*Theatres of Extraction: Performing Labor and Industrial Heritage in South Africa*

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"All right, guys. The first exercise of the day is called the shake-off. Stand up, *bafowethu*—we are going to shake things off." The audience, a group of around 150 workers employed by a South African bus manufacturer, stand—some eagerly, others begrudgingly. They have been gathered in the plant's active workshop site, where the metallic clang of machinery rings through the air and fumes of paint mingle with an odor drifting from a nearby wastewater treatment facility. The facilitator, a company subcontractor and artist named "Mr. Safety," has been brought in to deliver a theatrical performance that reiterates the industry's commitment to workplace health and safety.[1] Like other industrial sectors in South Africa, the business is legally required to ensure employee compliance with occupational health and safety regulations, including conducting risk assessments, completing hazard checks, and safe equipment handling. Yet, as one safety representative explained while accompanying me to the canteen that morning, workers at this site are often laxer about these protocols than those in more heavily surveilled corporate environments. In particular, the wearing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as hard hats, goggles, and gloves, is often disregarded in the interest of completing tasks quickly in order to maintain production schedules. As such, the industry's commitment to harm-free working conditions repeatedly collides with the everyday realities of shop-floor output.

"Stand up, stand up," Mr. Safety orders, striding through the crowd. "Guys, listen. I am your *induna*—I am your supervisor. Each and every time I speak to you, you respond by saying *yebo, induna.* Do you understand?" In unison, a chorus rings out: "*yebo, induna.*" "Louder. Do you understand?" "*YEBO, INDUNA*!" Gesturing toward his co-actor, who is dressed in the same yellow safety vest and hard hat, the performers model the shake-off. Rigorously punching their arms and legs into the air, the men count down from five to one, concluding the activity by doubling over, throwing their limbs outward and shouting, "Safety first!"

The shake-off, often referred to as "Shake It Off," is a common actor's warm-up exercise used to release tension and boost energy in advance of a rehearsal or performance. In the context of this production site, however, the game transforms into an embodied disciplinary drill of workplace vigilance. "Safety is like a beat," Mr. Safety explains. "We must all get the same beat, the same rhythm. Then it means we are all safe. If one of us is off beat, it's an injury. And an injury to one is an injury to?" "All," the room responds automatically. Over the next several minutes, workers—machine operators, painters, welders, technicians, mechanics, and so on—cycle through repeated rounds of the exercise, the precise, rhythmic gestures of the drama game recalibrated as a collective rehearsal for alertness in the context of workplace injury and the managed dangers of industrial labor.

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[1] "Mr. Safety" is a pseudonym used to protect the anonymity of the research participant.

Off the momentum of the shakeoff, Mr. Safety swiftly launches into the next command. "Now *bafowethu*, hold up your hands and fingers." Hundreds of palms rise into the air. "Repeat after me: I love my hands and fingers." The workers comply. "These are my best tools. Without these tools, I cannot handle any other tools." Again, the crowd repeats. "Can you operate machinery without your hands?" "NO." "Can you tie your shoes without your fingers?" "NO." Laughter surfaces when he asks whether they can request replacement fingers from the storeman after losing them the previous day. "These," he insists, holding up his hands, "are your money makers. With these hands, you provide for your family. When you practice safety, you are not doing it for your supervisor, you are doing it for your family. Safety makes you go back to your children." The chant shifts register: "Do not put your money makers in the line of fire. Repeat after me: fire." "FIRE!"

The phrase becomes a cadenced chant and gesture, once again exhibited by the two-man performance troupe: "Hands, fingers, money maker." Drawing out the "a" in "money maaaker," workers commence a synchronized dance: they clap their hands, hold out and wiggle their fingers, then rub their thumbs against their forefingers in the universal sign for money. The energy swells as Mr. Safety grabs a nearby *djembe* drum and thumps a beat that cuts through the surrounding mechanical noise. For the next several minutes, the movement continues without interruption, with workers clapping, swaying, and gyrating their hips in shared recognition of the risks of their employment and the foundational monetary promise that sutures them to it. Finally, the *induna* permits them to sit. The show will now begin.

