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Auditing and the unconscious: managerialism's memory traces

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes J.M. Coetzee's "The Mind of Apartheid" as a point of departure in thinking about audits in universities. Using the psychoanalytic framing of apartheid that Coetzee puts in place, audit is likened here to a form of obsessional neurosis. If this is indeed a plausible diagnosis of audits – and this should remain a question for deliberation – then a set of questions emerges for post-apartheid universities, which the paper seeks to develop. By what scenes from the past are audits haunted? What memory traces do audits reactivate? What phantoms do audits seek to exorcise? Can we speak of the demons by which auditing is possessed? And what sort of working through the past would this call for?

KEYWORDS

Apartheid; audit; managerialism; obsessional neurosis; universities

In the England of 1688, said Daniel Defoe, there were men ready to go to war with Popery without knowing whether the Pope was a man or a horse. As I write in late 1990, South African legislators are drafting measures to "dismantle" apartheid. It is not inconceivable that in the not too distant future, the major protagonists having agreed that apartheid has been "dismantled," the era of apartheid will be proclaimed to be over. The unlovely creature will be laid to rest, and joy among nations will be unconfined. But what exactly is it that will be buried?

J.M. Coetzee 1991, 1

Introduction

The special issue for which this paper has been written invited contributors to revisit the psychoanalytic argument of Coetzee's (1991) "The Mind of Apartheid," and to use it to think, again, about "apartheid and the unconscious" (see Truscott, van Bever Donker, and Hook's editorial introduction to this issue). I have taken the occasion as an opportunity to reflect on the rise of managerialism within universities, and, specifically, on institutional audits and the unconscious.

At the heart of Coetzee's essay is a simple question: "What was apartheid?" (Sanders 2002, 60) In Coetzee's terms, once apartheid has been "dismantled," once the "unlovely creature" has been "laid to rest," it remains for us to ask: "But what exactly is it that will be buried?" (1991, 1). Responding to his own question, Coetzee explores the idea that "the men who invented and installed apartheid were possessed by demons" (2). Coetzee's

recourse to the demonic offers him a way of speaking about apartheid as a form of madness that coursed through the defences against the desires that the “knights of apartheid” (3) could not bring themselves to recognise as their own, a desire for “race-mixture” that they warded off with singular viciousness. Reading the texts of apartheid ideologue, Geoffrey Cronjé, Coetzee suggests that, while apartheid no doubt had an economic rationality, “it also flowered out of desire and out of the hatred of desire” (2). Coetzee then diagnoses Cronjé’s “fascination with and reactive horror of the mixed, of the breaking-down of boundaries, the dissolution of difference” (21–22) as symptomatic of an obsessional neurotic reaction formation.

Cronjé’s apartheid and managerialism are far from identical. Implicating them, however, allows an uncommon line of approach to the complexities of academic responsibility today. Let me begin with some of the key debates on managerialism before relating audits and Coetzee’s reading of apartheid’s discourse.

Managerialism can be defined as a “mode of governance exported systematically from the private to the public sector” (Lynch, Grummell, and Devine 2012, 17–18). It has meant, for universities across the world, an “increased concern with issues of efficiency and economy,” and tighter “forms of accountability” (Anderson 2008, 251). An “audit culture” within universities has been rationalised in the name of “responsibility,” where “transparency of operation is everywhere endorsed as the outward sign of integrity” (Strathern 2000, 2–3).

In the scholarly literature critical of auditing, one repeatedly reads that “we are not arguing against the principle of accountability” (Shore, Wright, 2000, 78). Few academics would deny the need to “give an account of their actions” (Power 1997, 122). Nor is there any denial of the need for “proper financial planning, budgeting, and credit control” (Webster and Mosoetsa 2002, 79). The main concern, rather, is a shift from the auditing of strictly financial matters to the “obsessive concern with the periodic and quantitative assessment of every facet of university functioning” (Mbembe 2016, 31).

Achille Mbembe is not alone in this diagnosis. Audits have been characterised as not only a mode of control suffused with “defensive mentalities” (Power 1997, 139), but as a part of “obsessive-compulsive bureaucratic practices” designed to ward off anxieties over “losing control” over “boundaries” (Diamond 1985, 664). There seem, then, to be at least provisional reasons to draw on Coetzee’s reading of Cronjé to inquire into the ways in which audits may be riven by desires that those carrying them out will not fully recognise as their own. If audits do repeat something of apartheid’s psychic economy, what kind of institutional working through might this call for? If it is not apartheid’s obsessional discourse that audits act out, then what pasts do audits carry within them?

The managerial university is frequently described as a space of “competition, individualism, and most importantly precariousness and uncertainty” (Harney and Dunn 2013, 339). The primary effect of competition is the stratification of a higher education landscape (Gumport 2000), and within this hierarchised field each institution is itself divided – managers on one side, academics on the other – with diminished collegiality and trust between and within the two sides: scholars, within and across institutions, have become managed competitors. It is with this division and stratification in mind that Mbembe suggests that managerialism is inaugurating “global Apartheid in higher education” (2016, 38). If Coetzee saw the necessity for supplementing a historicist account of apartheid – “historiography,” Coetzee suggests, may “have to extend the terms of its

discourse in order to take account of irrational forces in social life” (1991, 1) – there may well be a similar need for a psychoanalytic reckoning with “global Apartheid in higher education.” But is that an adequate name for what is being institutionalised across the world, including in South Africa?

