

of language, its active structure, then vernacular is the inventive version that comes from being lax about rules, “a prosodic gift whose agency flourishes in the bodily time of an institutional and economic evasion.” Like the soundscapes, the liberation from grammar in its printed form allows the material text to be a vehicle for alternative histories. Nilling is an important ethic for both the creation of such works and their reception: “Poetry may show us that when we sing to the subjectivity of the other, without determining that subjectivity, this is politics.”

Robertson is not occupied with what a text can do, but rather what it can contain. Inside the study, Robertson finds warmth and companionship: “Turning the pages, my desk-lamp joining the complicitous glow, I become a member of anonymity.” But, read differently, anonymity becomes an escape. Why must we always abandon our history? And why must we turn our prose into essays? Robertson shows us the beauty that a text can harbor when its own nilling is met with ours. In less pacifist situations, when a text’s will meets our nill, or our will butts up against understanding, the outcome is less certain. The social content of Robertson’s best examples is accidental and incidental, and the writing itself achieves egalitarianism when her words are least wrought and academic; when she remains close to the texts at hand; and when the will to read her work and the concentration it requires fall away.

Nausicaa Renner

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Ivan Vladislavic, *Double Negative*. London: And Other Stories, 2013. 204pp. \$15.95

One of the most important moments in Ivan Vladislavic’s *Double Negative* comes early in the novel, when the father of our protagonist, Neville, arranges for Neville to spend a day following Saul Auerbach, a famous South African photographer and family friend, around the city of Johannesburg. Shortly after meeting Auerbach, Neville, a disaffected college student struggling with his place in South Africa’s apartheid system, follows him up a hill high above the city to apprehend what lies below. “You think it would simplify things, looking down from up here,” Auerbach says, “but it has the opposite effect on me. If I try to imagine the lives going on in all these houses, the domestic dramas, the family sagas, it seems impossibly complicated. How could you ever do justice to something so rich in detail? You couldn’t do it in a novel, let alone a photograph.” In one sense, the moment alludes to the novel’s original mixed-media format. *TJ/Double Negative* is Vladislavic’s collaboration with the South African photographer David Goldblatt; putting literature and photography together represents an attempt at helping the reader “see”

what each medium invariably fails to capture. But one doesn't need to have Goldblatt's companion portraits in order to understand Auerbach's aporetic moment as essential to the novel as well. Vladislavić's novel returns time and again to the fundamental difficulty of "doing justice" to the city and the lives of those who live there, to the fact that whatever is brought into focus also occludes something else from view.

The conclusion of this scene presses the point further: at Auerbach's suggestion, Neville, Auerbach, and the British reporter who accompanies them each select a house at random and head off to photograph anyone they might find living inside. What results is a powerful testament to the deeply conflicted attitudes about the city that one finds in other Vladislavić novels like *The Restless Supermarket* (2001) and *The Exploded View* (2004), attitudes shared by many other artists and authors as well. The first house turns out to be empty, but Auerbach meets a black African maid who agrees to let him into her tiny, run-down home out back. "What had he told her?" Neville wonders, before continuing on: "Then again, it hardly mattered whether she grasped what we were up to. Who we *were* was clear. We were white men. We would do as we pleased." According to Neville, the photograph that Auerbach takes that day—of the woman and two children in front of a family portrait indicating that a third child has recently passed away—becomes iconic. "The photograph is one of Auerbach's best.... You can look it up on the internet," we read. But we as readers are privy to information about its production that those who find it on a fictional Google search are not—the same political pressures that force Auerbach's anonymous maid to live with her family in a cramped backyard shack are also those that enable Auerbach's camera to penetrate the privacy of her impossibly tiny home.

For *Double Negative*, in other words, there is no perspective on the city's private spaces that is not wholly caught up in its social inequalities, no way of doing justice to the lives that unfold in the city below the hill that does not reproduce its spatial and social fractures. This is a problem, moreover, that does not end with the end of apartheid. The "new" Johannesburg to which Neville returns after more than a decade in exile is, if anything, more heavily fragmented than the city he knew as a youth—still divided by the geography of apartheid, widespread fear of crime means that middle-class citizens like Neville have begun to retreat into homes surrounded by walls and monitored by private security systems. Thus when Neville, who eventually becomes a photographer himself, moves from catalogue shoots to more artistic fare, his approach is different than what his early affiliation with Auerbach might suggest—he makes a name for himself taking portraits of Johannesburg residents standing outside their doors. The project reflects, at least in part, his frustrating political impotence, a defining characteristic of his from beginning to end. In many ways an archetype of white South

African liberalism, Neville notes at one point that while his radical student friends believe they “would be carried in one piece to a classless shore,” he looked at himself somewhat differently. “History would break over me like a wave that had already swept through the manor house,” he says, “and bear me off in a jumble of picture frames and paper plates.” His images of people standing in front of their doors thus reflect his unwillingness to see behind the scenes, as it were, or his inability to fully come to terms with the forces that make his subjects and their residences who and what they are.

