Terror Terroir: Building Disruptive Possibilities in Ivan Vladislavić's *The Folly*

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Summary

Ivan Vladislavić's 1993 novel *The Folly* has received less critical attention than his other writing. The novel was republished recently and, in this article, I read *The Folly* as a text that, from the vantage point of 1993, stages white South African suburbia as a site fraught with tensions. In the novel, the appearance of a drifter on a *terrain vague* dissolves the certainties of a suburban neighbourhood, creating an inchoate but gnawing sense of threat that finds expression in the Malgas family. I argue that white suburbs are under-examined cultural sites whose mundanity disguises their disciplining principles. I draw on experiences of inhabiting 'white space' as a Black person to read Vladislavić's novel as parodying white unease towards spaces that disrupt the taut or smoothed surfaces of suburbia. This unease is reflected most visibly in the post-apartheid evolution of such suburbs into lifestyle clusters, security estates and other configurations of life that are arranged around the alleviation of white middle-class anxieties.

Opsomming

Die kritiese resepsie van Ivan Vladislavić se 1993-roman *The Folly* is opmerklik meer beperk as dié van sy ander romans. Onlangs verskyn 'n heruitgawe van *The Folly*, en in hierdie artikel lees ek dié roman as 'n teks wat, vanuit die oogpunt van 1993, wit voorstedelike Suid-Afrika voorstel as deurspek met spanning. In die roman laat die verskyning van 'n swerwer op 'n *terrain vague* die sekerhede van 'n voorstedelike woonbuurt verdwyn en skep dit 'n onvolledige, maar knaende, sin van bedreiging wat deur die Malgas-familie voorgestel word. Ek voer aan dat wit woonbuurte kulturele terreine voorstel wat nog nie na behore ondersoek is nie en waarin alledaagsheid hul dissiplinêre beginsels verbloem. Ek steun op my eie ervarings as swartmens wat in 'n "wit ruimte" woon om Vladislavić se roman te lees in terme van hoe dit wit ongemak teenoor ruimtes wat die strak of egalige oppervlakte van die voorstede versteur, parodieer. Hierdie ongemak word die duidelikste weerspieël in die post-apartheid-evolusie van sulke woonbuurte. Dit sluit in leefstylgroeperinge, veiligheidskomplekse en ander vorme van die menslike bestaan wat in diens van die opheffing van die wit middelklas se vrese georden is.

Ivan Vladislavić's 1993 novel *The Folly* has merited less critical attention when compared with other texts in his oeuvre such as *The Exploded View*

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(2017), *Propaganda by Monuments* (1996) or *Portrait with Keys* (2006). Published in the turbulent last year of the apartheid regime's existence, *The Folly* is a departure from the realist modes of representation common to much South African fiction at the time. The novel shares Vladislavić's interest in the complex meshing of social practices, values and value judgments that infiltrate the everyday in a South African society unsure of its past and future. Because it occults itself in white suburbia rather than the city, *The Folly* is more oblique than Vladislavić's other novels; nevertheless, the criticism that has emerged is broad and diverse in scope.[1]

The Folly is about a couple whose mundane suburban domesticity is interrupted when a stranger arrives at the threshold of their lives. Those lives are bound up inextricably with the fabric of their suburban home. The Malgas family finds that their torpor – the banal repetitions of work, encrusted consumerism and grotesque domesticity – is radically disrupted when a man arrives, seemingly from nowhere, to take up residence. The man performs a parody of home ownership, taking great trouble and care over the details of the house he is "building". The couple's comfort in their surroundings is shaken by the presence of the outsider, whose disdain for the conventions of the suburb and enthusiasm for his own building project, a task he is performing without materials, fissures the ontological stability of the white suburb. The character of the suburb frames the story as a reflection on the texture of whiteness in South African cultural life.

Ultimately, the man's presence raises questions not only about who he is, but also about what underpins the fabric of the suburb in which he is taking up residence. He unsettles the community by exposing how the suburb is structured by an undemocratic logic of sameness. Belonging to the community of the suburb means submitting oneself to its edicts, values and beliefs, but the stranger's disregard for these rules directly challenges the authority they wield by presenting themselves as pragmatic or common-sensical.

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1.   My reading of *The Folly* was enriched by Ashraf Jamal's theorising on the novel in "Bullet Through the Church: South African Literature in English and the Future-Anterior". I am also indebted to Gerald Gaylard's perceptive reading of the novel in his article "Fossicking in the House of Love: Apartheid Masculinity in *The Folly*". Other useful readings of the novel may be found in Marita Wenzel's "Liminal Spaces and Imaginary Places in *The Bone People* by Keri Hulme and *The Folly* by Ivan Vladislavić", as well as Peter Horn's "A house/a story hanging by a thread: Ivan Vladislavić's *The Folly*", which appears in the collection *Marginal Spaces: Reading Ivan Vladislavić*, edited by Gaylard. Also see Kirby Manià's insightful PhD thesis (2014).