Although the “managerial tools of accounting and audit” (Power 1997, 92) have not been as intensely applied in South Africa as in the UK, audits at post-apartheid South African universities have become routine, and they operate with a double mandate. There has been “pressure,” on the one hand, “to prepare South Africa for participation in a sophisticated global economy,” and, on the other, “to render higher education more responsive to the needs and challenges of a country pulling itself away from its apartheid past” (Ensor 2006, 183). Responses to both these “pressures” are measured and managed in universities: audits are used to make universities competitive spaces, and they have been turned into an instrument that monitors the extent to which transformation is being monitored. For Paula Ensor, these are “two potentially contradictory pressures” (183). Wally Morrow, by contrast, discusses “equity and development” as “independent and equally important objectives” that “inevitably come into conflict with each other” (2009, 21). However one understands their relation, it has become clear that audits neither adequately addresses issues of transformation, nor are they able to compute the conflicting objectives of post-apartheid universities.

Often enough, audits – even and especially audits of transformation – are instrumentalist undertakings concerned with institutional “image management” (Ahmed 2012, 110). There can be little doubt that, as their critics point out, audits are not routinely deliberative, and that they frequently reduce the nuances and complexities of both intellectual work and social change to the metrics by which universities are evaluated, internally or externally. Designating these tendencies as a “demonic” aspect of the “managerial techniques” of the “bureaucratic mind” (Eagleton 2010, 101, 122–123) may well have its attractions – Coetzee himself gestures towards this possibility when he notes the “academic-bureaucratic castle” (3) that Cronjé helped to build during apartheid. But to adequately pose the question of the “demonic mystery of desire” (Derrida [1992] 1995, 3) in relation to institutional audits will require dealing with more than a straw-man “minor official” (Eagleton 2010, 122) placed on one side of a Manichaean world of careful scholarly reflection and thoughtless bureaucratic quantification.¹ In South Africa, external audits are conducted by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), which is mandated by the Higher Education Act of 1997 to audit institutions, a responsibility it carries out through its Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). There are good reasons to assume a critical attitude to HEQC audits, placing them, and the ripple effects they have, within an “audit culture.” But there should also be no denying the self-consciousness with which the CHE carries out audits.² Indeed, this paper can be read as an assumption of the very critical orientation to audits that the CHE invites from academic auditees (CHE 2021a, 2021b). That is not, of course, the only attitude for which the CHE asks. On the one hand, its audits assess “how deeply all staff have internalised ... quality assurance principles and measures” (CHE 2021b, 17). On the other hand, it does not “expect institutions to adopt the HEQC’s audit processes in an uncritical and unreflective

manner” (45). There is assessment, in other words, of the extent to which staff have become good little auditable subjects, but it makes a certain ambivalence about audits a criterion for a “mature” grade. The CHE, modelling “mature” ambivalence for those they evaluate, states that it only “continues to use the term ‘audit’ based on the Higher Education Act, 101 of 1997, as amended, which mandates the CHE to *audit* institutions” (2021a, 15). All of which is to say that there is no easy way to stand outside of the “audit culture” that has taken hold, where critique is weighed, graded, placed on a developmental scale – the CHE may not, as it insists, rank institutions, but their grading system can also see an institution being labelled “not fully developed” (2021a, 28). Does this sound familiar?

If audits of transformation at South African universities aim to assess and redress the injustices of apartheid and colonialism before that, audits are seen by many critics as a foreign, invading force occupying the university, as a form of “colonisation” or “imperialism,” which is being used to monitor how transformation is being monitored (see Anderson 2008; Ginsberg 2011; Zeleza 2016).³ With academics needing to “report on how much they have done to ‘decolonise’ their curricula” (Jansen and Walters 2019, 23–24), the knot in which this places universities in the process of “decolonising” themselves is that the very measures used to gauge the extent to which they have been “decolonised” are left unexamined.

It is here that, I think, Coetzee’s claim that Cronjé was “possessed by demons” can be related to an “audit culture.” In his reading of Jan Patočka’s *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History*, Jacques Derrida associates the demonic with “nonresponsibility” ([1992] 1995, 3). For Patočka, as Derrida puts it, the demonic is “a space in which one does not yet hear the call to explain oneself, one’s actions or one’s thoughts, to respond to the other and answer for oneself before the other” (3). Derrida’s reading of Patočka, the complexities of which are admittedly being glossed over here, can be brought into contact with what he calls, in “The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils” (1983), “evaluative actions.” Here, questions of responsibility are, likewise, at the forefront of Derrida’s concerns. While “evaluative actions” are carried out in the name of “responsibility,” it is “studying such evaluations” that, Derrida suggests, is “one of the tasks most indispensable to the exercise of academic responsibility” (1983, 13). It is not that the CHE, which audits institutions of higher education, fails to hear the call to answer for itself – it answers to the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, and it is accountable to Parliament. A potentially “demonic” element may reside, rather, in the way auditing – HEQC audits, and all the audits of teaching, research and community engagement, but also of “wellness,” hand sanitiser distribution, printers in and out of use and so on and so forth – are not seen as requiring an account, as requiring “study.”