The performance described above is one of many unfolding across South Africa—not within community halls, city centers, or development spaces where applied drama is typically thought to reside, but inside the logics and infrastructure of industrial labor. In these settings, the intertwined priorities of behavioral compliance and output are neither abstract policies nor distant systems to be assessed from afar; rather, they structure the daily risks and realities of workers whose experiences resonate with tens of millions engaged in extractive labor worldwide. South Africa remains one of the world's most significant mineral economies, long central to the global production of gold, platinum group metals, manganese, chromium, and other industrial resources (Davenport, 2013; Fine, 2018). Today, the nation supplies vast quantities of resources that circulate through global supply chains and materialize in everyday objects, from the stainless-steel appliances in our kitchens to the smartphones in our hands. The daily labor of workers such as those described above thus undergirds local, national, and global economies. Within these enclaves of production, this study traces how theatrical performance functions as a constitutive dimension of industrial systems themselves: it organizes bodies, structures shifting relations of danger, collectivization, and selfhood, and mediates the material conditions through which extractive economies are reproduced.

This book proposes a conception of theatre and performance as inextricable from shifts in labor and processes of social and economic extraction worldwide. Tracing a history of workerist theatre in South Africa, the book analyzes how performance practices within the workplace shape evolving understandings of work, risk, and projects of labor collectivization. Spanning sites including gold mines, diamond towns, gas plants, and union halls, it places into conversation an archival study of theatrical productions created within organized labor during the 1970s and 1980s with ethnographically informed analyses of contemporary performance

practices at industrial sites. What links these sites and cultural moments, tracking from the anti-apartheid struggle through democratic transition and the neoliberal present, is the recurring deployment of performance in relation to ongoing operations of extraction that sustain the global economy. By situating theatre-making within the infrastructures of industry and foregrounding the embeddedness of artistic skills, practices, and ideologies therein, this book reconceives extraction not simply as the removal of resources but as a social and bodily logic that organizes how artists and workers live, train, and labor. From the shop floor to the wider terrains of industrial and post-industrial performance, the book offers a vocabulary for understanding performance not as detached from extractive systems but as one of their conditions of possibility—shaping the forms of collectivity, creativity, and survival that emerge within them.

**Performance in the Age of Extractivism**

As neoliberal capitalism has intensified globally over the last few decades, "extraction" and "extractivism" have emerged as key frameworks in humanities and social science scholarship for theorizing the economic, cultural, and affective dimensions through which material conditions get reproduced. Originating from the Latin *extrahere*, to "pull out," extractivism in its most basic economic sense refers to the large-scale removal of natural resources, usually for export. As a critical discourse, extractivism derives from *extractivismo*, a term developed by scholars and activists in Spanish-speaking Latin America to name not only resource-dependent economic models but also the social, political, and ecological formations that accompany them (Riofrancos, 2017; Sempértegui, 2026). Within these contexts, histories of mineral, agricultural, and oil extraction are inseparable from colonial structures of power, racialized and classed divisions of labor, and territorial dispossession. The analytical framing of extractivism therefore remains deeply entangled with Indigenous homelands and sovereignty struggles as well as the local communities who have borne the enduring costs of resource frontiers (Gómez-Barris, 2017). More recently, the concept of "neo-extractivism" has been used to describe how left-leaning governments in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela have continued to rely on intensive resource extraction to fund social programs and national development, even while rhetorically positioning themselves against neoliberalism (Svampa, 2019).

