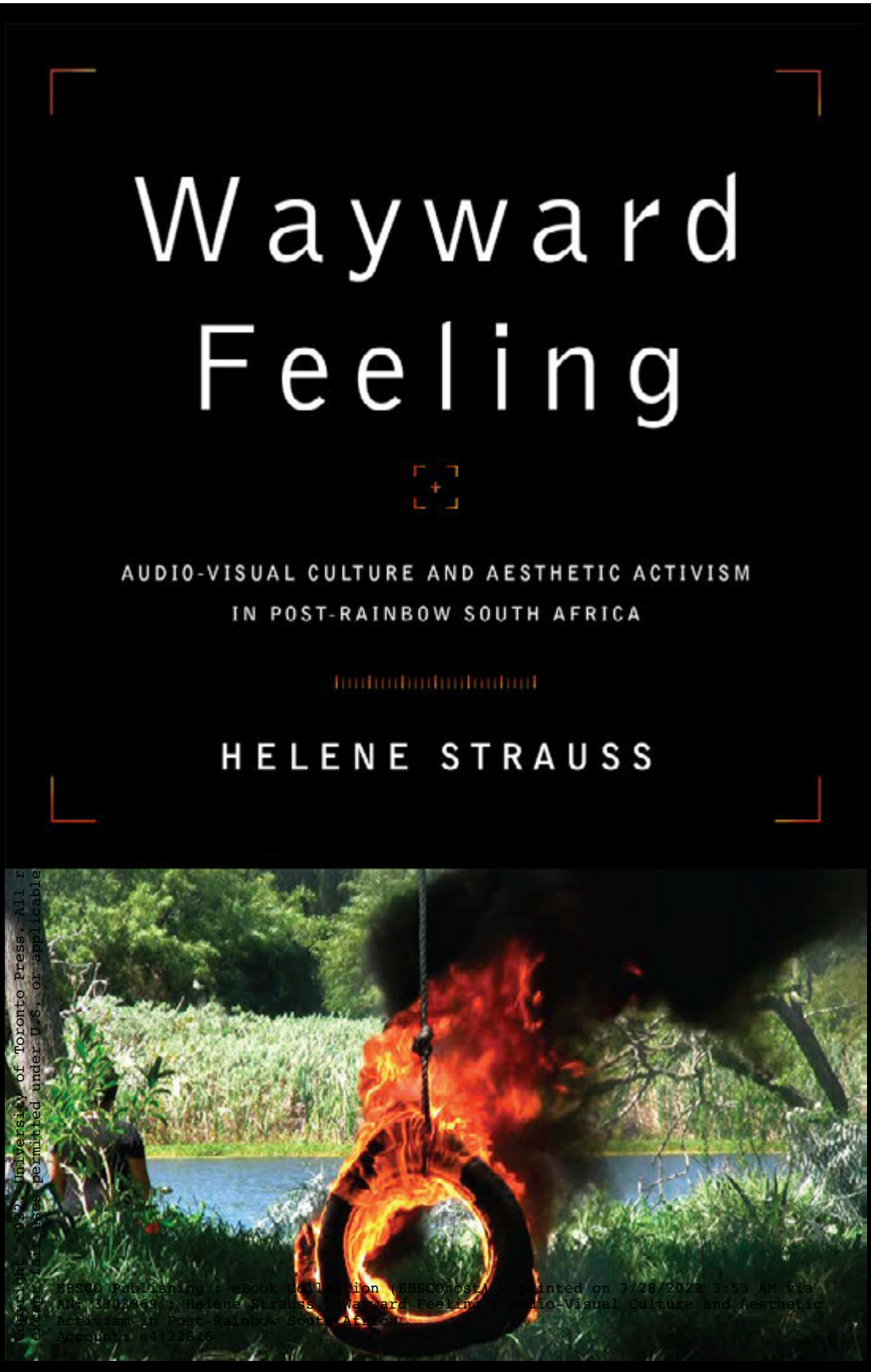

Leila Hall, Assistant Editor of *The Thinker*, in conversation with Prof. Helene Strauss about her recent book, *Wayward Feeling:* Audio-Visual Culture and Aesthetic Activism in Post-Rainbow South Africa (2022; University of Toronto Press).

Leila Hall (LH): Thank you for taking the time to talk to us about your book, *Wayward Feeling: Audio-Visual Culture and Aesthetic Activism in Post-Rainbow South Africa*. The book has just been awarded the University of the Free State Book Prize for Distinguished Scholarship for 2022. Congratulations on the award! Before we delve into a discussion of the book, could you tell us something about yourself, your background, and the work that you do?