In following Coetzee into the psychoanalytic, I have found my bearings in Sigmund Freud’s *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* ([1916–1917] 2001). Here, Freud sets out a conception of obsessional neurosis as a “disturbance of memory” that does not entail, not in any straightforward way, amnesia, but, rather, a reactivation of “memory traces” ([1916–1917] 2001, 283). Without entering into the specifics of the two cases of obsessional neurosis with which Freud begins *Part III* of his *Introductory Lectures*, they are instructive insofar as the “symptomatic ceremonials” of Freud’s two patients, conducted with very little “rational basis,” do have a “sense,” Freud argues, that is graspable in the

way that an order to comply obediently with the rules of the ritual is experienced as if coming from “all-powerful guests from an alien world” (278). That “alien world” is the past, and it is as though the rituals were completing a “task which has not been dealt with” (275). If audits, as rituals of inspection and repetitive checking, bear some of the marks of obsessional neurosis, their “sense” can be grasped, if we carry out what Freud calls an “historical interpretation of symptoms” (271), in the way they recall a scene not forgotten but from which they have become severed (see also Freud [1918] 2010).⁴

I have found it useful to think of such scenes of activation in terms of what Nikolas Abraham and Maria Torok call an “intergenerational phantom.” In the psychic life of intergenerational transmission there is a subject, as Abraham writes, who “appears possessed not by his own unconscious but by someone else’s” (1994, 171), and the past replays itself through them as a “visitation,” as Torok puts it, that is “not to be confused with the return of the repressed” (1994, 181–182). If Freud posits “memory traces” from early infantile life, a “phantom,” as Abraham and Torok theorise it, entails “memory traces derived from the experiences of earlier generations,” requiring, as Nicholas Rand comments, that we “listen for the voices of one generation in the unconscious of another,” for “the “unfinished business . . . unconsciously handed down to . . . descendants” (1994, 168, 166, 167). By what scenes are academic audits haunted? What “unfinished business” do academic audits seek to complete? And what might it mean “to process memory imprints” (Freud [1918] 2010, 41) that audits activate? Clearly, those carrying out audits have their own answers, which we are obliged to question.

Managerialism and its memory traces

In his frequently cited study, *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*, Michael Power frames his critique of audit [sic] through two scenarios. In the first scenario, “the audit process becomes a world to itself.” Here, “rituals of inspection” engender reports on academic work “decoupled” (1997, 96) from what they are reporting on. As Martin Trow puts it, “reports flowing up from the field come to have less and less relation to the facts on the ground that they purportedly represent” (1996, 314). We might with some justification call this auditory hallucination, if by that we mean that “the facts on the ground” do not fit the metrics of audit, with the result that a parallel universe must be conjured to make academic work legible to outside constituencies that think in terms of “measurable accountability” (Lynch 2015, 193–194).

Power does not see “decoupling” as the only or even the most appropriate way to understand the effects of audits, though they can always be discerned. The second scenario is where organisations are “colonised by an audit process which disseminates and implants the values which underlay and support its information demands” (Power 1997, 95). Here, the “values and practices which make auditing possible penetrate deep into the core of organisational operations,” producing “new mentalities, new incentives and perceptions of significance” (97). In this scenario, academic practice becomes the pursuit of reportable activity, constituting not only “a new rationality and morality” but a new kind of subject, “self-managing individuals who render themselves auditable” (Shore and Wright 2000, 57), often, it should be noted, with depressed resignation. In this second scenario, being “made acutely aware that their conduct and performance is under constant scrutiny,” scholars, like the inmates of Jeremy Bentham’s prison, “come

to scrutinise their own behaviour and eventually adopt the norms of conduct desired by the disciplinary institution” (Shore and Wright 2000, 76–77; on panopticism and audits Amit 2000; see also Schmelzer 1993). Ultimately, for Power, this binary obscures “other possible . . . relations such as cooperation, anomie and collusion,” and, to varying degrees, both scenarios play themselves out in universities, often accompanying and braided into each other (1997, 154, n. 1).

Michael Peters, commenting, in the early 1990s, on “the wholesale adoption of private sector management processes,” warned that it will “impose an adversarial management cost-accounting culture on traditional structures of consensus-style management and accountability” (1992, 299). This, many would agree, has largely come to pass. It is in this light that Eagleton’s more recent, and palpably agitated, “The Slow Death of the University” can be read: “Instead of government by academics there is rule by hierarchy, [and] a good deal of Byzantine bureaucracy . . . Senior professors are now senior managers, and the air is thick with talk of auditing and accountancy” (2015).

There is a large body of scholarship examining stress, strain and the intensification of “the hours spent complying with new accountability and quality assurance requirements” (Anderson 2008, 251). From a South African perspective, Edward Webster and Sarah Mosoetsa have reflected on the problem of burnout – a word that recurs in the literature no less than competition – and “the inability of those working with great intensity to sustain the pace after a few years” (2002, 61). But what various critiques of managerialism hold in common, despite approaching the problem from different angles, is that *nothing new is ever allowed to emerge within the managerial university*, despite the rhetoric of innovation.⁵ Beyond the stressed, strained, overburdened condition managerialism engenders, beyond the burnout it causes, it is the banning of what David Graeber calls “play” that does the greatest “spiritual damage” (2015, 190–191). All the administrative processes and procedures that must be adhered to have the effect of excluding, if not academics as individuals from participation in decision making, then their critical sensibilities from the judgements they are forced to make using evaluative criteria drawn from business and management science. The point, for many, is not to substitute the evaluative criteria of managerialism with those of any other ideological standpoint, but “finding ways to keep the question of evaluation open, a matter for dispute” (Readings 1995, 480–481). But, as I will try to sketch here, it is precisely “dispute” that is repressed by the competition managerialism compels.