Some analyses of *The Folly* read the novel as an exploration of homelessness or, in metaphysical terms, as a satirical exploration of belonging.[2] These readings generally place the work within a series of assemblages that speak to their collective enunciating of South African subjectivities, or as an exercise in literary playfulness, or a brief foray into magical realism. My reading situates *The Folly* in terms of white anxieties over land ownership in South Africa. I suggest that the novel anticipates the shift toward gated communities with its depiction of the white suburban home as both refuge and trap.

The republishing of *The Folly* in 2014 came amidst a decade of robust public discussion about the nature of the South African urban makeup. As South African cities have begun to articulate visions of urban futurity along globalized trajectories (as "world-class cities", for example), it has become increasingly necessary to question what these visions leave behind or exclude. However, my point of departure is that while much has been written about the complexities of the inner cities of South Africa in their post-apartheid incarnations, and while historically there has been a great deal of writing on sites of forced removal such as District Six and Sophiatown, in the contemporary moment more attention has been paid to theorising sites like the township, or to the movement and migration of Black people into previously exclusively white spaces, than there has been to the aesthetic order of those spaces. This means that there is relatively little work that has been done on literature about suburbs which were exclusively white and have largely remained so in the two decades since the formal end of apartheid, and less on the link between these suburban configurations and the new securitised estates that have supplanted them. What *has* been written has tended to focus on these suburbs in a deductive way: as case studies illuminating broad urban trends such as gentrification, security, or desegregation.

Less attention still has been paid to the ways in which white suburban space in South Africa may be read as a subtopia. When Ian Nairn brought the word into use in the 1950s, he was referring to the way in which the utopian idealism of modernist architecture had been subverted and banalised by urban planning. At more or less the same time, the apartheid government was planning the entitlements and restrictions of space via legislation such as the Group Areas Act. The actions of the government designated certain spaces as "white spaces", and these included "city centres, suburbs, game reserves, farms, beaches and mountains" (Murray 2007: 73), which Black people were only permitted to enter if they were labourers, and if they had documents that tracked them and certified their purpose in these areas. The historical workings that underpinned the use of space in apartheid South Africa might thus be seen as a mode coterminous with Nairn's view of architecture being subverted to serve negative ends. In this regard, I follow Noeleen Murray's

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2. See Ina Gräbe's discussion of the novel in her article "Voices in Contemporary South African Narrative" for an example of such a reading.

idea of South African urban development as being entangled in "apartheid modernity", a term she uses to describe the processes through which the social forms of modernity were yoked in the service of Afrikaner nationalism. According to this precept, white suburbia was a space that, in Richard Ballard's terms, encouraged white people to "shore up" their identity as white (2004: 51). That is, it is a space that allowed for the generation of fantasies by which white South Africa was rendered intelligible to itself.

If the thinking behind white suburbia in South Africa has generally accorded with the fantasy of life as, to quote from Michael J. Murray, a "bourgeois utopia of single-family homes on spacious lots set in tree-lined residential neighbourhoods far away from the confusing cacophony of urban life" (2011: 208), then the realised expression of that desire in imaginatively bereft lifestyle villages and security estates speaks directly to Nairn's idea. The recasting of suburbia as subtopia allows us to perceive the protocols behind the banality of suburban style that has found firm traction in post-apartheid South Africa. South African suburban spaces are mostly characterised by bland repetition, and by a blurring of aesthetics to produce superficially uniform appearance. What is key here is that the appearance of homogeneity is vital to the planning of these areas. They are planned spaces whose aesthetic similarity stands for the certainty of life promised by these spaces: the underlying ideal is of a world where the grass will always be neat, the streets always tree-lined and well paved, supplies of amenities always constant and plentiful, and safety always guaranteed. Such a promise can only be galvanized by a totalitarian approach to the use of space. This is why South African subtopia often expresses itself in unchecked sprawl, where vacant land, derelict or unfinished sites and other "empty" areas are rapidly built over, occupied and consumed. Subtopias are untroubled by their immediate context, so that the existence of a Tuscan-styled villa or a sybaritic gated community modelled on the aesthetics of Provence in close proximity to the city presents as an accomplished fact requiring no scrutiny.