Across these conversations, extractivism names not simply an economic activity but a "way of world-making, determining, and making demands on most aspects of modern societies, and on the overall organization of the world system and its dynamics" (Chagnon et al. 2022, p. 762). Other scholars have advocated for more focused understandings of extractivism that foreground its causal dynamics of exploitation and dispossession. Writing on the proliferation of extractivism scholarship in cultural studies, Laura Junka-Aikio and Catalina Cortés-Severino (2017) describe extractivism as "an ideological construct and a paradigm of severe exploitation" whose ongoing currency derives from its growing ubiquity and translatability across Global South and Global North contexts. As they explain, extractive frontiers are no longer confined to geographically distant sites: "from the mining pits of South Africa as much as Northern Finland, to the fracking fields of the English countryside and oil drilling in the Arctic," extractivism now denotes a dispersed yet structurally shared condition marked by inequality, exploitation, and differential subject formation (p. 176). In this broader framing, extractivism names a broader "approach to nature, bodies, and ideas … as well as the attitudes that allow such resources to be commodified and consumed for profit" (Richards and Davis-Fisch 2020, p. 7).

Amid these strands of scholarship, a substantial body of work has examined how cultural forms, including literature, sound practices, photography, and visual art, render extraction perceptible and intelligible (Kapstein 2025). This research explores how narratives, aesthetic forms, and cultural representations of various "extractivisms" (Szeman and Wenzel 2021) illuminate the lived experiences and structural logics of resource extraction across differently situated local, national, and global contexts. In doing so, scholars demonstrate how cultural media can function as a "catalyst in the collective effort to imagine alternative social structures and lifeways" beyond extractivism (Parks 2021, 360). While diverse in method and medium, this body of work broadly positions cultural production as a vehicle for exposing the socially and environmentally destructive operations of extractive industries, generating solidarity with those most affected, and giving shape to "post-extractivist" futures (Serafini 2022). As Junka-Aikio and Cortés-Severino observe, "theorizing social injustice is important; however, the challenge of devising real (and concrete) alternatives … is where critical practice and scholarship is most needed" (183).

Within theatre and performance studies, related concerns have emerged through engagements with broader transformations in the global political economy. Since the mid-2000s, performance scholars have increasingly adopted the dominant analytic frameworks circulating within cultural studies and critical theory. As neoliberalism became consolidated as a central concept, shaped by engagements with thinkers such as Michel Foucault, David Harvey, and Wendy Brown, performance scholarship increasingly theorized theatre and performance as sites for contesting market rationalities and neoliberal governance (Harvie, 2012; Lavender, 2021). In particular, the language of the "alternative" gained renewed prominence during the 2010s as the rationalities of global corporate capitalism became structuring concerns across the field. Once associated with institutional and aesthetic departures from commercial theatre in the 1960s and 1970s, the resurgence of the "alternative" can be read in part as a response to the neoliberal hegemony encapsulated in Margaret Thatcher's 1980 insistence that "there is no alternative" to market capitalism. If neoliberalism sought to foreclose political imagination by naturalizing the inevitability of markets, performance scholarship has reclaimed theatre and performance as spaces for staging alternative social arrangements, collective futures, and modes of political imagination otherwise constrained by neoliberal reason.

While theatre and performance studies has yet to undertake a sustained engagement with extractivism as a framework, the small body of scholarship on the concept largely approach it through the paradigm of resistance. Researchers examine how sites and techniques of creative praxis—from Indigenous and community-based theatres to play texts and adaptations and staging devices like scenography and technology—expose the violence of extractive enterprise while implicating audiences within the broader regimes of imperial knowledge and value that sustain it (Delbecke, 2025). Across this literature, a general dynamic emerges: if extraction is equated with colonial-capitalist logics of dispossession and practices of loss and erasure, performance is cast either as its duplicitous promoter or as its ethical counterpoint.