While accounts differ on exactly when and how universities began adopting private sector principles and practices, they generally converge around two scenes. Firstly, the post-Second World War “massification” of university education, a shift from “from elite to mass provision.” And secondly, the neoliberal economics of the 1970s and 80s, which entailed “a shift from public funding . . . towards greater revenue from more market-oriented or entrepreneurial activities” (Bundy 2005, 86–87). With the “massification” of higher education in the middle of the twentieth century, the “diversity” of students, and especially the increasing “diversity” of teachers, gave rise to concerns about “standards” and “accountability” (Trow 1996, 319).

In understanding this from a post-apartheid perspective, what must be underlined is “the delayed arrival in South Africa of the changes spreading so rapidly across higher education globally” (Bundy 2005, 89), that it was only with the end of apartheid that managerialism made its appearance on South African university campuses (Webster and

Mosoetsa 2002; Du Toit 2000), and that at the time Coetzee was writing “The Mind of Apartheid” from his office at that other “academic-bureaucratic castle” on the hill, a first fleet of ships was only just coming into view on the horizon. Higher education under apartheid was cushioned against such accountability measures, but if Mbembe’s thesis is correct, there are, here, two iterations of apartheid – South African apartheid, with its “castles” and its “bush universities,” and a system of surveillance and control the culmination of which is “global apartheid” – both of which have the aim of dealing with “diversity.” That is to say, what the mid-twentieth century rise of managerialism – which has reached an apothecotic state of borders, divisions, stratifications and hierarchies – shares with South African apartheid are a moment of emergence and an anxiety over difference. If we consider that the rise of managerialism coincides, too, with the emergence of post-independence universities in Africa, institutions that would become subject to intense pressures from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Mamdani 2019; Zeleza 2016), the scenes which an audit culture may recall can be loosely characterised as those moments wherein possibilities of new understandings and practices of freedom flashed up and were, virtually simultaneously, subject to the repressive evaluative measures under which we still labour.

There may well be an uncanny hosting of South African apartheid in post-apartheid South African universities. Cronjé’s ghost still haunts certain campuses. As Jansen (2016) notes, there are “symbolic reminders” of South African apartheid everywhere, and he is particularly concerned with “symbols in the post-apartheid university,” a graduation programme from the University of the Free State being his first example, containing a list of honorary doctorates the university has issued over the years, a list that includes, he notes, the name of one Geoffrey Cronjé. Such “symbols” – and he refers to others – “remind us of our violent past,” they “bring up the subject in the minds of especially black students” (2016, 345–346). But a reconsideration of Coetzee’s question may also have to grapple with the way “the end of apartheid in South Africa coincides precisely with the country’s entry into the neoliberal order of global apartheid” (van Bever Donker et al. 2017, 15).

Despite the “delayed arrival” of academic managerialism, South African universities have been brought in line and up to speed with global changes. As Deresh Ramjugernath, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching at Stellenbosch University, stresses, “administrative structures need to become less bureaucratic It is not entrepreneurial to take a long time to get the simplest thing done in universities” (quoted in Anstey 2021). Here we see how Eagleton and others may misrecognise the problem. Ramjugernath, like Eagleton, bemoans “Byzantine bureaucracy,” and what is at stake for him is the very “survival” of the university: “COVID-19 has taught us that if we . . . don’t evolve and . . . become innovative and entrepreneurial . . . we will go extinct” (quoted in Anstey 2021).⁶

Ramjugernath is hardly trumpeting a new idea, the dangerous implications of which glare out at the reader of David Osborne and Ted Gaebler’s *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*, a book that deals – alarmingly for readers today, though no doubt it startled many then, too – with the discovery of a “new world,” for which they provide a “map” (Osborne and Gaebler 1992, xvii). References to “Columbus,” “pioneers,” “exploration,” the “discovery of new lands” – all of this cannot but recall conquest, slavery, colonisation. But neither this,

nor the social Darwinism implied by Ramjugernath's propositions, should overshadow an appeal worth worrying about, a promise that the entrepreneurial university will become not only "transparent" – and, thus, "accountable" – in the "services" it renders, but also able to more directly address the urgent needs of an unequal society, an "evolution of the mindset" (Anstey 2021) of the university in the name of both speed and social justice.

For the likes of Ramjugernath, "innovative and entrepreneurial" practices are the cure for an institutional malaise that may ward off its "extinction." Ramjugernath, to critics of managerialism – who may ignore that Ramjugernath sets himself against not only "traditional structures of consensus-style management and accountability," but bureaucracy in general, including corporate bureaucracy – is typical in his assertions: he deploys "techniques for the calculated administration of life," by which "norms" and "deviations" are established (Miller and Rose 2008, 69), he speaks the language of "administrators" who "diagnose and prescribe organisational well-being," their mantra being "organisational survival" (Gumport 2000, 76). But, with crucial differences, this same language of "life" is frequently used by critics like Eagleton, for whom it is "the flourishing of a managerial ideology" that is bringing about "the slow death of the university." These, it would seem, are the biopolitical – and, some would say, necropolitical (Mbembe 2003) – terms on which a struggle over the university is being waged today: life and threats to it, conjured as either toxin or stagnation, even necrotic rot, which, left untreated, will lead to "death" and, finally, "extinction."