Neville’s project has salutary aspects as well, a point that comes out most clearly when a young journalist named Janie arranges to follow him on a day of driving around the city. A blogger focused on growing her personal brand, she spends much of their drive proclaiming her disinterest in history and haphazardly taking pictures on her phone. When Neville stops to take a photo he has arranged in advance, moreover, she wanders through the door from which Neville’s Congolese migrant emerges in order to see what lies inside the compound he calls home. She finds the place utterly fascinating—it is comprised of a series of makeshift huts that house migrants from all over Africa—though Neville is less than enthused. “When you’re done, you should look around,” she tells him. “No...I don’t want the inside story,” he replies.

If Janie’s wanderings represent a post-apartheid reprisal of the perspective that defines Auerbach’s iconic image, Neville’s preference for front-door portraits suggests a respect for privacy that Janie seems to reject. However, Neville’s disinterest in the “inside story” is not solely a function of well-worn liberal resistance to the technologically mediated experience that Janie represents—for him, it also means a different way of inhabiting the city than Janie does. Janie calls her city travels “urban exploration,” an activity of well-to-do youth who “venture into run-down paradises with cameras and notebooks to enjoy their pleasures and chart their mysteries.” Janie and her fellow explorers find joy in discovery, but the connotations of “exploration” cannot be overlooked—theirs is a game about mapping subaltern terrain. Neville’s knowledge of the city comes instead from a game he used to play with his father, in which he lay down in the family car and tried to guess his location as his father drove around the neighborhood. The difference here is instructive; upon mastering his father’s game, Neville believes he “had unlearned the art of getting lost.” For him it is less a joy than coming to terms with some part of himself.

Double Negative is certainly aware of the history of inequities that defines present-day Johannesburg. But against the invasiveness implicit in “urban exploration” and the varied technologies of surveillance that accompany it, the novel suggests that coming to terms with Johannesburg entails embracing a mode of experience that those who focus on the “inside story” tend to miss. *Double Negative* at times feels vague and evasive, a story that won’t quite

come into focus, but this is less a failing of Vladislavić's prose than it is an essential part of the narrative: for the novel, doing justice to Johannesburg is less a matter of grasping the city whole than it is of learning to see it as an amalgam of its parts, and of getting lost in its dizzying maze of experiences.

Brady Smith

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Heriberto Yepez, *The Empire of Neomemory*. Oakland, CA and Philadelphia: Chainlinks, 2013. 274pp. \$15

Heriberto Yepez's *The Empire of Neomemory* is not strictly a manifesto; the size and scope of the text position it as a serious scholarly intervention. But its style (the chronic use of polemically charged and open-ended declaratives: "Patriarchy is not sustained by fathers. Patriarchy is constructed by pseudo-sons." "All translation is a colonial act.") and the particular intensity of its intellectual furor belong to the lengthy political/aesthetic manifesto tradition in Latin American letters. *Manifesto*: "made public." In Yepez's hands, this rhetorical genre makes manifest the *pantopia*, that invisible yet omnipresent specter haunting the margins of our late capitalist world as the limit expanse of empire, "a total space, individuated from every other space, which contains all things, all events, ordered under the same set of laws, under the same empire." Memory and mnemonics are the basis upon which pantopia is founded, for both function as a flattening of temporal difference over an infinite expanse. Yet Yepez resists the ongoing "Americanization of the world"—Hollywood romanticism and cultural imperialism under a single topology—through a disintegrative praxis that embraces a poetics of difference, disorder, forgetfulness.

The focal point of Yepez's critique is not the United States, the pantopia par excellence, but Charles Olson, the lexical progenitor of the "postmodern" and inheritor of the Poundian tradition of paratactic epic verse. Yet Yepez is not interested in Olson's position as the paterfamilias of a dominant lineage of twentieth-century, Anglo-American poetry: rather, Olson serves as "a microanalogy for decoding the psychopoetics of Empire." The symptom, in this case, precedes the diagnosis. Yepez reads Olson's volume *Letters for Origin* as ethnographic "projectivism," and his journeys into Mexico and its Mesoamerican past as the colonization of indigenous America's mythic past for a fresh batch of occulted "neomemories"—the selective accounts of history recycled to fit a linear, and thus reversible, model of time. "Neomemory," Yepez writes, "is an arithmetic in which parts are subtracted from *historical memory*...in order to obtain a database of new, purified, sublime mnemonics." In Yepez's view, Olson's work ushers in a new mode of ethnographic