For instance, in a special issue on "Extractivism and Performance" focused on extractive industries in Canada, for instance, Kimberly Richards and Heather Davis-Fisch (2020) describe how Canadian performance practices navigate a terrain in which they either "help extractive industries maximize profit" or rehearse "performative modes of disrupting the settler-colonial project." (p. 7). In this framing, performance is positioned as either instrumental to extractive

regimes of domination or, alternatively, a means of constructing "a meaningful life outside consumerism and capital," working to "subvert extractive narratives" and "engage audiences in decolonial world-building" (Richards and Davis-Fisch, p. 7; Knittelfelder and Lever 2025, p. 40). As Chantal Bilodeau similarly argues in relation to the role of performance artists and researchers, "the story of extractivism has been dominant for far too long … We need to figure out what our new story is … before the old one kills us all" (2020, p. 38).

While this body of work has been vital in exposing the layered violences of extractive industries and in foregrounding the urgent critical and imaginative capacities of performance, it has also tended to reproduce a recurring moral and spatial geography: extractive enterprise exists an enemy, a ubiquitous and abstract system to be generally opposed; the local – often framed across various axes of marginality – exists as an always-already dispossessed periphery; and performance operates as the exceptional space of communication and immanent critique, presumed to stand apart from the extractive economies it addresses. Yet even as extraction now appears everywhere—structuring global supply chains, fiscal structures for cultural production, planetary imaginaries, and even regimes of labor inside the creative industries and academia—performance scholarship has most often approached extraction through scenes of representational critique, rather than through the systems, environments, and experiences in which extractive labor is organized and operational.

This book shifts the analytic vantage point of performance toward spaces where industrial and extractive work is performed on a daily basis, such as the safety meeting, training room, and workshop floor. These are not only environments of industry but also sites where performance circulates as a form of preparation and artistic practice, shaping the roles of practitioners and the conditions under which artists themselves work. In doing so, the book responds to recent calls within theatre and performance studies for greater attention to the conditions through which performance circulates under capitalism. As Loren Kruger (2023) observes, capital often appears in theatre scholarship more as a "dramatic subject than as a material base or the economic and ideological infrastructure supporting—or thwarting—the institutions and audiences of performance" (p. 391). Similarly, Doug Eacho's call for a "market theory of performance" urges researchers to develop "material histories of transmission" that situate performance within the technologies and economies that condition its circulation (2024, p. 24). Attending to these spaces in historiographic and ethnographic detail, the chapters that follow examine how performance organizes and mediates the shifting relations of collectivity, livelihood, and endurance through which extractive economies are inhabited and reproduced.

## Performance and Industrial Histories of Extraction in South Africa

The entanglement of performance and extractivism is particularly visible in South Africa, where theatrical practices have long circulated within the infrastructures of mining and industry, shaping evolving understandings of labor, discipline, and collectivization from the late apartheid era to the present. One important starting point for this book lies in the 1970s and 1980s, when trade union cultural units mobilized what came to be known as "workers theatre" within industrial sites such as mines and manufacturing plants. Emerging under Apartheid, a regime of racial segregation and labor control that structured the country's mining and industrial economies, union-sponsored performances deployed theatrical practice as a tool for political

consciousness-raising and solidarity building (Von Kotze, 1988). Plays created by Black African workers agitated for more dignified labor conditions and directly challenged the authority of the apartheid state, even as they emerged from the very industrial environments that made them possible. The political horizon was not the abolition of mining or industrial production themselves, but the transformation of racialized labor relations within them. In this context, performance functioned as a medium through which workers collectively staged and critiqued the dehumanizing conditions of industrial labor while articulating demands for dignity, recognition, and collective power within the processes of production.

This relationship between performance and extraction was reconfigured in the decades following the formal dismantling of Apartheid in 1994 and the electoral victory of the African National Congress (ANC). The national economy did not move beyond extraction; rather, mineral wealth remained central to South Africa's development strategy even as the country became increasingly integrated into global markets. The post-apartheid state sought to reconcile commitments to redistribution and racial redress with the continued importance of mining and industrial production within a liberalizing political economy. Workplace governance within extractive industries continued to manage persistent tensions among safety regulation, labor discipline, and the demands of productivity.