However pervasive this biopolitical struggle, it is in never allowed to take place outside of the competition that managerialism compels, both within and between universities. This renders collegial cooperation difficult, if not impossible; while this is worth challenging, the key point is that all conflicts – including but not limited to struggles for institutions that prioritise care, collaboration and the recognition of interdependence – are reduced to a contest within certain unquestionable rules, those of the academic marketplace. "The University," as Samuel Weber writes, "excludes conflict as far as possible." In the place of "struggle," the university offers "pluralism," the function of which is "to deny the necessity of conflict, in the name of peacefully coexisting diversity" (1987, 42). As if Ramjugernath's fast entrepreneurialism and Eagleton's slow ideology critique were merely different brands. This, for Weber, is how universities have come to control "diversity," subjecting it, and all conflict to which it may give rise, to the rules of the academic marketplace.

The implications of this confined struggle are dire. As Michael Apple describes education under neoliberalism, "those who are unable or unlikely to become competitive entrepreneurs are criminalised" (2010, 179). At play here is what Michel Foucault calls, in his discussion of biopolitics, a "death function" (2004, 256). While the institutions of a biopolitical state have the manifest aim of fostering life, of "making live," this undertaking requires a mechanism through which can be established threats to the life in whose name biopolitics operates. That discriminatory mechanism through which biopolitics exposes certain lives to the threat of death – criminalising non-competition, as Apple puts it – is, Foucault argues, racism.

Whatever the tensions between a Foucauldian analytics and the psychoanalysis being drawn upon here, and whatever hesitations one has over embracing either or both as a means to apprehend the complexities of accountability in higher education

today, there are signposts for beginning to decipher the memory traces of audits. Biopolitics “first develops,” Foucault writes, “with colonisation, or in other words, with colonising genocide” (2004, 257). This should not imply a single scene of origin. The compulsion to audit is, I want to suggest in the next section, overdetermined, and emerges from multiple scenes, each in its own way bent on the domination of difference.

A chain of numbers

Coetzee begins “The Mind of Apartheid” with what at first seems to be an analogy between seventeenth-century England and twentieth-century South Africa: “In the England of 1688, said Daniel Defoe, there were men ready to go to war with Popery without knowing whether the Pope was a man or a horse” (Coetzee 1991, 1). While there are good reasons to read with caution George Macaulay Trevelyan’s account of 1688, he does offer a sense of who Defoe might have meant by “men ready to go to war” when he writes that “hatred of Popery” – and of James II, the “Popish Prince on the throne” who wanted to “Romanise England” – “had sunk so deep into the nation, that the classes most removed from the influence of religion were, in a negative sense, fervent Protestants” ([1904] 2002, 411, 415, 416). “Travellers,” he continues,

were searched the upon the roads by no warrant save that of public safety; villages were held by mounted men, the town gates by militia, in no name save that of the Protestant religion. The gentry and the middle classes were up in arms, expectant of the unknown, while mobs were sacking Catholic chapels and mansions . . . Englishmen were drawn out as for war, armed, excited, in the grip of panic, ready to plunge the sword into one another at a word. (Trevelyan [1904] 2002, 429)

The first line of Coetzee’s essay offers 1688 as a very short cautionary tale for a post-apartheid South Africa. Will future South Africans know what apartheid was any better than seventeenth-century Englishmen knew what – French, Catholic, or, for that matter, English, Protestant – absolutism was? Coetzee thus asks his readers to “reopen the coffin,” to examine “what apartheid looks like in the flesh” (1991, 1).

The date, 1688, compels reflection on the apartheid past. But if we read “The Mind of Apartheid” as an essay written both on the brink of apartheid’s end and in the immediate wake of the tercentenary of England’s “Glorious Revolution,” this date relates South Africa to a Thatcherite neoliberal conjuncture marking 1688 as a “peaceful transfer of power that gave rise to the title of the bloodless revolution,” and which secured “constitutional freedoms under the law which . . . people have continued to enjoy for three hundred years” (Thatcher 1988; cf. Hall 2011; Vallance 2006).⁷ It was also in 1988 that Margaret Thatcher launched her Higher Education Act, which altered how university research was funded, and was “motivated by her desire to stop academics . . . from ‘putting out poison’ into the public ear” (Higgins 2012, 32). The kind of “poison” she no doubt wanted stemmed was the idea that England’s “bloodless revolution” inaugurated “the rise of a mercantile imperialism” (Anderson 1964, 29), that a key form of absolutism that was opposed in 1688 was the one exercised by the Royal Africa Company, which had a monopoly on the slave trade, and thus that 1688 “led to a massive increase in the slave trade” (Vallance 2006, 33).⁸ The date Coetzee sets in play, in other words,

compels a consideration of the relation between seventeenth-century England and late-twentieth-century South Africa where the former is not only the analogue of the latter – two nations, 300 years apart, both on the brink of “peaceful transfer of power” – but where they are, at one and the same time, analogous and contiguous, where it was 1688 that allowed Britain to colonise South Africa.

Soon after Britain occupied the Cape for the second time at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it abolished the slave trade, and then, through a protracted process, slavery altogether. If the decision to “dismantle” slavery in the British empire was debated and then agreed upon in parliament, the very same parliament oversaw the “demise of the Royal African Company’s monopoly” that “allowed more Englishmen to be involved in the slave trade” (Pettigrew 2007, 4–5). This recasts the relation between England and South Africa. Would South Africa’s “bloodless revolution” – like England’s, it was, and continues to be, far from “bloodless” – not only reactivate “memory traces” of imperialism, but stir the ghosts of slavery?