This article reads the relative lack of scrutiny where white suburban life is concerned as working in the service of whiteness.[3] This is not to say that there are no representations of white suburban life across the South African literary field. On the contrary, authors like Richard Poplak (*Ja, No, Man*), Nadine Gordimer (*The House Gun*) and many others have written about whiteness, or from the orientation point of white life (even if they do not observe themselves as such). The visual artist Alice Mann also lays out white suburban life as racialised fantasy in works such as *Domestic Bliss* and *Southern Suburbs*. Nevertheless, the idea that white suburban life is uninteresting, or that it is

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3. There is a robust field of South African academic writing on white identities in relation to questions of complicity, shame, guilt, and reconciliation. I think here of Melissa E. Steyn's study *Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be*, as well as the work of theorists such as Nicky Falkof, Jonathan Cane, Angelo Fick, Noeleen Murray, Eusebius McKaiser, Sarah Nuttall and others.

only interesting as a site for personal reflection, or when moments of spectacular violence occur there, is indicative of a too-proximate relationship that resists easy dislodging.[4] As Sara Ahmed and other theorists have speculated, there is the risk that noticing whiteness "as a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience" (2007: 150) might sanctify whiteness rather than demystify it. There is perhaps a reluctance on the part of white scholars to be seen to be taking interest in their own milieu. As Ahmed avers, "what comes into view, or what is within our horizon, is not a matter of what we find here or there, or even where we find ourselves, as we move here, or there. What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations we have already taken" (2007: 152).

My aim here is to suggest that there is something fruitful in reading the orientations brought about by whiteness via its phantasmal configurations. Specifically, I am interested in reading Vladislavić's novel in order to trace whether the anxiety depicted in *The Folly* through the characters of Mr and Mrs Malgas reflects an ongoing and self-perpetuating anxiety that holds as its subject the permeability of the white suburb.

There is plenty to suggest that the suburb, more than simply being a geographical location, is also an embedded practice of space-making that generates racialised meanings about the world and those who inhabit it. As spaces that are symbols of power and wealth, they are overwritten with cultural forms and underpinned by psychological preoccupations. In the case of South Africa, early suburbs were concretised expressions of apartheid modernity, in which, as Achille Mbembe argues, "a separation between the indoor world and the world outside, or between members of the family and domestic servants, became a defining aspect of white subjectivity in a racially divided city" (2008: 46-47). The apartheid spatial imaginary constructed suburban dwellings "as both seclusion and security […] as a way of assuaging white citizens' fears and instilling in them a morality of social conformity in exchange for racial privileges" (Mbembe 2008: 47). South African suburbia, then, was historically structured to legitimise the rejection of the racial other. The fantasy of the twentieth century South African suburb as a harbour in which the ideal of the good life might be realised is thus coincident with the organisation of South African life according to patterns of discrimination, segregation and exclusion. It follows that South African suburbia is still freighted with the legacy of these origins. But the suburbs are also zones with corners, interstitial gaps and dips in surface where unanticipated or unforeseen meanings can accumulate. These spaces are often temporary, threatened or

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4.   I think here of Leon de Kock's incisive assertion that "in progressive scholarship in and about South Africa, whiteness had become so delegitimized by virtue of its complicity with apartheid that it had often been rendered 'blank', a taken-for-granted negative essence, a place less looked-into, a site of unredeemed racism and assumed uniformity" (2006: 175-176). De Kock's argument echoes Nuttall's earlier critiques in "Subjectivities of Whiteness".

contingent. They represent domains outside the logic of the suburb, and they provide the potential for defamiliarising relations to occur. Thus, suburbs present an opportunity to think through architectural expression as a form of social inscription that makes cultural sediment readable. The story contained in *The Folly* is about what happens to a fantasy of life when a challenge to the supposed fixity of its meaning occurs.

In reading *The Folly*, I suggest that Vladislavić's depiction of the white suburb as fantasy-become-banal also evinces in current day white suburban life. My argument is not that Vladislavić is merely reproducing the texture of life in the subtopia, but that through depicting the phantasmal project of house-building and the anxiety it generates in others, Vladislavić is pre-figuring the emancipatory possibilities of a kind of excess that is not quantifiable and which evades the banalising fixities represented by the suburbs.