During these same decades, the arts sector underwent significant restructuring through new cultural policies, shifting funding regimes, and the growing professionalization of creative labor. As arts and culture were increasingly heralded by the post-apartheid state as a potential "new gold" for the national economy, theatre-making increasingly became embedded within corporate and industrial environments. Artists from professional and community-based backgrounds built careers delivering safety trainings, compliance workshops, and motivational performances within industrial workplaces. At the same time, former sites of extraction were repurposed as heritage destinations such as the Big Hole in Kimberley and Gold Reef City in Johannesburg, where immersive tours and experiential techniques restage extractive pasts as curated encounters with industrial history. Across these formations, performance repeatedly operates as a mode of calibration in relation to extraction, mediating changing relations between workers and management while reshaping the material and imaginative conditions of artistic training, philosophy, and practice.

Yet South Africa's extraordinary mineral wealth has not translated into broadly shared national prosperity. Extractive industry has long shaped the country's labor regimes, spatial organization, and political economy while contributing to persistent inequality and uneven development (Elbra 2013). The development of mining in southern Africa unfolded within a deeply racialized imperial order whose legacies continue to structure industrial life today. The slogan "Safety First" invoked in the opening vignette, for instance, echoes a longer history of industrial safety campaigns associated with early twentieth-century mining capital, including initiatives supported by figures such as Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and Jan Smuts, whose political projects helped consolidate the segregationist order later formalized under apartheid.

At the same time, the social worlds of extractive labor in South Africa have never been reducible to simple binaries between colonizer and colonized or capital and labor. Throughout the twentieth century, mining regimes brought African migrant workers from across southern Africa

together with African, white, Coloured, and Indian South African workers within shared industrial spaces, though under highly stratified systems of employment, mobility, and authority. Under apartheid these hierarchies were violently codified through pass laws, migrant labor systems, and spatial segregation, producing a rigid racialized labor order across the country's mining and industrial sectors. Even so, the lived realities of industrial labor were shaped by forms of interdependence, negotiation, and conflict that exceeded the legal architectures of apartheid itself (Moodie and Ndatshe 1995).

In the post-apartheid era, these hierarchies persist in reconfigured, though no less material forms as workers, managers, and artists navigate shifting positionalities within extractive economies that continue to evolve through corporate consolidation, restructuring, and changing regulatory priorities around fiscal control, subcontracting, safety, culture, and production. Within these dense and uneven social worlds, performance frequently emerges as a mediating practice through which the tensions of extractive labor are reflected. In this sense, performance not only registers these shifting conditions but also helps organize the changing relations through which extractive work is governed, including the management of safety and bodily risk, the pressures of productivity, and the broader restructuring of industry itself. […]

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**Chapter Excerpt: "Nothing Shall Stand Between This Day and Us:" The Figure of the *Impimpi* and the Shifting Politics of Collectivization**

"Unity is our conscience," declares a worker in Durban, South Africa, in 1985, during a theatrical performance by the Durban Workers' Cultural Local (DWCL), a cultural wing of the anti-Apartheid trade union movement. The line captures the central message of *Usuku*, a workers play written by Mi Hlatshwayo—former factory laborer, artist, and inaugural cultural organizer for the newly formed Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). Showcased at the opening of the Clairwood Trade Union and Culture Centre—a venue that worked alongside shop stewards and other cultural units to mobilize drama, music, poetry, and other art forms in support of the union struggle—*Usuku* underscored the necessity of personal sacrifice as a component of collective resistance against Apartheid while foregrounding the workplace solidarities through which workers sought to challenge the conditions of racialized labor.