Helene Strauss (HS): Thank you, Leila! I am currently a professor in the Department of English at the University of the Free State. I obtained my PhD from the University of Western Ontario, Canada, in 2006, and took up my first permanent academic post in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University in July of that same year. Most recently, I was a visiting research associate at Bard College, Berlin, where I completed the manuscript of this book. My current research focuses mainly on Southern African literature and audio-visual culture, feminist and queer aesthetic activisms, protest cultures, mining, and embodied pedagogy.

LH: It sounds like your research spans a wide range of interests! This is certainly reflected in *Wayward Feeling*, which explores varied creative and activist responses to the increasing feelings of disaffection that have taken root in post-apartheid South Africa. Your focus in the book is on the work of South African filmmakers, audio-visual activists, and performance artists. Before we discuss some of the specific audio-visual texts that you analyse, I am curious about two of the key terms in your title and in your book. Firstly, what does the title *Wayward Feeling* signify here? Why have you chosen this title and how does it encapsulate some of the broader arguments and ideas that you put forward in the book? Secondly, could you talk us through the term 'post-rainbow', which as I understand is significantly different to 'post-apartheid'?

HS: Thank you, those questions really get us into the heart of the work. There are many ways in which this term, 'waywardness', helped me to shape my thinking around post-apartheid—and specifically post-rainbow—'structures of feeling', to use Raymond Williams' famous phrase. I tie this together very concretely in the conclusion, where I talk about waywardness as a term for the many creative, life-affirming, and breath-giving ways in which various forms of suffocation—emotional, spiritual, epistemic, economic, environmental, as well as those found within university institutional spaces—are being mitigated in affective and embodied ways by the artists that I address in the book. So, there is this move towards waywardness as what Saidiya Hartman so beautifully refers to as the 'everyday struggle to live free [...] when there is little room to breathe' (2019: 227–228). I was very pleased, at the end of this project, to discover this superb text by Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019), in which she thinks about waywardness in part in terms of the capacity to breathe. Indeed, this is a preoccupation that has long been central to the work of many theorists of racial injustice in the US, South Africa and elsewhere. At that stage of my writing, the breath had already emerged

as a theme in this book, *Wayward Feeling*. So that helped a lot, but I also differentiate between wayward feelings as feelings that are difficult to contain, that are unruly, that cannot be clearly managed, that come out in unpredictable ways, and 'wayward feeling' as a conceptual frame that helps me to tie together the different parts of the book. The first part of this framing is defiant survival in contexts of extreme daily hardship, which is basically an extension of Hartman's notion of breathing in constrained surroundings. The second part, and this pertains specifically to the book's later chapters, is 'wayward feeling' as a marker for the kinds of aesthetic strategies that filmmakers and artists in the book use to enliven viewers and listeners to the sensorial realm of embodied feeling, to draw the body into a kind of ethical responsiveness to scenes of inequality, suffering, and hardship—and maybe to gesture towards alleviating some of that harm. And then, the third part of the definition is as a kind of methodological commitment to undoing the body-mind dualisms that have become so entrenched in the Westernised university and the kind of university that we've inherited here in South Africa. So, this is a condensed account of the definition of 'wayward feeling' I provide in the book.

I prefer the term 'feeling' because of its capaciousness, and its privileging by feminist and queer theorists, a lot of whom I draw on in this study. It's an umbrella term for many other words—including mood, affect, emotion, and sensation—that have been used to do similar work by those who are associated, whether willingly or not, with what we call the affective turn. I chose the term 'feeling' particularly for feminist reasons, because this study is deeply indebted to the body of feminist, queer and antiracist scholarship that has been thinking about the embodied experience of inequality for a much longer time than many of those anthologised in more recent volumes on affect in dominant critical and continental theory.

For the term 'post-rainbow': I periodise this as starting roughly in the mid-2000s, when the affective palliatives offered during the early transitional years started to wear off, which then resulted in a sharp rise in national protest action. It also earned South Africa the unenviable label of being the protest capital of the world. But I also read the 2006 Jacob Zuma rape trial as partly inaugurating this 'post-rainbow'

