

# Nothing Matters

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Here's something I've been thinking about:

nothing matters.

Depending on which word we emphasise, there are at least two ways this can be interpreted.

When we say *nothing* matters, we are saying that nothing, as a kind of absence of something, can be a vital force, generative even. Let's call that something 'resources' – infrastructural, intellectual, financial. These resources are typically controlled by formal structures such as galleries, museums, local and international funding bodies, private, and public collections. Their accessibility is determined by principles that aren't necessarily conversant with the interests and intentions of practitioners today. From here I will refer generally to these structures as 'the centre'<sup>[1]</sup>.

To consider nothing as a force may seem contradictory, yet it is in the space generated by this absence that we find the opportunity to experiment with ways of working; a moment to project our desires and intentions for practice into this edgeless and shapeless void. The enigmatic nature of this space, let's call it the 'project space', reveals an unexpected promise – an occasion to disrupt traditional structures and do without the dynamics that support them, creating a hopeful (and holding) space for our practices. The word "project" reveals an essential duality: it denotes both an active propulsion towards the future or uncertainty, as well as a spirit of collaboration.

The potential of the project space is not solely derived from the absence of the centre. It is also found in the relationships between individuals who share this experience of exclusion, or whose practices do not fit into more commercial spaces, or who just want to try something different. It is a space of imagination and experimentation, where weird ideas and alternative modes can take root and flourish, or wither away.

[1] The centre does hold the promise of progress, but it is also influenced by forces that limit the social conditions necessary for new ideas to emerge. These forces are often tied to material wealth, social status, and the networks that uphold them. Those who have access to these resources within the centre are insulated from the financial and emotional risks of pursuing new ideas, while many others are left out, their contributions overlooked or dismissed. Where the centre may fail to support or recognize the value of independent practice, the relationships we forge with one another nurture and sustain.

Nothing becomes a kind of vantage point, a basis from which we can assess how existing frameworks of resource management serve the aesthetic and functional needs of practice and, where necessary, look to others. In these project spaces, dynamic and generative communities of mutual support emerge. Ideas take shape, phone calls are made, friends are rallied, and we come together to create something out of nothing. We encounter fertile relationships. We pool resources, skills and knowledge in order to just try something out.

Working in this way, across disciplines and mediums, grants access to an unpredictable, improvisational energy that moves beyond the limits of the centre. Engaging in this collective process, embracing the hybridity of the methods that emerge, practitioners are creating spaces that reflect the dynamic situations around us. Thus the project space reveals a world of possibility, where new ways of thinking and being can emerge from the spaces in between.

Gqi<sup>[2]</sup> The Mutha\_ship Landing.

The Mutha\_ship temporarily stations itself in a Lower Main Road house<sup>[3]</sup>, existing beyond the Cape Town's central network both conceptually and in geography. It lands amidst the clamour and din of commerce, the call to prayer and the smell of fresh bread coming from the Blue Ribbon Factory, occupying a position that offers a different perspective of the city's landscape. The house has a Juliet balcony that faces north-east, away from the mountain, away from the familiar landmarks, away from the centre. It is a kind of perspectival shift that registers physically and affectively.

It is the kind of perspectival shift that I am thinking about when I say 'nothing matters'. In a context where access to resources and institutional support is limited, building and maintaining connections with others becomes essential. It's through mutual support that we can share ideas, collaborate on projects, and provide encouragement. Here, Julie, Phokeng, Dudu and Loyiso<sup>[4]</sup> shared with us a space that fostered a critical intimacy. Here we shared meals, read to one another and thought through projects that might still be in their embryonic stage - incomplete but vital.

[2] When you read this word, I want you to imagine that you are a rugby player side-stepping an on-coming tackle from the opposing team. I want you to allow your neck and shoulders to participate in this imagination, side-step twice if you have to.

[3] The Mutha\_ship Landing was stationed in Observatory, Cape Town from the 30th October until some time in December 2020.