The messiness of the British Empire’s break with a slaving past is starkly apparent in South Africa. After Britain’s second occupation of the Cape, the Company Slave Lodge was emptied of slaves and repurposed, housing the Supreme Court, the General Post Office, and, later, the Orphan Chamber, the Receiver of Revenue and the Attorney-General. The Slave Lodge became the site of law and administration. As Anthony Holiday argues, invoking psychoanalysis, “legislative and judicial activities would be infected by a slave-owning mentality for the next 150 years or more” (2013, 10). As I have argued elsewhere, “the British empire sublated the force of the institution of slavery it was in the process of abolishing” (Truscott 2020, 74). From that point on, “any stirrings of discontent had to pass through the controls of a government communication network housed in the Slave Lodge” (Truscott 2021, 24).

This should not, of course, imply that what Eagleton calls the “bureaucratic mind” was born in the nineteenth century. What emerged from 1688 was not only an intensification of the slave trade but also a new moment in the genealogy of accountability. Douglass North and Barry Weingast suggest that one of the key achievements of 1688 was the public scrutiny, through parliamentary proxies, of crown expenditure: “Parliament gained the never-before-held right to audit how the government had expended its funds” (1989, 816). Once spending was not only internally monitored by the exchequer but audited by parliament – and the fates of the two previous kings, North and Weingast suggest, was a sign of the deathly seriousness of such audits – we enter the realm of the accountability measures that have infiltrated universities, among other public institutions. North and Weingast perhaps overstate the rupture of 1688. Paul Seaward is more measured when he writes that 1688 “produced a political situation whose elements echoed previous episodes of rapid institutional development” (2007, 52). The new king, William III, was indeed audited in 1689 and 1690, “a practice that soon became annual” (52), but 1688 carried along with it something of earlier scenes of accountability to, and then of, the sovereign.

A genealogy of the kind of accountability dominant within universities today does not, then, begin in 1688; one would need to trace the scenes echoed in audits back still further to the double-entry bookkeeping of fifteenth-century European merchants, which, as Poovey (1998) shows, is the “embryonic” form of the idea of “creditworthiness.” And once double-entry bookkeeping was, in the sixteenth century, “codified,” it “became

a display of mercantile virtue” (Poovey 1998, xvi; see also Miller and Rose 2008, 66–67). If one considers that an audit is the means by which a university shows that its “books are in order,” we are still very much inside of this moral episteme, even if it has radically changed. There is a kinship, that is to say, between a university that undergoes an audit to display that it is operating not only “effectively” and “efficiently” but that its checks on transformation are in order and the way early modern merchants showed their “cred- itworthiness” and “virtue.”

The question is whether mercantile imperialism, slavery and accounting can be disentangled. Baucom (2005) offers one form of response when he writes, “what haunts the accounting procedures and the econometric logic of justice” – and an “econometric logic of justice” is certainly at play in the audit of transformation in universities –

is not only the spectre of a modern principle of bookkeeping and a modern system of finance capital capable of converting anything it touches into a monetary equivalent, but the spectre of something else such financial protocols made possible . . . the spectre of slavery, the slave auction block, the slave trader’s ledger book. (Baucom 2005, 7)

Does “the slave trader’s ledger book” haunt universities oriented towards audits? What is the significance of the way that precisely the “black students” of which Jansen writes – and the students, too, repeatedly invoked by the CHE’s *Framework for Institutional Audits* as the immediate beneficiaries of audits, as those for whom audits check whether there is evidence in institutions of “deliberate, continuous, systematic and measurable improvement of the student experience” (2021a, 14) – “enter the log,” as Baucom notes, “as little more than a chain of numbers” (2005, 14)?

There are irrefutable arguments that slavery played a crucial role in the formation of South African society (see Keegan 1996 for an overview). While Cape-based slavery resembled in many respects slavery in other parts of the world, “legal slavery in the Cape was not the only form of slavery practised in this colony” (Morton 1994, 257). Much of it took place beyond the Cape, on its frontiers, and was carried out through raids where, “as a rule, few . . . were subject to open accounting procedures” (252).⁹ Slave ledgers certainly do exist in South African archives, but the auditing to which universities are subject are more directly related, we can safely say, to the Atlantic slave trade. No doubt Cape Town is a city built by slaves, and over the bodies of slaves (Grunebaum 2007). But we are also haunted by “memory traces derived from the experiences of earlier generations” from multiple locations. Our “phantoms” are overdetermined, we are haunted by those dead, buried and built over here, and by those who entered the logbook as a “chain of numbers” in distant places, by the undocumented and by processes of documentation that have undergone a series of displacements to become our standard measures of accountability.

We might call an institutional audit “an uncanny moment,” as Baucom, drawing on Walter Benjamin, writes, “a moment of repetition, a moment in which the past returns to the present in expanded form, a moment in which present time finds stored and accumulated within itself a nonsynchronous array of past times” (2005, 29).¹⁰ The problem is not, as I see it, amnesia. Nobody has forgotten about the histories of slavery any more than they have forgotten about the repressive measures that emerged to stamp out the possibilities of freedom in the 1950s and 60s. It is, rather, a failure to connect these histories with the everyday psychopathologies of contemporary academic life

through which “memory traces” of audit’s past are encountered with an afterwardsness, with what Freud ([1918] 2010) calls *Nachträglichkeit*.