“ the breath had already emerged as a theme in this book, Wayward Feeling. So that helped a lot, but I also differentiate between wayward feelings as feelings that are difficult to contain, that are unruly, that cannot be clearly managed, that come out in unpredictable ways ”

era. I did this in part for stubborn reasons, because I think it's important to make sure that gender and sexuality are placed at the very centre of the larger intersectional project of decolonial redress, and I don't think any feminist reader of the past twenty or so years of South African history will miss the importance of that key moment for attuning South African publics to some of the failures of the nation-building projects put in place in the immediate aftermath of apartheid, particularly as far as gender justice is concerned. Having said this, I'm less interested in the term 'post-rainbow' as a temporal than as an affective marker, namely as signalling some of the affective complexities left not just in apartheid's wake, but also in the wake of the various projects of affective management—including the widely discussed Truth and Reconciliation Commission—implemented since the end of apartheid. I'd say that the anaesthetising effects of these projects started to wear off most markedly in the mid-2000s when we began to see these new expressions of insurgent citizenship. We also started to see the emergence, however sporadically, of a reinvigorated public sphere. In many ways, aesthetic activisms since then have been filling part of the void left by a government who no longer bothers to invest in the kinds of grand unifying narratives, visions, and nation-building projects that characterised the Mandela and Mbeki eras, as the state has become stuck in the never-ending crisis- and scandal-management cycle.

LH: Your answer already touched quite significantly on affect and embodied experience, which leads well into my next question. A concern with affect is central to this book. You not only explore affect in terms of the feelings of 'despair, disappointment, and rage' (Strauss, 2022: xiii) that have become so prevalent in present-day South Africa, and that reverberate throughout the audio-visual texts that you study, but you go deeper than this in advocating for the importance of understanding how these emotions are inextricably tied to the physical, material body. This is closely linked to the particular way that you use the word 'aesthetic' as related to the original meaning of the word, and as concerned with sensation and feeling, rather than with beauty or artistic merit. In what ways is the centring of the physical body a key part of your study?

HS: My late cat Tulsi Banana, to whom the book is dedicated, offers one entry point into this question. Tulsi suffered from a disease called feline hyperaesthesia syndrome, a condition characterised by episodes of extreme agitation, hallucinations, and even seizures caused by hypersensitivity to sensory stimuli. The treatment she was given for this debilitating condition was a daily dosage of Prozac, which as you know is a medication given to humans to treat depression. Tulsi's condition has haunted me for years, and it certainly influenced how my thinking on aesthetics took shape as I wrote the book. In popular usage, the term used to describe Tulsi's condition, namely hyperaesthesia, reveals more about the history of aesthetics than the term aesthetics itself, since, like the terms anaesthesia and synaesthesia, it still has the body at its centre, whereas aesthetics in its conventional sense as a branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of beauty and art has been stripped of this power by many years of elitist disciplinary specialisation and depoliticization designed to serve dominant Western sensibilities. With Tulsi's guidance, I came to understand aesthetics as concerned less with some object confined to a gallery, museum, page, or a screen, than with the muddle of affective co-existence, and the capacity of audio-visual cultural production to relationally redirect the flow of our bodily energies.

Aesthetic activisms, as they feature in the book, are concerned specifically with the intersections between politics, sociality, and material affective embodiment. These activisms reach us at various stages of being either numbed to or enlivened by the state of the world. A lot of these insights have become commonplace in the fields of decolonial affect studies, and feminist art and cultural theory, but when I started this project, I was surprised by the relative absence of work reading the combustive terrain of protest and audio-visual mediation in South Africa through an affective lens. That was the case certainly at the start of the project, though this has now started to be addressed within pockets of South African cultural theorising.

As I wrote the book, it further struck me that extractive and colonial capitalism's current culmination in the climate crisis has turned all of us into Tulsi Bananas in some or other way, as we are trying—and more often than not failing—to manage the effects of various forms of overstimulation and violence on our psyches, our bodies, and our spirits (albeit from varying places of privilege). It's not an accident that we are currently facing a global pandemic of addiction to anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medication, or related drugs across the upper and downer spectrum. This is not really the topic of the book, but these issues intersect with the book's interest in the many ways in which cultural workers have been harnessing the affectively enlivening or dulling capacities of the body towards visions of a better future than the one to which our current reality seems to point us.

LH: That's so interesting that Tulsi set so many ideas and thoughts into motion. Could you tell us more about the process of writing this book? What initially sparked the idea for the book? What drew you to the specific audio-visual texts that you analyse? How did the ideas and main arguments in the book begin to coalesce as the project unfolded?

