

UM-Wits planning meeting
Wednesday, 12 November

Present were Sarah Duff, Isabel Hofmeyr, Cynthia Kros, Pamila Gupta, Jonathon Klaaren and Stephen Sparks from Wits; and Gabrielle Hecht, Anne Pitcher, Ray Silverman, Damola Osinulu, Judy Irvine, Madhumita Lahiri, Geoff Eley and Derek Peterson from UM.

Background

In our application to the Mellon Foundation we proposed to organize two workshops per year, each lasting two weeks, one in Joburg, the other in A2. The **themes we proposed to pursue** were:

1. Legacies of the imperial archive in post-colonial history, museums and performance
2. Textual analysis, visual culture and the state in the making of African publics
3. Interrogating Neoliberalism as idea and explanation
4. The politics of literacy, legibility and expert knowledges in Africa
5. Narrative, visual forms and biopolitics in the medical humanities
6. Cultural studies of science and technology in Africa
7. Intellectual property and curatorship in the digital humanities (held Nov. 2014)
8. Public spaces, informality and infrastructures in the desegregating city
9. Vernacular literatures in the making of transnational movements and subjects
10. The Global South as an idea and a source of theory (held May 2014)

In addition the Joburg meeting identified the following **working groups** that are meant to pursue their own research and meeting agendas, in parallel with (or intersecting with) the twice-per-year workshops:

- 1) Toxicity, waste, detritus -- Gabrielle Hecht and Pamila Gupta
- 2) Capitalism from the South -- Sharad Chari and Howard Stein
- 3) Global South as Idea -- Achille Mbembe, Nancy Rose Hunt and Adedamola Osinulu
- 4) Cultural theory from the Global South -- Sarah Nuttall, Jennifer Wenzel and Joey Slaughter
- 5) States from the South -- Anne Pitcher and Claire Benit-Gbaffou

There are at least **three additional areas of collaboration**—not discussed at the Joburg meeting (because the relevant people were not in the room)—that could/should feed into the workshop schedule above:

- a. Performance. Askew and Andre (at UM) and Mhlambi and Somma (Wits) have an interest in organizing a workshop on performance, music and theater.
- b. Heritage. The ‘African Heritage Initiative’—based at UM, but drawing in scholars at Wits, UWC, the University of Ghana and other institutions--has for the past five years organized a series of workshops, conferences, archive preservation projects and museum displays. The most recent major workshop was held in July 2011 at Wits, and has resulted in an edited book (forthcoming on Cambridge UP).

- c. The 'African Print Cultures' group is a collaboration of scholars from British, African and American universities. The group met in Oxford in 2011, Michigan in 2012, and Birmingham (U.K.) in 2013. Papers presented at these occasions have now been edited, and the resulting book is under review at the University of Michigan Press.

Forward plans

At the 12 November meeting the planning group decided the following:

1. The next workshop on 'Public Spaces, Informality and Infrastructures' (theme 8) will take place at Wits starting on **Monday, 4 May 2015** and running for a week. Gastrow, Pitcher, and Murray to organize. A white paper has been prepared and circulated to the Sugarman list.
2. 'Labor History' (theme 1, reworked) will take place in Ann Arbor over three days, starting on **Monday, 16 November** and running through **Wednesday, 18 November**. Sparks and Eley to organize.

We note that the African Studies Association annual meeting starts on Thursday 19 November in San Diego; we encourage participants in the Wits/Michigan network to propose relevant panels for the ASA that extend the themes of our collaboration.

3. 'Cultural studies of science and technology in Africa' (theme 6) will take place in Durban starting on **Monday, 20 June 2016**, and will run for a week. Hecht, Edwards, Gupta and Breckenridge to organize. The working group on 'Toxicity, waste and empire' will convene around this workshop.
4. In parallel with the events listed under 3. above, the working group on 'African Print Cultures' will meet in or around Joburg in May or June 2016 (dates TBD). Hofmeyr, Bheki Peterson and Duff (Wits) and D. Peterson (UM) to organize.
5. 'Vernacular Literature' (combining parts of themes 2, 4 and 9) will take place in Ann Arbor starting on **Monday, 27 November 2016**, organized in conjunction with the UM Center for South Asian Studies (and possibly with CISA in Wits). Lahiri and Peterson (UM) and Hofmeyr and Peterson (Wits) to organize.
6. 'Heritage', or possibly 'Museums' (theme 1; mentioned above under 'working groups') will take place in Joburg in May 2017. Kros and others in Wits to organize.
7. 'Performance' (theme 1; mentioned above under 'working groups') will meet in Ann Arbor in November 2017. Andre and Askew (UM) and Mhlambi and Somma (Wits) to organize.