The story of *The Folly* circulates around the presence of a vacant lot in the suburb. Here, I want to expand on how we define spaces as problems in relation to the suburb. The category of "problem building" is defined very specifically by municipal ordinance as any building:

- that appears to have been abandoned by the owner with or without the consequence that rates or other service charges are not being paid
- that is derelict in appearance, overcrowded or is showing signs of becoming unhealthy, unsanitary, unsightly or objectionable
- that is the subject of written complaints in respect of criminal activities, including drug dealing and prostitution
- that is illegally occupied
- where refuse or waste material is accumulated, dumped, stored or deposited with the exception of licensed waste disposal facilities
- that is partially completed or structurally unsound and is a threat or danger to the safety of the general public

(Muizenberg Improvement District 2015)

This seems a comprehensive definition, where each of the points coheres around notions of threat and proximity. But each of these categories – abandonment, dereliction, moral dissipation, illegality, dirtiness, and incom-pletion – also coheres around the question of presence (abandonment is a form of having-been-present). When such buildings are located in the suburbs, there is an assumption underpinning this set of statutes/stipulations: that the houses which isolate the problem building by virtue of their completeness, or the completeness of their occupation, are by virtue of their presently whole form, not themselves provisional structures subject to their use. The idea is that these sites must be reincorporated into the logics and economies of the suburb. This process inevitably erases the evidence of the site's lack of productivity, or obliterates the site itself.

In expanding this category conceptually, I want to think about a way of relating to space which apprehends the principle that a physical structure often outlasts its intended use. Thinking this way, we might expand the category of problem buildings to include purposeless plots, unnamed tracts, areas of changed or discontinued use, and so on. If we do this, the problem expands, too: the suburb is a category defined by utility and function. As such, what is no longer used or what has not been used (in the case of Vladislavić's novel, the plot of land whose original function is not clear), becomes surplus to the aesthetic economy of the suburb, and thus problematic. The suburbs idealize order and uniformity, and in so doing they become monuments to the security of the routine and the same.

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It is first necessary to consider how the suburb functions as a marker of place. It is a private compact which displays its surface as a synecdochical expression of meaning. In the style of a wall, or the expression of architectural design, or the planning and layout of walkways, roads, paths and so on, the suburb is presented to those seeking admission as though its explicit meaning is clear to see. The goal of the suburban planner is to achieve the immaculate topographical site. Here, Michel de Certeau's idea of the map as that which attempts to totalise the meaning of the place it represents is closely cognate with the work of planning which structures the suburban layout. The planning of a suburb includes as its sine qua non the erasure of the suburb's own provenance, including abolishing ruptures, discontinuities and imperfections.

In *The Folly*, the plot that Otto Nieuwenhuizen stakes out is a gap between established places in the neighbourhood. The plot can be read as a *terrain vague*, a concept coined by Ignasi de Solà-Morales to describe a space whose purpose is undefined, or which exists outside of recognisable circuits of use and productivity. The plot exists as a blurred or unreadable site until it is occupied by the stranger, whose arrival transforms the plot into a space of contamination. Significantly, it is he, rather than the Malgas family, who provides our introduction to the novel. The novel begins with Nieuwenhuizen standing on the threshold of the suburb. He arrives at night, unseen. Why he is there, or who informed him of the plot's existence is not disclosed. The plot itself is a richly layered site of urban archaeology. It was at some point in its history fenced off with wire and wood and concrete, but "the remains of this frontier – crumpled scrolls of barbed wire, a gate, some club-footed wooden posts in concrete boots" (Vladislavić 2014: 7) lie decaying. As Nieuwenhuizen takes the measure of what is described as "his inheritance" (Vladislavić 2014: 7), his presence disturbs the occupants of the adjacent house.

When we are introduced to the Malgas family, they are sitting in front of the television in their house with its wagon-wheel Vibracrete walls. The house is

figured as an enclave from a hostile outside world, and the suburb's alienation from the strife and violence of the apartheid state's final act is brought home as the couple watch the eight o'clock news. Mr Malgas's grunted comment – "Here we go again" – signals to how routine the news is, and he shuts off the sound of the television as a report of unrest begins, reducing the external world to contextless images of shacks burning (Vladislavić 2014: 2). Mr Malgas wonders aloud where the inhabitants might be, foreshadowing later events with Nieuwenhuizen as they watch the shanty structure disintegrate in "a silent outburst of sparks and embers" (Vladislavić 2014: 2). The silence of the house performs the artificial placidity of the suburb, and the couple's rootedness to their lounge betrays the banality which undergirds their existence. The news playing soundlessly, meanwhile, represents the temporal distance of chaos and disorder. The world depicted on the news seems removed from the suburbs, but it is closer than it appears.

That proximity announces itself first as "an unaccustomed smell" of wood smoke, and then the sight of fire through the window above the kitchen sink. Mr Malgas stares out from the window into the darkness, noticing with unease that the fire is coming from the vacant plot next door. He summons his wife, and they peer out, unaware that they too might be seen. As they do so, Nieuwenhuizen's shadow appears before the fire, "casting a gigantic shadow over their house" (Vladislavić 2014: 11).