HS: Writing the book was informed in large part by my transnational biography. I spent many years in Canada prior to returning to South Africa to take up my current post. It was during my time in Canada, in conversation with many peers and friends, that the book's initial preoccupation with these complex reciprocities between body, sense, world, and politics, began to take shape. But the book was written after my return to South Africa and specifically during the time that I served as the Chair of the English Department at the University of the Free State. So,

it was very much informed by my own fluctuating feelings about various shifts in public culture during this time, and the forms of protest to which these shifts gave rise. But, perhaps more importantly, my interest in the entanglement of the social and the psychic, and the personal and the political, was driven by my longstanding concern with forms of mediation that propel South African publics towards what I call more affectively discriminating and ethical ways of inhabiting gross social inequality. The various turns associated with growing international scholarly interest in feeling, emotion, affect, mood, and so forth, offered a generative lens for re-thinking the post-rainbow South African moment and the failures of approaches that try to focalise our current political ferment through the lens of cognition—or even the psychological—alone.

The filmmakers, audio-visual artists, and aesthetic activists that drew my attention in the study did so in large part for how they harness the full embodied sensorium in a range of conscientizing aesthetic projects. And by conscientizing I mean not simply a raising of awareness that would accompany a straightforward dissemination of knowledge. Instead, most of the creative cultural workers that I discuss in this study conscientize in and through their appeal to bodily energies that exceed what can be fully articulated through conventional discursive or linguistic means. They express the malaise of our time through a deliberate engagement with affective socialities that include, but also exceed, language. My aim in the book was to take guidance from these cultural workers as I tried to interpret some of the key moments in recent South African history—including the Marikana massacre, the hashtag student protests, ongoing feminist organising against gender-based violence, and outbreaks of xenophobic violence—through the lens that some of the scholarship on affect provided. But also, through an engagement with post-rainbow audio-visual cultural texts and performances that, in both explicit and more subtle ways, invest in undoing the afterlives of historical harm, the project was able to highlight the complex collective embeddedness of individualised feeling in larger structural and historical currents that exceed our immediate experiential biographies. The book further identified in the tension between publicly prescribed or sanctioned feeling, and the feelings called forth by our everyday lives, an enormously generative site of inquiry.

“through an engagement with post-rainbow audio-visual cultural texts and performances that, in both explicit and more subtle ways, invest in undoing the afterlives of historical harm, the project was able to highlight the complex collective embeddedness of individualised feeling in larger structural and historical currents that exceed our immediate experiential biographies.”

LH: In the book, you write about an awareness of your own positionality in South Africa today, and how you—as a white South African—are inevitably a beneficiary of South Africa's colonial and apartheid histories. How did this awareness of your positionality influence and inform the writing of this book, and how does this awareness continue to influence and inform your research and teaching?

HS: This is a very important question that white South Africans, and white academics, must continue to confront as we try to formulate newer and better answers. And this shifts continuously; the work here is never done. As my former colleague Daniel Coleman once taught me, citing Malcolm X's famous claim, racism is like a Cadillac: there's a new model every year. One of the most important outcomes of the hashtag student protests has been a renewed emphasis on holding white academics to account in university spaces in terms ranging from curriculum design to improving equity in hiring. Inhabiting this higher education environment, with students across the racial spectrum, has been instructive in guiding me towards responses to this question not driven by defensiveness, but by a genuine interest in mapping new forms of relationality that are anchored in accountability and a sincere concern with trying to

undo harm. And there's certainly a great deal of harm left to be undone in this country, especially on the part of those of us who inherit unearned racial privilege.

So, it's imperative for me as an educator to help students find new ways of crossing experiential racial divides ethically. For white students, undoing the histories of racism from which we continue to benefit demands that we take a role in a 'political project that outstrips one's own interests' (2016: 197), as psychoanalytic and critical race theorist Derek Hook so memorably phrases it. Working towards an ethical politics of care, reparation, and interconnectedness in this sense requires that one step out of the overdetermining 'I, me, mine' story (a lesson I take from my yoga practice), and learn to genuinely look at how suffering can be alleviated. In the book, this comes through for instance in Chapter 4 on 'Feeling the Fall' and the amazing work that student activists and scholars did during the #Fallist period to place Black pain squarely on the national agenda. And part of the imperative and the political project of that chapter was to listen to that call, to not simply pathologise or anthropologise Black pain, but instead—and this is something that white students and scholars especially must do—to look at the roots of Black pain. Doing so requires that we confront the histories, the affective, the political, and the social modalities at the root of Black pain, to which students so powerfully drew our attention. It's also important to get out of those deep psychic grooves that leave white students especially within their racial siloes, and instead to face Black pain without dismissing it, without retreating from it, and to do so knowing that one cannot share this experiential reality. This is a point that Sara Ahmed makes beautifully in her reading of witnessing another's pain. She says it's crucial not to transform somebody else's pain into one's own sadness. And this is something that white people so often love to do, that is, to again place ourselves at the centre, whereas what's needed is to acknowledge that we cannot know this pain, but that this experiential gulf does not absolve us of the ethical obligation to act towards undoing that which causes the pain.