At the time of the performance, Durban was at the crossroads of both intensifying opposition against the Apartheid regime as well as escalating state repression in the form of successive states of emergency. Catalyzed by mass labor protests known as the Durban Strikes of 1973, the city had become a hotbed for an independent, worker-centered trade union movement that turned to culture as a weapon of struggle against the segregationist state and its dependance on racialized labor and capitalist exploitation. As one example of culture-based activism, *Usuku* sought to mobilize workers by dramatizing the structures of domination in which they were enmeshed at the factory. Its title, derived from the isiZulu word for "day," carries a deliberately layered political resonance: it signifies both the imminent day of a planned workers' strike, and also a collective pledge that only through worker solidarity could freedom, one "day," be secured from Apartheid's violent labor regime. As a widely spoken language among Black African workers in the KwaZulu-Natal region, isiZulu anchored the play in the lived experiences of its

intended audience while asserting indigenous cultural identity in defiance of the state's attempts to fragment workers along linguistic and ethnic lines.

The performance begins with workers recognizing their subjugated status as members of society who are "looked down upon…because [we] are illiterate and therefore know nothing." (Von Kotze, 1988, p. 123). Acknowledging that "workers' dignity" can only be "preserved by the workers themselves," they commit to an imminent strike. Energized by this pledge, the play's protagonist, a longtime worker named Shabalala, returns home to tell his wife about the planned action. She cautions him against becoming swept up in the politics of younger organizers and reminds him of the risks of retaliation. The following scene introduces the factory manager, Bhodwe, whose name, Hlatshwayo notes, derives from the isiZulu word for a pot used to boil animal tendons and ligaments because he is "never satisfied." Bhodwe attempts to undermine the strike by offering the workers a pay increase if they abandon their plans, cloaking his demand in the paternalistic language of care: "everybody at his factory is one happy family." The workers refuse, insisting that the offer does nothing to address the broader struggle for dignity and collective power. Their response is resolute: "We have made a vow. We have set a day. We have said: between this day and us, nothing—not even death—shall stand" (Von Kotze, p. 123).

This declaration soon becomes a chilling premonition when Shabalala learns that his daughter is ill and will die without a medical procedure costing R300, a sum the family cannot raise. Bhodwe seizes on this vulnerability, offering to pay Shabalala's hospital fees if he reveals the date of the strike. Shabalala turns to the audience, weighing the choice between his child's survival and the solidarity of his comrades. Ida, his wife—whose status as "educated" in the script marks her as socially distinct from Shabalala—lashes out at his adherence to worker solidarity: "Take delight, workers … why do you look at me like that? Say your slogans. Your victory songs. Oh, my child …" (Von Kotze, p. 126). Shabalala ultimately refuses management's offer, declaring, "I cannot simply sell my labour wherever I want to," acknowledging that individual concessions would fracture the unity of the union and undermine its long-term struggle for more dignified labor conditions under racialized subjugation (p. 126). His daughter dies, and the tragedy exposes the brutal moral economy of industrial capitalism while underscoring the wider social stakes of labor's political organization and the profound personal sacrifices demanded by collective struggle.

Near the end of the play, the manager apologies to Shabalala, delivering a statement that offers a Marxist meditation on the cannibalistic nature of industrial capitalism:

> The aim of the factories making profits is really nothing. Many a time the employer is tempted to exploit the workers in order to extract more surplus value. You employers [and] workers are like hunters, you are directed by your stomachs. Whether they are made of clay or steel, these factories are doomed. They are a forest. Now if the antelopes decrease in number in the forests, is it not true that the hunters end up [becoming] the rodents? (p. 126).

The monologue above distinguishes the profit motive as "nothing," a hollow objective used to justify the continued exploitation of workers and the relentless extraction of resources. The

factory becomes a metaphorical forest in which both employers and workers are cast as hunters driven by hunger. In this degraded ecosystem it is the workers, figured as antelopes, who are ultimately hunted and gradually wiped out. The manager's warning that the hunters will themselves become rodents offers a stark prediction: once the system has exhausted its labor force it turns inward, feeding on its own remains. The speech articulates a condemnation of capitalism as an extractive machine that consumes until nothing is left—then collapses under the weight of its own logic. That this critique is delivered by an authority character, rather than a worker, inserts a layer of tragic irony wherein the figure tasked with enforcing discipline becomes the one who expresses the system's moral bankruptcy. In this moment, the manager's alienation begins to mirror that of the workers, revealing how the extractive cycle of capitalism ultimately corrodes not only workers but also the managerial agents who sustain it.