The *terrain vague* that Nieuwenhuizen claims as his own is conceptualised as a political problem which performs its estrangement from the suburb by virtue of its untidiness. The site belongs to the order of the problem building if we think of problem buildings as being problems precisely because they cannot immediately be removed or rehabilitated. The empty space is not neutral space. Indeed, it is a paradox because its emptiness is filled with meaning. It challenges the finitude of the houses around it, and Nieuwenhuizen's claim to it confers upon him the same undesirable attributes. When Mrs Malgas perceives Nieuwenhuizen as being shifty or suspicious, she is transferring her anxieties about the space to the interloper. Here, she questions her husband when he returns from his first exploratory investigation:

> What does he want?
>   He doesn't want anything. He's building a house.
>   A house?
>   A new one. Probably a double-storey.
>   A double-storey? Bang goes our privacy.
>   Never mind that. In this day and age it's security that counts. You can't afford to have an empty plot on your doorstep. Ask anyone. It attracts the wrong elements.
>   Building operations, I can just see it, noise and nuisance, generators, compressors, pneumatic hammers, concrete-mixers going day and night, strange men – builders. Dust all over my ornaments. It's terrible. I'll complain.
> (Vladislavić 2014: 32)

The conflicting reactions of the members of the Malgas family are illuminating. For Mrs Malgas, Nieuwenhuizen is a threat to the established order. It does not occur to her that the litany of threats she invokes (noise, building equipment, builders) would also have been used to create the Malgas home. Her disconnect from the world is symbolised by her inability to conceive of their house and their suburb as being linked to external processes and networks of production, or as being part of the world being reflected back at them via the television:

> Is he one of these squatters we've been hearing so much about? Will he put up a shack and bring hundreds of his cronies to do the same? "Extended families." What do you think? Will they hammer together tomato boxes and rubbish bags, bits of supermarket trolleys and motor cars, noticeboards and yield signs, gunny sacks and jungle gyms, plastic, paper, polystyrene [...] brass, bronze and Beaverboard. Fine. We'll be forced out of our home. They'll play their radios loud. They'll go in the streets like dogs. They'll tear up our parquet for firewood.
>
> (Vladislavić 2014: 17)

Her fears call attention to the precariously maintained illusion of isolation engendered by white suburbia. The "squatters" represent a way of life that is incompatible with the order of the suburb. For Mrs Malgas, the provisional cannot abut the parquet. Nieuwenhuizen's presence on the plot symbolises the destructive presence of that which has until now been kept at bay by the constructedness of the suburb.

Meanwhile, Mr Malgas's reaction betrays a different anxiety. He is more prepared to welcome Nieuwenhuizen because he sees the man as providing a solution to the problem of the vacant plot. Vladislavić foreshadows the debate over the appropriation and occupation of empty land that has become a feature of South African public life over the first two decades of democracy. Mr Malgas speaks as though the empty plot is a site of possibility, but his words suggest that the verticality of this optimism is bisected by the horizontality of threat – the threat of invasion and overrun. Thus, while he chastises his wife for always thinking "the worst of people" (Vladislavić 2014: 14) and positions himself as receptive to the otherness of the stranger, Mr Malgas's anxiety is of a piece with his wife's.

Mr Malgas casts onto Nieuwenhuizen his own commodified desires, attempting to absorb the man's strangeness/estrangement into the symbolic order he is most familiar with. As the owner of a hardware store, he decides that he will assist Nieuwenhuizen, even though the man has not explicitly declared that he plans to create a house on the site. This decision is also an attempt on Mr Malgas's part to re-establish his authority: in offering help, he positions Nieuwenhuizen as the subject of his hospitality, reasserting his belonging to the space of the suburb. The suggestion, again, is that the radical nature of Nieuwenhuizen's claim of belonging cannot exist alongside Mr

Malgas's. The latter reassures himself that Nieuwenhuizen is legitimate, with no support other than his own belief. He suggests to his wife that their new neighbour is probably "in real estate […] Property development, renovations, restorations, upgrading, that sort of thing" (Vladislavić 2014: 26). There is nothing about Nieuwenhuizen that would connote these speculations, but Mr Malgas perceives things only in terms of categories of ownership.

The novel suggests that the imaginative response Nieuwenhuizen triggers in Mr Malgas signals the latter's longing for those utopian ideals the suburb promises, but which remain illusory. He throws himself into helping Nieuwenhuizen build, and Nieuwenhuizen in turn subverts the host-stranger dichotomy by first being indifferent to Mr Malgas's offers of assistance, and then by having Mr Malgas do most of the work. This work takes on a parodic quality which is only increased by Mr Malgas's earnestness, and the parody does not escape Mrs Malgas's notice. She watches Nieuwenhuizen, the kitchen window a restrictive prism marking the boundary between the ordered world of white suburbia and the incoherence and disorder of the *terrain vague*. While Mr Malgas helps Nieuwenhuizen, Mrs Malgas notes that the dust from the men's exertions begins to filter through the sealed windows, settling "like a five o'clock shadow on the smooth surface of her home" (Vladislavić 2014: 56). The novel prefigures the blurring of boundaries between suburb and new dwelling in this unsettling accretion.