And then, just one more point here: when I went back and re-read the book prior to drafting the conclusion, I noticed that my growing interest in the cultural politics of mining had a formative role to play in how the various threads in the book came together, and specifically in how one needs to re-think the inheritance of white privilege as something that works not only in discursive and economic ways, but also biochemically, in the sense that we inherit forms of bodily health by virtue of our positioning within histories of racism. As white South Africans, we might for instance live in areas that are less polluted than the areas identified by the apartheid government for Black South Africans, and we may therefore be protected from the many forms of environmental racism that have settled into Black people's bodies—often across generational lines. So, part of the agenda here has been to first acknowledge those very specific forms of privilege, but also to think differently about an ethics of healing, which I get to in Chapter 5 of the book, where I discuss the work of Gabrielle Goliath, but also in my Conclusion where I think more carefully about the embodied politics of the 'shutdown' in the context of the corporate university and the contemporary climate crisis.

LH: In Chapter 3 of the book, you discuss Rehad Desai's documentary *Miners Shot Down*, which investigates the Marikana massacre of 2012, in which 34 striking miners at Lonmin Platinum Mine were killed by the South African Police Service. The Marikana massacre, as you and numerous other critics have pointed out, is now widely understood as a turning point in South Africa's post-apartheid socio-political imagination. For you, Marikana also signifies the beginning of increased securitization and what you term 'affective engineering' (Strauss, 2022: 21) in post-apartheid South Africa. Could you talk us through your understanding of Marikana, how it forms a central part of this book, and what drew you to Desai's documentary?

HS: The Marikana massacre itself really shifted attentions around the mining industry: the ongoing struggles of the men who are locked into these unsustainable forms of extractive labour, but also of women—both those working in the mines and those impacted by the ongoing injustice of migrant labour. These experiences have been part of what was swept under the rug during the heady days of the early post-transitional and liberation euphoria years. The Marikana massacre brought this reality, which the ending of apartheid has not alleviated, newly to the forefront of people's attentions. And, as a turning

point, I think increasingly mining has, following this massacre, emerged as a key consideration for many contemporary cultural theorists in South Africa, specifically also because of how the politics and the history of extraction are currently culminating in a growing climate crisis. So, there are multiple strands that come together around histories of extraction in the text. But the third chapter, alongside Desai's documentary, very concretely tries to listen to the miners themselves. What drew me and many other scholars to this documentary is precisely the fact that it centres the experiences and perspectives of the miners. Their voices, as those of us who lived through that moment will remember very vividly, were muted in the kind of rush towards wrapping this up, towards affective management, towards hurriedly declaring a week of national mourning, without having really stated what precisely was being mourned. This rush towards closure was particularly striking given the fact that the surviving miners were still at the time being held accountable for the deaths of their comrades, a charge justified under that archaic apartheid-era 'common-purpose doctrine,' which extends criminal liability to all involved in an action deemed unlawful. What we saw then was akin to what Rob Nixon might call a 'turbo-capitalist' (2011: 4) scramble to manage the affective, political, and of course financial, fallout of the massacre, and to swiftly lull South African publics into a false sense that the crisis had passed.

Miners Shot Down does the opposite of this: it forces South African publics to slow down, to get the side of the story that the mainstream media brushed over. The politics of securitisation that we saw emerge in the aftermath of the massacre made me think very concretely about 'neoliberal time' as characterised by the use of many opportunistic temporal tactics to direct or divert public attention for the sake of securing the interests of capital, first and foremost. And so, temporality became a thread that ran through the entire manuscript. The accelerated temporality of overcoming, for instance, is one that we've seen emerge in many tense moments in history, where we are told that we've prevailed over all these hardships, and those public declarations then serve to delegitimise the responses and the traumas of those whose experience of time does not align with national structures of feeling. If one remains attached to loss and suffering in a melancholic way, one is then stigmatised as pathologically refusing to move forward, when in fact these national initiatives don't chime with the individual experience of trauma and loss. The miners who survived this incident have never, in fact, been at the forefront of these national initiatives of mourning. They were designed more as a way of placating national South African publics. Thankfully, a very robust creative public sphere emerged in the wake of Marikana, in which precisely these supposedly pathological attachments to loss, these forms of productive melancholia, started to power interventions aimed at addressing the hardship and the pain of people at the centre of events like these in a more substantive way. These interventions include the work done by a range of civic organisations, as well as aesthetic mediations of this moment in documentaries, various forms of performance and audio-visual artwork, as well as in literary texts. Most recently, the poet and academic Uhuru Phalafala's volume *Mine Mine Mine*, offers a particularly compelling rethinking of the ongoing destruction wrought by South Africa's history of gold mining in particular.

