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Platform: in theory

Introductory editorial

Platform has moved[1] – and we accept that it will be a while before our new and welcoming location in *Acta Academica* becomes known, beyond the journal's regular readers. Even in its short life to date the site has presented itself in projects where conversations will develop over time through active collaboration with contributors. The motivation for **Platform** and two projects already presented in the first three appearances (archived here under **Platform: invitation for collaboration and conversation**, and found at https://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/aa/issue/view/521) are: first, development and examples of theory deliberately employed; and second, keywords as illuminating change and power in society. Here we are introducing a third, namely temporality, and the dangerous framing of ideas and activism within the rigid boundaries of short-term thinking.

It should be clear that these projects all relate to understanding the past and the present, in relation to the need to understand how to meet the future. They are concerned with holders and employers of power, the means and the consequences.

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1   The **Platform** initiative, by Gerhard Maré with prior discussion over several years with Peter Vale, was launched in the journal *Transformation* (www.transformationjournal.org.za) in 2020. It appeared there for three issues. However, due to disagreements about direction, Maré resigned from the editorial board of *Transformation*. It was accepted that **Platform** would leave *Transformation*, and we found that the journal *Acta Academica: critical views on society, culture and politics* accepted what we intend with the site.

We wish to thank for the support already given, the team at *Acta Academica*: in the first instance editors Henning Melber and Rènè Eloff, and Heidi Hudson as dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the UFS, for accepting **Platform** and its purpose.

Temporality, the ancestor and our future: an exploration

This space, called **Platform**, intends to question and query all aspects of everyday thinking: in this spirit, we are inviting ongoing exploration and reflection on the issue *time* from a range of scholarly fields. This interest arises out of the failure that short-term thinking has delivered to humankind and continues as obstacle to meaningful engagement with humanity's role in life on planet earth.

Specifically, **Platform** is interested in how understandings of, and acting in, time affect thinking about climate change, in South Africa and globally. Does it block effective engagement with the issue, or deviate thinking away from it? Can contemporary ways of thinking only provide short-term answers to what is a long-term inevitability? How do we link the present (and the past for that matter) to an unfolding future which promises climate catastrophe?

The time frame within which we mostly think, and in terms of which we are *called upon* to think about our lives and the world about us, is constantly confirmed by high and by low politics. Take two recent examples: first, consider how political parties presented their platforms in the 2020 local government elections in South Africa. Frankly put, the climate issue was blatantly absent – as were several other issues crucial to the lives of all citizens; and where it has subsequently been confronted, it is by way of defending the present against the future, as though these can be separated. Secondly, almost at the same time as South Africans went to the polls, 'world leaders' gathered in Glasgow to take decisions to slow global climate change. But acting in the name of global solidarity, COP26 failed to accept what is *immediately* required for the longer-term survival of the most vulnerable at present and future generations, namely, imposing a ban on carbon-based energy.

Reading and reflecting on the 2020 book *The Good Ancestor: How To Think Long Term in a Short-Term World*, by Roman Krznaric (2021), and returning to earlier writing on this theme (Kahneman 2012; Kahneman, Stony and Sunstein 2021), stimulated the idea of opening a conversation on the issue of time-thinking. So, we approached a few people directly, to help get the conversation going. Happily, and in quick time too, we received four reflective pieces – framed by their reading of Krznaric – on the concern we raised with them. As is plain and intended, each contributor reports from their academic or other perspective or

engagement.² These short essays highlight different ways to approach the issue and offer imaginative ways to face the future.

Among issues that arise are: how do we understand the normal, in different social locations, and for whom, divided as the planet (and the country) is by material inequality, and by calls on 'fixed' identities; what are the demands – and the effects on all other concerns, such as inequality – set by the unfolding climate catastrophe; again, where and for whom and what are these demands, in terms of time thinking; what are the obstacles – especially conceptual – which prevent a longer-term vision and exploration of what this will mean in individual and community lives, now and into a future?

Platform is interested in looking forward rather than backwards, in ways of making our own decisions, rather than having them 'read' to us by the ancestors who were – or who have – most to gain from remaining in short-term thinking.

In Roman Krznaric 's terms, then, dear Reader, **Platform** wants to explore what makes a 'good ancestor', individually and collectively, for those who will experience the consequences of what we do now. The challenge Krznaric issues, early in his book, casts the net wide. These first contributions are on the platform. We ask you to respond to that challenge, redefining what is meant by 'appropriate' responses to the *long-term* demands, in the present. A final word from Roman Krznaric:

> ... time rebels must confront the stark reality that some of the fundamental ways we organise society, from nation states and representative democracy to consumer culture and capitalism itself, are no longer appropriate for the age we live in. They were invented centuries ago in the Holocene - the 10,000-year geological era of stable climate during which human civilisation thrived - at a time when our planet could largely absorb the ecological impact of material progress, the costs and risks of new technologies and the strains of population growth. That epoch has now passed as we move into the Anthropocene, the new era in which humans have created an unstable earth system threatened by ecological breakdown.
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> This is the classic QWERTY problem writ large: just as the layout of our inefficient QWERTY keyboards was actually designed in the 1860s to prevent mechanical typewriter keys jamming by placing commonly used letters far apart, so we are lumbered with institutions that were designed for the challenges of a

2   We facilitated their access to the book through Love Books in Melville, Johannesburg.

different age. *It is virtually impossible to escape the conclusion that if we want to create a world fit for both current and future generations, we will need to profoundly rethink and redesign core aspects of society – how our economies function, how our politics work, what our cities look like – and ensure that they are underpinned by new values and goals to secure the long-term thriving of humankind.* And we have precious little time in which to do it. (2021:14, emphasis added)

References

Kahneman D. 2012. *Thinking, fast and slow*. London: Penguin.

Kahneman D, Sibony O and Sunstein CR. 2021. *Noise: a flaw in human judgment*. London: William Collins. https://doi.org/10.53776/playbooks-judgment

Krznaric R. 2021. *The good ancestor: how to think long term in a short-term world*. London: Penguin.