Mrs Malgas does not easily cast aside her attachment to order. She grows increasingly scornful of her husband's efforts to curry favour with Nieuwenhuizen, feeling that Mr Malgas is lowering himself by providing the stranger with sustenance, building supplies and, crucially, labour. Mr Malgas's toil is unseemly in a setting where white bodies do not do work, and Mrs Malgas's awareness of this only grows as she notes that

> whereas [Malgas] did the work of two men, [Nieuwenhuizen] did nothing but stir and shake, and scare up clouds of dust to obscure his own idleness. Now He was down in the gutter next to the road herding dry leaves into piles; now He was galloping on the spot and hurling His trident into the blue; now He was prancing up and down along the hedge, beating it up with the flat of His spade, raking it with His hands and kicking it with His feet, so that its leaves flew up in clattering flocks and whirled in circles overhead. Where would they come to roost? Where they liked. What was the purpose of it all? To make more work for Mr.
>
> (Vladislavić 2014: 62)

We find that the more Mr Malgas, who deals in wood-and-nail certainty, invests himself in the project, the more the house refuses to be realised. Mr Malgas's faith that order will assert itself through the nature of the building, displaces his initial will-to-mastery. The Quixotic nature of the project, however, produces a sense of community in Mr Malgas which contrasts with the subtopia's planned alienations. When Nieuwenhuizen thanks him for his

labour, "[h]is host's gratitude, so deeply felt and tastefully expressed, brought a lump to Malgas's throat, and he had to wash it down with a slug of the mixture before he could voice his own appreciation for everything" (Vladislavić 2014: 92). In opening himself up to working with Nieuwen-huizen, Mr Malgas is propelled by his curiosity into rethinking his relationship to place. At this point, he has become part of the strangeness symbolised by Nieuwenhuizen. The implication, if this moment is to be read in ethical terms, is that Mr Malgas has given himself over to alterity in a way that allows for the possibility of transforming his world into something new. The plot is cleared, but it remains radically apart from the houses around it.

Nieuwenhuizen's disdain for the fixity of the suburb does not go unnoticed. After they have cleared the plot, the men reach a kind of impasse, and Mr Malgas grows impatient for the house to be realised. His impatience repre-sents the reassertion of the suburb's ordering impulse, and his tetchiness in turn makes Nieuwenhuizen uncomfortable. The plot, at this point, is a site of conflicting fantasies, the one a return to safety and the other a flight from the normal. Then Nieuwenhuizen suddenly and abruptly begins to lay out the floor plan, hammering nails and looping string in a confusing way.

The tangle that refuses to make itself readable distresses Mr Malgas immensely. Even after Nieuwenhuizen gives him a closely guided tour of his "house", with its illusory wings, staircases and balustrades, Mr Malgas is unequal to the task of imagining the structure. Only much later, when he tries to imagine it in terms of his own fantasy, does Mr Malgas begin to see it:

> It was a magnificent place, every bit as grand as Malgas had thought it would be, but it had its shortcomings, which he was quick to perceive too. It had no depth. It had the deceptive solidity of a stage-set. The colours were unnaturally intense, yet at the slightest lapse of concentration on his part the whole edifice would blanch and sway as if it was about to fall to pieces.
>
> (Vladislavić 2014: 122)

What follows is an extended squabble over whose representation of the house will secure protocols according to which the house might be given value. Mr Malgas's utopian vision of the site is the wrong one, since he is possessively invested in securing the values of white suburbia, and thus maps those values onto the site. Meanwhile, a crowd gathers at the edge of the plot, observing the parodic goings-on accompanied by a television news team. As the site is scrutinised, Nieuwenhuizen decides that he must pull the illusory building apart. He rebukes Mr Malgas for his prescriptive attachment: "'This is my house', Nieuwenhuizen declares, 'My namesake. You're just a visitor […] not even that, some sort of janitor'" (Vladislavić 2014: 139), and his words sound the end of their collaboration.

The collapse of Nieuwenhuizen's house (and Mr Malgas's psychic collapse with it) suggests that architecture cannot be tied so completely to a single purpose. The house is, in Jamal's terms, a "hole in the symbolic order" (2010:

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13). It cannot stand within a community defined according to fixative logic. The vision becomes banalised when the wider public attempts to read it as a consumable artefact. They surge past the police barriers and raid the plot, bearing away souvenirs and some of Mr Malgas's utensils. Their actions are an act of assimilation that returns the plot to the normal order of the suburb, leaving behind only the scattered detritus of Nieuwenhuizen's idea. The man himself slips away unnoticed, his destination unknown.