There's a connection also between the chapter on Marikana and Chapter 5 of the book, 'Feminist Resonance', in which I consider Gabrielle Goliath's moving mediations of the experience of gender-based violence, and her long-standing investment in the work of reparation, care, repair, and healing. Desai's documentary on Marikana came out at a time when a lot of the information that he shares was not widely available, so it was a very necessary move, but many feminist theorists have subsequently criticised the documentary for the absence of women's voices. A lot of subsequent work, including a film such as Aliki Saragas' *Strike a Rock* and the writings of Phalafala and others, has centred the experiences of women who are either affected by histories of migrant labour, and were left for years on end with living husbands who were absent, women who work in the mines themselves (the focus, for instance, of Asanda Benya's research), or the women in the surrounding communities.

The kind of aesthetic strategies that Desai uses to focus our attentions, quite rightly, on the suffering of the miners, have further been approached with greater caution by someone like Gabrielle Goliath, who has long expressed concern about the ethics of screening violence and extreme bodily suffering. These

concerns are especially relevant to African contexts, where a long history exists of spectacularising the violated Black body—a history that we can trace from the slave era in South Africa into the global present. So, there are many ethical questions that surround the representation of violence to which someone like Gabrielle Goliath is painstakingly attuned because of her expressly feminist training and her interest in finding aesthetic registers within which viewers are called upon—in very multisensorial, embodied ways—to break cycles of violence. In many of her installations she focuses both on survivors and on the women who did not survive, and the communities of mourning left in their wake. Key to her approach is the search for ethical ways of honouring these histories and legacies. Through her diligent curation of collaborative, survivor-centric performative spaces that amplify the agency and subjective singularity of her subjects, Goliath forges new creative pathways towards ethical spectatorial responsiveness to sexual and gender-based violence. My reading of Goliath's work in the book's fifth chapter brought me to the concept of 'resonant feminist listening', which I define in part as a way of attending to deep histories that continue to echo across generational lines. I've also been thinking about the notion 'toxicity' in its many forms. 'Toxic' has become such an overused word, but I think there's value in how it guides us to the intersections between the inheritance of damaging forms of interpersonal interaction resulting from histories of colonisation and the reality of inhabiting polluted environments. Max Liboiron's brilliant recent book *Pollution is Colonialism* (2021) has done especially important work in this regard to help us reckon with some of these intersections. What Gabrielle Goliath does so captivatingly in focusing on the breath, for instance, is to harness the body's capacity to regenerate and to rework its positioning within a larger whole. Her work basically offers a reparative aesthetic alternative to corporate and neoliberal ways of responding to the expression of civic frustrations with a past not fully past.

LH: Thank you for that extensive response! Would you also like to talk to us about Chapter 4, which I believe is a really important chapter in the book? In Chapter 4, you write about the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements which shook South Africa's universities in 2015 and 2016. In this chapter, you analyse performance pieces that were central to these movements. Can you tell us more about these performance pieces, why they resonated with you, and some of the key ideas that you put forward in relation to them?

HS: The most well-known piece discussed in this chapter is the protest by Chumani Maxwele, who threw human excrement onto the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at UCT in 2015, setting into motion the so-called #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall era. A lot has been written about this particular moment, but I struggled to find anything that focused primarily on its affective dimensions. I wanted to focalise Maxwele's performance of affective alienation specifically through the lens of infrastructure and sanitation history, and here I found the work of Shannon Jackson and Steven Robins especially valuable. They helped me to understand the affective complexities surrounding the so-called 'toilet wars' in Cape Town, and the history of relegating certain kinds of bodies and forms of bodily expression to the margins. There's an instructive history to the racially skewed allocation of access to sanitation infrastructure in South Africa on the part of the colonial and apartheid states. This legacy is far from having been addressed, and we see it of course also in the energy infrastructure problems we all experience now, but by which populations in historically marginalised communities have long been disproportionately affected. Maxwele's protest was particularly interesting to me because of how it thrust the corporeality of disgust into the centre of whiteness, as it were, into white galleries and the white university, to expose this history of bodily discomfort that was so central to apartheid engineering.