If the CHE is, as it states, bound by the Higher Education Act to the word, audit, if all it can do is stretch what audit can mean and draw lines marking what CHE auditors are not – e.g., “forensic” or “inquisitorial” (2021a, 14; see also 2021b, 61) – then perhaps it will be of strategic use to audit auditing. It may or may not constitute the study of evaluation for which Derrida calls as a matter of “academic responsibility,” but through it we may be able to “listen,” as Rand puts it, “for the voices of one generation in the unconscious of another” (on audit as the analogue of the gaze as theorised in psychoanalysis, see Mowitt this issue, and 2015). There would be a critical orientation to such listening for the unconscious, but also, at least potentially, a reparative aspect. If, as Abraham notes, a phantom can become “established as a social practice,” this should also, he argues, be understood not only as a repetition but as “an attempt at exorcism, an attempt, that is, to relieve the unconscious by placing the effects of the phantom in the social realm” (1994, 176). Are audits, as repetitions and as exorcisms, able to confront their own “nonresponsibility,” and can they be brought to account for obsessive desires that are perhaps best understood as being extimate to auditing, desires both at the heart of audit’s genealogy and, at the same time, what audits aim to master quantitatively?

Conclusion

The tentative thesis I have attempted to set out is that managerialism and its audits have “unfinished business,” that they are haunted by “phantoms,” and that they may also be “an attempt at exorcism.” The division and mistrust within post-apartheid universities can be understood as, at least in part, an effect of the pasts carried within the evaluative measures that orient us to our daily work as we compliantly trample over each other according to the rules of the academic marketplace in anticipation of having to show that our books are in order.

If audits, and all the preparatory work they require, recall scenes of the repression of diversity, of slavery and colonisation, the sincerity of university managers who believe they are carrying out decolonisation-by-audit should not be doubted, nor, for that matter, should the motivations of students be doubted when their representatives demand that a university Senate conduct an audit of the teachers they do not trust. We would do well, however, to turn to the growing literature on “accounting as a political construct implicated in perpetuating inequality” (Haynes 2017, 110). Accountants have, of course, long been placed among the “little engineers of the human soul” (Miller and Rose 2008, 5).¹¹ But the role of accountancy in colonialism has been receiving increasing attention over the past decade. “It is no coincidence,” Suki Sian and Chris Poullaos write, “that the expansion of professional accountancy throughout Britain and her self-governing colonies occurred . . . during the height of Britain’s imperial power” (Sian and Poullaos 2010, 2).

Within this body of critical accountancy studies, Sean Power and Niamh Brennan have recently discussed the role of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) whose “charter was to improve the condition and civilisation of indigenous native peoples,” and yet, as Power and Brennan argue, “the BSAC discursively constructed its annual-report accounting narratives to dehumanise the natives” (2022, 2; on accountancy and

dehumanisation, see also Fleischman and Tyson 2004).¹² It is of significance, as Power and Brennan note, that its CEO was one Cecil John Rhodes. The full implications of Rhodes having to fall have not yet been appreciated. His statue has been removed, and his library is being removed from university curricula, but the instruments of his undertaking have been incorporated by the post-apartheid university as a means of accountability.

When it is announced that another audit is to be conducted, are we not entitled to ask questions, to contest this? I have been suggesting that it may not be unreasonable to ask if we can be compelled to embrace, if not our own enslavement, then the processes and procedures that made slavery possible. The moral episteme constituted by accounting is, to state the obvious, a constructed one, with discrete if protracted moments of emergence, presenting the possibility of not only setting limits on its power to produce indexes of “creditworthiness,” but of imagining a different order of valuation within the university more capable of giving expression to justice.

What this means for historically black universities, for those that emerged out of the Extension of University Education Act of 1959, or were radically reshaped by it, is a complex matter that I will take up elsewhere (although see Lalu 2007). It is complex because managerialism has been introduced onto a base of “native administration” that “apartheid’s universities” were enlisted to perform. They were “tightly controlled,” as Webster and Mosoetsa suggestively phrase it, “by apartheid managers” (Webster and Mosoetsa 2002, 67), and characterised, as Tembile Kulati and Teboho Moja put it, by “highly centralised and autocratic management styles and practices” (Kulati and Moja 2006, 158). The key point is the inadequacy of any critique of managerialism at historically black universities that takes as its point of departure a defence of a lost golden age of academic autonomy. If Bill Readings, among others, has argued that the idea at the heart of the university must, in this moment of crisis, be invented, that new foundations must be built, a new idea “found or made up” (1995, 490), this is given a fresh significance from the perspective of historically black South African universities. It is not simply a matter of asking what such invention might mean for historically black universities, but, rather, what, from their locations in a divided higher education landscape, comes into view about it that is hidden from the “academic-bureaucratic castles” that see themselves as being, once more, besieged.