In thinking through this novel, I imagine Nieuwenhuizen's house as a folly in the architectural sense, as a try-out for a new kind of relationality that is provisional and playful. Crucially, Vladislavić's novel mirrors the house of its story, devolving towards a state of fraught ambiguity.

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Read from the perspective of the present, what happens to the Malgas family prefigures a possibility for reconfiguring the experiential possibilities of life in the South African suburbs that has not materialised. The prospect of social change that is signalled to in Vladislavić's novel, where a white comfort zone is momentarily disrupted, has been ineluctably dispensed with in favour of new fantasies that allow white South Africans to assuage the anxiety brought about by the realisation that, in the post-apartheid dispensation, belonging and ownership can no longer easily be assumed.[5] Although the base of political power has shifted, the shift has not been matched by an equivalent shift in the ways that space is conceived.

More specifically, the idea of the suburb as a site opening out to hetero-geneity has been subverted by a new order in which the production of suburban space is still tied to processes of control and exclusion. As urban space has transformed to accommodate ever-increasing flows of people mobilised in the service of city economies, South African cities have witnessed a proliferation of office parks, retail zones, shopping malls, transit hotels and other theatres of use. These are sites whose non-specificity (the same shops, similar companies doing similar work, uniform hotels) marks them as places of repetition and stagnation, rather than of regrowth or regene-ration, but they are also forms of space that direct middle-class life (and predominantly white suburban life) away from subordinated publics.[6]

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5. In this regard, see Nuttall's assertions about changing patterns of proximity in "Subjectivities of Whiteness" (2001: 118).

6. As Mbembe remarked of inner Johannesburg in the 2000s, "[f]or the most part, the white population has abandoned these areas, leaving behind an infra-structure now occupied, inhabited, or used by blacks in ways sometimes radically different from its original purposes" (2008: 59). Mbembe's argument is of its time but, read from the perspective of 2019, it can be seen that many

This last point bears stressing: the transformation and reshaping of the everyday along lines of social order (rather than freedom and play) becomes visible in these hard points of encounter. To drive through the modern South African city is to experience the sharp contrast points that mark "the violence of racial capitalism and its structural maladjustment" (De Kock 2015: Foreword). It is also to encounter the accumulation of spaces that shore up the old modernist structuring of the city against undesirable forms of decay. Johannesburg is witnessing a concerted campaign to sanitise its inner core, with strenuous efforts being made to reverse urban decay. Problem buildings are being rehabilitated, auctioned off to developers who will do the same, or demolished to make way for upscale regeneration. Accordingly, the city has seen renewed interest in recreational activities such as festivals, running events, and rooftop parties, all of which reflect a certain nostalgia for public urban space as safe for use and consumption by middle class people. That nostalgia articulates itself as a kind of suburbanising, marked by a focus on "exclusivity, homogenization and themed place marketing" (Murray 2011: 323) as the tools necessary to "recapture" or "take back" the city from those deemed to have captured it. The rhetoric around the rehabilitation of the city gestures towards a desire to align the city centre with the cleanliness of the suburbs that border it. If the project of suburban place-making during apartheid was the sublimation of larger mechanisms of social discrimination, in which configurations of white living areas were premised on medico-biological ideas around health conditions for whites (which were then expressed in the removal of racial others), then the spread of those configurations can only reinvigorate old exclusions.

The reformatting of urban space according to circulations of fantasy finds its mirror in the reorganising of affluent suburbia according to trajectories of "lifestyle" fulfilment, broadly conceived as an investment in the quality of one's life. South African suburbs, as Monique Marks argues, "are places that people want to 'get to' because they are viewed as an escape from the atomized and chaotic life of the inner city and they are seen to be a 'step up' from township life" (2018: 20). As different, less restrictive publics have occupied some formerly white suburbs, many white families have steadily chosen to place themselves in gated communities, security estates, and other scenes of living where the order of choice can be more effectively policed and maintained. These zones are not the porous suburb of the kind Nieuwenhuizen enters. On the contrary, their boundaries are rigidly enforced: one cannot enter and leave as one wishes. One's movements are observed, scrutinised and subject to the threat of expulsion or violence from privatised police patrols.