But, as I point out in the chapter, Maxwele was hardly an uncontroversial figure, and so feminist interventions were crucial to correcting some of the gender blindness and sexism that characterised so many male-centric protests at the time. The work of Sethembile Msezane, which inspired much of my thinking in this chapter, was key in this regard. Her performance of 'Chapungu'—who was a Zimbabwean spiritual medium considered to have been a messenger of God and the ancestors—at the moment when Rhodes was taken from its plinth in front of the UCT rugby fields, was vital in highlighting the need to listen to historically maligned ancestral wisdoms, and to recognise that these wisdoms in fact live on in the bodies of people like Msezane and the feminist activist

groups that she's been part of. Much pioneering work is currently being done to re-energise some of those knowledges, by theorists such as Hugo ka Canham, in his amazing book *Riotous Deathscapes* (2023), which I so wish had been out in print prior to me completing my manuscript. The book powerfully re-maps the history of embodied suffering resulting from colonial and apartheid violence, routes these histories through indigenous knowledge systems, and locates the embodied sensorium within Black-centric theory and creative production (via what he calls Mpondo theory). His work is part of an exciting body of knowledge that has recently been reinvigorating academic thinking around historical violence from specifically Black, indigenous, and Black/indigenous feminist and queer perspectives. Msezane has long been bringing these knowledges into the embodied present in a performative way, through live art, and through her refusal to let archives remain confined to stone, statue, or museum.

LH: You submitted the manuscript for this book just as Covid-19 hit in 2020, and as South Africa was entering its first lockdown. In your preface, you reflect on this inadvertent but significant timing, as you mention that the book's concerns were suddenly 'amplified' (Strauss, 2022: x) by the context of the pandemic. Can you tell us a bit more about this?

HS: Yes, I completed the manuscript in March of 2020, and wrote the preface at the end of that year after it had passed peer review. Several events indeed coalesced that year to throw the book's primary preoccupations into sharp relief. Both the Covid-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd, for instance, brought questions surrounding struggles for breath—especially on the part of Black citizens in South Africa, the U.S., and elsewhere—anew to the forefront of international attention. While working on the preface I further came across the news that Fikile Ntshangase had been assassinated. Ntshangase was a leading environmental activist for the Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation (MCEJO), who worked towards blocking the planned expansion of Tendele's mining operations in the area near the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi nature reserve in KwaZulu Natal. Tendele's plan to enlarge the Somkhele opencast coalmine is guaranteed to exacerbate air and groundwater pollution in the region, not to mention to worsen human and nonhuman health. And so, concerns about the impact that the expansion of existing extractive projects in South Africa would have especially on respiratory health, were echoed in the book's focus on the inequitable distribution of access to breathable atmospheres across a range of sites. These concerns are of course central also to how I came to think about waywardness—with the help of Saidiya Hartman and others—as a methodological, epistemological, and affective-embodied anchor for the text.

> "The preface and conclusion of Wayward Feeling reflect in part on this longstanding diminishing of our capacity to breathe (and I use the pronoun 'our' here advisedly, knowing that not all of us are included in the 'our' of extraction in equally destructive ways). For those whose labour and affective resources are extracted in service of racial capitalism, the assault on airways is further heightened by the inequitable distribution of access to green space along racial lines."

This interest in racial capitalism's theft of breath has also stretched into my current research on bad relations, including the bad chemical and atmospheric relations caused by South Africa's mining histories and related forms of environmental racism and pollution. I recently submitted a paper on the documentary film *Dying for Gold* for a book on 'The Ruptured Commons,' in which I bring together the long-standing pulmonary pandemic resulting from South African gold mining with histories of botanicide that have long characterised industrialisation's relationship to the earth. The project brought the struggle of the 'Living Limpopo' movement to my attention, and specifically the work they've been doing to halt the absurd plan to relocate over 109,000 trees in the Limpopo's Northern Vhembe district—a district which includes the environmentally-sensitive Unesco Vhembe Biosphere Reserve—to make way for a massive new metallurgical zone. The so-called

Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone (MMSEZ), a multi-billion-dollar South Africa-China bilateral economic initiative driven by President Ramaphosa already since 2017, is set to have devastating environmental consequences. And so, at the same time as we've seen minor gains in the fight for breath—most prominently in the landmark victory in the #DeadlyAir case, which found the South African state to be in breach of its constitutional obligation to clean up toxic air in the Mpumalanga Highveld—new threats continue to emerge alongside ongoing histories of environmental plunder. The preface and conclusion of *Wayward Feeling* reflect in part on this longstanding diminishing of our capacity to breathe (and I use the pronoun 'our' here advisedly, knowing that not all of us are included in the 'our' of extraction in equally destructive ways). For those whose labour and affective resources are extracted in service of racial capitalism, the assault on airways is further heightened by the inequitable distribution of access to green space along racial lines. And so, while the Covid-19 pandemic to an extent equalised the struggle for access to breath in unexpected ways, people in the service industries and Black and indigenous people around the globe continued to be disproportionately affected.