Notes

1. Terry Eagleton associates the demonic with managerialism. If the angelic is the attempt to rise above a “degraded state of fleshliness in pursuit of the infinite,” the demonic is the attendant state of meaninglessness to which an obsessive angelic pursuit of order gives rise, the “despair” that “nothing means anything” (2010, 75). The demonic is thus attached, indissociably, to the angelic, forming a diabolical pair that Eagleton associates with the “minor official” rather than the “tyrant,” and thus with “blandness” and “managerial techniques” (122–123). While compelled in many respects by Eagleton’s argument, I think he misrecognises the problem of managerialism, at least as it shows itself in South African universities, as I discuss later. In short, and to foreshadow where I am heading, what Eagleton calls the “bureaucratic mind” is what managerialism takes as its problem.
2. Their assessments of the internal processes by which institutions assess their own transformation is more nuanced than often acknowledged. It was academic auditees in the first

round of HEQC audits who were “unfamiliar with the philosophical aspects” of the audit documents with which they were furnished by CHE, including the relation between quality and transformation, which either fell into an “institutional ‘blind spot’” or was interpreted in a “technical” sense (McKenna and Quinn 2012, 1042).

3. To cite just three recent instances, Gina Anderson, referring to the “‘imperialising discourse’ of managerialism,” notes “the process of colonisation implicit in the managerial project” (2008, 262, 267). In his frequently cited *The Fall of the Faculty*, Benjamin Ginsberg refers to an “administrative blight” for which, he avers, the “prescribed medication will come too late for some victims, but others may yet recover” (Ginsberg 2011, 35). If blight is an agricultural disease, by the end of Ginsberg’s introduction, “the all-administrative university” assumes the quality of an “administrative imperialism,” which, like a foreign, alien force, takes over the body of the university. “Administrative imperialists, like their counterparts in other realms, may claim that their intervention is needed to rescue faltering enterprises. This claim, however, is usually no more than a pretext for territorial expansion” (35, 39). Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2016) similarly alludes to this when he titles a section of his concluding chapter to *The Transformation of Global Higher Education, 1945–2015*, “The Invasion of Assessment Culture..”
4. Freud’s *Introductory Lectures* are not, it may be objected, a theoretically rigorous place from which to proceed. But even in Freud’s Wolf Man case, a text on obsessional neurosis that folds back against his *Introductory Lectures*, and deals with a “long-forgotten memory trace [*Erinnerungsspur*] of a scene,” it is not amnesia that afflicts his patient, but the “unconscious traces left by a memory imprint [*Eindruck*],” and “the activation of this scene” (Freud (1918 2010)), 51, 53). The Wolf Man has a – screened, fractured – memory of this scene; it is the significance of these “memory traces” that has not been grasped.
5. Teaching, for instance, becomes not primarily about constituting shared interests through an unequal pedagogical dialogue, but about the already constituted and ostensibly fully known interests of student-customers being satisfied (Morrow 2009).
6. Managerialism, corporatisation and entrepreneurialism in the university are often used synonymously. While managerialism and corporatisation are questioned almost across the board, even by career managers, entrepreneurialism is frequently defended, setting its possible meanings – often turning its etymological soil, finding fertile ground in its associations with a “venture,” an “undertaking,” a “seizing hold of” – against the way it is being misrepresented. Entrepreneurialism, while frequently associated with both corporatisation and managerialism, has also been posited as the antithesis of the corporate university, of which managerialism is a feature. As Clyde Barrow argues, “despite deploying the rhetoric of entrepreneurialism, the corporate university is structurally antagonistic to entrepreneurialism” (Barrow 2018, viii). Indeed, for Barrow, “corporatisation and entrepreneurialism are contradictory aspects of marketisation” (4–5). It is, thus, worth tentatively unbundling these terms. To put the matter all too baldly, corporatisation and managerialism are closely related but not identical. The latter can be understood as an aspect of, and has come with, the former. While entrepreneurialism might, at some future date, be turned against how it is used within the corporatised university, and be turned into “a form of social creativity” (Hjorth 2005, 387), I treat it here – reductively, for some – as a concept lodged tightly within the corporatised university, which has entailed varying levels of managerial control.
7. Neoliberalism is “grounded,” as Stuart Hall writes, in the idea of “the ‘free, possessive individual,’ with the state cast as tyrannical and oppressive,” an idea, Hall suggests, that “has its roots in the struggles of the rising classes . . . to challenge, break and displace the tyranny of monarchical, aristocratic and landed power,” of which the “‘historic compromise’ of the ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688” is a key moment (2011, 10, 13, 14). Viewed from an Irish perspective, the “bloodless revolution” was “marred by horrific violence” (Vallance 2006, 30), a point even Thatcher acknowledges.
8. It seems of at least some importance, at least for a reading of Coetzee, that Defoe may well have been a propagandist for the Royal Africa Company, employed to write pamphlets and

petitions at a moment when its monopoly on the slave trade was disintegrating (Pettigrew 2007, 14).

9. The enslavement of indigenous peoples was always against the law, which clearly discouraged documentation. “*Inboekstelsel*,” as Fred Morton writes, “was different than other forms of slavery in the Atlantic world,” mainly because “it was neither tied to nor stimulated by an external slave market” (1994, 261).
10. A different reading of this “uncanny moment” might have focussed on the protestant “systematisation of the ethical conduct of life” (Weber [1905] 2002, 84). Max Weber notes how “the scrupulous Reformed Christian *monitored* his state of grace” as if his journal were an audit: Benjamin Franklin carried out a “statistical bookkeeping of his progress in the individual virtues,” and John Bunyan held an “image of God as bookkeeper” (84, emphasis in original).
11. Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose are referring here back to their writings in the 1980s.
12. As Richard Fleischman and Thomas Tyson put it in their study of “accounting’s role in bolstering slavery’s institutions,” by “converting human souls into objective categories, slaves were commoditised and effectively dehumanised” (Fleischman and Tyson 2004, 377, 380).

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