To enter these spaces is to feel oneself somewhere that is characterised by an exaggerated sense of anxiety directed at bodies that do not belong. If one

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of these spaces are being recycled or remixed according to resurgent fantasies of the city as a space for the consumption and play of middle-class publics.

is Black, one becomes aware of oneself as moving within a fantasy whose form is collective, self-perpetuating and excluding: high walls, security cameras, placards denoting the proximity of dangerous dogs or signs denoting the ability to call upon private security firms. These objects are extensions of an embodied sense of white security, markers meant to convey that the protection of privacy, property and life are of primary concern to those within whose ambit they function. They are not friendly: on the contrary, they engender fear, and uncertainty – one might be followed through such a space because one is marked as not belonging by one's colour. Black bodies in such spaces are often subject, in Ahmed's terms, to forms of stopping,

> where the stopping is an action that creates its own impressions. Who are you? Why are you here? What are you doing? Each question, when asked, is a kind of *stopping device*: you are stopped by being asked the question, just as asking the question requires that you be stopped.
>
> (2007: 161, emphasis in original)

Encounters with stopping devices are an intrinsic part of white suburbia. Where it is not possible to impose a hard barrier – in the form of a gate or other technologies of access control – the stopping is activated by certain protocols for recognising who is "out of place". According to these protocols, some bodies do not need to be stopped, because their whiteness confers belonging. I recognise myself as not belonging because being Black has failed to become habitual in these spaces. The range of activities that are common to these spaces – which might include jogging, or driving one's car, or conversing on the street while out for a stroll – are not activities that adhere to me. To be recognised as out-of-place in such areas is to be read as potentially criminal. These spaces do not extend one the generosity of welcome. One perceives oneself as causing discomfort, and one feels discomfort at the presence of so many measures directed at securing or limiting one's presence. To be marked as not belonging disorients the fantasy of completitude, allowing one to glimpse what lies behind the surface ordering of these spatial configurations.

  Where I live in Stellenbosch, the former white suburbs are being inexorably replaced by densified security developments with wearisomely banal aesthetics. These spaces are a new form of mythic place-making that is pitched at the adherents to an upwardly mobile lifestyle in which objects are conspicuous bearers of value. They bear out Nairn's warning that subtopia would be signalled by "the annihilation of the site, the steamrollering of all individuality of place to one uniform and mediocre pattern" (1955: 363). And so it proves to be. New mass-produced townhouse clusters proliferate, many of them distinguishable only by names that gesture disingenuously to the rural origins of the landscape that has been developed. In the suburbs surrounding my place of employment, all space is accounted for. One plot, where a house has recently been demolished, has been secured against potential misuse. The

gate that used to mark the limit of the house has been fortified with locks and opaque netting that prevents those on the street from observing the emptiness within. The implication is that this vacant plot is potentially a site for unintended forms of occupation, and that such unplanned forms of use would harm the security of the neighbourhood. The gate not only smooths the social disruption signalled by the house's removal; it also makes the plot appear uniform and of-a-piece with the properties around it. The gate connotes ownership, and it silences the critique of the suburban forms offered up by the empty space.

The style of life represented by these spaces is one of wish-fulfilment undergirded by capital. Access to the latter allows the purchaser to access a stake in a set of fantasies by which a lifestyle may be fashioned. To track fantasy across the surface of South African life in this way is to take note of the possessive investment in the production of a world where privilege continues unbroken. The inhabitants of these spaces are encouraged to cluster themselves around secure macro hubs, so that they present the strange juxtaposition of being both high-value and high-density sites. These hubs are packaged as gated spaces they need never leave, except to go to work, since shopping and entertainment facilities also form part of these living arrangements. In such spaces, the right to decide who is permitted to enter, under what conditions and for what purposes, is arrogated to bodies who aggressively police the boundaries of the subtopia. These estates become the architectural embodiment of paranoia, and shape living spaces "in ways that produce spatial outcomes similar to those that prevailed under apartheid" (Murray 2011: 181).

What distinguishes these places is their enthrallment to fantasies of separation. In the face of perceptions that the state is increasingly unable to provide secure access to utilities like water and electricity, these new communities provide an oasis where, it is said, life can be maintained in the ways it always has been. They are an escapist fantasy of a world in which control has not been ceded. As such, they are hostile to *terrain vagues*, which might be evidence of unanticipated financial misfortune, or uneven take-up of the fantasy being sold to consumers. Put simply, they represent glaring ruptures in the capital-smoothed surface.

Where might we locate Vladislavić's novel, against this? I would argue that *The Folly* marks the point of transition where the subtopia becomes hyperreal. In the years since the advent of democracy, much of the fiction generated in the context of white suburban sprawl has to do with the breachability of the suburb. The fear of others mutates into a desire for exclusivity brokered by structural inequality. In my reading, I suggest that Vladislavić constructs the encounter with the uncanny as an ambivalent one where the established order and the new possibility meet each other frictionally. The novel provides an interesting case for thinking about how earlier material forms drawn from the white imaginary engage with, and disengage from, the postcolony.

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