LH: In the book, you write that your concern is 'less in disappointment itself than in that to which it gives rise' (Strauss, 2022: 13). Although the subject of your book is audio-visual texts that grapple with feelings such as disappointment, rage, and despair in response to the contemporary South African moment, you concurrently explore how these texts are ultimately concerned with defiance, and even with hope. How do you understand the texts as expressions of defiance, and as pointing towards realms of possibility beyond the problems of inequality, racism, and sexism that continue to define present-day South Africa?

HS: I think it's no longer controversial to characterise the contemporary structure of feeling in South Africa as marked by disappointment. And yet, even as we sit with daily and new configurations of disappointment, we've seen a lingering investment in some of the aspirational ideals of the anti-apartheid struggle that resistant publics in South Africa continue to carry with them. Indeed, the very fact of our disappointment speaks to a melancholic attachment to desires that remain unmet, in turn powering creative new modes of surviving—perhaps even thriving. As Sara Ahmed phrases it, 'disappointment can be experienced as a gap between an ideal and an experience that demands action' (2010: 41). If some of what remains at the root of our disappointments could be described as hope, this hope issues from what Donna Haraway calls 'the thick present' (2016: 1). To stay 'with the trouble' (2016: 1) in the way Haraway conceptualises it, is to relinquish our attachment to linear teleologies of progress, and to what I call in the book 'the prolepsis of the promise', as though the promise already brings something into being, as though it's performative in that Butlerian way. In the post-Mandela, post-Mbeki present, we've had to learn to live with the fact that the 1996 Constitution, for instance, did not in fact bring into being all the forms of justice that it so aspirationally tried to write into South African law. This work remains to be done, but we keep getting distracted if we attach our activist energies to these overdetermining futures.

It's important further to remember that doing this work is experienced as utterly exhausting or even crushing for many. So, in my second chapter, 'Moody, Expectant Teens', I consider some of the often-draining strategies of defiant endurance in which young people in South Africa invest to make lives more bearable. I found in the visual autobiographies of young filmmakers such as Evelyn Maruping and the late Sarah Chu particularly inspiring creative experiments in life-making amid difficulty. These young women refused to be crushed by the hopelessness of the environments in which they live. This is conveyed, for instance, in Maruping's exploration, in her film *Where is the Love?*, of early reproduction, which is such a heavily regulated site within patriarchy. Zayleen Elwing, one of the women in the film, went against the grain of conventional expectation here in particularly revealing ways. Despite the demand for her to be disappointed and unhappy and ashamed of herself for having fallen pregnant at an early age, this woman found in her connection with her young child these beautiful moments of sustenance, joy, and healing. So, in these moments of improvisation—the improvisation of multiple futures on the edges of global capitalism, as Anna Tsing and Rita Barnard might phrase it—we find some powerful lessons in how to 'survive disappointment,' as I define it in conversation with theorists including Lauren Berlant,

Lee Edelman, Nthabiseng Motsemme, and Dia Da Costa. And this again brings us back to Hartman's point about breathing, finding breath, in the face of extreme hardship. I call this 'wayward agency', which requires a considerable deal of energy and tenacity. But there is a kind of qualified hope to derive from this, which we find, for instance, in the examples of women such as Elwing, but also in the work of the many creative cultural workers who are helping South Africans reach towards something other than the stuckness of post-rainbow disillusionment.

LH: Thank you so much again for your time, and for these really detailed and insightful answers. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you would like to add or say about the book?

HS: Thanks so much, Leila, for engaging so thoughtfully with my work, and for asking such incisive questions. If there's one thing I would like this book to achieve, it would be to highlight the incredible work South African filmmakers, audio-visual activists, theorists, and creative cultural workers have been doing to distil ongoing South African moments of emotional difficulty—whether quotidian or spectacular—into animate expressive form, and, by extension, to steer us towards more socially just ways of inhabiting the present and connecting across difference. We will need this guidance as we must learn to confront an accelerating climate crisis without retreating into isolation, fear, and violence.

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