

PRELUDE: What Remains?

OCCUPATION



FIGURE P.1 Playing soccer, Highbury Ground, Wentworth, 1995. © Cedric Nunn.

It sits in the middle of Wentworth like an occupying power. Cedric Nunn's photograph at apartheid's end captures perfectly the contrast between corporate power and community vitality. Blink, and the soccer players will have run off the frame while the smokestacks are frozen in time. Fermented rot of ages,

the devil's excrement that we cannot get enough of, oil conjures petrodollars and oil wars, ruined environments and hopes of untold wealth. Oil encapsulates corporate imperialism digging its heels into every reserve on land and sea, under glacial ice and desert sand, foreclosing democratic energies that may have led elsewhere. Places proximal to the promise of oil wealth have a particular pathos, in oceanic rigs, oil-saturated water tables, children playing around lagoons of crude, and neighborhoods stuck next to oil refineries. In this seventh century of imperial crossings, the empire of oil lurks in the background. Detritus of our living planet, charred remains of our collective dreams.

SITTING



FIGURE P.2 Sitting, Wentworth, 1995. © Cedric Nunn.

And yet it sits in the middle of the neighborhood surrounded by the bustle of life. They call it the ship that never sails, its fumes billowing from silhouetted smokestacks. On certain nights the smell is so obvious that it goes without comment, and yet bodies remember, curtains remember. Refineries and other polluting industry surrounding the neighborhoods of Wentworth and Merebank saturate daily life to such an extent that they seem inviolable. Photographers like Nunn have been exemplary critics of what remains pain-

fully unsaid as people sit, smoke, walk, talk about work, go to church, scope out sexual possibilities, make an angle, crack a joke, wait for a *kombi* (shared taxi), or shout at the kids. Wentworth is an exceedingly vibrant place; its edgy, transgressive poetry borne by daily contrasts of power and inequality has produced jazz singers, dance troupes, soccer players, and everyday dreamers. In the shadows of smokestacks, this young man sits, lost in a daydream.

THE DISTRICT



FIGURE P.3 *Alabama*. Wentworth, 2003. © Jenny Gordon.

There is something expansive about *the District*, the relatively small, walkable square mile of Wentworth, with its low homes, little hills, and micro-neighborhoods, next door to the equally walkable neighborhood of Meribank with its lanes, temples, mosques, and backyard churches. Wide skies do not advertise pollution but rather hide it, shifting its pain into the interiors of homes, into uncounted forms of chronic suffering. Jenny Gordon's wide-angle "environmental portraiture" awes and inspires while subtly suggesting slow and pervasive suffering. This image was taken from the Alabama Road flats, from the home of a man who also repairs cars and fridges on the road outside. The photographer looks out to the former green "buffer zone" between the former Coloured Group Area of Wentworth and the former white area on the horizon beyond. From this vantage, the hustle-bustle of life entwines with refinery smokestacks. This is the District, where the sky remains wide and beautiful. At night, all is quiet. The quiet release of pollutants, the smell of dreams.



FIGURE P.4 *Hafiza Reebee*. Merebank, 2003. © Jenny Gordon.

Embodied remains of corporate waste. Gordon photographs Hafiza Reebee with her inhaler in her home in Merebank in a series that documents how people live with toxic suffering. Reebee passed away after many years of asthma attacks, the consequence of nocturnal emissions from the refinery. Another gentle man who ran a *spaza* shop (informal convenience store) in Assegai is now gone. And another person, another brother, another sister. There are no statistics of a long history of ill health. The apartheid regime did not keep records linked to Black people's addresses, so journalists like Tony Carnie battled to document slow death in South Africa's cancer alley. Capital makes people workers and consumers, and also repositories for industrial waste. Yet embodied life slips the grasp of power. Her eyes. Her expression. One arm outstretched, holding on.

WAITING



FIGURE P.5 Waiting, Wentworth, 1995. © Cedric Nunn.

The refinery is also a sign of prized labor. Wentworth men have been compelled to aspire to be industrial artisans waiting for periodic employment as boilermakers, pipe fitters, or fitters and turners, particularly when the refinery shuts down for maintenance. However, living in a neighborhood surrounded by industry has never guaranteed them work. City hall plays the “race card” when workers from surrounding neighborhoods protest; it is expedient to portray them as Coloureds and Indians fighting against African jobs. In the eclipse of Black Consciousness politics, the city manager is complicit with a deepening mire of political corruption in Durban and in the African National Congress (ANC). Here, Nunn photographs young people in Wentworth standing, leaning, sitting, smoking. A year after the democratic elections, we might ask what they are waiting for. We might ask when this time of waiting will end.



FIGURE P.6 Tattoos, Wentworth, circa 2004. © Peter McKenzie.

When I tell an interlocutor from Wentworth that I finally have a book title, *Apartheid Remains*, he nods. “How true.” Pausing, he wonders if affirmative action is a kind of apartheid. I deflect, shifting to the ambiguities of various things that remain. He humors me. As elsewhere in South Africa, race is unrelenting. Peter McKenzie carefully photographs marks on the body, etched in the psyche. Frantz Fanon famously described the horror with which a white child saw him, but he realized as a psychiatrist treating victims and perpetrators of colonial violence that this was the tip of the iceberg. Of the Algerian Revolution, he warned that any successor regime would also inherit the protracted psychic, embodied, and spatial effects of colonial violence. Any attempt to think against the relentlessness of race stumbles on the rigidities of categories, archives, subjectivities, stories, songs, feelings, hopes, skins, and dreams. As we write with hope about a shared future, the Hydra of race returns, shifting its face and form, sneaking into the hand held out in solidarity. In McKenzie’s image, the living mind-body remains, tattoos of survival pointing to the beauty of life beyond race.



FIGURE P.7 Young people in conversation, Wentworth, 1983. © Cedric Nunn.

These young people photographed by Nunn in 1983 did not yet, perhaps, know that they were going to sign up for the revolution. Robert McBride, in the middle, remains vilified for his role in blowing up two beachfront bars. His father, the late Derrick McBride, incarcerated on Robben Island, recalled suggesting to Chris Hani, popular leader of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the ANC, that he could blow up all the oil tanks along the airport in South Durban, to which, apparently, Hani gently replied, “We want to inherit this country, not blow it up.” The aging militant recalled this with a specific irony, as it is his restraint that is important in this biblical warning of “the fire next time.” This gesture calls forth wider echoes and kindred spirits across centuries of revolutionary politics. Derrick McBride, an aging community activist when we met, thought resolutely against forms of knowledge in his neighborhood, as well as in the country and the world at large. The implicit care and caution in his warning provides a moment of emotional solidarity with the arcane, priestly work of academic writing and pushes for a space of learning beyond it.



FIGURE P.8 Looking out, Wentworth, circa 2004. © Peter McKenzie.

Social science was not always so venerated. To most people it continues to be weird and inaccessible. Who can argue with so many dates and citations, big words and claims to really know how the world works? Scholarly labor involves its own preoccupations, but there are some consolations, including that many things can make it into the written record. Look around at the many moments of arrested science that hold open the possibility of learning from less privileged people facing the conditions of their social domination. Each man in McKenzie's photograph offers a different view. The central figure dares to look directly into our uncertain future; the others are more guarded. This is not just a book about what specific populations think, nor is it a township study about life after apartheid, nor is it about degradation in a toxic sink in a time of jobless growth. While these are unavoidable aspects of the problem of life in the shadows of oil refineries, what remains on these pages are living energies that continue to strive, under conditions not of their choice, for a future in which nothing of racial capitalism, nothing of apartheid, remains.