The moral dilemma staged in *Usuku*, in which Shabalala must choose between betraying the project of labor collectivization and preserving the life of his young child, invokes the specter of the *impimpi*, a figure that circulated widely within the political vocabulary of the anti-apartheid labor movement and appeared frequently in workers' plays throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The *impimpi* functioned as a powerful moral and political category: the informant who, by collaborating with management or the apartheid state, threatened the solidarities upon which collective struggle depended. The term itself has a long history within South African political culture. Some scholars suggest it derives from the English word *pimp* and became associated with South African prison culture, while others trace it to the linguistic and social environments of the mining industry. In particular, *impimpi* has been linked to the isiZulu and isiXhosa word *impempe*, meaning "whistle." As Hashi Kenneth Tafira (2016) writes, African mineworkers used the term to refer to *baas-boys*, intermediaries employed by mine management who often blew whistles to summon workers or relay mining communications. Positioned between workers and management, these intermediaries occupied a fraught role within the labor hierarchy, tasked with monitoring discipline and enforcing managerial authority while remaining socially embedded within the workforce itself.

More broadly, the *impimpi* came to signify a range of associations tied to collaboration, surveillance, and betrayal within colonial and apartheid governance. Following the formal institutionalization of apartheid in 1948 and in the decades that followed, the South African security police relied on tactics including arrest, harassment, surveillance, infiltration, and detention without trial to maintain white minority rule while targeting activists and others deemed threats to the National Party. Some individuals became government informers, or "sell-outs," often under conditions of coercion, manipulation, or torture by the security state. Accusations of being an *impimpi* carried severe political and social consequences within liberation movements. Suspected informants were frequently subjected to public punishment or expulsion, and in some cases to the practice known as "necklacing," in which a tire filled with petrol was placed around the accused person's neck and set alight. The charge of *impimpi* thus condensed a broader set of anxieties about complicity, infiltration, and betrayal within anti-apartheid organizing.

This chapter traces how theatrical performance within industrial labor environments has repeatedly staged and reworked the figure of the *impimpi* as a way of grappling with the fraught relations between workers and management, as well as the broader shift from collective

responsibility to individual accountability within industrial workplace culture. In the workers' theatre of the anti-apartheid labor movement, the *impimpi* often appeared as the archetypal informer: the figure who colluded with management or the apartheid state and thereby threatened the collective solidarities upon which political struggle depended. As the dilemma staged in *Usuku* demonstrates, workers' theatre also acknowledged the personal sacrifices and vulnerabilities that could lead individuals toward betrayal, recognizing the tragic moral terrain through which collective struggle was sustained.

Contemporary forms of industrial theatre, however, recast the figure in more fluid ways that reflect shifting understandings of workplace safety and the worker's relationship to the project of production as the basis of individual livelihood. In artist-facilitated worker gatherings and safety role plays, the *impimpi* often manifests within workplace scenarios in which reporting a co-worker's safety violation may halt production, trigger investigation, or jeopardize individual livelihoods. In this context, the *impimpi* appears not as the betrayer of worker solidarity but as a potential threat to the project of extraction itself, exposing a contradiction in which extractive industry simultaneously proclaims "safety first" while stigmatizing those who report unsafe practices. Rather than marking a fixed political position, the *impimpi* emerges as a shifting theatrical figure through which workers, managers, and performers negotiate the uneasy balance between solidarity, individual survival, and the imperatives of ongoing production. Because performance operates through improvisation and embodied enactment, it renders visible the changing relations between workers and management, revealing how projects of collectivization are reconfigured under neoliberal workplace regimes that emphasize individual responsibility. […]

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