[4] The use of first names in my writing is an attempt to gesture towards the intimate connections that make collaboration, and collective work possible. The question of how to appropriately write someone into a thought exercise remains unanswered for me. Is it convention that dictates the form of address? The context of the thought? Or the nature of the relationship being explored? I don't know. What I am trying to convey through the use of first names is a sense of ease - that familiar and unguarded interaction that develops between those who share a deep connection. It is this kind of intimacy that I seek to evoke in my writing, capturing the subtle nuances of human connection that exist beyond the realm of formality and social convention. Power dynamics and social hierarchies can inhibit genuine connection. By using first names, I hope to convey a sense of solidarity, a reminder of the importance of community and the bonds that sustain us.

We could also talk about *nothing-matters*: matters that are nothing.

This is to say where and how we derive value doesn't have to be so narrow; that value can be created for oneself. So when we say *nothing-matters*, it is a proposition to adapt, reinterpret, or contradict inherited systems of value, to interrogate the assumptions and hierarchies that underlie them, and to create space for alternative perspectives to emerge. It invites us to domesticate our frameworks and conceive of methods of working that make sense ideologically and in practice; a method of establishing value that meaningfully supports practice in a way that the centre and its ways of working might not be able, or ready, to sustain.

Put differently, it is to say that Sundance isn't more important than Vimeo; that the dream you had three years ago is just as reliable as any academic text; that where the idea ends up does not make the idea.

Gqi-gqi Under Projects.

In contrast to the sales-based model that determines most value systems, Under Projects fosters a community-driven approach, relying on the support of individuals who are invested in the space. It does not position itself as a gallery in the traditional sense, but rather seeks to keep a non-commercial model of working that supports emerging and experimental practice. It is a community that values mutual support, where collaborations and friendships become the foundation for sustained and meaningful experiments to take shape. Here, Brett, Guy, Luca and Mitchell<sup>[5]</sup>, make an empty room available to test out ideas and works - to practise for practice's sake.

The value of project spaces cannot be measured in monetary terms: here, the constructed metrics of what is 'good' or 'bad', 'sellable' or 'unsellable' don't matter, instead the connections made through the process of sharing space do. Sharing resources, making friends and building community are essential components of these spaces, creating an environment where the collective effort is greater than the sum of its parts. While the outcomes of these endeavours may not always be measurable, the benefits to the individual and the community are.

To say nothing matters is, for me, not a rejection of existing formal structures, though it is certainly (and perhaps necessarily) a call for something else. The strength of this proposition lies in its potential to become. It lends itself to introspection, to the loosening and shaking

[5] The Mutha\_ship Landing and Under Projects are just two sites (of many) that embody the liberatory possibilities of collaboration and resource-sharing. These project spaces have been animated by the creative and intellectual energies of a collective of dedicated artists and curators, including Dudu Lamola, Julie Nxadi, Loyiso Qoboshiyana, Phokeng Setai, Brett Seiler, Guy Simpson, Luca Evans, and Mitchell Messina.

Both The Mutha\_ship Landing and Under Projects decide against the traditional boundaries of space-making and the dominant narratives that obscure the complexities of our social reality. Instead, they make space for diverse voices and perspectives to be expressed and heard, where the politics of representation are taken seriously, and where the dynamics of power and privilege are interrogated. Their contribution to the art scene and to conversations around its transformation cannot be overstated.

off of convention and to the exploration of something less certain. It's an exercise in the appropriation of space and meaning, a necessary denunciation of what we know in order to find something else. This something else is self-organisation, collaboration and the creation of networks of mutual support. Within this framework, we can imagine ways of working that are conversant with the needs of here-now.

From nothing, something.

**Sihle Sogaula** is interested in film photography as a meditative practice, fashion as embodied and emancipatory ritual, and alternative research methodologies. In her work, she explores the ways in which material things can hold many truths at once; how objects are invocations of the present as much as they are of the past. Sihle lives and works in Cape Town.

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