC: Reflections, Pathways and Unmaking Apartheid's Legacy* (Cape Town, 2012). He has contributed to current debates on the humanities through various newspaper opinion pieces, and in journals such as *History and Theory, Current Writing,* and *Journal of Asian and African Studies.* Lalu is a former trustee of the District Six Museum and is the current chair of the Handspring Trust of the Handspring Puppet Company.